



Position Paper: Supporting Community College Baccalaureate Degrees in Illinois

Illinois Community College Faculty Association (ICCFA)

Approved by the Board, February 28, 2025

Executive Summary

The Illinois Community College Faculty Association (ICCFA) supports the authorization and expansion of Community College Baccalaureate (CCB) degrees in Illinois. CCB degrees provide affordable, accessible, and workforce-aligned education opportunities that meet the needs of Illinois residents, particularly in underserved regions. Expanding baccalaureate degree offerings at community colleges will address workforce shortages, increase educational attainment, and uphold the mission of community colleges as institutions that serve local and regional needs.

Key reasons for ICCFA's support include:

1. **Improved Access and Equity** – CCB programs provide an affordable pathway to four-year degrees for students who may not have access to traditional university programs due to geographic, financial, or personal constraints (Illinois Community College Trustees Association, 2023).
2. **Workforce and Economic Development** – Many high-demand fields, such as healthcare, technology, and business, require a baccalaureate degree, and CCB programs can help meet workforce shortages (New America, 2024).
3. **Preserving Faculty Roles and Institutional Integrity** – As enrollment challenges continue, allowing community colleges to offer bachelor's degrees can maintain faculty positions and ensure that students receive high-quality instruction from credentialed faculty (Skolnik, 2022).
4. **Alignment with National Trends** – Many other states have successfully implemented CCB degrees, demonstrating their viability and effectiveness in addressing workforce gaps (American Association of Community Colleges, 2023).

ICCFA urges state policymakers to support legislative initiatives that allow Illinois community colleges to offer baccalaureate degrees in select high-demand fields.

Faculty Perspectives on Community College Baccalaureate Degrees

A. Addressing Access and Equity

1. Illinois faces a college completion gap, particularly among underrepresented and nontraditional students. Many students are place-bound due to financial, familial, or work commitments that prevent them from relocating to attend a university (Illinois Community College Trustees Association, 2023).
2. CCB degrees offer an affordable and accessible pathway for students who might not otherwise pursue a four-year degree, thereby expanding educational attainment across the state (New America, 2024).
3. Community colleges have a strong track record of supporting diverse student populations, including first-generation students and working adults (Bragg & Harmon, 2023).

B. Workforce and Economic Development

1. Many industries experiencing workforce shortages require bachelor's degrees for entry-level positions (e.g., nursing, cybersecurity, early childhood education, advanced manufacturing) (American Association of Community Colleges, 2023).
2. By offering targeted CCB programs, community colleges can directly align education with workforce needs, ensuring a skilled workforce for Illinois businesses and industries (Bragg & Harmon, 2023).
3. Community colleges have existing partnerships with local employers and regional economic development agencies, allowing for program design that is responsive to workforce demands (Illinois Community College Trustees Association, 2023).

C. Impact on Faculty and Institutional Integrity

1. The introduction of CCB degrees strengthens the role of community college faculty by allowing them to teach upper-division coursework in specialized fields (Skolnik, 2022).
2. Community colleges already employ highly qualified faculty with advanced degrees who are capable of delivering baccalaureate-level education (New America, 2024).
3. Expanding degree offerings ensures that faculty positions are maintained and potentially expanded rather than reduced due to declining enrollment in lower-division courses (Bragg & Harmon, 2023).

D. National Trends and Legislative Precedents

1. 24 states currently allow community colleges to offer baccalaureate degrees, with demonstrated success in improving degree completion and workforce readiness (American Association of Community Colleges, 2023).
 2. Studies show that CCB programs serve students who are unlikely to enroll in traditional four-year universities, rather than competing with university enrollments (Illinois Community College Trustees Association, 2023).
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Recommendations

1. **Authorize Illinois Community Colleges to Offer Baccalaureate Degrees in Select High-Demand Fields**
 - Focus areas should include healthcare, education, technology, and applied sciences based on workforce demand.
 - Community colleges should collaborate with regional employers to ensure program alignment with industry needs.
2. **Ensure Faculty Oversight and Curriculum Integrity**
 - Faculty should be involved in the development and approval of CCB programs to maintain academic rigor.
 - Faculty governance structures should oversee curriculum design, faculty credentialing, and assessment.
3. **Increase State Funding and Support for CCB Programs**
 - Financial investment is needed to expand facilities, hire additional faculty, and provide student support services.
 - Funding should prioritize community colleges serving regions with the highest workforce needs and lowest four-year degree attainment rates.
4. **Develop Clear Transfer Pathways and Articulation Agreements**
 - Collaboration with universities should ensure smooth transfer options for students who wish to pursue graduate education.
 - Clear articulation agreements should be established to prevent duplication and maximize credit transferability.
5. **Align Faculty Benefits at Community Colleges with Those at Public Universities**

- As community colleges expand their role in offering four-year degrees, faculty benefits should be reviewed for greater alignment with public university faculty, particularly in areas such as retirement healthcare.
 - This transition presents an opportunity to advocate for equitable faculty benefits, recognizing the increased responsibilities and contributions of community college educators in baccalaureate programs.
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Conclusion

Expanding Community College Baccalaureate degrees in Illinois is a necessary step toward increasing educational access, addressing workforce shortages, and maintaining faculty positions in a changing higher education landscape. ICCFA strongly advocates for legislative action to authorize and fund CCB programs, ensuring that community colleges can continue their mission of serving students and communities effectively.

References

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