



UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS
SYSTEM

STUDENTS CONNECTING WITH CONGRESS

CONTENTS

University of Illinois System Federal Priorities: Messages, Talking Points and Background	3
University of Illinois System Fast Facts	9
Tips for a Successful Hill Meeting	10
Contact Information	16
Legislator Information	17

ABOUT THE OFFICE OF GOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

The U of I System's Office of Governmental Relations (OGR) consists of three teams handling state relations, federal relations, and grassroots advocacy. OGR's federal relations team, through its offices in Washington, D.C. and Illinois, works closely with Congress, the Administration, and federal agencies to promote the system's education, research, health, and economic development missions. State relations staff foster similar connections with the Illinois General Assembly, the governor's office and state agencies, and with local officials across Illinois.

OGR also includes Illinois Connection, a grassroots advocacy network that brings together alumni, students, faculty and staff to support the system's legislative interests. By increasing awareness and understanding of the U of I System's positive impact on the state, nation and world, Illinois Connection advocates help to ensure that the system continues to build on its long, rich legacy of service to students and the public good.

MESSAGES, TALKING POINTS AND BACKGROUND FOR UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS SYSTEM STUDENT ADVOCACY

Below are messages for your virtual meetings with members of Congress, along with background information and talking points. We encourage you to put these messages in your own words and to incorporate personal stories about the role and value of the University of Illinois System in your lives.

MESSAGES

The University of Illinois System calls on Congress to:

- I. Support urgent pandemic relief
- II. Enhance higher education affordability and access
- III. Protect undocumented and international students

I. Support urgent pandemic relief

The University of Illinois System is [working to support](#) our 89,000 students and 28,000 employees during the COVID-19 pandemic, while harnessing our technical expertise, medical resources and research capabilities to help steer Illinois and the country through the crisis. These efforts have taken a significant financial toll, however. As of July 31, the [total economic impact](#) of COVID-19 on the U of I System stands around \$256 million, not including the costs to the system's hospital in Chicago. This figure includes housing refunds as well as costs associated with [extra support for students](#), purchases of hardware and software for online classes, and cleaning and medical supplies. We are spending tens of millions more dollars as we commence fall operations.

We appreciate the federal support we have received to date, but much more is needed. The U of I System received roughly \$65 million directly from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, enacted in March. Half of that total has been set aside for emergency financial aid grants for our students, many of whom are facing new financial, personal and academic challenges. We support [the request made by the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities \(APLU\)](#) that Congress provide an additional \$47 billion in emergency funding for students and institutions of higher education.

The pandemic has also [taken a heavy toll on researchers](#), particularly [women](#). Federal research grants, which help to pay salaries, have been disrupted and many labs suspended operations. Additional funding and regulatory relief are needed to address disruptions to research grants, and to fund the scientific breakthroughs—such as Urbana's [new rapid, saliva-based COVID-19 test](#)—that will help address the pandemic. APLU is requesting [at least \\$26 billion in emergency funding for federal research agencies](#).

States and localities are also grappling with significant costs and revenue losses associated with the pandemic. Without more federal funding, states like Illinois could see budget cuts, potentially impacting public universities. Direct state support makes up 9% of the U of I System's revenues.

Finally, the economic impact of the pandemic is making it harder for Americans to pay back student loans. The CARES Act suspended borrowers' obligation to make payments on their federal Direct Loans through September 2020, suspended interest on the payments and counted the suspended payments towards payment requirements for forgiveness provisions. CARES also suspended the garnishment of wages,

Social Security and tax refunds, among other measures, for borrowers in default during this period. In August, President Trump issued an executive order to extend the moratorium on student loan payments through the end of the year.

In May, the U.S. House of Representatives approved a \$3 trillion bill that included many of higher ed's priorities. Unfortunately, the Senate has not considered the House-passed bill, dubbed the Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions (HEROES) Act. Senate Republicans did release an alternative bill, the \$1 billion Health, Economic Assistance, Liability Protection and Schools (HEALS) Act. The HEALS Act included roughly \$29 billion for higher ed relief, while HEROES included \$37 billion. While the funding is needed urgently, the White House and congressional leaders have failed to reach agreement on a path forward.

We ask Congress to provide urgent pandemic relief that includes:

- At least \$47 billion for universities and students
- Additional funding for research agencies
- Support for states and localities
- Relief for student loan borrowers

II. Support higher education affordability and access

The U of I System is committed to providing Illinois students a world-class education at a reasonable cost. We have increased institutional financial aid from about \$107 million to more than \$239 million over the last decade, a 123% increase. From 2014-2019, the U of I System froze in-state undergraduate tuition, and in April we announced that we would waive tuition increases for in-state undergraduate students for 2020-21. Our commitment to access is reflected in the fact that [17 percent of our undergraduates are the first in their family to attend college. In addition, four out of five undergrads across the system are Illinois residents.](#)

Affordability and access are pillars of the Higher Education Act (HEA), the federal law first enacted in 1965 that authorizes federal financial aid programs for individuals pursuing a postsecondary education and programs that support institutions of higher education. Title IV of the HEA authorizes the federal government's major student financial aid programs, including need-based grants such as Pell and the federal student loan program. Two campus-based aid programs, Supplemental Education Opportunity Grants (SEOG) and Federal Work-Study (FWS), are also designed to increase access to higher education.

The programs authorized by HEA provide essential aid for our students. More than 20,000 U of I System students received \$96.3 million in Pell grants in 2018-19 while 5,749 students received a total of \$2.3 million in SEOG funding and 3,032 students participated in FWS. Direct loan disbursements for U of I students totaled more than \$472.6 million in 2018-19.

Unfortunately, HEA has not been comprehensively reauthorized since 2008. In the fall of 2019, the House Education & Workforce Committee passed the College Affordability Act (CAA), comprehensive legislation to reauthorize HEA. Given the considerable impact of the proposed legislation, U of I System Executive Vice President Barb Wilson sent a [letter](#) to the Illinois delegation offering input on the CAA.

HEA reauthorization legislation should also address the Department of Education's new Title IX regulations, which went into effect August 14. The new regulations, which are more than 2,000 pages in length, provide significant and troubling changes relating to the definition of sexual harassment, evidentiary standards and the grievance process. Higher ed associations have criticized the substance and timing of the final rule ([ACE](#), [APLU](#), [AAU](#)). Among other concerns, they have noted that the rule turns student

disciplinary proceedings into courtrooms, featuring direct cross-examinations in real time. Since the final rule was released in May, there have been several legal challenges. You can view the U of I System's concerns about the proposed rule [here](#).

We ask Congress to strengthen federal support for access, degree completion and student success by ensuring that HEA reauthorization:

- Maintains mandatory and discretionary funding for Pell grants, and permanently indexes the award amount to inflation
- Simplifies loan repayment options and eliminates origination fees on federal student loans
- Maintains graduate student loan options, strong repayment terms and loan-forgiveness benefits that put graduate and professional studies within reach for all interested students.
- Supports SEOG and FWS
- Blocks implementation of the Department of Education's new Title IX regulations

III. Protect undocumented and international students

The U of I System’s excellence in research and science depends, in part, on our continued ability to attract the best and brightest from around the world. Whether they were brought to the U.S. as children or want to study here as young adults, international and undocumented students are invaluable to our campus communities. The U of I System is committed to supporting them and protecting their access to the world-class education and opportunities provided by our three universities.

The U of I System has encouraged Congress to pass comprehensive immigration reform that includes the DREAM Act and expands visa and citizenship opportunities for STEM graduates. We opposed the decision to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program and supported efforts to, at a minimum, codify the protections of DACA into law. As U of I System leadership noted in [June](#) after the U.S. Supreme Court blocked the effort to end DACA, “DACA reflects our values and our land-grant mission to open our doors wide, provide a high-quality education for every deserving student and create the next-generation workforce that is essential to move America forward.” You can learn more about the U of I System’s commitment to DACA and undocumented students [here](#).

The U of I System has also urged Congress to address statutory and regulatory obstacles facing international students and scholars. In February, U of I System President Tim Killeen led a [letter](#) from close to 30 Illinois universities expressing concerns that changes to federal immigration policy and procedures are harming efforts to recruit and retain international talent. The letter noted increased delays and denials for both student entry (“F-1”) visas and temporary worker (“H1-B”) visas, as well as delays in processing applications for Optional Practical Training, which permits foreign students to work temporarily in the U.S. in a job directly related to their major area of study.

More recently, the U of I System [worked aggressively](#) to challenge restrictions on international students’ ability to remain in or enter the U.S. for online courses during the COVID-19 pandemic, including joining amicus briefs in support of litigation.

We ask Congress to protect undocumented and international students by:

- Passing the DREAM Act
- Enacting comprehensive immigration reform that loosens restrictions on work and student visas

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS SYSTEM FAST FACTS

- **Extraordinary Reach: The U of I System educates more than half of all students enrolled in Illinois’ public universities.** The U of I System now has more than 89,000 students across three universities. From Rockford to Chicago to the Quad Cities, Peoria and the southern tip of Illinois, the U of I System touches virtually every field, forest and city block in our state. In fact, 54 percent of all students enrolled in a public university in Illinois are enrolled at one of our three universities. We have students from 101 of Illinois’ 102 counties, and 80 percent of our undergraduates are in-state students.
- **Economic Engine: The U of I System pumps more than \$17.5 billion into the Illinois economy annually.** The system supports 171,000 Illinois jobs, one of every 46 jobs across the state. Through spending by its universities, employees and students, and the increased earning power of its graduates, the U of I System accounts for 2.2% of Illinois’ gross state product, nearly matching the total of the entire hotel and food services industry.
- **Groundbreaking Innovations: The U of I System is a research powerhouse, with more than \$1 billion in federal, state and private funding per year.** Our universities are among the most innovative in the world. New initiatives include the [Illinois Innovation Network](#), which connects public universities across the state with the Chicago-based [Discovery Partners Institute](#) to develop tech talent for high-demand jobs and conduct applied research and development. Our research and development expenditures have increased by 20% since 2010. We also transform our research into sustainable businesses and global solutions. We are ranked in the [top 20 worldwide](#) in number of patents granted to universities.
- **Access for the underrepresented is at an all-time high.** In the fall of 2019, underrepresented minorities made up 30% of all undergraduate students in the U of I System, an all-time high. That translates to an almost 5% increase in just one year.
- **Our alumni are dedicated to our success.** They are more than 755,000 strong, including nearly 398,000 in Illinois, and you’ll find them in all 50 states and more than 160 countries.

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL VIRTUAL HILL MEETING

The COVID-19 pandemic has moved political advocacy almost exclusively online.

Constituent meetings, site visits and briefings are now done using videoconferencing software such as Zoom, Skype, WebEx and Microsoft Teams. Elements of this shift to online advocacy will likely stay long after the pandemic is over. For this reason, it is necessary that advocates learn how to make the most of the online format.

This guide features information about best practices for professional virtual meetings aimed at helping advocates get the most out of their time online with legislators and their staff. The topics covered include:

- An overview of virtual advocacy meetings
- Preparing for virtual meetings
- Virtual professionalism and etiquette

Overview of virtual advocacy meetings

Virtual advocacy meetings are simply online meetings with legislators and/or their staff to advocate for certain policy outcomes and inform relevant policy discussions. The biggest difference between an in-person meeting and a virtual meeting is the format; the content of the meeting stays largely the same. Most meetings only last between 15 and 20 minutes so it is important to make the most of the brief meeting time.

Below are guidelines for your virtual meetings

- **Signing on:** Unless instructed otherwise, sign on 20 minutes before the meeting begins. This should give you ample time to troubleshoot technology problems that could arise the day of the meeting. It will also give you the opportunity to ask your teammates last minute questions. If you do ask questions, keep in mind that a legislator or their staff could join the conversation at any moment.
- **Troubleshooting technology problems:** If there are technology problems, staff from the U of I System's Office of Governmental Relations (OGR) will help you solve the issue. Common problems include microphone or speakers not working, trouble accessing the online meeting space, and poor internet connections.
- **Greeting the legislator/staff:** An OGR staffer will join each call to coordinate and keep the conversation on track. The OGR staffer will greet the legislator or their staff when they join the meeting and will make sure the students have the chance to introduce themselves. Say your name, the university you attend, and any connection

you have to their district or state. Most people in virtual meetings are polite and interested in the conversation and are appreciative when others in the meeting are as well. Starting the meeting in a professional but relaxed way can help everything run smoothly from beginning to end.

- **Providing information:** As advocates for the U of I System, you will be providing information about the institution and your personal experience as a student. The information you provide will be directly related to your "asks" and will provide context as to why the U of I System and its students need action from the federal government. Legislators and their staff respond best to informed advocates who can provide useful information and are reliable enough to provide follow-up information if it is requested. Come to the meeting prepared to confidently provide accurate information and share insight on your student experience.
- **Making your ask:** If a legislator or staff member remembers one thing from your meeting, it should be the ask. The "ask" is the specific action that you are requesting from the legislator and should be supported by detailed information outlining the need for the action. An example of a strong ask is a request for a specific amount of federal relief funding that is supported by information outlining why that specific amount of money is needed.
- **Response and questions:** The legislator or staff member will likely respond with their opinions about your ask and may have follow-up questions. Pay close attention to what they say. If someone asks a question that you do not know the answer to, do not try to guess or make up an answer. Honestly tell them that you do not know the answer right now but that you would be happy to follow up with the information they requested as soon as possible.
- **Conclusion and farewells:** Thank the legislator and their staff as the meeting comes to an end. Make sure you take all the necessary steps to exit the meeting. Do not to accidentally leave your camera or microphone on.
- **Follow up:** Send a follow-up email to the legislator or staff member you spoke with about a week after the meeting. Reiterate the main points of the conversation and make your ask very clear. Reiterate what a privilege it was to meet with them and that you are thankful for their time and service.

Preparing for virtual meetings

Like in-person meetings, virtual advocacy meetings require careful preparation for the best results. Legislative offices respond to well-informed advocates who can contribute specialized knowledge to their policymaking. Being well-prepared not only makes your ask more appealing but can establish you as a useful point of contact in the future. If you are meeting as part of a team, be sure to include everyone in your planning efforts to ensure that you are all on the same page. Some key aspects of preparing for a successful virtual meeting include:

- **Do your research:** Knowledge about the issues at hand and the legislative office you are meeting with will help you get the most out of your meeting time. You should know how your proposed ask will affect constituents of the legislator's district/state. Legislators' top priority is serving constituents, so information specific to their district/state can be invaluable. You should also be familiar with the legislator's voting record and previous statements about the issues you are talking about. You can find this information in the press release section of their website and on the database [Congress.gov](https://www.congress.gov). Do not hesitate to ask anyone on the OGR team for help finding information about your legislator.
- **Rehearse your pitch:** Rehearse what you will say before the meeting. It may be helpful to do this using a private video platform in the physical setting where you will take the meeting. This will allow you to check the camera angles, backgrounds and other aspects of production while you still have time to adjust them. Some platforms may even have a recording feature so you can watch your rehearsals.

Virtual professionalism and etiquette

Professionalism and etiquette may be the most difficult aspects of advocacy to transfer online. Traditional aspects of professionalism, like your outfit and manners, are still important. However, microphone clarity, internet connection, the background and background noise, and many other factors are vital to making a good impression on legislators and their staff in online meetings. Below are some tips for virtual advocacy meetings.

- **Choose the right setting:** Where you choose to conduct your video meeting is of the utmost importance. The setting should be quiet and free of distractions. Loud areas with a lot of people running around should be avoided. Make sure that any area that can be seen on screen looks clean and professional. If a bed is in the background, it should be made and well kept. Piles of clothes and papers should be out of sight as well. These distractions can make you look unprofessional and may hurt legislators or their staff's perception of you. If you cannot find an area with a professional background, the U of I System offers official backgrounds for public use here. Check to make sure that your webcam is compatible with virtual backgrounds prior to the event.
- **Look respectable:** It is important that you present the best version of yourself to legislators and their staff, which includes your appearance. You never want to be the worst-dressed person in a meeting. Whatever part of you that is going to be on screen should be dressed to impress. If people are only going to see you from the shoulders up then be sure to wear an ironed dress shirt or blouse. Your hair should

match the professional aesthetic of your clothes and be styled neatly away from your face. Remember to present yourself in a way that makes you feel confident and proud. Not only will you be able to see all the other meeting attendees, but you will also be looking at yourself for the duration of the meeting. Being confident in your appearance will help you be your best self in the meeting.

- **Set the lighting:** Good lighting for professional Zoom calls can be challenging and may narrow your options for settings. A good light source should be facing you from behind the camera, as if you were looking towards the sun. This can be accomplished by placing a lamp behind the camera so that the light is shining on you. Placing the camera in front of a window will have the same effect. Good lighting will separate you from your background and make your image clear to everyone in the meeting. Your face and background lighting should be balanced so that you do not look too bright or too dark. OGR staff will let you know if your lighting is inadequate before a legislator or member of their staff joins your meeting.
- **Use the mute button:** Keep your mute button on when you are not speaking. This prevents background noise and feedback from interrupting other participants during the meeting. It can be difficult to determine the source of such distractions. Do not be the reason someone has to stop the conversation to tell a participant to use the mute button.
- **Get optimum sound quality:** Most built-in computer microphones have poor sound quality and pick up a lot of background noise. Using headphones with a built-in microphone or a headset will provide the best possible sound quality. If you are unsure of how you sound, conduct a virtual practice meeting with a friend using the platform designated for the meeting. Ask your friend if you sound clear and professional. Refrain from speaking quickly and remember to enunciate every word.
- **Use a reliable internet connection:** Having a reliable internet connection will ensure that the meeting runs smoothly and that you do not lose unnecessary time to technical difficulties. Do not use a mobile hotspot or public wifi, such as wifi from a coffee shop or restaurant, to conduct your advocacy meeting. Use a stable internet connection in your home environment or an internet connection provided by your university. If circumstances out of your control prohibit you from accessing reliable internet, contact someone on the OGR staff to inquire about solutions to this problem. If your internet connection is causing problems the day of the meeting, alert your teammates and someone on the OGR staff.
- **Consider using a phone camera:** One last-minute solution to a poor internet connection is to use a phone with data and a tripod/selfie stick to attend the meeting. Take all the previous advice into consideration when creating your setup. The lighting, sound quality, setting and your appearance should be on point. Dress accordingly if this option shows more of you onscreen than just your shoulders. Make sure the

camera gets a landscape image of you so that is consistent with laptop webcams. Most videoconferencing platforms will allow you to call in with a phone number, but you will not be able to use your camera or see anyone else's picture with this option.

When you meet with legislators and/or congressional staff:

- **Be flexible:** Schedules change frequently on Capitol Hill, and members may be called away unexpectedly for committee business or floor votes. Meetings may need to be shortened or rescheduled on short notice.
- **Be prepared:** Review the key messages and talking points in this booklet and think about how you want to put them in your own words. Plan your messaging as a team to ensure that everyone in the meeting is on the same page. Make sure you know who your own congressional representative is.
- **Have a U of I story ready:** You can amplify the impact of the key messages by incorporating a story from your own experience with the U of I System. For example, consider talking about what your education means to you, or how U of I System research helps your community.
- **Make connections:** Look for things you may have in common, such as interests, hometowns, friends and, of course, the U of I System.
- **Be sure the information you provide is accurate:** Legislators may ask you questions about the policies you are advocating for or about unrelated topics. Do not guess or overstate anything. It is okay to tell them you do not know the answer and will ask OGR staff to follow up.
- **Be courteous:** Sometimes a legislator may have a different opinion than you. Please remember to be respectful despite any disagreements, both in person and on social media. If the legislator is unavailable, remember that congressional staff play an important role in advising members on policy issues. Staff meetings can be just as useful as member meetings.

After your meeting:

Debrief with your team about your conversation at the scheduled debrief session after all of the meetings are complete. An OGR staff member will be responsible for submitting your feedback form for each meeting. OGR will take note of any promised actions, unanswered questions and responses to the items you discussed with the legislator or their staff.





CONTACT US OGR.UILLINOIS.EDU

Paul Weinberger

Director, Federal Relations
University of Illinois System
paulw3@uillinois.edu | 217.300.4739

Melissa Haas

Associate Director, Federal Relations
University of Illinois System
mshaas@uillinois.edu | 217.244.4815

Grace Hart

Federal Relations Specialist
University of Illinois System
gkhart2@uillinois.edu | 309.798.9222

Marissa Brewer

Associate Director, Advocacy
University of Illinois System
mccord3@uillinois.edu | 217.333.1648

Mitch Dickey

Advocacy Coordinator
University of Illinois System
mdickey2@uillinois.edu | 217.300.5997

Theresa Thomas

Advocacy Specialist
University of Illinois System
tthoma36@uillinois.edu | 217.244.6436

LEGISLATOR CONTACT INFORMATION

NAME	DIST	PARTY	COMMITTEE
Sen. Dick Durbin	IL	D	Appropriations, Agriculture, Nutrition, & Forestry, Rules & Administration, Judiciary
Sen. Tammy Duckworth	IL	D	Armed Services, Commerce, Science, & Transportation, Environment & Public Works, Small Business & Entrepreneurship
Sen. Kelly Loeffler ●	GA	R	Health Education Labor & Pensions (HELP), Joint Economic Committee, Committee on Veterans Affairs, Committee on Agriculture Nutrition & Forestry
Rep. Bobby Rush ●	1	D	Energy & Commerce
Rep. Robin Kelly	2	D	Energy & Commerce, Oversight & Government Reform
Rep. Dan Lipinski	3	D	Science, Space & Technology, Transportation & Infrastructure
Rep. Chuy Garcia ●	4	D	Financial Services, Transportation & Infrastructure
Rep. Mike Quigley	5	D	Appropriations, Intelligence
Rep. Sean Casten	6	D	Financial Services, Science, Space & Technology, Climate Change
Rep. Danny Davis	7	D	Ways & Means
Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi	8	D	Oversight & Government Reform, Intelligence
Rep. Jan Schakowsky ●	9	D	Energy & Commerce
Rep. Brad Schneider	10	D	Ways & Means
Rep. Bill Foster	11	D	Financial Services, Science, Space & Technology
Rep. Mike Bost ●	12	R	Agriculture, Veterans' Affairs Transportation & Infrastructure
Rep. Rodney Davis	13	R	Agriculture, House, Administration, RM Transportation & Infrastructure
Rep. Lauren Underwood	14	D	Veterans' Affairs, Education & Labor, Homeland Security
Rep. John Shimkus	15	R	Energy & Commerce
Rep. Adam Kinzinger	16	R	Energy & Commerce
Rep. Cheri Bustos ●	17	D	Appropriations/Agriculture
Rep. Darin LaHood ●	18	R	Ways & Means
Rep. Chuck Fleishman ●	TN-3	R	Appropriations
Rep. Kurt Schrader ●	OR-5	D	Energy & Commerce
Rep. Larry Buschon ●●	IN-8	R	Energy & Commerce

● = UIUC Alumni | ● = UIC Alumni | ● = UIS Alumni

