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The Illinois Articulation Initiative

Panel Member Training Manual for the Course Review Process

Welcome!

On behalf of the IAI Leadership Team, we sincerely thank you for serving on an IAI panel. Many panel members find this to be a valuable experience, as it offers the opportunity to collaborate with faculty and staff from institutions across the state and gain insight into innovative teaching techniques and materials used within their disciplines. We deeply appreciate the significant time and expertise you contribute in support of IAI and Illinois transfer students.

This training manual is intended to serve as both an introduction for new panel members and a reference guide for long-serving members. It covers several key topics designed to assist you in navigating the course review process, understanding voting options, and deepening your overall knowledge of the Illinois Articulation Initiative (IAI).

We truly appreciate your service, dedication, and ongoing support of Illinois' transfer policies and students!

Malinda Aiello, ABD
State Director of the Illinois Articulation Initiative

About IAI

The Illinois Articulation Initiative (IAI) is celebrating over 25 years since statewide implementation in 1998 and serves as the primary mechanism to facilitate the seamless transfer of students among over 100 Illinois public and private colleges and universities. The passage of the IAI Act in January 2017, along with subsequent amendments, codified IAI and state transfer policies into law for all public institutions. There are nearly 300 GECC and Major descriptor codes used to identify over 8,500 approved courses across Illinois that share common course content and learning outcomes.

IAI includes the transferable General Education Core Curriculum (GECC) Package consisting of 37 to 41 credit hours; course recommendations for transferring into nearly 20 majors that are designed to support students who are undecided about their transfer institution or are self-advising; and is a faculty-driven course-review process which serves as one of the most comprehensive in the nation, providing statewide quality assurance and serving as a model for other states.

The IAI Leadership Team — comprising staff from IAI, IBHE, and ICCB — oversees the management of six GECC panels and sixteen active Major panels, which meet every spring and fall. Additionally, the IAI Steering Panel advises the State Higher Education Agencies and IAI staff on policy-related matters and serves as a forum for discussion of issues concerning course submission and review.

The iTransfer.org website serves as Illinois' student transfer portal, offering information on courses and state transfer policies for students, transfer coordinators, faculty, and higher education administrators. The homegrown iManage system is the platform where institutions submit courses to IAI panels for approval consideration; these submissions are then reviewed and voted on by panel members within the system. For more detailed information about the Initiative's purpose, structure, and policies, refer to the IAI Policies and Procedures Manual.

There is much to know and learn about when it comes to IAI policies and procedures, course submissions, and reviews. Here are a few overarching points to help get you started:

- IAI panels are created around General Education or Major courses. A full list of panels is available at the iTransfer Illinois Transfer Portal website (itransfer.org). Panels meet every fall (between October 1 and early December) and spring (between March 1 and early May).

- Panel membership includes a specific number of faculty, academic officers, and transfer coordinators representing two- and four-year public and private colleges and universities.

- Colleges and universities submit courses to the General Education Core Curriculum (GECC) and/or IAI Major discipline panels for approval under a specific IAI descriptor code via the iManage Course Submission & Review System. The submitted course syllabus, along with any supporting materials, is reviewed by panel members in the iManage system prior to the panel's scheduled meeting. These pre-meeting reviews, comments, and preliminary votes serve as the basis for discussion and final decisions during the meeting.

Where do I start and what is expected of me?

- Panel members serve three-year terms which may be extended by the Board panel manager. Attendance is taken at all meetings; lack of participation in the meeting or course voting can result in removal from the panel.

- Regular panel meetings typically occur once each spring and fall, usually from 10:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., though the exact timeframe may vary by panel. GECC panel meetings are held in person, with lunch provided by IAI, and include a remote attendance option. In contrast, nearly all Major panel meetings are conducted exclusively remotely.

- The primary role of panel members is to review submitted courses for alignment with the panel's descriptors and course approval criteria. Additionally, the members develop common understandings about course objectives and curriculum content, monitor changes and developments in the disciplines to ensure relevance and currency, and to modify its recommendations based on disciplinary changes and developments, as necessary.

- Course review takes place in two phases in the <u>iManage system</u>: 1) review, discussion, and preliminary voting prior to the panel meeting, and 2) the regular seasonal panel meeting. Panel members are expected to complete the pre-review process and attend all regular panel meetings, and participate, if possible, in any special meetings scheduled to discuss other panel business or complete unfinished course review. *Note: The iManage system can also be used to email all of your fellow panel members.*

- The time commitment to complete the course review process varies depending upon the panel's approval criteria and submission volume each season. Panels with a high number of submitted courses will require more time than those with a lower number of courses. Review, preliminary voting, and comment prior to the formal panel meetings influences the length of the actual panel meetings.

- Remember that the submitted syllabus serves as a representation of what will be taught at the institution and how. Differences in opinion by panel members regarding each course is fine, but we ask that everyone be respectful and trust institutional integrity.

- Recent screenshot walkthrough presentations for <u>logging in</u> and <u>voting on</u> courses in the iManage System are available under the *Training* section of the iTransfer.org website.

What can I expect at the panel meetings?

- An agenda listing all submitted courses up for review along with any discussion items needing to be discussed will be sent to members the week of the actual panel meeting. In the event you would like to add a discussion item under the Panel Business section, please contact the IAI staff to either add it to the agenda or mention it at the beginning of the panel meeting by the ICCB or IBHE panel manager.

- Prior to the start of the meeting, IAI staff will review and determine how many courses are able to be 'quick accepted', then enter Accept decisions into the iManage system. Quick accepted courses are those that had an overwhelming majority of votes to accept the course and the posted discussion mentions little to no issues. These courses are announced accordingly and are not opened for discussion and final decision change consideration unless requested by the panelists.

- The IBHE and/or ICCB panel manger(s) run the meetings with the assistance of IAI staff. All effort will be made to ensure each new course submitted to the panel is reviewed. In panels with a large number of courses, the panel manager may choose to change the review order for expediency.

- During the panel meeting, the ICCB or IBHE panel manager will guide the group through the course review process, providing opportunities for comment, clarification, and discussion. The primary role of the panel manager is to ensure that the panel remains within its scope, adhering strictly to the approved descriptors and review criteria, and does not request information or revisions beyond its authority.

- Before beginning the course review portion of the meeting, the panel manager will remind the panel of the voting options.

- Each course name, number, and vote prior will be read. For each course without a prior 'Quick Accept' decision, the primary panel manager will provide a vote tally and brief summary of comments, then lead panel members through a discussion and review of the course syllabus as needed to make a final decision on the course.

What can I expect at the panel meetings? *(continued)*

- IAI staff will draft a narrative decision for the institution using panelist comments and commonly used statements. For all non-approved courses, the final decisions are sent to the institution's course submitter who will then work with the academic department and instructor in order to obtain any additional information and/or changes that must be made to the representative syllabus before resubmitting to the panel for further review.

   ➢ *Important Note: IAI staff will occasionally draft course decisions prior to the meeting as a starting point when there is a large number of courses up for review and/or substantial discussion items on the agenda, thus requiring expedited discussions and decisions. This language is only a starting point for the panel's conversation and the panel is expected to approve or change the draft decision statement as needed.*

- Once the course review process has been completed, all meetings allow time for members to discuss Panel Business agenda items. This is when panels bring up issues with course review, possible changes to descriptors, adjustments to course approval criteria, etc. If topics arise during the course review that are better suited for Panel Business, the panel manager or IAI staff will suggest deferring the discussion, making a note of the topic, and revisiting it during the Panel Business portion of the meeting.

What types of courses will I be reviewing?

Each GECC and Major panel will review only newly submitted and ongoing review courses assigned to that specific panel.

New Courses: New courses are submitted to the panel to seek approval for the IAI code. These courses have not been reviewed as a part of the IAI process and require detailed review for alignment with the descriptor and accompanying panel documents.

Resubmitted New Courses: New courses that were voted as Not Enough Information or Return in a previous panel season are resubmitted to the panel. These resubmitted courses are reviewed only for the comments and requirements sent to the institution during the previous decision. This is done in order that the panel does not have a moving benchmark for course review.

Ongoing Review Courses: Courses that are currently approved for an IAI are called for ongoing review every five years. As the panel's approval criteria may change over time, ongoing review provides an opportunity to ensure the course is still aligned. These courses are currently approved and typically require only minor adjustments to keep in alignment with the panel's approval criteria and descriptor.

Resubmitted Ongoing Review Courses: Resubmitted Ongoing Review that were voted as Not Enough Information or Return in a previous panel season are resubmitted to the panel. These resubmitted courses are reviewed only for the comments and requirements sent to the institution during the previous decision. This is done in order that the panel does not have a moving benchmark for course review.

What are my Course Review voting decision options?

After reviewing each submitted syllabus for alignment with the panel's descriptor and course approval criteria, you will be asked to enter your comments and votes into the iManage system where they will be viewable by your fellow panel members. Please provide as much information as possible in the comments section to expedite the discussion within the panel meeting. These comments will serve as your notes as well as the basis for IAI staff to write and send the panel's final decision to the institution. Panelists have the following voting available prior to the panel meeting.

Approve: A panelist votes to approve a course for the submitted IAI code if the course meets all of the criteria in the course descriptor as well as the accompanying panel documents. Prior to the panel meeting, IAI staff will review the current votes and determine if a course has enough votes to approve to be "Quick Accepted". These courses do not require discussion during the panel meeting.

> ➢ *Note that while "Approve with a Note" is not an iManage system voting option, you are welcome to vote approve and add notes indicating this is your preferred option so long as the institution is encouraged to do something specific on future submissions.*

Conditionally Approve: Courses with alignment to the descriptor that require very few clarifications (such as a word-count or assignment count) may be conditionally approved. Institutions are then asked to provide the missing information or clarification, by a specific due date, to the panel co-chairs for final review and approval. In the event the institution does not provide the information or the co-chairs are not satisfied, the course will not receive approval and will return in the next panel season for review by the full panel.

Not Enough Information: Courses that show alignment, or potential for alignment with the descriptor but are missing required components necessary for review, may be voted as Not Enough Information. Courses missing panel requirements such as detailed topical outlines or labs are sent back to the institution with feedback on specific elements of the course that need clarification.

Needs More Discussion: If unable to make a clear voting decision, panelists may vote for more discussion on the course. Please clearly describe the points of concern and/or needing clarification in the comments section to aid the full panel's discussion during the meeting. Note that Needs More Discussion is a voting option only available prior to the panel meeting and not utilized for a final decision to be sent to the institution.

Returned: Courses that do not show alignment and do not have potential for alignment with the panel's descriptor if some changes are made and/or more information is provided are returned to the institution. This decision is typically made when the panel understands that the required changes to bring the course into alignment would require approval by the institution's individual approval processes (curriculum committee or similar). *Note: Decisions of return are not recommended for ongoing review courses unless they clearly indicate drift and no longer align with the IAI code.*

What information must each school provide for the course submission?

For each course, institutions typically need to provide detailed information within a representative instructor syllabus that demonstrates the course meets content and outcome standards for statewide transferability. While the specific requirements can vary depending on the GECC or Major panel's approval criteria, below is a list of the common syllabus components to be included with all course submissions. This list also includes additional notes on what to look for and/or major reasons that panelists have historically chosen to vote for Not Enough Information vs. Return.

Representative Instructor Syllabus
- Institutions are to submit a current instructor syllabus. Submissions of a master syllabus are typically voted as Not Enough Information given that these documents are usually basic, lacking details, and serve as a foundation for the instructor syllabus (e.g., readings, assignments, and weekly outline). However, panels may accept a master syllabus in cases where the course is new and has not yet been taught at the school.

Course Offering Information
- Submissions should include course title, prefix, contact hours, catalog description, credit hours and any additional information such as prerequisites.
- General Education courses including a prerequisite in the Major are typically Returned. Exceptions include information such as 'college ready' or sequence courses. *See Appendix A for more information.*
- Courses with unclear credit or contact hours are typically voted Not Enough Information as the panel does not have enough information to determine if the requirements are met. Occasionally, this information is missing as an oversight. If the rest of the course meets the descriptor and additional panel approval criteria, members typically vote for a Conditional Approval and allow the institution to make a minor update to be reviewed by the panel Co-chairs. This information may also be present in the iManage submission documentation.

Detailed Weekly Topical Outline Going Beyond Chapter Title
- The weekly topical outline need not provide every detail but an overview to ensure the topics covered in the descriptor are included. Ask yourself, "If I were given this course, would I know what topics to cover each week?"
- Instructors have freedom to cover content in the order or detail of their choosing as long as the course still meets the panel's descriptor.
- Course outlines *missing* multiple required topics are typically Returned.
- Course outlines without sufficient detail to determine if the content is included are typically voted as Not Enough Information. Course outlines needing only a minor clarification are typically voted as Conditionally Approved and reviewed by the co-chairs. **Lack of detail in the Weekly Topical Outline is the leading cause for Not Enough Information votes.**
- Remember, Weekly Topical Outlines need not be *Daily* Topical Outlines. Outlines only need be as detailed as required to confirm the content meets the descriptor. Chapter/Topic heading and a few subheadings is sufficient in most cases for approval.
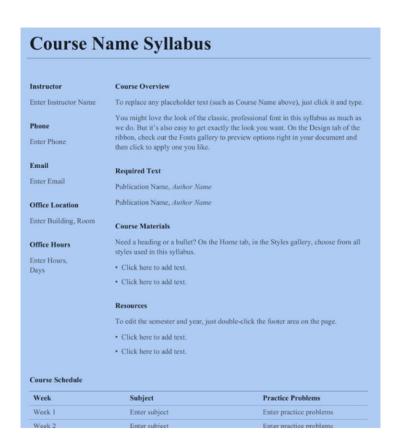
Textbooks and materials
- Unless required by additional panel approval criteria, panels may not require specific textbooks or editions.
- A course will not be Returned solely on textbook recommendations; you are reviewing the course, not the textbook.
- Use of an appropriate college-level textbook and open access materials is expected.
- A course with unclear textbook requirements or missing textbooks/materials entirely is typically voted as Not Enough Information as the panel needs the text material to determine appropriateness. Keep in mind that some panels' approval criteria may require other specific text considerations such as engagement with primary sources.

Methods of assessing student outcomes and grades
- Methods of assessment shall include specifics on assignments and evaluation, such as quizzes, exams, essays, etc. Writing and/or lab assignments required by panel approval criteria that are unclear in assessment, scale, or length (e.g., word/page count) are typically voted as Not Enough Information.

The Course Review Process:
Key Guidance and Reminders for Panel Members

Before starting the course review process each season, review and be familiar with your panel's approval criteria and course descriptors which can be accessed here. All submitted courses must be thoroughly reviewed, robustly commented on, and preliminarily voted on *before* the panel meeting. This preparatory work lays the essential groundwork for focused discussion, formal voting, and decision-making during the meeting, significantly improving both the efficiency and effectiveness of the panel's process.

During your review in the iManage system, carefully note any missing topics or components that do not align with the panel's descriptor. These observations should be entered in the comments section when recording your vote. Comments are visible only to fellow panel members and IAI staff and may be used to help formulate the final decision communicated to the institution.

While reviewing each course, reviewers should primarily ask themselves two key questions:

- o Does the course align with the panel's descriptor?

- o Does the submitted syllabus provide sufficient detail to demonstrate that all required topics − and, where applicable, course outcomes − are adequately addressed and met?

Please note: Unless the descriptor explicitly requires that a certain percentage of time be spent on a topic, the inclusion of that topic in the weekly topical outline is sufficient to meet the descriptor. Panels may not impose additional percentage-based content requirements that are not specified in the official descriptor.

As outlined in the *Guidance on IAI Course Review & Weekly Topical Outlines* memo (see Appendix B), panel members are also expected to approach course reviews with the following considerations in mind:

- The goal of course review is to ensure courses submitted to the identifier are transferable, not identical.

- Courses submitted for review are created by your peers and have already been through their various institutional review processes (curriculum committee, departmental approval, etc.).

- Panels review courses for content and alignment with the descriptor.

- The panel cannot dictate how an institution's syllabus must be structured.

- The submitted syllabus is a representation of what will be taught at the institution. While there may be questions (e.g., how, who, and what), panels must trust and rely on institutional integrity.

- The IAI course review is a holistic approach, considering the entire syllabus, along with any additional documentation submitted by the institution. Some components are required and must be clearly stated on the submitted syllabus, whereas other components may be used to clarify content covered. IAI generally does not make institutions rearrange their documentation.

- The purpose of the detailed weekly topical outline is to show the context in which the required topics of the descriptor are being taught. It is not and does not have to be a comprehensive list of everything covered in the course. It does not have to include every subtopic which is typically taught for each topic unless the descriptor specifically requires it.

- While consistency in course decisions is important, reasonable flexibility by panel members is also encouraged. This means that if a holistic review of the syllabus – along with any additional documentation – clearly demonstrates what is being taught and shows that student performance aligns with the panel's descriptor, then the course shall be approved without requiring further action from the institution.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Additional Information re. Prerequisites for GECC Courses

General education courses should not have a prerequisite beyond "college-ready" due to the survey-level nature of most GECC course content. Submitted courses may not be approved for an IAI GECC code if it has a prerequisite of a college-level course within the same discipline or if the course is restricted to major students. Institutions shall check the panel's approval criteria for information regarding prerequisites for that discipline prior to submitting a course for approval consideration.

Exceptions to this rule include:
- GECC courses that require fundamental reading, writing, or math skills in order to be successful within the course may require students to meet certain prerequisite developmental or college-readiness standards, as determined by the institution. For example, institutions may require or use Intermediate Algebra with a C or better, placement tests, co-requisite courses, multiple measures, ACT or SAT scores, transitional mathematics competencies, PMGE, or professional organization recommendations, among other measures, to assess a student's college-readiness for general education mathematics.
- GECC science courses that have a companion lab for a GECC-approved lecture course within the same course
- If the course is the second or third in a sequence, the panel will accept the prior course(s) in the sequence as a prerequisite. Additionally, in the case of the GECC writing sequence, students must earn a grade of C or higher in the first composition course before taking the second course.
- The GECC Humanities and Fine Arts panel requires extensive writing within the course for approval. Therefore, courses may have the prerequisite as all or part of the General Education Core Curriculum writing sequence (i.e. C1 900/R and C1 901/R)

Common reasons why GECC courses are not approved:
- Course has a prerequisite(s)
- Course has multiple prerequisites that indicate a course is an advanced course
- Courses or prerequisites are restricted only to majors

Appendix B: Fall 2025 Guidance Memo re. IAI Course Review & Weekly Topical Outlines

ILLINOIS ARTICULATION INITIATIVE

To Facilitate Interinstitutional Transfer

Illinois Board of Higher Education	**Illinois Articulation Initiative**	**Illinois Community College Board**
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Memo

To: IAI GECC and Major Panel Members

From: Malinda Aiello, State Director, Illinois Articulation Initiative,
        Justin Bradley, Illinois Board of Higher Education
        Brian Messner and Patrick Moore, Illinois Community College Board

CC: IAI Steering Panel
        Krista Jackson, Illinois Articulation Initiative

Date: September 30, 2025

Re: Guidance re. IAI Course Review & Weekly Topical Outlines

In recent panel review seasons, a growing trend of inconsistency and disagreement has emerged regarding the level of detail required in weekly topical outlines. As a result, an increasing number of courses have been returned solely for additional information in this section. This issue has become a significant source of frustration for institutional course submitters, campus faculty, IAI panel members, and IAI leadership alike. To address this concern, the IAI Leadership Team is issuing this guidance memo and is also developing training materials to support both new panel member onboarding and ongoing training for current members involved in the course review process.

The IAI Leadership Team understands and supports each panel wanting consistency in course decisions on submitted courses. Accordingly, forthcoming training materials will restate what constitutes approval with a note vs. conditional approval decisions, as well as not enough information and return decisions. Leadership may also work with panels to determine a common understanding of how many issues are found within a submitted syllabus qualify for each of the course decision options. The primary goals of this work are to provide clarity to panel members reviewing courses and reduce the impression of panel overreach by institutional faculty and academic officers.

Going forward across all panels, the detailed weekly topical outline must continue to go beyond chapter numbers and titles but shall also include subtopics being taught each week. This may be done using a few bullet points <u>or</u> a couple of sentences. **The requirement to embed assignments and readings within the weekly outline is no longer mandatory, provided that this information is clearly presented elsewhere in the syllabus.** Exceptions to this policy may be requested by any panel by providing clear rationale to the IAI Steering Panel for consideration at their next regularly scheduled meeting.

<u>Guiding Principles</u>

While there are nuances to the course review process, please keep in mind the following reminders (in no particular order):

- Panels are tasked with reviewing courses for IAI code approval based on their transferability and comparability to the IAI descriptor—not for identical content.
- Panels review courses for content and alignment with the IAI descriptor.
- Panels shall avoid being too prescriptive or restrictive for faculty teaching IAI-approved courses. IAI also cannot dictate how an institution's syllabus must be structured.
- Institutions are required to submit a representative instructor syllabus. While they may also submit a master syllabus in some cases, this practice is not encouraged as discrepancies between the representative instructor syllabus and the master syllabus may indicate content drift or a failure to update the master syllabus appropriately.
- The submitted syllabus serves as a representation of the instruction to be delivered at the institution; therefore, panels must place trust in the institution's integrity.
- The IAI course review process should take a holistic approach, considering the entire syllabus along with any additional documentation submitted by the institution. While certain components are required and must be clearly stated in the submitted syllabus, other elements may be used to provide clarity regarding the content covered.
- The purpose of the weekly outline is to demonstrate the context in which the required topics from the IAI course descriptor are being taught. It is not intended to serve as a comprehensive list of all content or activities included in the course. In the spirit of the course review process, panel members should ask themselves: "Does the outline address all required topics listed in the descriptor?" Inclusion of every possible subtopic is not necessary unless specifically required by the descriptor.

- In keeping with the spirit of the IAI course review process, the items listed in a panel's course approval criteria are intended to serve as guidance for members and to allow for appropriate flexibility during the course review and decision-making process.

IAI is successful and nationally recognized because it is a faculty-driven process. The IAI Leadership Team greatly appreciates the time and attention that all panel members invest in the course review process, both in pre-meeting voting and within the panel meetings.

Thank you in advance for your attention to these important matters!