



UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS
SYSTEM

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS SYSTEM

FEDERAL PRIORITIES FOR THE 119TH CONGRESS



TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Enhancing Affordability, Access and Student Success	3
II. Promoting Innovation, Economic Growth and Workforce Development	6
III. Welcoming and Supporting Students from Underrepresented Populations	8
IV. Maintaining Illinoisans' Access to Healthcare Coverage and Training	9
V. Protecting Dreamers, Maintaining Pathways for International Students and Workers	10
VI. Ensuring the Tax Code Supports Students and Nonprofits	11
VII. Strengthening Research, Extension and Education in the Next Farm Bill	12
VIII. Supporting Student-Athletes and College Athletics	13
IX. Advancing Research Security while Preserving International Collaboration	14

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I. ENHANCING AFFORDABILITY, ACCESS AND STUDENT SUCCESS

The University of Illinois System is committed to providing Illinois students a best-in-class education at a reasonable cost. As part of that commitment, we provided \$298 million in undergraduate aid for the 2023-24 academic year, an increase of 5.2 percent over the previous academic year, and a figure that has grown by \$104 million over the past 10 years. Each of our universities has financial aid programs that fully cover tuition and fees for qualified in-state students ([Illinois Commitment](#), [Prairie Promise](#) and [UIC Aspire](#)).

Our students also rely on federal financial aid programs authorized by the Higher Education Act (HEA) and administered by the Department of Education (ED). HEA has not been comprehensively reauthorized since 2008. As Congress considers changes to HEA, we urge them to address the priorities discussed below.

Enhancing Affordability and Access

Pell Grants are the cornerstone of federal financial aid and the foundation of a student financial aid package at the U of I System. Pell eligibility can be a good indication of eligibility for additional state and institutional aid, depending on residency. In Academic Year 2023-24, over 20,800 students across the system received \$116.3 million in Pell Grants.

- ▶ We urge Congress to:
 - Double the maximum Pell Grant award to \$13,000 to restore its purchasing power. In the 1970s, the maximum Pell Grant covered nearly 80 percent of the cost of attendance at four-year public universities, but now it covers less than a third. The U of I System is actively participating in [#DoublePell](#), a national campaign to double the maximum Pell Grant award. Students across our universities have [shared stories](#) about the positive impact that Pell Grants have had in their lives.
 - Prioritize the extension of the Pell Grant mandatory inflation adjustments, which expired at the end of 2017.
 - Extend the Pell Grant eligibility period by two semesters and extend eligibility to graduate education and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) participants.
 - Make Pell Grant funding fully mandatory.

The debilitating delays and challenges associated with the rollout of the 2024-25 **Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)** caused both immediate and long-term problems nationwide for universities and students. According to the [Government Accountability Office](#), the botched rollout contributed to about 9 percent fewer high school seniors and other first-time applicants submitting a FAFSA, with the largest declines among lower-income students.

- ▶ We urge the Administration and Congress to ensure that the 2025-26 FAFSA process remains on track.

Campus-Based Aid Programs such as Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (SEOG) and Federal Work-Study (FWS) provide crucial support for our students. SEOG provides important flexibility to institutions, allowing financial aid officers to target funds to students who have experienced unexpected financial changes. SEOG supported over 6,360 students across the U of I System with nearly \$3.8 million in total funding in 2023-24.

FWS gives students the opportunity to earn additional aid through part-time employment on campus, in community service, and in jobs related to their studies. In 2023-24, over 2,650 U of I System students participated in the FWS program, receiving a total of \$7.4 million. These funds are essential for low-income students who continue to experience housing and food insecurity at higher rates in recent years. University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) and University of Illinois Springfield (UIS) qualify for the Title III waiver on institutional share for FWS, which means our FWS students at those campuses are fully supported by federal funds. Without this funding, those universities would be very limited in how many student employees they could hire.

- ▶ We encourage Congress to provide strong support for federal campus-based aid programs such as SEOG and FWS.

Direct Loan disbursements for U of I System undergraduate, graduate, and professional students totaled more than \$471.5 million in 2023-24. We support simplifying loan repayment options and eliminating origination fees on federal student loans to lower the cost of borrowing.

With over **34,700 graduate and professional students**, the U of I System is providing the human capital and highly skilled workforce that Illinois needs. Federal support for graduate students is key to those efforts.

- ▶ We urge Congress to:
 - Maintain graduate student loan options, strong repayment terms, and loan forgiveness benefits that put graduate and professional studies within reach of all interested students.
 - Support Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need (GAANN), which helps ensure a pipeline of talented experts to meet the need for a 21st century workforce.

The high cost of textbooks affects learning outcomes and student success. The 2023 Illinois Course Materials Survey: Student Perspective, conducted by the Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois (CARLI), indicated that the cost of course materials is adversely impacting Illinois students' academic careers.

Open educational resources (OER) can mitigate these problems, promoting equity of access to learning materials. OER includes not only textbooks, but also ancillary materials such as quizzes, tests, study guides, and worksheets. Our universities have programs to encourage faculty to adopt and use OER materials as alternatives to commercially produced textbooks. The U of I System leads CARLI, and, through a statewide collaborative enterprise that includes a partnership with the Office of the Illinois Secretary of State and its \$3 million OER program, is working to promote, develop, and expand OER across the state

- ▶ We encourage Congress to support OER through continued funding for the open textbooks pilot (OTP) program in ED's Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE). Thanks to CARLI's OTP grant award, 27 Illinois institutions ranging from community colleges to graduate programs have saved students money and improved learning through the implementation of OER.

Boosting Degree Completion and Student Success

The U of I System proudly educates many low-income, first-generation students. There are several federal programs that are critical to ensuring that underrepresented students have the resources they need for success. We fully support the federally funded **TRIO** programs, which motivate and support students from disadvantaged backgrounds in their pursuit of a college degree. The system has six TRIO-funded programs that serve approximately 1,116 students. They include Student Support Services (2), McNair, Upward Bound (2), and Talent Search.

- ▶ We ask that Congress increase funding for TRIO programs.

We also support the **Postsecondary Student Success grant program**, which provides funding for institutions to expand evidence-based

initiatives to equitably improve postsecondary student outcomes, including retention, transfer, credit accumulation, and completion.

Addressing Teacher Preparation and Education Research

With colleges of education at all three of our universities, the U of I System is committed to preparing the next generation of educators, educational leaders and educational researchers.

- ▶ We urge Congress to address the needs of the U.S. educator workforce by:
 - Sustaining and expanding educator preparation programs, including the Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) Grant Program, the Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) Program, and the Augustus F. Hawkins Center of Excellence (Hawkins) Program. These and other funding initiatives should include support for wrap-around services to prepare teachers in critical shortage areas including STEM, bilingual, special education, rural, and early childhood education.
 - Increasing federal support for a critical and growing need — educating and certifying high school teachers to teach computer science, and IT/digital skills more broadly.

In addition, more federal funding is needed to help institutions of higher education train special education teachers via ED's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), and to support research into topics such as AI, mental health, and special education.

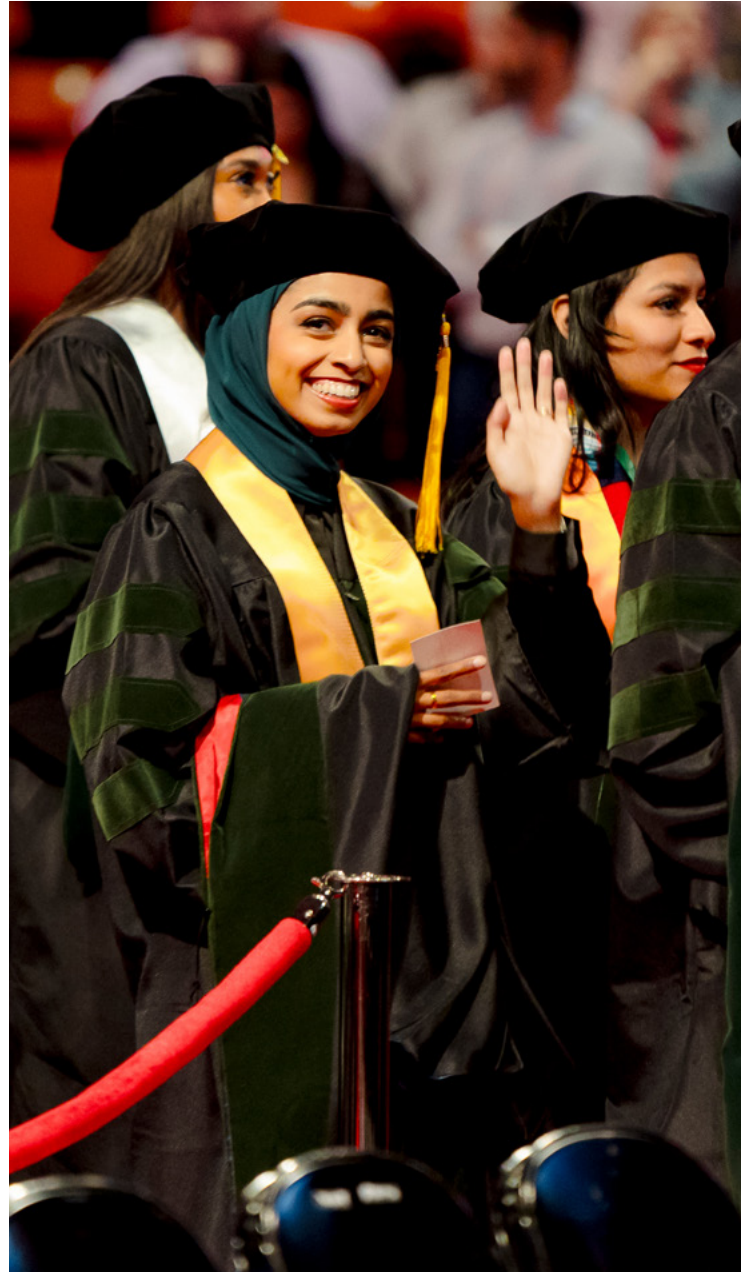
Supporting and Reauthorizing Title VI under HEA

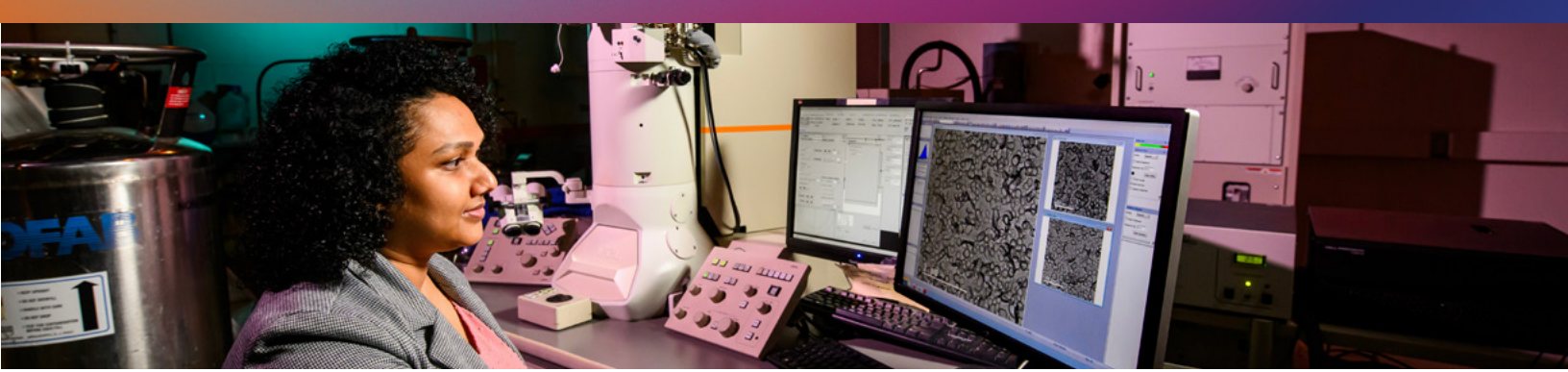
ED funds important international and foreign language teaching, research and outreach through the Title VI International and Foreign Language Education programs. University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) was one of the top Title VI funding recipients in 2022, with six National Resource Centers (NRC): the Center for African Studies; the Center for Global Studies; the Center for Latin American & Caribbean Studies; the Center for South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies; the European Union Center; and the Russian, East European and Eurasian Center. These centers, which have more than 600 faculty affiliates, provide students with specialized language skills, support area/international studies teaching and research, and provide professional and curriculum development for K-14, graduate, and postsecondary educators. Our NRCs also administer Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) Fellowships, totaling \$7 million over four years, which are underwritten by ED, and support graduate and undergraduate language study in combination with area and global studies, as well as related professional studies.

- ▶ We urge Congress to provide robust funding and reauthorize the critical international education programs under Title VI of the HEA to strengthen our nation's global engagement and competitiveness.

Regulatory Changes to Distance Education and Third-Party Servicers

In 2024, the Department of Education proposed new regulations for distance education. During the public comment period, the U of I System articulated concerns about the impact that the changes would have on our distance education programs, especially for underserved and non-traditional students who depend on the flexibility and accessibility of our asynchronous online programs. While ED did not publish a final rule before the Nov. 1, 2024, deadline, should the department revisit this issue in the future we hope it will take into account these concerns.





II. PROMOTING INNOVATION, ECONOMIC GROWTH AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The U of I System is an engine for statewide and regional economic development, contributing \$19 billion annually to the state's economy, and supporting nearly 164,200 jobs, or one out of every 46 jobs in Illinois. Federally funded research and development (R&D) plays an important role in helping the U of I System advance economic growth and innovation.

Our faculty and staff bring in over \$730 million annually in federal research funding (research expenditures) from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the National Science Foundation (NSF), the Department of Energy (DOE), the Department of Defense (DOD), the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and other federal agencies. UIUC routinely leads the nation in NSF grant awards, and UIC is a top recipient of NIH funding.

The U of I System has launched two initiatives to expand the reach and impact of our universities. The Discovery Partners Institute (DPI), based in Chicago, seeks to promote innovation and economic growth, and help train the workforce of the 21st century. The Illinois Innovation Network (IIN) is a statewide network of 15 economic development hubs that includes all of Illinois' public universities. IIN combines research, public-private partnerships, entrepreneurship and workforce training programs to spur inclusive economic development.

Additional federal support is needed to ensure that institutions like the U of I System can continue to power our state's economy and our country's leadership in science and technology. By increasing funding for basic and applied research and research infrastructure in key areas such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), quantum science and technology, high performance computing, drug discovery, cancer and biotechnology, Congress can foster the groundbreaking innovation that will move America forward. In addition, continued federal support for the social sciences, humanities and arts will complement those efforts by helping to advance understanding of history, culture and societal challenges.

▶ We urge Congress to:

- Provide robust funding at the full levels authorized in the CHIPS and Science Act for NSF and the Departments of Energy and Commerce:
 - NSF support for basic research is essential for ensuring the United States remains at the forefront of science and innovation. Unfortunately, after an overdue boost in funding in FY2023, NSF received a 5% cut to its budget in FY2024. As the agency prepares to mark its 75th anniversary in 2025, it is more important than ever that Congress substantially increase support for NSF's vital work.
 - The Regional Technology and Innovation Hub program overseen by Commerce's Economic Development Administration received an appropriation of just \$41 million in FY2024, and program funding is already far below the authorized level of \$10 billion over five years. The Illinois Fermentation and Agriculture Biomanufacturing Hub (iFAB), led by UIUC, is one of just 12 designated hubs that were funded in 2024. iFAB was awarded \$51 million, significantly less than the \$70 million requested budget.
- Support quantum education, workforce and research by reauthorizing and funding the National Quantum Initiative Act.
 - With backing from the state and federal governments, the U of I is overseeing efforts to stand up and manage the Illinois Quantum and Microelectronics Park in Chicago, a first-of-its-kind facility for quantum scale-up and related quantum and advanced microelectronics R&D.
 - UIUC is home to the Illinois Quantum Information Science and Technology Center (IQUIST) and is leading the NSF Quantum Leap Challenge Institute for Hybrid Quantum Architectures and Networks (HQAN).
 - UIC is leading a DOE-funded national consortium that will educate the next generation of quantum engineers, and provide pathways into the quantum computing workforce for groups traditionally underrepresented in STEM fields.

- Fund AI research and infrastructure, including efforts such as the NSF-led National Artificial Intelligence Research Resource (NAIRR) program to ensure more equitable access to AI resources for research and training.
 - UIUC operates three federally funded AI institutes, and UIUC’s National Center for Supercomputing Applications helps to coordinate NAIRR and provides significant computing power for AI researchers through the NSF ACCESS and NAIRR programs.
- Continue support for biomedical research across federal agencies.
 - NIH is a major funder of our research, through initiatives such as the Center for Clinical and Translational Science as well as funding for interdisciplinary teams of investigators across departments and colleges. Strong, sustained funding for NIH’s 27 institutes and centers will advance treatments and cures for diseases and improve the health and well-being of our nation.
 - Teams led by UIUC and UIC faculty are also funded by the Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health (ARPA-H), which focuses on high-risk, high-reward research to accelerate better health outcomes for all. Strong support for ARPA-H as an independent entity will help ensure that U of I System researchers can continue to make breakthroughs in health innovation.
- Oppose efforts to cut reimbursements for university research costs.
 - Federal research grants are intended to cover both direct costs, such as salaries and equipment, and indirect costs, such as lab space, high-speed data processing, patient safety protocols, hazardous waste disposal, regulatory compliance and energy and utility expenses. In practice, federal grants do not fully cover indirect costs — also called overhead or Facilities & Administrative (F&A) costs — which requires universities to use their own funding to subsidize research.
 - Unfortunately, some have proposed further reducing federal support for indirect costs. Cutting F&A rates would raise costs for universities and result in less support for research programs including faculty, staff and space.
- Continue support for clean energy and climate resilient research and infrastructure.
 - As a member of the International Universities Climate Alliance, the U of I System is committed to advancing climate science and to serving as a model for environmental sustainability. As part of that commitment, we are proud to co-host the 2025 Sustainability Research and Innovation Congress in Chicago.
- Continue funding for research and scholarship in the social sciences, humanities and arts.





III. WELCOMING AND SUPPORTING STUDENTS FROM UNDERREPRESENTED POPULATIONS

The U of I System is committed to educating deserving students from all backgrounds.

The federal government is an important partner for universities like ours that are seeking to ensure their campuses — and future workforces — reflect the rich diversity of our state and country:

- ▶ We urge Congress and/or the administration to:
 - Increase support for programs such as TRIO that help ensure that students from disadvantaged backgrounds are able to obtain a college education.
 - Support universities' efforts to provide inclusive and welcoming learning environments that embrace historically marginalized and underrepresented populations.

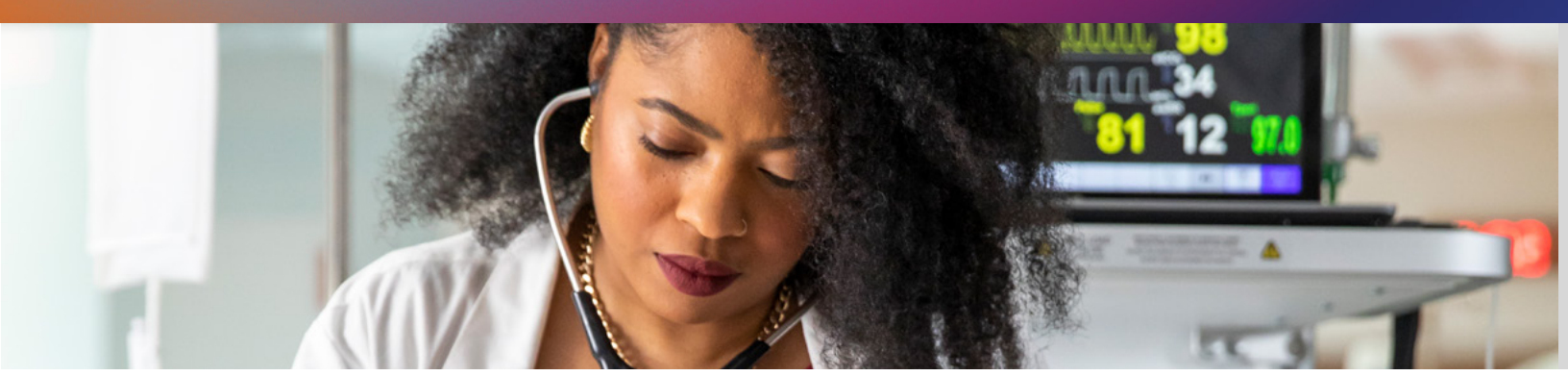
Federal support is particularly important for institutions of higher education that serve large underrepresented and underserved populations. A federally designated Minority-Serving Institution (MSI) since 2010, UIC is both an Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) and an Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI). These designations allow UIC to apply for new grant opportunities set aside for federal MSI, HSI or AANAPISI institutions under Titles III and V of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended by the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008.

UIC has received four grants totaling \$7.1 million for its AANAPISI Initiative to support Asian American, Pacific Islander, low-income, first-generation, and English language learner undergraduate students. In 2016, a five-year, \$5.3 million grant from ED affirmed UIC's designation as an HSI and supported UIC's efforts to increase the number of Latinx and low-income students obtaining degrees in STEM fields. UIC has also received NIH and NSF awards to support its efforts to expand opportunities for underrepresented students.

UIC is a founding member of what is now the alliance of Hispanic Serving Research Universities, which consists of HSIs that are in the top 5% of universities in the country for research. The alliance is

seeking to increase both the number of Hispanic doctoral students enrolled at alliance universities and the Hispanic professoriate in alliance universities.

- ▶ We urge Congress to:
 - Provide significant increases to Title III and V programs authorized through the HEA. These increases are particularly necessary given the significant increase in the number of HSIs.
 - Pursue a legislative fix to address grant eligibility restrictions that currently prevent institutions with dual designations from receiving two Title III-Part A grants (e.g., one for HSI and another for AANAPISI) simultaneously.
 - Support efforts by HSI research universities to increase the numbers of Hispanic graduate students and professors.



IV. MAINTAINING ILLINOISANS' ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE COVERAGE AND TRAINING

The University of Illinois Hospital & Health Sciences System (UI Health) provides comprehensive care, education, and research to the people of Illinois and beyond.

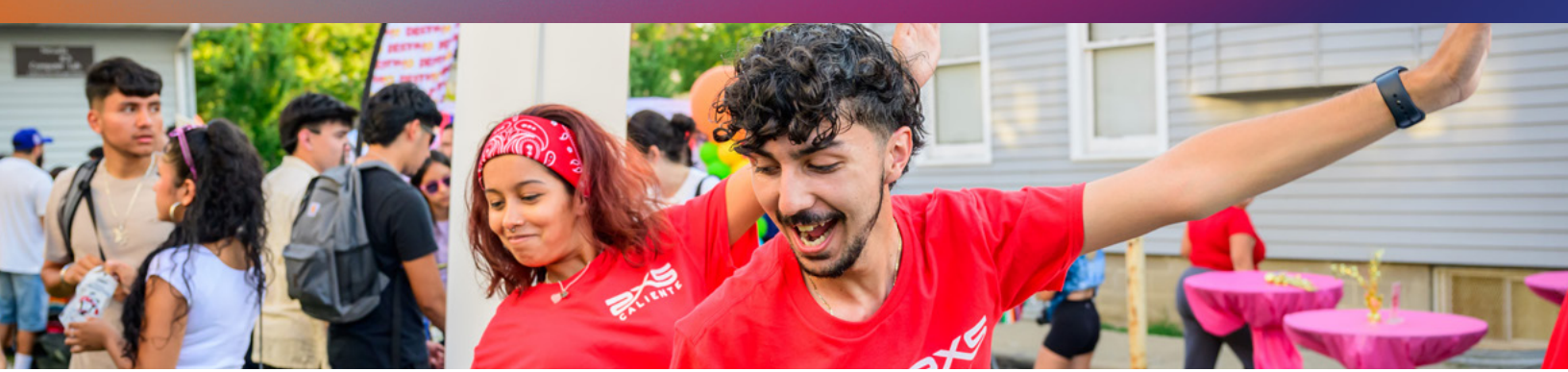
Part of UIC, UI Health is an academic health enterprise that integrates UIC's seven health sciences colleges with the clinical activities of:

- a 438-bed tertiary care hospital serving the expert specialty care needs of the state and underserved communities throughout Illinois;
- 40-plus outpatient clinics and 11 federally qualified Mile Square Health Center facilities that are dedicated to improving the lives and health of neighborhoods and communities in Chicago, Cicero and Rockford by addressing health disparities; and
- the University of Illinois Cancer Center, which seeks to translate ground-breaking research into innovative care designed to eliminate cancer health inequities.

UI Health's healthcare mission, and its support for low-income and disadvantaged peoples and communities, depend on federal programs, such as funding for the University of Illinois Hospital as a Disproportionate Share Hospital and for our graduate medical education programs.

- ▶ We urge Congress and/or the administration to:
 - Increase access to Medicaid coverage and avoid policy changes that could reduce federal funding to states or access for Medicaid patients. Medicaid cuts could jeopardize care for populations most in need and further increase the burden of uncompensated care.
 - Ensure stability for the Medicare program and oppose any cuts to the program including cuts to the Physician Fee Schedule.
 - Oppose efforts to move from differentiated payment based on site of care to site-neutral payments, such as the Lower Costs, More Transparency Act (H.R. 5378 in the 118th Congress). Such efforts are not reflective of actual cost differences between services provided in physician offices versus hospital outpatient departments/clinics.

- Continue to address the growing use of prior authorization and other barriers to care by health insurers, especially with respect to Medicare Advantage (MA) plans. Denials should be based on specific clinical evidence or established alternative treatments and not solely with the intent of reducing utilization and limiting MA plan costs. Building on rules that the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services issued in 2024, rulemaking or legislation could include provisions to require timely communication of denials, and increased transparency of who makes denial decisions and what criteria are used.
- Continue to support the 340B prescription drug program, which allows UI Health to leverage drug discounts from pharmaceutical companies to ensure patients can access care they otherwise might not receive, at no cost to taxpayers. Potential changes to the 340B program proposed by the pharmaceutical industry would make it difficult for UI Health to provide access to drugs for patients, including those with complex and chronic diseases.
- Provide continued federal funding for Graduate Medical Education (GME) and indirect medical education and increase the number of Medicare-supported GME positions to ensure access to care for future generations. GME funding is vital to our efforts to train the next generation of physicians, including the 1,169 residents sponsored by the University of Illinois College of Medicine each year.
- Make permanent the telehealth flexibilities that were implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic. These flexibilities, which allowed UI Health to safely care for patients, include removing geographic restrictions, allowing the use of audio-only services, and expanding the types of practitioners eligible for reimbursement.



V. PROTECTING DREAMERS, MAINTAINING PATHWAYS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND WORKERS

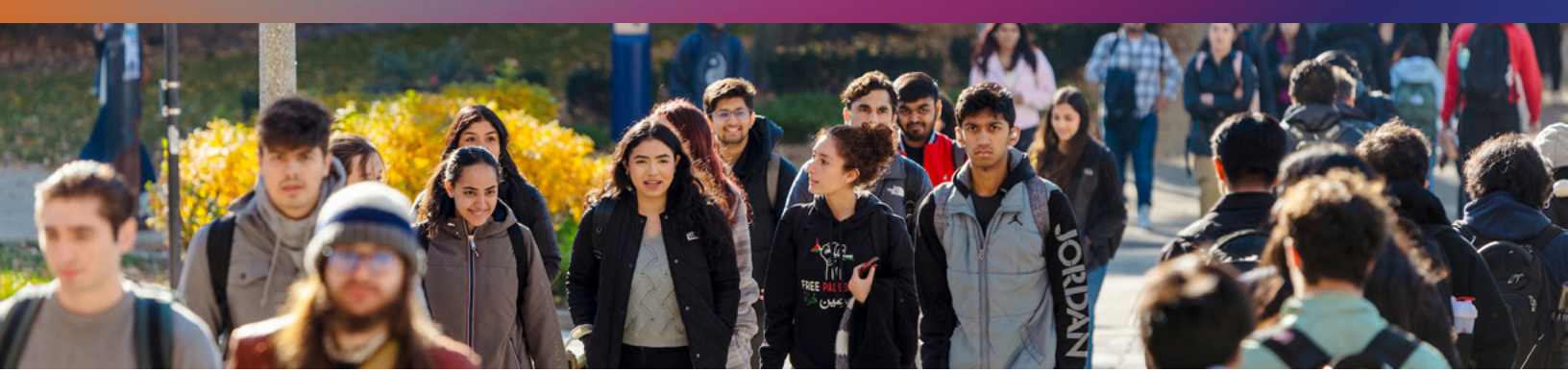
The U of I System is committed to providing educational opportunities for qualified and deserving undocumented and international students.

The Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program has provided a vital pathway for undocumented students who came to the U.S. as children to pursue a degree without fear of deportation. Unfortunately, the program’s limited scope and uncertain legal status — and the halt on new applications — do not provide the protections that current and prospective students need. Congress should enact bipartisan legislation such as the DREAM Act, sponsored by Illinois Sen. Dick Durbin, that will permanently protect these deserving undocumented immigrants.

Congress and the administration should also work on a bipartisan basis to ensure that the United States continues to be a welcoming and sought-after destination for international students, scholars and workers. Over 62,000 international students are enrolled in universities across Illinois, and they contributed an estimated \$2.4 billion to the state’s economy in the 2023-24 academic year and supported over 23,000 jobs. Their presence adds to the diversity of backgrounds and perspectives in our student body, provides a richer cultural and academic experience for all, and supports pioneering research.

- ▶ We urge Congress and/or the administration to:
 - Enact the DREAM Act.
 - Expand visa and citizenship opportunities for international students and high-skilled workers. This includes extending the concept of “dual intent” to F-1 and J-1 visas so that international students and exchange visitors can no longer be denied visas because they failed to adequately demonstrate an intent to return to their home country.

- Reduce the amount of time it takes to obtain a student or work visa by eliminating administrative processing delays across agencies and streamlining the application process.
 - Depending on what country they are in, students overseas may have to wait many months for an appointment to apply for an F-1 visa.
 - Backlogs at the Department of Labor for prevailing wage determinations for both H-1B (worker) petitions and permanent resident (green card) applications can make it challenging for universities to attract and retain international faculty and staff.
 - Applicants also face lengthy wait times for U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to process changes of status, employment authorization documents, extensions for dependents of H-1B visa holders, etc.
- Provide opportunities and support for students and scholars displaced by humanitarian crises or subject to persecution around the world.
- Address the long-term physician shortage in the U.S. by passing legislation such as the Conrad State 30 and Physician Access Reauthorization Act, which Rep. Brad Schneider (IL-10) introduced in the 118th Congress as H.R. 4942 (S. 665 in the Senate). For years, rural areas in Illinois and across the country have benefited from the J-1 waiver program for international physicians who have been trained in the U.S. Legislation is needed to extend the program and to increase the number of slots available to at least 40 or allow states to pool unused slots.



VI. ENSURING THE TAX CODE PROTECTS STUDENTS AND UNIVERSITIES

With key provisions of the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act set to expire in 2025, Congress and the administration should work together to enact tax policies that make higher education more affordable and accessible, and ease the burden on universities and other nonprofits.

▶ We urge Congress to:

- Consolidate and simplify the American Opportunity Tax Credit (AOTC) and the Lifelong Learning Credit (LLC). [Higher education associations have proposed reforms](#) that would allow more low- and middle-income students to benefit from the AOTC and LLC.
- Repeal the taxability of Pell Grants. Pell Grants are the cornerstone of federal financial aid and the foundation of a student financial aid package at the U of I System. Congress can support low-income students by making Pell benefits non-taxable.
- Encourage charitable giving by renewing the charitable deduction for all taxpayers regardless of whether they itemize deductions. Charitable giving helps the U of I System to support our students and meet our nonprofit mission. We were pleased when Congress enacted the CARES Act of 2020 to provide non-itemizers with an above-the-line charitable deduction of up to \$300. Congress later extended the deduction through 2021 and increased the deduction to \$600 for joint filers. Rep. Danny Davis (IL-7) has been a lead cosponsor of the Charitable Act (S. 566, H.R. 3435 in the 118th Congress), which would renew and expand the universal deduction.
- Increase support for employer-provided educational assistance programs. Under sec. 127 of the tax code, employers can provide up to \$5,250 in tax-free educational benefits per year; that cap has not been adjusted since 1986. Those benefits can include loan repayments, but only through December 2025. Congress should increase the size of the benefit and make the inclusion of loan repayments permanent.

- Repeal the gross income exclusion for interest on advance refunding bonds. Since 2004, the U of I System has advance refunded approximately \$921 million of tax-exempt debt, saving approximately \$64 million. The ability to advance refund and restructure outstanding debt is critical for many universities.
- Protect and enhance governmental defined contribution plans. As participants in the State Universities Retirement System (SURS), U of I System employees are not eligible for Social Security. By improving 403(b) and 457 retirement plan features and implementation timelines, Congress can help ensure our employees are able to save for a secure retirement.



VII. STRENGTHENING RESEARCH, EXTENSION AND EDUCATION IN THE NEXT FARM BILL

UIUC is a world-class provider of cutting-edge agricultural and technology research, agricultural education, and innovation and technology transfer through the College of Agricultural, Consumer and Environmental Sciences (ACES) and Illinois Extension.

UIUC contributes to the Illinois ag sector's global leadership in crop and livestock productivity; biomanufacturing; AgTech; nutrition, health, and food security; and climate, workforce, and economic sustainability and resilience.

The Farm Bill, last signed in 2018, provides a five-year reauthorization and funding for significant portions of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Of particular importance for the U of I System is Title VII, which reauthorizes the National Institute of Food and Agriculture's (NIFA) education, research, and extension programs.

- ▶ We urge Congress to:
 - Increase capacity funding, including:
 - Hatch Act of 1887, which supports agricultural research and state agricultural experiment stations.
 - Smith Lever Act 3(b) and 3(c), which supports the Cooperative Extension System through dollar-for-dollar matched funding, providing research-based education and programs that advance agriculture, economic development and health.
 - Smith Lever Act 3(d), which in part supports Extension's innovative Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program, targeting low-income populations.
 - Increase competitive funding. The Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) is the USDA's competitive grant program for food and agriculture research, education and extension.
 - Support Title V, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Nutrition education funded through the SNAP-Education program enables Illinois Extension to provide programs and assistance to food-insecure individuals and families.
 - Support Title II, the Regional Conservation Partnership Program, which supports important water quality and nutrient loss programs in Illinois.

Congress should also ensure that the next Farm Bill reauthorization helps colleges of agriculture to address a large backlog of deferred maintenance and to modernize facilities. In 2020, Gordian, a top provider of construction cost and data, [estimated](#) 69% of buildings in colleges of agriculture were at the end of their useful life, with \$11.5 billion in deferred maintenance and an estimated \$38.1 billion replacement cost nationwide. At UIUC, there is \$470 million in estimated deferred building maintenance for College of ACES buildings which support innovation and discovery. Investing in research infrastructure will propel advancements in climate, food and nutrition sciences; attract the next generation of students to the food and ag sector; and support Illinois' innovative and vibrant AgTech economy.

- ▶ We urge Congress to invest in renewing research, extension, and education facilities by reauthorizing the Research Facilities Act, which provides competitive funding for colleges of agriculture.



VIII. SUPPORTING STUDENT-ATHLETES AND COLLEGE ATHLETICS

The U of I System is committed to safeguarding the integrity of college athletics and ensuring that student-athletes have the resources they need to succeed in their sport, in the classroom and in life.

Recent years have been characterized by tremendous disruption in college athletics, including conference realignment, challenges to the ability of the NCAA to regulate college sports, and new opportunities for student-athletes to transfer schools and to earn money from commercial use of their own name, image, and likeness (NIL). The U of I System supports allowing student-athletes to profit from NIL, as permitted under Illinois law. As states have passed their own NIL laws, however, the result has been a patchwork of policies with varying requirements relating to transparency and accountability.

The NCAA has agreed to a landmark settlement with plaintiffs that seeks to address this new landscape. Among other provisions, the settlement would: allow Division I institutions like UIUC and UIC to share revenues with student-athletes, provide approximately \$2.8 billion to former student-athletes, and permit legitimate NIL opportunities while prohibiting tacit pay-for-play schemes. The settlement has received preliminary judicial approval, with final approval anticipated in April 2025.

Even with the settlement, federal legislation is needed to establish a national framework that supports all student-athletes while safeguarding the integrity of college athletics.

- ▶ We urge Congress to:
 - Provide limited liability protection to allow regulation of college sports.
 - Preempt state NIL laws to provide a consistent national framework and an even playing field for universities and student-athletes in all states.
 - Confirm that student-athletes are not employees.





IX. ADVANCING RESEARCH SECURITY WHILE PRESERVING INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION

In recent years, Congress and federal agencies have taken a number of steps to address efforts by foreign countries to obtain illicit influence over, or access to, U.S. universities and researchers.

To give just a few examples:

- In July 2024, the White House issued guidelines to implement National Security Presidential Memorandum-33 (NSPM-33), “Presidential Memorandum on United States Government-Supported Research and Development National Security Policy.” The guidelines are intended to ensure that major research institutions have effective programs in place to safeguard the security of federally funded research.
- The CHIPS and Science Act of 2022 included several provisions to enhance research security through new or expanded training, risk assessments, information sharing, disclosures of foreign financial support and guidelines on foreign talent recruitment programs.
- In recent years, Congress has enacted annual National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) bills that include provisions to protect national security research and academic researchers from undue influence and other security threats.

The U of I System is committed to protecting our universities, faculty and students from efforts by foreign actors to compromise or unfairly exploit research. We have internal controls in place to secure and manage access to research on sensitive topics, such as technology control plans. We also educate our faculty about risks, and about the importance of complying with federal laws, regulations and policies that are designed to prevent misuse of research. These federal protections include the classification system for national security information, as well as federal policies on Controlled Unclassified Information and on Dual Use Research of Concern in the life sciences. These protections also include export controls, which place limits on certain research with foreign persons or entities; sharing of certain technologies and information overseas; and foreign travel.

At the same time, the U of I System is committed to advancing knowledge through open research and international collaboration in which methodologies, data and research results are shared freely with the public. That commitment is essential to ensure scientific progress as well as national and economic security, which is why it has been the policy of the federal government for decades that basic and applied research should “to the maximum extent possible... remain unrestricted” and that “where the national security requires control, the mechanism...is classification.”

The U of I System is open to proposals to enhance research protections that are consistent with the longstanding principles outlined above, and with efforts already underway at federal agencies.

- ▶ We urge Congress and the administration to ensure that any new controls on the distribution and accessibility of federally funded research: (1) are narrowly defined, (2) focus on specific technologies that are essential to national security, (3) are harmonized to be consistent across all federal agencies, (4) are shared with universities, and (5) do not unduly restrict international collaboration.

