



Issue 32 / January 2026

# MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

ILLINOIS EASTERN  
COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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**FORWARD** >>>  
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# ACROSS THE DISTRICT

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## From the Office of the Chancellor

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**This month, I want to reflect on how another part of our work at IECC is becoming more intentional—and why that matters for students.**

I've been in higher education long enough to remember when “assessment” really meant just one thing: grading students on tests and papers. For the early part of my career, that seemed to be most of the conversation. We measured what each student learned in a course and assigned a grade to reflect their level of subject mastery. Over time, more layers were added. We began measuring and supporting teaching through peer observations and student surveys. Later, we were asked to list learning outcomes on every syllabus. Each step was presented to me as a way to strengthen quality in the classroom, so I did it.

Assessment has come a long way since then. In practice, though, the more assessment we were asked to do, the more it was treated as a bureaucratic chore rather than a genuine opportunity for improvement. I've watched faculty and administrators, myself included, approach outcomes assessment primarily as a compliance or accreditation exercise instead of an authentic tool for teaching and learning. **The irony is hard to miss!** We are professionals dedicated to learning, yet at times we resist learning from our own results. We do exactly what we tell students not to do. We focus on earning the grade (turning in results) instead of learning for application (using results for change).

At a lot of institutions, faculty complete assessment reports because they have to, and administrators compile reports because they are required. It's no surprise that assessment fatigue has set in. One major review found that among 146 campus assessment “best practice” profiles, only 6 percent could provide clear evidence that their efforts led to improved student learning. That statistic stings, but it aligns with the lived experience of many of us. Too often, we gather data, write reports, and file them away with little else to show for it. **That sounds a little like strategic plans, but that is a conversation for another day.**

If you feel skeptical or tired when you hear the word “assessment,” you are not alone. This frustration is widespread across higher education, and I suspect even here at IECC. Assessment expert Peter Ewell described this years ago as a verification model. In that mindset, the focus is on proving to accreditors or administrators that assessment exists rather than using assessment to improve learning. **We end up measuring learning while failing to learn from our measures.**

Still, I think most of us have seen glimpses of what assessment can be when it is done well. At its best, assessment shines a light on what students are learning and where they are struggling. It can spark meaningful conversations among faculty and administrators about how to improve teaching, curriculum, and student support services. The challenge is moving from compliance and fatigue to a culture of continuous improvement. I believe that journey is already underway at IECC, and recent work gives me real hope that we can move even further in the right direction.

Over the past several years, IECC has made important changes that set the stage for a more meaningful assessment culture. In 2019, we reorganized from four separate colleges into a single college. In 2023, we committed to becoming a Guided Pathways institution as part of our Forward Together strategic plan. Also in 2023, we created a FACULTY Director (Kelly Payne) for Assessment with administrative (Brandon Weger) support.

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(Chancellor cont.)

More recently, the Board approved new transfer program pathways that formally package our transfer degrees into clear curriculum maps, much like our long-standing career and technical education programs. This is a significant moment for us. For the first time, we can clearly define learning outcomes at the course, program, and institutional levels for both transfer and CTE programs. In other words, we finally have the structure to do quality assessment across all programs, not as an afterthought, but as part of how we intentionally design education. Even if your primary experience with assessment has been limited to your own courses, this work means that what happens in individual classrooms now connects more intentionally to a larger design for student learning. **And educational experiences should be designed.**

In the past, most of our design work happened at the course level. Each course often functioned as its own island. Without a broader curriculum structure, those islands could drift in ways that were not always good for students. Important skills sometimes fell through the cracks because everyone assumed someone else was covering them. In other cases, topics were unintentionally repeated across courses. Without unified pathways and strong curriculum maps, students could experience gaps and redundancies we never intended.

Formalizing our transfer pathways helps address this directly. Each pathway represents a clear promise to students: a coherent sequence of courses with defined outcomes that intentionally build on one another. Faculty, administrators, and staff collaborated across the district to map where skills and knowledge are introduced, reinforced, and mastered. They also identified the general education courses that best support students pursuing each program of study. This work is not finished, and good curriculum design never truly is. But we now have a strong place to begin.

Curriculum mapping is powerful. When courses are aligned to outcomes, misalignments become visible. We can see where something essential is missing or where content is unintentionally duplicated. Learning begins to build intentionally, much like the progression we expect from Bloom's Taxonomy. Introductory courses focus on foundational knowledge. More advanced courses build on that foundation and allow higher levels of critical thought and application. Students benefit from a smoother, more coherent experience, and faculty can more clearly see how their course fits into the larger picture—even if they teach only one or two courses.

Our CTE programs have long operated this way because external standards require it. Now we are bringing that same clarity to our transfer programs. Academic freedom remains central. Faculty still bring their expertise, examples, and personality into the classroom. The difference is that this freedom now exists within a shared framework. We are moving from isolated islands to connected pathways. That shift gives us a much stronger foundation for meaningful assessment. We can finally ask, at the program level, whether students are learning what we collectively agreed they should learn by the time they complete a pathway.

Another important piece of this work is defining what every IECC graduate should leave with, regardless of program. I like to think of this as the shared DNA of an IECC education. Beyond discipline-specific skills, what common abilities, attributes, or values do we want all students to develop?

Many colleges articulate this through **institutional learning outcomes** such as effective communication, critical thinking, ethical reasoning, or civic engagement. These outcomes reflect institutional values and help define what it means to be an IECC graduate. Importantly, they are developed not only in classrooms, but through co-curricular experiences as well—student clubs, service learning, athletics, the arts, travel, advising, TRIO and Upward Bound, student ambassador programs, work study, and programming in our CETL and Learning Commons. These are not just passive offerings; they are active tools used to support specific student outcomes.

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(Chancellor cont.)

None of this is easy. It requires us to be honest about priorities and realistic about what can be achieved in a two-year experience. There is always a temptation to list everything and the kitchen sink, **but when everything is a priority, nothing truly is.** Making these choices is governance work, and it requires thoughtful collaboration across the institution.

Once defined, institutional outcomes become a north star. Programs align portions of their outcomes to them. Courses align to program outcomes. This creates a clear line from institution to program to course. Mission statements stop being slogans and start becoming lived experiences in classrooms, hallways, and communities. **Nothing is left to chance.**

Guided Pathways gives us the structure to do this well in both academics and student services. It invites a simple but powerful question: **what do we promise our graduates?** Once we answer that, assessment becomes less about compliance and more about whether we are keeping our promises to students and the communities who support us.

Changing assessment culture means shifting from external accountability to an internal commitment to improve for our students. In a healthy culture, assessment is driven by curiosity rather than fear. It becomes a tool for reflection and growth instead of a chore to satisfy accreditors.

We also need to acknowledge that most of us were never trained in assessment, and many of us have learned about it only through the course of doing our jobs here at IECC. Professional development matters. Workshops, peer sharing, and learning from other institutions will all help build confidence and skill. When faculty and administrators see a wider landscape and have the opportunity to share what has worked, assessment becomes creative and energizing rather than mechanical.

None of this is easy. Real change takes time. Research on reforms like Guided Pathways suggests that full implementation often takes four to seven years, and next year is truly year one for us. That calls for patience and persistence. Starting small is not a weakness. It is often the smartest path forward.

I am optimistic. Assessment fatigue is real, but IECC is increasingly positioned for a different future. We have a unified structure, clear pathways, and a shared commitment to student success. I like to imagine IECC a few years from now: faculty in department meetings talking regularly about student learning and using evidence to improve curriculum; students benefiting from stronger support services and more intentional co-curricular experiences; our CETL helping faculty experiment with new approaches and measuring whether they work. **In that environment, accreditation becomes a byproduct of good practice rather than a scramble at the end.**

At its heart, assessment is about growth—the same growth we want for our students. An assessment culture asks us to learn as an institution, to face hard truths, and to keep improving. It is not a report or an event. It is an ongoing conversation we have with each other.

Changing long-standing habits can be hard, and there will be bumps along the way. But if we approach this work with curiosity, collaboration, and grace for one another, we can build something better. Every time the conversation shifts from “What do we have to do?” to “What do our students need?” we move forward. Together.

Ryan Gower, Ph.D.  
Chancellor; Illinois Eastern Community Colleges



## IECC Transfer Guided Pathways for Fall 2026!

IECC's Transfer Guided Pathways represent a major step forward in helping students move seamlessly from IECC to four-year universities. Each pathway is a clearly structured degree plan designed to provide students with a clear and intentional route to a bachelor's degree.

Rather than having students use the cafeteria plan where they are navigating lots of options towards building their degree path, students will now have a clear outline to guide their class schedule for each semester they are at IECC. IECC faculty and staff have mapped semester-by-semester degree plans that connect directly to specific majors. Students will know from day one what courses to take, when to take them, and how the courses will apply towards the bachelor's degree they want to pursue.

The Guided Transfer Pathways initiative is part of IECC's broader commitment to a student-centered approach that organizes transfer programs into clear academic and career routes, strengthens advising, and supports students completing degrees on time.

### Benefits of Transfer Pathways at IECC:

- Improved Student Success and Completion Rates
- Stronger Enrollment and Retention
- Clear Financial Value for Students and Families
- Enhanced Academic Advising
- Data Informed Planning
- Assessment for Program Outcomes

Each transfer pathway includes two First Year Experience courses to focus on supporting student retention and overall success at IECC. These courses are one-credit hour each and will be completed in the first year of enrollment.

IECC will begin recruiting students into the Transfer Guided Pathways programs during the current admission cycle for Fall 2026!

## Vice Chancellor Town Halls

Presented by the Vice Chancellors, these forums provide important updates, promote transparency, and foster collaboration across divisions as we continue advancing the IECC Strategic Engagement Plan. Faculty and staff are encouraged to attend, ask questions, and share feedback. For convenience, each campus will host both a morning and afternoon session.

### Upcoming Town Hall Meetings:

- **February 26 - OCC Banquet Room: 11:00 - 12:00 PM and 1:00 - 2:00 PM**
- **March 24 - WVC Student Services Conference Room: 11:00 - 12:00 PM and 1:00 - 2:00 PM**
- **April 28 - FCC Mason Hall Conference Room: 11:00 - 12:00 PM and 1:00 - 2:00 PM**



## Enrollment Management Update

### Upcoming IECC Events

IECC campuses are buzzing with opportunities for students to explore careers, creativity, and college pathways this winter. Highlights include **LTC Scout Badge Day** on January 31, **Ag Acquaintance Day** on February 3, and **OCC Fine Arts Day** on February 6. Music takes center stage at the **LTC Jazz Festival** on February 10, followed by the **IECC College Fair** at OCC on February 18. The month wraps up with the **LTC Future Educators Summit** on February 23, **Newton Career Fair** on February 25, and **Cadaver Day** on February 27—offering hands-on learning and career exploration for students across the region.

### Community Education

Anyone interested in hosting a summer camp or Community Education class for **Summer 2026–Spring 2027** is encouraged to connect with Curtis Miller at [millercc3@iecc.edu](mailto:millercc3@iecc.edu), as planning is currently underway.

## IECC Tiered Nursing Admission

When challenged to set 1, 5, and 10 year goals in 2022, the nursing faculty chose an ambitious 5 year goal: to fill the seats at all four campuses. Between all four campuses, the district could start 130 nursing students a year, and the last year the nursing program admitted 130 students was 2018. Despite the challenges experienced in higher education, applications were still being placed for the nursing program, but students were struggling to reach the required admission testing minimums for program entry.

This gap identification led to an investigation of admission criteria in the nursing program and developed into the Pilot Nursing Tiered Admission. Students who apply to the program and meet all the traditional admission requirements will be seated in the nursing program, just like every other year. The magic of the tiered admission is with the unfilled seats. If any campus has unfilled seats, students who are within a percentage of the admission test score may be awarded a seat on a provisional basis. These students will attend summer sessions with nursing staff to learn and prove competency in the tested learning areas of math, science, and reading. Students will also review study skills to prepare them for entrance into the nursing program.

The goal of this program is to close the gaps for these students that fell just below the cut off and allow them the opportunity to proceed into their goal program. This tiered admission pilot will allow us to increase students while ensuring those students are prepared for day one of nursing school in a meaningful way.



# TRIO

UPWARD BOUND

IECC MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

JANUARY 2025

## LTC Grant Student Highlights



Aidan Secrest, a senior at Lawrenceville High School, has been a dedicated member of TRIO Upward Bound since his freshman year. His high school journey has been marked by outstanding leadership and involvement in a wide range of activities. Aidan has served as President and Vice President of BETA, President of the National Honor Society, and President of Interact, while also participating in FCA, SADD, the Science and Engineering Club, Track, Cross Country, and the tutoring club. Recently, Aidan achieved an incredible milestone—he was accepted to Washington University in St. Louis and awarded the WashU Pledge, which covers tuition, fees, housing, and meals. With plans to study Astrophysics, Aidan is reaching for the stars—literally! We are beyond proud of his accomplishments and cannot wait to see the amazing things he will achieve in the future.



Rhyc is a senior at Newton Community High School who brings positivity and enthusiasm to everything she does. She is an active member of both the Spanish Club and Art Club and regularly participates in TRIO, where her friendly, outgoing, and sweet personality really shines. A dedicated student with a love for learning, Rhyc has been accepted to Eastern Illinois University, where she plans to major in Education and pursue her passion for making a difference in the classroom. Outside of school, she's a proud Swiftie and even had the opportunity to spend two weeks in Germany last summer as part of The Effingham/Kelheim, Germany Exchange program! We are so proud of Rhyc and can't wait to see all that she accomplishes next!

## OCC Grant Student Highlights



Jaycee Kolb is our Student Spotlight for February. She is an outstanding student currently in her senior year at Edwards County High School. Jaycee is a superintendent's honor student, a member of the National Honor's Society, and is involved in school volleyball as well as travel volleyball. Jaycee has been admitted to the University of Evansville and is hoping to be granted freshman direct entry into the UE Doctor of Physical Therapy Program. Jaycee has been a member of TRIO Upward Bound all four years of High School. She enjoys being outside, spending time with family and friends, and her best fur friend Bo. We look forward to watching Jaycee achieve her goals and we know she will do great things!



TRIO Upward Bound proudly recognizes River Logan, a senior at Richland County High School, for her exceptional leadership and community involvement. She is active in several organizations, including CEO, Youth Alive, Theater, Interact Club, Tri-M Music Society, and Chorus. As a junior, River was the Director of the Interact Club and Historian for Tri-M. She co-founded Youth Alive and continues to lead it. After high school, she plans to attend a Christian college for a degree in ministry. River's dedication aligns with TRIO Upward Bound's mission to empower students for college success. We look forward to her future opportunities!

## WVC Grant Student Highlights



Makenzie Slotter is a Senior at Mount Carmel High School. Makenzie is an excellent student, who excels in leadership and plans to pursue a Bachelor's in Music Therapy from a 4-year institution. She is an ALL-STATE level French horn player and has a passion for music that has led her to finding a field she can pursue both this passion and her love of helping others.



Matthew Winkler is a junior at Red Hill high school. Matthew is an outstanding student, a remarkable leader, and a consistent source of support for his classmates. He has embraced numerous leadership roles in various school organizations, such as the choir, band, and art club. His talent for balancing involvement in these groups, along with work and participation in the Trio Upward Bound program, serves as an inspiring example for those around him.

ANNOUNCEMENT!

**THE STEM LAB OPEN HOUSE WILL TAKE PLACE IN  
FEBRUARY. STAY TUNED FOR UPDATES FROM TRIO U.B.!**

<https://iecc.edu/trioub>



## Spring New Student Orientation & Refresh Held January 14th

Campuses across the district kicked off the semester with an abridged New Student Orientation for students beginning in the spring term, alongside a “Refresh” session designed for students on academic probation or academic warning. These sessions offered attendees a focused overview of key student success resources, including NetTutor, TimelyCare, Entrata, Canvas, and Learning Commons services.

The Directors of Learning Commons also engaged in Q&A with students, gathering valuable insights into challenges that may have contributed to academic difficulties during the fall semester. The feedback proved meaningful, and the sessions were well received by those in attendance. Discussions are already underway to offer these orientations more frequently to better support vulnerable student populations.

## IECC College and Career Fair at OCC Campus

50 businesses and universities have registered to participate in the IECC College and Career Fair at the Olney Central College campus on Wednesday, February 18th, from 9:00 am until 12:00 pm. Over 180 area high school students are also registered to attend.

This is a great opportunity for IECC students to explore post-secondary education opportunities and network with potential employers.

Transportation will be provided from FCC, LTC, and WVC for students attending the fair.

Please encourage your students to attend this event.

Here is the link and QR code for IECC students to register to attend.

[IECC student registration - College and Career Fair 2026 – Fill out form](#)

IECC student registration - College  
and Career Fair 2026



## STUDY ABROAD IN *Seville, Spain* MAY 27-JUNE 26

IECC is offering a study abroad opportunity from May 27-June 26 in Seville, Spain at the International College of Seville! Students will earn 6 college credits (Culture & Society of Spain, 3, and Spanish language, 3).

For more information, contact:  
Cassandra Goldman  
IECC Dean of Students

**Application  
deadline is  
March 1st!**







## CETL Micro-Certificates

Congratulations to Catherine Singleton for completing the Innovation in Education Micro-Certificate!

### ✦✦ First CETL Micro-Certificate Completer!

CETL micro-certification enrollment is still open. New courses include THEORIES OF LEARNING (EDUCATION 1615, Sec 400, CRN 61588, Instructors: Jamie Barbee and Mike Conn) and EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP (EDUCATION 1618, Sec 400, CRN 61590, Instructor: Kevin Smith). All courses are free for all employees at IECC.

- All courses are online.
- Dates: January 12, 2026 – May 14, 2026 – Still time to register!

[CETL Micro-Certificates Registration Guide | IECC](#)

### Spring 2026 – Online Courses From CETL

Title	Subject	Course #	Section	Credits	CRN	Instructor(s)
BASIC PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES	EDUCATION	1600	400	1	61589	MAYHALL, AMIE (Primary)
ADVANCED PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES	EDUCATION	1605	400	1	61585	HNETKOVSKY, NIXIE (Primary)
CREATING EDUCATIONAL VIDEOS	EDUCATION	1610	400	1	61586	MCDONALD, JESSICA (Primary)
BLOOMS TAXONOMY BEST PRACTICES	EDUCATION	1613	400	1	61587	BRUCK, LAURA (Primary)
THEORIES OF LEARNING	EDUCATION	1615	400	1	61588	BARBEE, JAMIE (Primary) Conn, Michael
EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP	EDUCATION	1618	400	1	61590	SMITH, KEVIN (Primary)
FACULTY ORIENTATION-ONBOARDING	NC BUSINESS/CAREER DEV	N122	F01	0	61938	WEASE, SONJA (Primary), CONN, MICHAEL

## CETL Video Series

Presentations from the January 9th CETL virtual series have been edited and shared on the CETL website, covering key topics such as Copilot, ALLY software, and AI for education.

[CETL Professional Development Workshops | IECC](#)

## Lincoln Legacy Teaching and Learning Community

**IECC is heading back to the LLTLC conference!**

**Dates:** May 18–19, 2026

**Theme:** Beyond Limits: Practical Pathways to the Future of Learning

**Location:** Illini Union, Urbana, IL

CETL will cover registration fees and arrange transportation from OCC. Don't miss this opportunity to connect and learn!

[LLTLC 2026 Registration Form – Fill out form](#)





## B&I Presents “Blueprints for Growth”

Business & Industry hosted “Blueprints for Growth,” attended by 33 local economic development personnel. Key topics included TIF, Business Districts, Strategic Planning, and an economic growth panel. We will also be co-hosting the annual PTA CE Summit on the 31st. Additionally, we have begun reaching out to businesses regarding our 2026 NSAW grant.



## SBDC Grant Renewal

We are pleased to announce that the SBDC has received grant funding for another three-year term. With the official notice of funding received on January 15th, we are now moving forward with new workshop and training opportunities. We are also actively preparing for SBDC Day in March.



## Student Parent Information Nights (SPIN)

Enrollment Management will be having a Student Parent Information Night (SPIN) at each campus in March. High School Juniors and Seniors are invited to attend along with their parents or guardians. We would like the faculty of each program to be present to answer any questions and share insights about their program at their respective campus. (For example, Radio/TV faculty to attend WVC SPIN, Process Tech faculty at LTC SPIN, Medical Lab Tech faculty to attend FCC SPIN, etc.). If you are interested in attending a SPIN event at another campus, you are more than welcome to do so.

Each program will be assigned to a table for students and parents to visit, with signage indicating the program being represented. While rack cards will be provided, faculty are encouraged to bring visuals or related items to showcase their program. This is a chance to be creative to promote your program and what makes it unique and to share all of your wealth of knowledge!

Below are the following SPIN events at each campus:

**FCC** - Tuesday, March 3rd, 5:30 pm to 7:00 pm in Workforce Development Center

**OCC** - Thursday, March 5th, 5:30 pm to 7:00 pm in the Student Union

**WVC** - Tuesday, March 17th, 5:30 pm to 7:00 pm in the gym

**LTC** - Thursday, March 19th, 5:30 pm to 7:00 pm in the gym

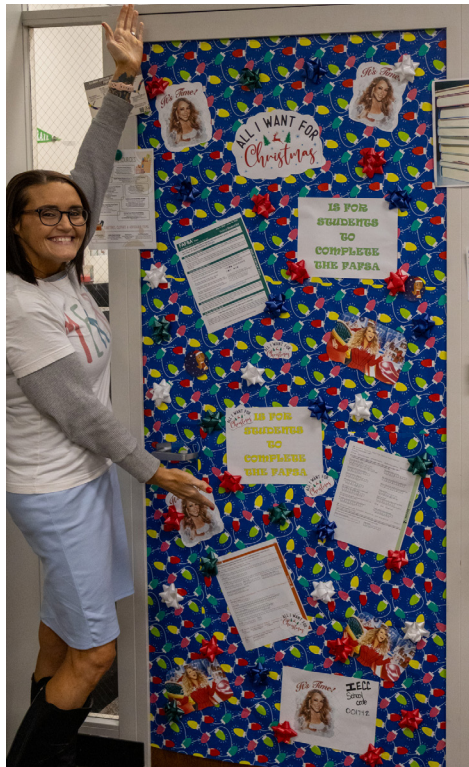
Please feel free to contact [Carrie Halbert](#) if you have any questions.



## Active Minds Door Decoration Contest Winners



**FCC  
Winner**



**LTC  
Winner**



**WVC  
Winnner**



# NEWS AT THE COLLEGES

*Click each newsletter to view*

The Voyager

Network LT

Knightline

View from the Valley

## LTC Alumna Wins State Fair Queen Pageant

Three LTC students or alumni were in the State Fair Queen Pageant this year. The Winner was Krista Phillips, an alumna who had gone to the FBLA National competition with Amie Mayhall and played volleyball for LTC. She is now a student graduating from UIUC in May. Congratulations!

[https://www.wandtv.com/news/effingham-county-woman-crowned-2026-miss-illinois-county-fair-queen/article\\_c22110f0-8675-47cc-acac-513eb0f9e023.html](https://www.wandtv.com/news/effingham-county-woman-crowned-2026-miss-illinois-county-fair-queen/article_c22110f0-8675-47cc-acac-513eb0f9e023.html)



## IECC Annual Reports Available

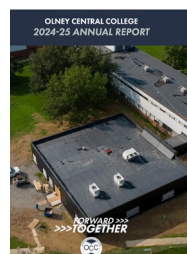
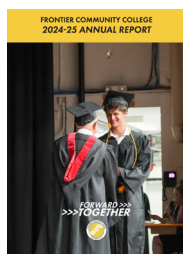
Read the new 2024-2025 Annual Reports for each campus:

[Frontier Community College](#)

[Lincoln Trail College](#)

[Olney Central College](#)

[Wabash Valley College](#)



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