



**Southern Illinois University System**  
ONE SYSTEM | MANY LOCATIONS | STATEWIDE IMPACT

October 21, 2020

Honorable Pat McGuire, Chairman  
Senate Higher Education Committee  
417 C State House  
Springfield, IL 62706

Dear Chairman McGuire:

On behalf of the Southern Illinois University System, I would like to thank you and the members of the Senate Higher Education Committee for addressing the growing challenge of college affordability and access. I would like to briefly share with you and the committee two significant actions our campuses have taken in the last year to increase access and decrease cost for some of our neediest students.

First, beginning last December, Southern Illinois University Carbondale announced it will no longer require the SAT or ACT test for admission, aligning with a national trend to make standardized tests optional. At SIUC, applicants with a high school grade point average of 2.75 or above who have met course requirements will be admitted to the university regardless of whether they submit their SAT or ACT scores. Last month, SIUC announced that future institutional merit scholarships awarded will be test-blind, which means these scholarships will be determined entirely based on the student's high school performance. While some institutions have done this for fall 2021 due the pandemic crisis, the new test-blind scholarship program is intended to be the long-term policy of the institution.

This was followed by an announcement at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville last month that it will not require SAT and ACT scores in spring and fall 2021 for incoming freshmen and certain transfers to be considered for admission. For admission through fall 2021, students with a cumulative 2.6 high school grade point average (GPA) on a 4.0 scale will be automatically admitted. In addition, SIUE will consider freshmen for merit scholarships and direct entry admission options based on grade point average (GPA) or a standardized test score.

Our research mirrors that of other institutions reflecting that GPA is a better predictor of college success. For more information on our data and decision-making process, I have attached information from both campuses for your review.

The second significant decision the university system made and our board of trustees has approved is the creation of the *SIU System Commitment*, a system-wide initiative beginning Fall 2021 that will cover tuition and mandatory fees for new four-year undergraduate students who have a family income of less

**Office of the President**

Stone Center • Mail Code 6801 • 1400 Douglas Drive • Carbondale, Illinois 62901  
Phone: 618/536-3331 • Fax: 618/536-3404

than \$63,575 and meet basic requirements. Our intent is to use this opportunity to fill the gap our neediest students might have after other financial aid and scholarships have been applied. The program will be available to new and first-time transfer students at both SIU Carbondale and SIU Edwardsville.

The amount paid from the SIU System Commitment will not exceed the cost of tuition and mandatory fees and will not cover other costs, such as housing, meals, course fees, books and supplies. To be eligible, participants must have an annual family income less than \$63,575 with assets less than \$50,000 based on a submitted Free Application for Student AID or FAFSA. They must be an Illinois resident who attended an Illinois high school, apply for admission by the priority deadline of March 1 and enroll in a baccalaureate degree program.

This decision was made easier thanks to the support of our elected officials who have recognized the need to provide more consistent public funding for higher education in Illinois and to create more pathways for our high school graduates to enroll in Illinois colleges and universities.

As I shared with our campus communities, this is a priority and we hope it sends an important message to students and their families that the SIU System campuses are doing all they can to make college available, especially for those who have the most challenging time paying for it.

Highlighted in a 2017 [report](#) by the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) that found that students from lower income backgrounds could only afford 1 to 5 percent of the 2000 colleges included in the study, we all agree that a student's zip code or economic status should not prevent them from achieving their goal of obtaining a college degree.

I have attached information from both campuses on the SIU System Commitment for the committee's review.

Thank you for permitting me the opportunity to offer this testimony on behalf of the SIU System. I am happy to discuss these great decisions we have made as we all work together to improve access and create more pathways for an affordable college degree. On behalf of our students, faculty, staff and alumni, thank you for your support of the Southern Illinois University System.

Sincerely,

Dan Mahony  
President  
Southern Illinois University System  
618-536-3471  
president@siu.edu

Senate Higher Education  
Committee Written  
Testimony Exhibits  
October 21, 2020



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December 13, 2019

## SIU Carbondale to end SAT/ACT admissions requirements

CARBONDALE, Ill. -- Southern Illinois University Carbondale will no longer require the SAT or ACT test for admission, aligning with a national trend to make standardized tests optional.

“Research has consistently demonstrated that the most important predictor of college success is the high school grade point average,” said Chancellor John M. Dunn. “Standardized tests can be a barrier to many students due to cost and demographic factors. We have a responsibility to level the playing field and ensure that every student with potential has an opportunity to study at SIU.”

According to the FairTest, a national organization that advocates for fairness in the college admissions process, more than [1,000 institutions](#) have made standardized tests optional, including the University of Chicago, the University of Arizona and Kansas State University. The board of trustees at Indiana University recently voted to allow faculty on its campuses to decide whether tests are required, and the leaders of the University of California and California State systems have advocated for the approach.

At SIU Carbondale, applicants with a high school grade point average of 2.75 or above who have met [course requirements](#) will be admitted to the university regardless of whether they submit their SAT or ACT scores. Students enrolling for summer or fall 2021 with a 2.75 or above will be eligible for consideration for most scholarships without submitting standardized test scores.

Standardized tests tend to favor students who come from high socio-economic families and whose parents have a college education, according to FairTest.

“SIU has a long history of attracting strong students from diverse backgrounds, and we want to make sure this tradition continues,” Dunn said. “More than 40 percent of our students are the first in their families to go to college. In fact, we have just launched a [First Saluki Center](#) to support our first-generation students.”

SIU also offers in-state tuition rates to any U.S. student, Dunn said.

“Our goal is to eliminate as many barriers to a college education as possible,” he added. “SIU Carbondale is a national university that gives students opportunities to engage in research and other hands-on learning experiences in the freshman year. We have a lot to offer students who are seeking a high-quality education in a friendly, supportive environment.”

The university’s test-optional plan is effective immediately.

Dunn said the decision to set the cut-off at a 2.75 grade point average is based on the university’s review of students who have been successful at SIU.

“Students come to us with a wide range of GPAs and test scores,” he said. “We know that those with a GPA of 2.75 or above are successful here, in part due to the strength and commitment of our faculty. GPAs are a reliable indicator because they reflect a student’s willingness to put forth effort and engage in the learning process – both factors that contribute to positive outcomes in college.”

Undergraduate students whose grade-point-averages are below 2.75 will continue to be eligible for admission based on submitted ACT or SAT scores. The automatic admission criteria include pathways for students who score a 23 or higher on the ACT or who are in the top 10% of their high school graduating class. Certain academic programs may continue to require additional admission requirements.

Admission decisions for those not automatically eligible for admission will continue to be reviewed for consideration for provisional admission to SIU using a number of other factors. The admissions requirements for international students will not change, Dunn added.

To learn more and apply, students can visit [admissions.siu.edu/apply/test-optional.php](https://admissions.siu.edu/apply/test-optional.php).

## SIUE Drops ACT-SAT Testing Requirement for 2021 Admission and Scholarships

September 15, 2020, 1:45 PM



Southern Illinois University Edwardsville will not require standardized SAT and ACT scores in spring and fall 2021 for incoming freshmen and transfers (with fewer than 30 credit hours) to be considered for admission. In addition, SIUE will consider freshmen for merit scholarships and direct entry admission options based on grade point average (GPA) or a standardized test score.

“Because of COVID-19 gathering restrictions in Illinois, most of our prospective students have not had access to the SAT or ACT standardized tests,” said Scott Belobrajdic, EdD, associate vice chancellor for enrollment management.

For admission through fall 2021, students with a cumulative 2.6 high school grade point average (GPA) on a 4.0 scale will be automatically admitted. Students with a cumulative 2.0-2.59 high school GPA will be considered by the admission review committee, which may require additional information such as a 7th semester high school transcript and statement. For more information, visit [siue.edu/undergraduate](https://siue.edu/undergraduate).

In regard to direct entry, students can be considered for direct admission to SIUE’s most competitive programs in the Schools of Business; Education, Health and Human Behavior; Engineering; and Nursing, as well as conditional entry to the School of Pharmacy. All programs have test-optional criteria. Visit [siue.edu/direct](https://siue.edu/direct) for details.

Scholarships will be more readily accessible as test scores are no longer required for consideration. Freshmen can qualify for a merit scholarship by meeting any one of the following criteria: 1) Cumulative 3.0 GPA on a 4.0 scale; 2) minimum SAT ERW + M only score of 1,130; or a minimum ACT score of 23. Need-based scholarships are awarded to admitted students demonstrating financial need as funding is available. For more information, visit [siue.edu/financial-aid](http://siue.edu/financial-aid).

“We would like to adopt the policy permanently in recognition of research demonstrating testing bias and inequities,” Belobrajdic said. “A national trend has been developing for several years, which is likely to remove the standardized testing requirement from the admission process for many schools within the next five years.”

Based on preliminary research completed by Carrie Butts-Wilmsmeyer, PhD, director of SIUE’s Center for Predictive Analytics, “both GPA and ACT (standardized) test scores can predict the likelihood of student retention at SIUE. GPA is much more important than ACT test scores overall. There may be some majors where this is not true, although the general major area did not suggest this is a concern. However, in general, high school GPA was weighted approximately 6.5 times more heavily.” Her research analysis shows SIUE students with a high school GPA of 2.6 have a 78.6% probability of returning for year two.

### **The SIUE Commitment**

For all Illinois residents whose family income is \$63,000 or less AND assets are \$50,000 or less (based on FAFSA data), SIUE will cover the remaining tuition and mandatory fee balances after applying all federal, state and institutional aid to student balances (no loans).



## **SIU to cover tuition, fees for select new students**

Scott Marion, smarion@hearst.net Published 11:53 am CDT, Saturday, September 26, 2020

EDWARDSVILLE — A new tuition initiative by Southern Illinois University could have a huge impact on low-income students who want to attend Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. New undergraduate students from Illinois with family incomes below \$63,575 can attend either SIUE or Southern Illinois University Carbondale tuition-free beginning fall 2021.

SIU President Dan Mahony announced the SIU System Commitment initiative during the Sept. 17 meeting of the SIU Board of Trustees. Under the new program, incoming four-year undergraduate students who meet the program requirements at both the Carbondale and Edwardsville campuses will have their tuition and any mandatory fees fully covered.

“It’s a totally new program for us and it’s something we’ve been talking about even before I started,” Mahony said. “Over the summer, people on both campuses put together a program that would work for everybody.

“What it means is that on top of whatever federal aid the students get, we will fill in the gap, so they don’t have to pay anything out of pocket. It’s a huge step for both institutions and for the system and it’s a game-changer for a lot of people in lower-income families to provide them with an educational opportunity in a way that is easily affordable.”

Students will still be responsible for housing, meals, course fees, books and supplies.

But for many local students, being able to attend college tuition-free opens a whole new window of opportunity.

“What this means for our students in East St. Louis is that it’s life-changing,” said Gina Jeffries, director of the SIUE East St. Louis Charter High School. “We will have students who never



considered higher education becoming first-generation college graduates. It's my belief that once they get there with free tuition, they're going to stay."

SIUE Chancellor Randy Pembroke knows firsthand about what a life-changing experience a college education can be.

"The two things I think about are access and affordability," Pembroke said. "We talk about how higher education changes lives, and it did for me. I grew up in a rural environment in Greene County and having access to a college education and a degree and becoming a teacher made a huge difference for me."

The SIUE East St. Louis Charter High School has 115 students, who are all residents of East St. Louis. The student body is 100 percent black and 100 percent of the students are eligible for the national free school lunch program.

"When you have students that are considering what to do after high school and what higher education institutions they want to look at, and when they see that it's SIUE, they know we're already a part of the system," Jeffries said. "It makes sense and it makes it an easy transition for them to want to go there."

The initiative will cover eight semesters of continuous enrollment. Participants must maintain satisfactory academic progress in order for the program to be renewed. In addition to the income restriction, students must have assets less than \$50,000 based on a submitted Free Application for Student Aid, or FAFSA; be an Illinois resident who attended an Illinois high school; apply for admission by the priority deadline of March 1; and enroll in a baccalaureate degree program.

Eligible students must first apply for all eligible state and federal financial aid for which they qualify, including federal Pell grants, state Monetary Award Program (MAP) grants and other institutional aid.

Mahony said the university will cover the outstanding balance.

Mahony believes that as the word spreads about the SIU System Commitment Initiative, the number of students taking advantage of it will continue to grow.

“When we looked at the incoming class, it would affect 200 to 300 students on each campus,” Mahony said. “We assume that number will be at least the minimum next year, so we think it will be north of 300 students.”

Pembrook expects the enrollment at SIUE to increase due to the initiative.

“We’re thinking about 100 [tuition-free] students coming in as freshmen plus another 100 transfers per year,” Pembrook said. “For some students, there is still a gap [after financial aid] and we’re looking to close that gap. It may be \$1,000 or \$1,500, but this will enable them to come to college and not have to pay tuition or fees.”

For high school students in East St. Louis and other communities, Jeffries believes the initiative will serve as a motivating factor.

“It will keep them in-state because the opportunity is just too good not to take advantage of,” Jeffries said. “They’re very close to home, which is another advantage.”

Jeffries feels the initiative will have long-term effects well beyond four years of free tuition.

“For black and brown students who have traditionally been underserved, having this opportunity will now diversify both SIU campuses, which will in turn better diversify the workforce,” Jeffries said. “We will finally see some equity across the line for those black and brown students.

“I’m elated and proud to be a part of a system that would do this.”

Pembrook, likewise, believes the opportunity for a tuition-free education will have far-reaching consequences for students and their families.

“I’m on a committee at the state level and we were talking the other day about the Aim High and MAP [grant] programs and many of the people that receive those kinds of funds are first-generation college students,” Pembroke said. “A lot of these students [under the new initiative] will be the first in their family to go to college, and that’s incredibly exciting.”

The SIU System Commitment Initiative comes on top of a recent announcement that SAT/ACT test scores are not required for admission at SIU through fall 2021.

“That was also part of our effort to increase access and equity, so the two measures combined provide a lot more opportunities for people,” Mahony said.



### **Southern Illinois University launches plan to pay tuition for low income students**

CARBONDALE, Ill. (WSIL) -- A new system-wide initiative at Southern Illinois University will help families pay for their freshman's education on both the Carbondale and Edwardsville campuses. The program is set to begin in the fall of 2021.

University leaders on the Carbondale campus call the initiative, "The SIU System Commitment." One former student told News 3, it's a great opportunity for incoming students and wishes the initiative was around when she was a student in Carbondale.

"I think it's a great initiative if it's helping our low-income students actually get an education," said Cassandra Beal.

SIU's System President said this is the exactly what the initiative is created to do.

"The SIU Commitment Scholarship Program and its focused on providing covering all of the tuition and mandatory fees students who come from families that make less than 63,575 and with assets less than 50,000," said the SIU System President, Dan Mahony.

Students who apply for the initiative must meet additional requirements, such as submitting a free application for Student Aid or FAFSA, be a resident of Illinois who attended an Illinois high school and apply for admission prior to the March first deadline.

The amount paid from the SIU Commitment will not exceed the cost of tuition and mandatory fees and will not cover other costs, such as housing, meals, course fees, books and supplies. It will apply to new, full-time undergraduates beginning in the fall 2021 and will cover eight semesters of continuous enrollment.

"It's about our efforts to provide more access and really focusing on students with the greatest need and trying to make it so that they can come without having to take out loans or any out of pocket cost when it comes to cover tuition or the mandatory fees," said Mahony.

An opportunity Beal says should help new students focus on their education and acquiring better paying jobs.



## **Southern Illinois University extends tuition-free offer to transfer students with family incomes below \$63,575**

- MOLLY PARKER      Oct 7, 2020

CARBONDALE -- Southern Illinois University is extending its offer to cover all tuition and fees of some first-time students in 2021 to also include some transfer students.

In late September, the university announced its Saluki Commitment pledge to cover any remaining tuition and mandatory fees for first-time Illinois students with a family income below \$63,575 who meet all eligibility criteria.

On Tuesday, SIU announced the pledge would also be extended to first-time transfer students enrolling full-time for the fall 2021 semester or thereafter.

In both categories, SIU plans to cover tuition and mandatory fees remaining after all eligible state and federal aid is applied, and students must also meet other limited academic, financial, age and residency requirements.

"Sometimes, there are gaps between what financial aid packages cover and the cost of attendance. Those gaps can be beyond the reach of many students and their families. We are committed to filling them," SIU Carbondale Chancellor Austin Lane said in a statement.

When the program was originally announced during September's meeting of the SIU Board of Trustees, Lane called it a "game changer" for students and the university. Officials also said they expected the initiative to boost enrollment. "Family income should not be a barrier for any qualified student to attend SIU, whether the student is going to the college for the first time or transferring from another college or university," Lane said Tuesday.

As well, Lane said the decision to extend the pledge to transfer students reflects the university's collaboration with community colleges. The program will cover four consecutive semesters for transfer students, and eight for first-time students.

Using fall 2020 enrollment statistics, the program would apply to 236 first-time students and 138 transfer students had it been in place this year. However, officials noted last month that those numbers may grow substantially next year because the existence of the program may encourage more people who meet the eligibility criteria to apply.

SIU Carbondale estimates the annual cost of the Saluki Commitment program for first-time and transfer students to be about \$1.2 million, spokeswoman Rae Goldsmith said. The program will be funded by the Illinois Student Assistance Commission's Aim High pilot grant program, she said. The amount of gap funding the university will cover per student could range from zero to a few thousand dollars. For new students with zero expected family contribution, the cost for this academic year would be \$469 per student, Goldsmith said.

To be eligible for the Saluki Transfer Commitment program, students must be dependent Illinois residents under age 24 who attended an Illinois high school, and have a GPA of 2.0 with 26 or more transferable credits. In addition to having a family income of less than \$63,575, they must also have assets less than \$50,000 based on a FASFA application and be eligible for federal financial aid.

## SIUE Scholarships, Awards and Grants

### The SIUE Commitment

**Amount:** Tuition, mandatory fees and course-specific fees for eligible students

**Deadline:** Awarded as funding is available.

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#### *Overview*

To ensure there are no financial barriers between you and your education, SIUE will cover tuition, mandatory fees and course-specific fees if you qualify for the SIUE Commitment. Your admission application and submitted FAFSA will be used to determine eligibility for this award. The SIUE Commitment will help close the gap after utilizing financial aid from all federal, state and institutional sources including merit-based scholarships.

#### *Criteria*

- Incoming freshmen or transfer students with family income less than \$63,575 and assets less than \$50,000 based on submitted [Free Application for Federal Student Aid](#) (FAFSA). SIUE code: 001759. File your FAFSA online or with the new app, myStudentAid. Use the IRS Data Retrieval Tool to make it fast and easy. The Alternative Application for Illinois Financial Aid can be used in lieu of the FAFSA for noncitizen students and transgender students who meet the [RISE Act](#) criteria.
- Independent students who are not Pell eligible will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis.
- Must be an Illinois resident.
- Must be enrolled full time in a bachelor's program. Award is valid for eight semesters. Pharmacy students may be eligible at the undergraduate rate.