

University of Illinois System

The University of Illinois System is the flagship higher education system in the state of Illinois.

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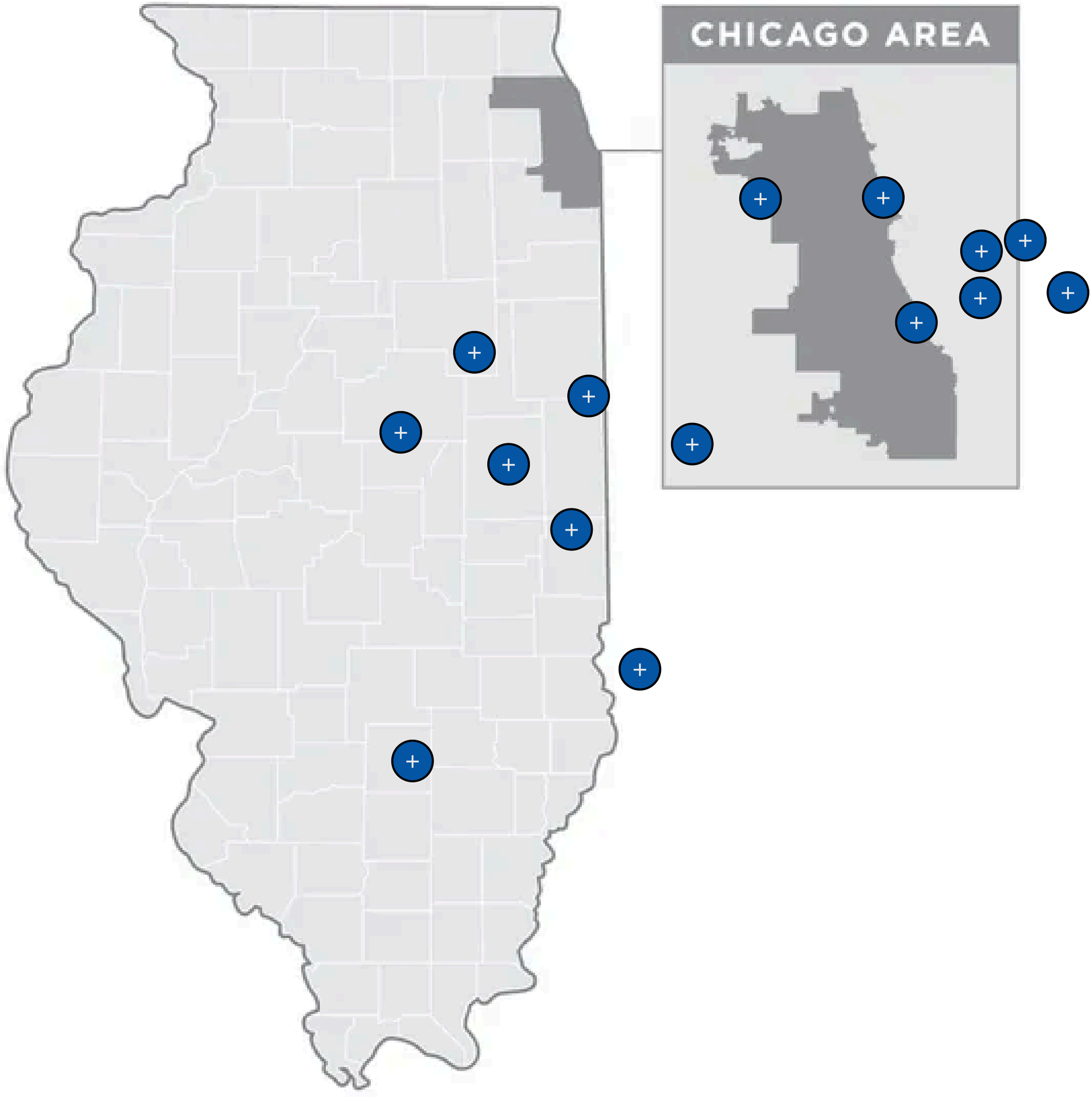
DRIVING A THRIVING ECONOMY: THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS SYSTEM'S STATEWIDE IMPACT

A thriving economy is more than just the bottom line—it's innovation flourishing, businesses growing, and communities thriving. It means accessible education that leads to careers, sustainable industries that power progress, and inclusive opportunities that uplift people and places. It's about resilience, collaboration, and shared success that lays the foundation for a stronger, brighter future.

The University of Illinois System is at the forefront of this vision—fueling Illinois' economy through research and tech innovation, expanding education pathways, ensuring access and affordability, advancing sustainability, and improving healthcare access.

In 2024, system leadership embarked on its fourth annual statewide tour, strengthening partnerships and shaping new initiatives to drive economic growth. By engaging with leaders, stakeholders, and communities, we continue to build upon past conversations and forge new collaborations—ensuring that every corner of Illinois benefits from the power of education, research, and innovation.

812
TOTAL MILES TRAVELED


CHICAGO AREA



WIDENING STUDENT PATHWAYS, STRENGTHENING ILLINOIS

Our 2024 statewide tour highlighted our commitment to building a thriving economy by increasing access to higher education and investing in Illinois' future workforce. University of Illinois System leadership visited high schools in the state to connect with students and their administrators. These visits solidified students' understanding of how accessible and affordable our best-in-class universities are, especially through our affordability programs, scholarships and recently expanded Transfer Guarantee.

These initiatives are working to welcome even more students to our universities. In fall 2024, the U of I System topped its previous record, reaching more than 97,700 students enrolled across the system.

The high school visits also opened doors to exploring opportunities for the system to provide critical programming and additional support.

By supporting high schools and strengthening talent pipelines early, we empower students to be college-ready and equip them to contribute to a robust and dynamic Illinois economy.

THREE HIGH SCHOOLS WITH

6,700+

POTENTIAL STUDENTS ENGAGED FOR MAXIMUM IMPACT

Building futures at Homewood-Flossmoor

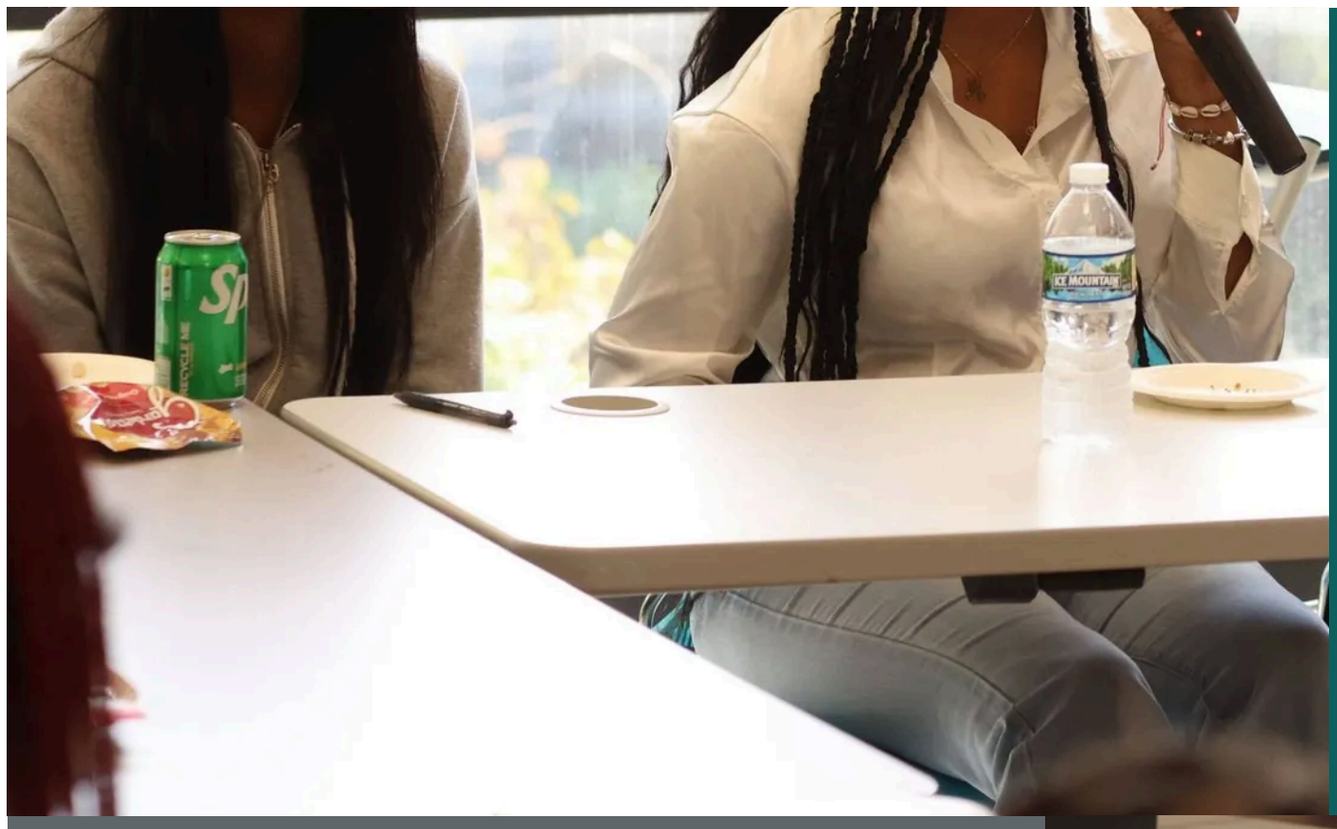
Students, educators, and leaders at Homewood-Flossmoor Community High School have many reasons to be proud, including a 96% graduation rate — almost 10 percentage points above the state average — and 20 College Board National African American/Black and Hispanic/Latino recognition awards.

We heard from students who shared their aspirations, concerns, and plans for their higher education journeys.

We also met with administrators to explore opportunities for partnerships on programs that support dual credit obtainment and deepen learning in critical areas like pre-calculus and the sciences.

These efforts aim to strengthen connections and prepare students for college, reinforcing our commitment to creating accessible pathways to higher education and fostering a resilient and prosperous future for Illinois.





Well-rounded students ready for the future

With active arts communities at all three U of I System universities, we recognize the arts are essential to a well-rounded education and vital to shaping adaptable, future-ready leaders.

At Walter H. Dyett High School for the Arts, educators nurture creativity and critical-thinking skills alongside a rigorous core curriculum, preparing the next generation of innovators and problem-solvers to contribute to a growing economy.

During this state tour stop, we heard from students about their post-graduation plans and dreams, and we shared our commitment to equitable recruitment, robust financial aid, and support on campus. Together with school administrators we planned the creation of custom tours at each of our universities, providing Dyett students with firsthand experiences that show the opportunities that await them.

Building the state's talent pipeline

At West Leyden High School, State Rep. Norma Hernandez facilitated a discussion with students from Leyden High School District 212 about their post-high school goals and future careers.

By building partnerships with high schools, increasing access and affordability at our universities, and expanding students' opportunities for tech and other careers in Illinois, the U of I System creates even more opportunities for these students to one day enjoy the prosperity that helps fuel the state's strong economy.

New U of I System statistics in the 2025 edition of Pocket Facts help tell the story. About 70% of graduates from system universities stay in Illinois to live, work, and contribute to the economy. Nearly 80% of our undergraduate students are Illinois residents, solidifying how essential it is for us to continue to retain Illinois talent.





BOLSTERING BUSINESS SUCCESS

From jobs to innovation to address local and regional needs, businesses and industries — large and small — are essential to driving Illinois' economic power. That's why we're leveraging the University of Illinois System's resources to ensure businesses succeed.

Through our strategic partnerships and targeted support for entrepreneurs, businesses, and industries, we're helping fuel a thriving economy. By equipping learners of all ages with the skills to meet critical workforce needs, we're strengthening talent pipelines and fostering innovation.

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BUSINESS LEADERS ENGAGED STATEWIDE

The heart of American transportation

Chicago has long been a cornerstone of the U.S. economy, serving as a critical transportation hub at the crossroads of the nation. This legacy of driving economic outcomes for Illinois was the focus of our visit to CSX Transportation Intermodal.

Our tour of the intermodal yard underscored the vital role of seamless logistics in moving goods across the country and the incredible diversity of jobs and innovations required to power such an operation. From cutting-edge technologies to the skilled workforce behind the scenes, the intermodal yard demonstrated how this industry fuels a thriving economy by connecting communities and creating opportunities.

The visit also included a dynamic discussion led by Bedford Park Mayor David Brady, featuring stakeholders from engineering, industry, and manufacturing—the economic engines of Cook County. The conversation highlighted the importance of collaboration in strengthening Illinois' economy and showcased how collaborations with industries are driving innovation, creating jobs, and contributing to a resilient and prosperous future for the region.





Incubating innovation

Established in 2018 and led by the U of I system, the Illinois Innovation Network (IIN) aims to foster a thriving economy by promoting research, entrepreneurship, and public-private partnerships that generate solutions to pressing societal challenges. In collaboration with the state's public universities — as well as industry, government and communities — we leverage our unique strengths to contribute to local and statewide innovation efforts.

We toured IIN's Distillery Labs, a newly completed capital project, during our state tour and explored the ways this facility serves as a beacon of progress.

Distillery Labs, located in Peoria's Innovation District, is a 40,000-square-foot innovation hub designed to support startup founders and small businesses. By providing coworking spaces, mentorship programs, networking events, and tools, it empowers entrepreneurs to turn ideas into successful ventures.

Notably, Distillery Labs hosts the gBETA Distillery Labs program, a free, seven-week accelerator for early-stage companies with local roots, fostering growth and innovation. The hub also advances healthcare, medical technology, and biomedical innovations, collaborating with stakeholders to build a thriving ecosystem in the Peoria region.

Through facilities like Distillery Labs, the U of I System continues to strengthen its commitment to building a resilient and prosperous Illinois for generations to come.

Revving up the future of transportation

In Rantoul, we found the spot where the rubber literally will meet the road for the vehicles of the future: the Illinois Autonomous and Connected Track, or I-ACT, at the Illinois Center for Transportation.

At the in-progress I-ACT, researchers will evaluate and refine electrified, connected, and autonomous vehicles. The net-zero high-speed track will feature rural, suburban, and urban test roadways, as well as a multimodal area, to shape progressive and sustainable transportation to address state- and nationwide demand.

The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign facility continually innovates and evolves through the system's longtime partnership with the Illinois Department of Transportation. The partnership helps shape an even stronger state economy by future-proofing how people and the goods they need effectively and efficiently traverse our region and country.





Fueling entrepreneurial ecosystems

Decatur, famously known as the Soybean Capital of the World, boasts a rich legacy of industrial and agricultural commodity processing. Building on this strong agricultural foundation, the Illinois Fermentation and Agriculture Biomanufacturing Hub (iFAB) is poised to lead on a global scale, driving innovation in precision fermentation and biomanufacturing to shape the future of sustainable agriculture and industry. These sustainable processes transform biomass into food, medicine, and materials, significantly reducing waste and reliance on fossil fuels, positioning Decatur as a hub for cutting-edge advancements in sustainability and industry.

In July 2024, iFAB received a federal award of approximately $51 million from the Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration.

We visited Innovafeed and Primient and engaged in discussions with Decatur-area leaders about potential partnerships in future economic development initiatives. With more than 30 partner organizations focused on economic development, iFAB serves as an example of the U of I System's ability to deliver excellence at scale through just one of our many networks of networks.

Feeding Illinois, and the world

In Teutopolis, our visit to the thriving Siemer Milling Company highlights how the strong connections between academia and industry — particularly in agricultural and food sciences — bolster rural, suburban, and urban economies and wellbeing.

Siemer Milling launched in 1882. Today, it employs 170 people and purchases 25 million bushels of locally grown wheat each year to produce some 750,000 tons of processed wheat products.

Showcasing UIUC College of Agricultural, Consumer, and Environmental Sciences alumni and donor Richard Siemer's work, this stop underscores the system's commitment to advancing research and education in grain science, fostering innovation, and strengthening industry partnerships close to home and around the world. Built on farming and food-production foundations, the Illinois economy benefits from both the advancements and partnerships in this essential industry.



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PARTNERING WITH THRIVING COMMUNITIES

Whether we're enhancing workforce opportunities or fostering innovations that drive economic growth, our shared success all starts with engaging the communities that call Illinois home.

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COMMUNITIES VISITED



Paving nontraditional educational pathways

The Arturo Velazquez Institute (AVI) is part of the seven-campus City Colleges of Chicago network. Three of the institute's popular staple programs — manufacturing, electrical construction technology, and sustainable urban horticulture — provide educational and economic opportunities for the Pilsen and Little Village communities.

To attract and support all kinds of learners, the U of I System partners closely with community colleges in Illinois to make transferring to system universities a smooth process. The system also is expanding its Transfer Guarantee, which secures admission for Illinois high school graduates transferring from any college or university in the nation who meet criteria.

During this state tour stop, AVI took the opportunity to spotlight numerous initiatives, including the new statewide "Make it in Illinois" campaign. The Illinois Innovation Network-community college-State of Illinois partnership aims to show how critical today's manufacturing work is to our ever-changing environment and climate.

Preserving cultural heritage

Our stop at Cahokia Mounds World Heritage and State Historic Site highlighted the system's commitment to preserving cultural heritage and conducting archaeological research.

With free programs including Kids Day, as well as lectures, hikes and solstice celebrations, Cahokia Mounds welcomes as many as 350,000 visitors each year.

Engaging with the site's historical and contemporary significance allows the U of I System to support regional economic potential, while enhancing educational and research opportunities. The site is part of the statewide Mythic Mississippi research project, with co-principal investigators from the University of Illinois Springfield and the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.





INCREASING HEALTHCARE ACCESS

With a firm focus on healthcare quality, equity, and innovation, the University of Illinois System works to continually improve the health and wellbeing of the people of Illinois. When people and their communities are healthy, they thrive, further adding to the state's economic vitality to benefit all.

Plus, healthcare careers abound, providing economic stability and professional satisfaction for thousands upon thousands of Illinoisans. The U of I System trains more medical and health professionals than any other institution in the state.

1,400,000+
PATIENT VISITS SYSTEMWIDE IN FY2024



Serving communities in need

After a healthcare resource in Chicago's Gage Park closed just before the pandemic, UI Health sprang into action.

Since opening, the UI Health 55th & Pulaski Health Collaborative has served over 30,000 patients by helping them manage chronic conditions such as high blood pressure and diabetes, and through education, cooking classes, support groups, and other resources.

The UI Health at 55th and Pulaski Health Collaborative is a joint effort of the University of Illinois College of Medicine, UIC College of Applied Health Sciences, and the UI Health Mile Square Health Center, bringing together UIC's health sciences colleges and local providers for health screenings and specialty services, as well as behavioral and mental health care.

The Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services funded the launch of the collaborative through a $15 million Healthcare Transformation Collaboratives award.

Real Impact: driving health, well-being outcomes in community

Rural healthcare solutions

Adding well-trained people to the state's healthcare workforce was the focus as our system leaders connected with peers at Logan County's Lincoln Memorial Hospital. The 25-bed critical-access hospital provides inpatient, outpatient, home health, hospice, behavioral health and primary care services.

The conversation featured insight via rural health experts from the University of Illinois College of Medicine at Rockford (RMED), part of the University of Illinois Chicago. Its Rural Medical Education Program is just one of the initiatives across our system that helps address patient-care gaps in the state. RMED graduates practice in 80 different Illinois communities, with 65% of practicing in towns of less than 50,000 people.

The U of I System's universities and UI Health give learners experience with patients from all walks of life and exposure to the technology and innovation shaping the future of healthcare.

Real Impact: Rural doctor, region thrive because of unique training



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SUPPORTING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

The University of Illinois System is committed to advancing sustainability solutions that address environmental challenges locally, regionally, and globally. By fostering innovation and partnering with communities, we're driving initiatives that not only protect our environment but also contribute to a resilient and healthy economy. As the system prepares to host the first international Sustainability Research and Innovation Congress in the United States during summer 2025, the state tour provided our leaders the opportunity to connect firsthand with environment-focused efforts across Illinois, showcasing how these initiatives ensure a bright future for all.

102

COUNTIES SERVED WITH ACCESS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Protecting natural habitats

Every day at the Therkildsen Field Station in Emiquon Nature Preserve brings opportunities to advance environmental research and education. As part of the University of Illinois Springfield, this site exemplifies the U of I System's commitment to protecting Illinois' natural resources and fostering a sustainable future. The Emiquon floodplain restoration project, launched in 2000, brims with nature at its finest, including the breathtaking presence of hundreds of thousands of migratory birds.

Emiquon covers more than 6,000 acres near Lewiston, about 40 miles southwest of Peoria, and stands as the premier demonstration site for The Nature Conservancy in Illinois' work on the Illinois River and within the Upper Mississippi River system. Partnerships on projects like these support critical conservation efforts that enhance the state's natural resources while contributing to a vibrant economy.

During this stop, state tour participants engaged with Emiquon's transformative impact through hands-on ecology activities, experiencing the same research-based approach used to prepare students for careers in environmental sustainability.

By equipping learners with tools and knowledge to address pressing environmental challenges, the U of I System ensures its students are ready to lead efforts that protect vital ecosystems and drive innovation for a sustainable and prosperous future.





Job training meets urban farming

In Chicago's Lawndale, the Farm on Ogden at the Chicago Botanic Garden combines food production and distribution, health and nutrition education, and sustainability-focused jobs in one location to offer opportunities for greater community wellbeing, as well as individual and family prosperity. State tour participants learned that the facility produces over 100,000 pounds of produce from 13 farms each year, most of which stays in the community.

The Farm on Ogden also provides paid, on-the-job training for at least 100 people each year. The University of Illinois Chicago is an enthusiastic partner in these initiatives that integrate food access, health education, and job training, directly benefiting local residents and fostering community resilience — which all combine to support the forward motion of the state's economy.

The tradition and future of farming

For well over 100 years, the Illinois Farm Bureau has championed the farm families and businesses that keep our communities fed and our economy strong. Today, IFB is the state's largest non-profit, serving nearly 400,000 members and more than 70,000 farmers, farmland owners, and agriculture industry professionals.

Spending time on the state tour with IFB leaders solidified the U of I System's ongoing commitment to supporting the agricultural sector through research, innovation, and economic development. The IFB's origin is part of the same movement that created Cooperative Extension nationwide and our very own Illinois Extension—led by UIUC's College of ACES—which serves the educational, social, and economic needs of people and communities in all 102 Illinois counties. This important stop also reinforced the importance of our land-grant mission and partnering with the agriculture industry on today's issues. Key economic and environmental topics included farm profitability and sustainability, sustainable aviation fuel, carbon sequestration, trade, and policy.

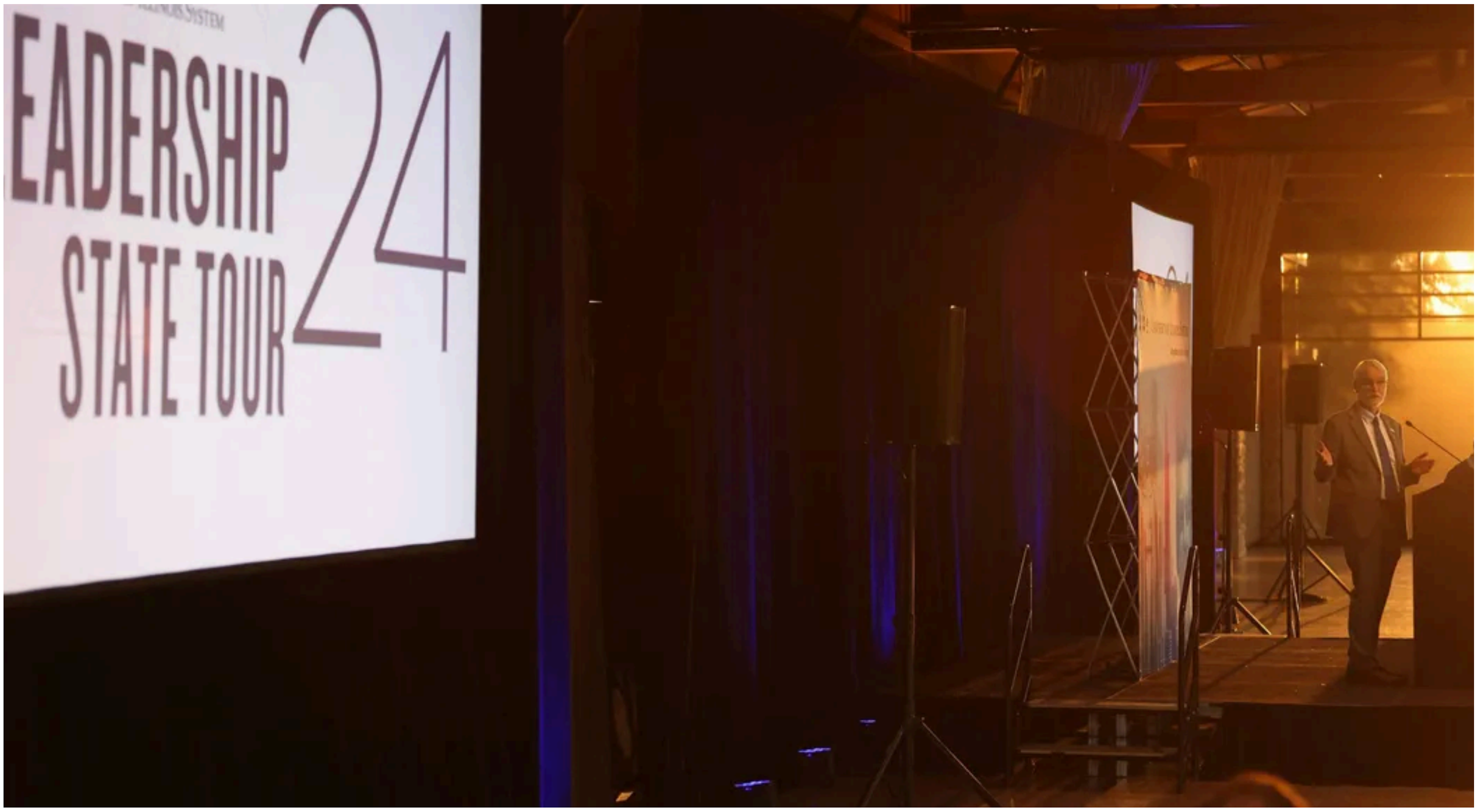


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EXTRAORDINARY ALUMNI, EVERYWHERE

Ever connected to their alma maters, engaged graduates from U of I System universities continually add value through their suggestions, support, and spirit. From lifelong learning to advocating for higher education resources, partnering with alumni broadens our reach and scales our investment to the state. With tour stops in Chicago, Tinley Park, Lisle, Bloomington-Normal, Collinsville, and Effingham, we spanned the state of Illinois to deepen connections with our alumni.

over 750
ALUMNI ENGAGED AT EVENTS








LEADERSHIP
STATE TOUR 24

















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Join Illinois Connection — a grassroots network of alumni, students, faculty, staff and friends of the University of Illinois System — to impact the things you care about.

- Accessible and affordable education
- Job training for a strong economy
- Safe and growing communities
- Innovation and world-changing research
- Healthcare when and where you need it

Join Illinois Connection. Your voice matters.

Learn more today



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