

**American International College  
Springfield, Massachusetts**

**2024 NECHE Interim (Fifth Year) Accreditation Report  
Submitted February 2024**

DRAFT

## Table of Contents

<b>LIST OF TABLES.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>INSTITUTIONAL OVERVIEW.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>RESPONSE TO AREAS IDENTIFIED FOR SPECIAL EMPHASIS.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>AREA 1: GOALS FOR ENROLLMENT, RETENTION, AND GRADUATION .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>AREA 2: LONG-TERM FINANCIAL PLAN AND STUDENT-ATHLETE ENROLLMENTS .....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>AREA 3: ACHIEVING THE GOALS OF THE STRATEGIC PLAN 2019 – 2024.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>AREA 4: INTEGRATION OF ADJUNCT AND GRADUATE FACULTY INTO GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>AREA 5: INSTITUTIONALIZING A DATA-DRIVEN APPROACH TO ASSESSMENT .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>STANDARDS .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>STANDARD 1: MISSION AND PURPOSES.....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>STANDARD 2: PLANNING AND EVALUATION .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>STANDARD 3: ORGANIZATION AND GOVERNANCE .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>STANDARD 4: THE ACADEMIC PROGRAM .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>STANDARD 5: STUDENTS.....</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>STANDARD 6: TEACHING, LEARNING, AND SCHOLARSHIP .....</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>STANDARD 7: INSTITUTIONAL RESOURCES .....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>STANDARD 9: INTEGRITY, TRANSPARENCY, AND PUBLIC DISCLOSURE.....</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>STANDARD 8 REFLECTIVE ESSAY: EDUCATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS.....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>INSTITUTIONAL PLANS .....</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>APPENDIX.....</b>	<b>59</b>

## List of Tables

TABLE A1.1	AIC APPLICATIONS, ACCEPTANCES, AND ENROLLMENTS .....	7
TABLE A1.2	SEM FORECAST FOR UNDERGRADUATE AND GRADUATE ENROLLMENT .....	8
TABLE A1.3	REPORTED AND PROJECTED STUDENT RETENTION RATES.....	8
TABLE A1.4	REPORTED AND PROJECTED STUDENT PERSISTENCE RATES .....	9
TABLE A1.5	REPORTED AND PROJECTED GRADUATION RATES.....	9
TABLE A5.1	PROGRAM REVIEW CALENDAR.....	19
TABLE 8.1	EXPOSURE TO CORE COMPETENCIES IN GENERAL EDUCATION COURSES .....	42
TABLE 8.2	AIC CONNECT FLAGS AND KUDOS .....	45
TABLE 8.3	UNDERGRADUATE INTERNSHIP, PRACTICUM, OR FIELD EXPERIENCE PLACEMENTS .....	46
TABLE 8.4	GRADUATE INTERNSHIP, PRACTICUM, OR FIELD EXPERIENCE PLACEMENTS.....	47
TABLE 8.5	PROGRESS TOWARDS APEX ENGAGEMENT AND ACADEMIC SUPPORT OBJECTIVES.....	49
TABLE 8.6	PROGRESS TOWARDS APEX CAREER READINESS OBJECTIVES .....	51
TABLE 8.7	REPORTED AND PROJECTED PERCENTAGE OF HISPANIC/LATINO STUDENTS .....	52
TABLE 8.8	REPORTED AND PROJECTED RETENTION RATES BY RACE AND ETHNICITY .....	53
TABLE 8.9	REPORTED AND PROJECTED PERSISTENCE RATES BY RACE AND ETHNICITY .....	53
TABLE 8.10	REPORTED AND PROJECTED GRADUATION RATES (6-YEAR COHORT) BY RACE AND ETHNICITY .....	53
TABLE 8.11	RETENTION, PERSISTENCE, AND GRADUATION RATES OF STUDENT-ATHLETES.....	54

DRAFT

## Introduction

In preparation of submitting the American International College (AIC) Five-Year Interim Accreditation Report to the New England Commission on Higher Education (NECHE) in February 2024, an AIC team, consisting of Dr. Michael Dodge and Nicolle Cestero attended the February 2023 Interim Report Workshop. In August 2023, a small steering committee was formed to include the following individuals:

- Nicolle Cestero, Executive Vice President, Chief of Staff, Chief Operating Officer
- Alex Cross, Interim Dean for Student Success and Title IX Coordinator
- Dr. Michael Dodge, Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs, Chief Academic Officer
- Christopher Putnam, Director of Institutional Assessment, Research, and Effectiveness
- Estelle Spencer, Director of Shea Library
- Dr. William Steffen, Assistant Professor of English, Chair of Faculty Senate
- Dr. Anne Stuart, Professor of Psychology

The committee met bi-weekly from August 2023 through the fall semester. In the initial stages, the members of the committee divided the work amongst themselves and identified relevant members of the campus community to be consulted for each area. As the semester progressed, the information was consolidated into drafts for each section. In September 2023, a subset of the steering committee met with Laura Gambino from NECHE to discuss the format for the Reflective Essay. The committee continued to meet regularly through the fall to review drafts, identify and provide supplemental material, and make revisions in preparation for the final report.

In December 2023, the committee prepared and distributed a draft for feedback from the campus community. Community members had the opportunity to provide feedback on the document. This feedback was then analyzed and incorporated into the draft as appropriate. As recommended, a draft of the report was submitted to NECHE in January 2024. Further revisions were made based on this feedback. A final version was submitted to NECHE in February 2024.

In addressing the areas identified for special emphasis, as well as demonstrating how the College continues to meet the standards and criteria for accreditation, the AIC Interim (Fifth-Year) Report represents the work conducted by the College during the past five years since the Comprehensive Evaluation. Additionally, this report demonstrates the progress AIC has made in the first years of *AIC Reimagined*, AIC's 2022 – 2027 Strategic Plan. The College has embraced the preparation of the Interim (Fifth-Year) Report as an occasion to reflect on its strengths and opportunities for improvement as it strives to provide access to a holistic education in an inclusive environment that propels a diverse community of learners to personal growth and professional success.

## Institutional Overview

American International College (AIC) was founded on July 18, 1885, and was chartered by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts on September 18, 1885. The founder of the College, Reverend Calvin Amaron, sought to provide access to higher education for French Canadian immigrants. The College began admitting women in 1892, becoming the first coeducational college in the region. In the early twentieth century, AIC extended the opportunity of higher education to all immigrants and their children. When immigration slowed in the 1920s and 1930s, the College expanded its scope to transform the lives of a diverse student body. Since then, AIC has continued to focus on its core values of access, opportunity, diversity, belonging, and community. The College has strengthened and grown its academic profile and has placed special emphasis on revising and adding academic and student support programs to prepare students for professional success.

In April 2022, Hubert Benitez, DDS, Ph.D. was appointed as AIC's twelfth president. Shortly after President Benitez's arrival, members of the campus came together to set a course for the future of the College and the students it serves. The result of those community efforts was [AIC Reimagined](#) – AIC's 2022 – 2027 Strategic Plan, exemplified by AIC's renewed mission, vision, and core values.

**Mission Statement:** American International College provides access to a holistic education in an inclusive environment that propels a diverse community of learners to personal growth and professional success.

**Vision Statement:** American International College will be a New England college of choice for students seeking a sense of belonging, innovative education, and profound student experiences.

**Core Values:** Access, Opportunity, Diversity, Belonging, Community

AIC is a private, coeducational, four-year institution in Springfield, Massachusetts. AIC students represent diverse geographic and cultural backgrounds. Not only do students come from the local communities surrounding Springfield, but students also represent 38 states, 2 U.S. territories, and 30 countries. AIC has a level of student diversity other institutions aspire to attain, with 55% of undergraduate students who self-identify as black, Hispanic, or two or more races (compared to 34% who identify as white). The College also serves a diverse socio-economic demographic, with more than 50% of undergraduates in Fall 2023 who were Pell-Eligible. Additionally, more than 35% of all undergraduate students in Fall 2023 were first-generation.

The College comprises three schools: the School of Business, Arts, and Sciences (BAS); the School of Education (SOE); and the School of Health Sciences (SHS). Degrees are awarded at the Associates, Bachelors, Masters, Certificate, and Doctoral levels. AIC's undergraduate programs incorporate an innovative general education program emphasizing interdisciplinarity, mastery of core competencies, and career readiness. Graduate programs incorporate the competencies of disciplinary expertise, critical reasoning, professionalism, and leadership. AIC's programs in Business, Nursing, Occupational Therapy, and Physical Therapy are accredited by their respective accrediting bodies: International Assembly for Collegiate Business Education (IACBE); Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE); Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education (ACOTE); and Commission on Accreditation in Physical Therapy Education (CAPTE). The Baccalaureate Nursing Program has full approval from the Massachusetts Board of Registration in Nursing.

## Response to Areas Identified for Special Emphasis

In letters received from NECHE dated May 12, 2020 and April 12, 2023, AIC was instructed to address several areas of emphasis in the 2024 Interim (Fifth Year) Report. Table 1 holds those areas of emphasis and where they are addressed in the Report.

**Table 1. Areas of Emphasis**

<b>Letter Date</b>	<b>Area of Emphasis</b>	<b>Location in Interim Report</b>
5/12/2020	Meeting the goals for undergraduate and graduate enrollment, retention, and graduation.	<a href="#">Response to Areas Identified for Special Emphasis – Area 1</a>
5/12/2020	Developing a realistic long-term financial plan to enhance the College’s financial stability with attention to reducing the institution’s discount rate.	<a href="#">Response to Areas Identified for Special Emphasis – Area 2</a>
5/12/2020	Achieving the goals of the Strategic Plan 2019-2024.	<a href="#">Response to Areas Identified for Special Emphasis – Area 3</a>
5/12/2020	Increasing the integration of off-campus locations, adjunct faculty, and graduate programming into the College’s governance structure.	<a href="#">Response to Areas Identified for Special Emphasis – Area 4</a>
5/12/2020	Institutionalizing a data-driven approach to assessing student learning and success.	<a href="#">Response to Areas Identified for Special Emphasis – Area 5</a>
4/12/2023	Success in achieving the goals for increased net revenue generated by student-athlete enrollments.	<a href="#">Response to Areas Identified for Special Emphasis – Area 2</a>

## Area 1: Goals for Enrollment, Retention, and Graduation

### Enrollment

Despite efforts AIC has developed to increase student enrollment, there has been a reduction in enrollment over the last few years as compared to earlier years. Table A1.1 holds the applications, acceptances, and enrollments for 2021 – 2024 and 2025 projections, in all segments of the College.

*Table A1.1 AIC Applications, Acceptances, and Enrollments*

	<b>3 Years Prior (FY 2021)</b>	<b>2 Years Prior (FY 2022)</b>	<b>1 Year Prior (FY 2023)</b>	<b>Current Year (FY 2024)</b>	<b>Goal (FY 2025)</b>
<b>Freshmen – Undergraduate</b>					
Completed Applications	1,565	2,369	2,692	2,453	
Applications Accepted	1,357	2,030	2,412	2,187	
Applicants Enrolled	342	343	330	279	392
<b>Transfers – Undergraduate</b>					
Completed Applications	212	260	201	211	
Applications Accepted	173	177	148	200	
Applicants Enrolled	91	73	55	0	138
<b>Master’s Degree</b>					
Completed Applications	560	455	573	359	
Applications Accepted	486	401	394	346	
Applicants Enrolled	304	263	254	216	261
<b>Doctoral Degree</b>					
Completed Applications	32	32	33	46	
Applications Accepted	32	21	27	38	
Applicant Enrolled	27	18	10	23	34

The enrollment reduction is a result of the complex interaction of several factors. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 led to prominent levels of uncertainty among students. AIC was fully remote for the 2020 – 2021 academic year which heavily affected student-facing services on campus, impacting enrollment and retention. When the College returned to in-person instruction in fall of 2021, many students reported that they were uncomfortable with being back in person. Other students did not attend due to the College’s vaccination requirements. The ongoing challenges remaining from the COVID-19 pandemic, combined with economic recession and inflation, have had significant monetary impact on AIC students and their families. The College’s mission is accomplished by upholding the values of access, opportunity, and diversity, and AIC is proud to serve a historically marginalized student body. Yet, during the pandemic, students of color, women, and those coming from low-income households experienced the worst economic disparities, directly impacting educational pursuits. With over 50% of AIC’s undergraduate student population being Pell grant eligible, over 50% identifying as non-white, and over 50% identifying as female, AIC students were impacted more by the pandemic than other students pursuing post-secondary education.

Additionally, regional community colleges have felt enrollment decline at a larger rate than is being reported nationally. The largest feeder institutions of two-year degree students, Springfield Technical

Community College (STCC) and Holyoke Community College (HCC), were down significantly between FY18 and FY22. STCC saw a decrease of 31% in full-time equivalencies while HCC saw a decrease of 40%. As AIC enrolls a considerable number of transfer students, the decline in enrollment at the regional community college level has impacted the College’s overall enrollment.

To combat the enrollment declines, and as discussed in Standard 5 (see also Area 2, Standard 2), the College has developed a [Strategic Enrollment Management](#) (SEM) plan which allows AIC to align its enrollment strategies with its initiatives across several domains, including academic affairs, athletics, student support services, and institutional advancement. Table A1.2 shows the culmination of the five-year (2022 – 2027) SEM plan forecast for both undergraduate and graduate enrollment.

*Table A1.2 SEM Forecast for Undergraduate and Graduate Enrollment*

TOTAL UNDERGRADUATE HEADCOUNT ACTUAL AND PROJECTIONS								
Fall 2019	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022	Fall 2023	Fall 2024	Fall 2025	Fall 2026	Fall 2027
1,307	1,354	1,288	1,168	1,143	1,445	1,540	1,640	1,695
TOTAL GRADUATE HEADCOUNT ACTUAL AND PROJECTIONS								
Fall 2019	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022	Fall 2023	Fall 2024	Fall 2025	Fall 2026	Fall 2027
1,734	1,237	956	846	812	1,210	1,540	1,732	1,818

Additionally, in 2023, AIC partnered with EAB (formerly known as the Education Advisory Board), a nationally recognized education industry consulting firm that uses data-driven strategies to drive enrollment through lead and application generation. In the first year, EAB projects an increase in first-year enrollment of at least 10%, growing to 18 – 20% in the second year as the College can conduct these efforts for an entire annual cycle.

#### Retention, Persistence, and Graduation

AIC recognizes that in addition to maintaining and increasing student enrollment, it is equally important to focus on retention, persistence, and graduation of current students. Table A1.3 holds the reported retention rates as presented to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) and the College’s projections for the next five years. The College defines retention as a measure of first-time, full-time students who return for their second year at AIC.

*Table A1.3 Reported and Projected Student Retention Rates*

Reported Retention Rates					Projected Retention Rates				
Fall 2018 to Fall 2019	Fall 2019 to Fall 2020	Fall 2020 to Fall 2021	Fall 2021 to Fall 2022	Fall 2022 to Fall 2023	Fall 2023 to Fall 2024	Fall 2024 to Fall 2025	Fall 2025 to Fall 2026	Fall 2026 to Fall 2027	Fall 2027 to Fall 2028
69%	70%	63%	67%	68%	70%	73%	75%	77%	

As noted in the table, the college saw a decline in Fall 2020 to Fall 2021. The College attributes this decline to the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and campus-wide vaccination and booster requirements and the decision to return to a fully in-person environment in Fall 2021. The College did see a notable increase of 4% for the Fall 2021 to Fall 2022 rates and small, but steady increases in subsequent years.



Beyond first-time, full-time students, the College has tracked how second year students persist to graduation. The concept of a “sophomore slump” is well documented in the literature as a time when students feel less supported and are faced with increasingly difficult coursework and other pressures. Table A1.4 highlights the persistence rates of second-year students who continue into their third year at the College as well as projected persistence rates.

*Table A1.4 Reported and Projected Student Persistence Rates*

Reported Persistence Rates					Projected Persistence Rates				
Fall 2017 to Fall 2019	Fall 2018 to Fall 2020	Fall 2019 to Fall 2021	Fall 2020 to Fall 2022	Fall 2021 to Fall 2023	Fall 2022 to Fall 2024	Fall 2023 to Fall 2025	Fall 2024 to Fall 2026	Fall 2025 to Fall 2027	Fall 2026 to Fall 2028
76%	79%	73%	69%	76%	74%	76%	78%	80%	

Persistence rates have consistently been higher than retention of first-year students. The decline in persistence from the Fall 2019 cohort to the Fall 2020 cohort likely reflects the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. AIC had fully remote-synchronous classes for the 2020 – 2021 academic year, with a limited number of on-campus students. First-year students in the Fall 2020 cohort did not experience the traditional first-year college experience as the other cohorts. As can be noted from the projected persistence rates, the College expects the efforts aimed at student retention will also improve persistence.

In addition to improving retention and persistence rates, the College is actively working to improve its 6-year cohort graduation rates. The College is seeking to increase the projected graduation rates by 6% over the course of the next five years. With an increased focus on retention and persistence as well as providing structures and support, Table A1.5 holds the reported IPEDS graduation rates and the College’s projections for the next five years.

*Table A1.5 Reported and Projected Graduation Rates*

Reported Graduation Rates (6-year Cohort)					Projected Graduation Rates (6-year Cohort)				
Fall 2013 Cohort	Fall 2014 Cohort	Fall 2015 Cohort	Fall 2016 Cohort	Fall 2017 Cohort	Fall 2018 Cohort	Fall 2019 Cohort	Fall 2020 Cohort	Fall 2021 Cohort	Fall 2022 Cohort
44%	44%	42%	37%	42%	45%	39%	37%	45%	48%

AIC is committed to improving the retention, persistence, and graduation rates for students. The College has undertaken several initiatives to increase student retention and progress toward graduation. These initiatives, including Destination Registration, redesigning Summer Summit Days and REXCEL, are described in detail in Standard 5 (see also Area 2).

Additionally, as an institution serving more than 50% students of color and seeking designation as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), the College recognizes the importance of examining and addressing retention, persistence, and graduation rates of key race and ethnicity subpopulations. Also, with student-athletes representing over half of the undergraduate population, AIC recognizes the importance of examining and addressing retention, persistence, and graduation rates of student-athletes. This information is presented in detail in the Reflective Essay for Standard 8: Educational Effectiveness.

## Area 2: Long-Term Financial Plan and Student-Athlete Enrollments

### Long-Term Financial Plan to Enhance Financial Stability

AIC has generated several medium- and long-term plans to enhance and strengthen the College's resources. As described in Standard 2 (see also Area 1 and Standard 5), the College is now executing on its 2022 – 2027 SEM plan. Concurrently, AIC has conducted a multi-year financial planning model that is sustainable, is aligned with the SEM plan, and reflects the capacity of the College to depend on its identified sources of revenue, while ensuring the advancement of educational quality and services for students.

### **Increased Enrollment: Academic Development, Growth, Expansion, and Institutional Partnerships**

The Academics pillar of [AIC Reimagined](#) focuses on expanding the breadth and scope of the academic portfolio. The College has taken a multifaceted approach to address demographic trends and decreasing enrollments. This approach includes a five-year plan for new programs, articulation agreements, and partnerships aimed at increasing enrollments at all degree levels.

### ***New Academic Degree Programs***

#### Bachelor of Arts Degrees within the Division of Arts, Media, and Design

The Division of Communication and the Arts has been revitalized into the Division of Arts, Media, and Design. New programs, developed in response to workforce demands and student feedback seeking clear pathways from program to profession, include majors and minors in Arts and Entertainment Management, Graphic Arts and Design, Digital Media Production, Public Relations and Social Media Administration. Additional minors in Creative Writing, Fashion Design and Merchandising, and Music Technology and Production were also developed. These programs had a soft launch in Fall 2023 and will have full launch for Fall 2024.

#### Online Master of Business Administration

A fully online version of the Master of Business Administration (MBA) program was launched in the summer of 2023 in response to workforce demands and students seeking increased flexibility in how they complete the degree. There are currently 16 students enrolled in the online MBA program as of the Fall 2023 census report.

#### Master of Science in Criminal Justice

A graduate Criminal Justice program was launched in the summer of 2023 in response to workforce demands. There are currently 11 students enrolled in the program as of the Fall 2023 census report.

#### Master of Science in Occupational Therapy Curriculum Redesign

The MSOT curriculum redesign was approved by ACOTE for a Summer 2023 implementation. This redesign adjusts the graduate program from a 3-year to 2-year program. For undergraduate AIC students, this shifts the design from a 2 + 3 program to a 3 + 2 program, providing more support for students entering the graduate phase. For direct entries into the graduate program, this reduces the time of the program by a year, making it more attractive to students.

#### Doctor of Education – Doctoral Completion Pathway Program

A Doctoral Completion Pathway program was launched in Fall 2023 in response to requests from AIC alumni and other educators in the region. This program is targeted at students who began an EdD in educational leadership or teaching and learning at another institution but stopped or were unable to

complete the dissertation. There are currently two students enrolled in the program as of the Fall 2023 census report.

#### Redesign of the Doctor of Education Program

The EdD programs within SOE were redesigned to include three new tracks: educational leadership, teaching and learning, and higher education.

#### Associate of Arts and Associate of Science Programs

Three new associate degrees were launched in Fall 2023: educational studies, criminal justice, and allied health.

### ***Institutional Partnerships***

#### Articulation Agreements

The College has signed amended articulation agreements with Springfield Technical Community College (STCC) and Holyoke Community College (HCC), providing scholarships and a seamless pathway for STCC and HCC students completing their associate degree. These agreements include waiving the AIC general education requirements, providing dedicated transfer support, opportunities for students to live at AIC while attending STCC or HCC, and the potential for dual enrollment. Currently, there are 15 students from STCC and HCC living on campus at AIC. There has also been an increase in transfer students from these schools for Fall 2023.

#### Keypath Education

The College has signed a multi-year agreement with Keypath Education, a global educational technology company, which will support AIC's efforts in expanding market share, recruitment, and enrollment. The Master of Arts and Doctor of Education in Clinical Mental Health Counseling was targeted in 2023 and is currently enrolled above the goal. The Master of Science in Nursing – Family Nurse Practitioner (MSN-FNP) begins in the spring of 2024. In the summer of 2024, the College will begin the partnership for the three new tracks within the EdD program.

#### RIZE

A partnership with RIZE, part of the Low-Cost Model Consortium (LCMC) of which AIC is a member, was established in 2023 allowing AIC to start three new undergraduate majors/minors in Cybersecurity, ESports and Gaming, and Public Administration. This partnership allows students to complete 75% - 85% of their coursework at AIC and then transition to online instruction. Each major will require students to complete an internship.

#### Partnerships with Springfield Public Schools

AIC has partnered with Springfield Public Schools (SPS) to provide offerings at the undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral levels. This partnership addresses identified needs for early college/dual enrollment offerings, as well as training and development for the district's para-educators and professional educators. In response to changes in Massachusetts' educator licensure requirements, AIC is building a program to help para-educators earn permanent licensure, including support for the Massachusetts Test for Educational Licensure (MTEL), and a degree completion program.

### **Financial Stability: Improving Registration, Retention, Persistence, and Graduation Rates**

AIC understands that student retention is equally important as new student enrollment and recognizes the impact that persistence and retention has on institutional outcomes. To that end, the College has developed strategies to increase registration, retention, persistence, and graduation rates.

### Registration Rush

Begun in August 2022, Registration Rush is a three-day event to help prospective students in the application pipeline convert into registered students. Prospective students were invited to meet with key offices such as Admissions, Registrar, Financial Aid, Student Accounts, and Advising allowing them to seamlessly apply, enroll, and pay for classes. The event successfully converted more than 20 applicants to registered students in 2022 and a similar number of students in 2023.

### Reenrollment Efforts

AIC has submitted a grant application to the City of Springfield seeking funding from money allocated to the city by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). The funding would support a workforce development program with specific focus on completing certificate or degree programs in education, mental health, and substance abuse, along with a degree completion track. The program is estimated to serve approximately 150 Springfield residents.

### Strategies to Improve Retention, Persistence, and Graduation Rates

The following are highlights of several initiatives the College has implemented to increase student progress towards graduation. Where noted, these initiatives are described in detail later in the report.

#### *Destination Registration*

As described in detail in Standard 5, Destination Registration was launched in the Fall 2022 semester to augment the recruit-back process. The event, held each semester, has assisted approximately 20 students each semester in getting holds lifted off their account and getting registered for the next term.

#### *Increased Staffing and Dedicated Resources for Advising and Tutoring Services*

The College is investing in additional staffing and resources to support Academic Advising (see Standard 5), the AIC Plan for Excellence (APEX) Program (see the Reflective Essay), and Tutoring Services (see Standard 5). The College will add an additional Student Success Advisor to decrease caseloads and increase student engagement. The APEX Program will add an APEX Student Success Coordinator to coordinate and implement student success initiatives. The College will also be increasing Tutoring Services support with additional peer tutoring hours, increased evening hours, and the adoption of *TutorMe*, an online tutoring service.

#### *REXCEL*

As described in detail in Standard 5, Rex's Center for Excellence and Learning (REXCEL) replaces the outdated concept of "study hall" for student-athletes. The program assists student-athletes in completing their academic work while also developing time-management skills.

#### *Redesign of Summer Summit Days*

The College redesigned Summer Summit Days, AIC's summer orientation program for first-time, full-time students. The goal is to increase student connection to campus, ensure students and families understand the college experience, and offer resources to enhance success. Each student meets with their Student Success Advisor to register for fall classes, is provided an individual meeting with Financial Aid and Student Accounts to discuss their bill and to make payment arrangements, and meets with different student life offices to learn about the variety of support services available to students.

### **Financial Stability: Enhancing Philanthropic Efforts**

AIC understands that increasing its fundraising and philanthropic efforts are part of the College's long-term financial sustainability model. The Vice President of Institutional Advancement was tasked with creating an institutional advancement strategic plan (see Standard 2) and projections model.

The College's growth model is based on increased engagement, comprehensive donor stewardship, increased donor retention and acquisition, and an expansion of giving opportunities, designations, and vehicles. A new focus on comprehensive relationship-based engagement with AIC's alumni and donor base will serve as the foundation for work moving forward.

The College has fully restructured its marketing and communications strategies. By utilizing communication tools including social media platforms LinkedIn, YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram as well as incorporating substantial video through the ThankView platform, the College anticipates a 50% increase in total impressions/views of social content. Additionally, the "AIC on the Road" program was launched in November 2023, bringing President Benitez to areas of the country where constituents live.

Multiple volunteer programs were and will be launched during the 2023 – 2024 academic year. These programs will engage many groups including alumni, friends, students, faculty, staff, and community members, resulting in closer connections and more engaged and informed constituents. Programs being launched include alumni, academic, and presidential level volunteer roles.

An area of opportunity for AIC to realize substantial revenue increases is through the acquisition, recording, and stewardship of planned gifts. Through efforts to confirm estate plans, learn more about the vehicles and anticipated totals, and focused engagement efforts, AIC anticipates experiencing substantial increases in estate plan gifts in coming years.

Finally, through enhanced grants research, expanded faculty involvement in the grant proposal process, and the building of a consistent grants network with targeted grant opportunities, AIC expects to see a marked improvement in grant sponsored revenue through both private foundation support and public grant funding.

### **Increased Enrollment Through a Revised Athletics Model**

With student-athletes representing over half of the undergraduate population, Athletics strongly supports the College's enrollment initiatives. AIC has developed a five-year undergraduate athletics aid model that is projected to increase the number of student-athletes by 24.3%, increase net tuition revenue for athletics by 85%, and lower the tuition discount rate for student-athletes by 6.9% over the five-year period. The model, which assumes annual increases in tuition, room and board, and need-based aid, is built on maximizing team rosters and establishing new student-athlete recruitment goals that align with national average team roster sizes at the NCAA Division II level. The model includes a \$2.2 million increase in total athletics scholarship aid, which now makes the athletics department 63% funded in allowable NCAA maximum scholarship equivalencies compared to the previous funding level of 48%. The increased athletics scholarship aid allocation is designed to strengthen teams with higher quality student-athletes who will retain, persist, and graduate at higher rates. The allocation is also designed to increase team competitiveness, which will increase the overall AIC Athletics profile, make AIC a more attractive destination to all students, and build pride and a sense of belonging on campus.

In the first year of the model for Fall 2023 enrollment, the athletics model projected an increase of 101 undergraduate student-athletes (16%), a net tuition revenue increase of \$4.9 million (19%), and a

decrease in the tuition discount rate for student-athletes from 80.9% to 77.7% (3.95%). To ensure all aspects of this aid model were met, each coach developed a comprehensive recruitment strategy and presentation focused on identifying prospective student-athletes throughout the country and internationally to ensure full and competitive team rosters. The recruitment presentations incorporated a commitment to academic support and expectations, community outreach, and campus engagement opportunities. Each coach set realistic undergraduate new student recruitment and team roster goals that align with the national averages for NCAA Division II sports. The athletics administration monitored the pipeline of recruits and active admits weekly to ensure adequate process was being made toward meeting established targets. The athletics administration also implemented a process of weekly reporting to ensure team athletics aid budgets were not overspent and the tuition discount for undergraduate student-athletes remained in line with projections.

DRAFT

### Area 3: Achieving the Goals of the Strategic Plan 2019 – 2024

The appointment of Hubert Benitez, DDS, Ph.D. as AIC's 12<sup>th</sup> president in April 2022 stimulated the College to examine its mission, vision, and course for the future. Thus, AIC's Strategic Plan 2019 – 2024 was sunset, and efforts were undertaken to generate a new strategic plan: [AIC Reimagined](#). Prior to that point, several goals in the 2019 – 2024 Strategic Plan were accomplished, including the following which will be discussed in more detail as they relate to Standard 2, Standard 4, Standard 5, Standard 7, and the Reflective Essay:

- Developing a preliminary assessment process for non-academic areas.
- Increasing external funding through grants for APEX and the Experimental Work Study Initiative
- Implementing a new general education curriculum.

#### *AIC Reimagined: AIC's 2022 – 2027 Strategic Plan*

In May 2022, the AIC community engaged in an inclusive process to reflect on AIC's mission and create a shared vision and strategic plan that would guide AIC into the future. Over the course of several planning sessions, President Benitez and the president's Cabinet engaged with faculty, staff, and administrators from different functional areas of the College. The collective effort of these sessions led to a revision of AIC's mission statement, the creation of a shared vision and new vision statement, an affirmation of AIC's core values, and the development of *AIC Reimagined*. In September 2022, AIC's Board of Trustees approved *AIC Reimagined*.

*AIC Reimagined* provides the foundation upon which all planning and resource allocation is made. It identifies the challenges and opportunities the College needs to be responsive to under six fundamental pillars: Academics; Student Life, Engagement, and Support; Fiscal Growth; Internal and External Community Engagement and Development; Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging; and Athletics. *AIC Reimagined* is accompanied by the development of new divisional plans, including AIC's Strategic Enrollment Management Plan, Institutional Advancement Plan, Athletics Plan, Institutional Effectiveness Plan, and Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Plan. All of these (see Standard 2) serve as AIC's guiding documents and support the College's model for growth, stability, and sustainability.

A Strategic Planning Committee (SPC) has been formed with representatives from each area of the College, including the faculty. The SPC, chaired by the Chief Operating Officer, oversees, assesses, and reflects on the progress of the strategic plan. Meetings of the SPC occur quarterly, and minutes of these meetings serve as evidence of the College's work to systematically review and revise the strategic planning process. The SPC reports their work results to the campus community annually.

Although the College is in the initial stages of *AIC Reimagined*, several initiatives have already been implemented under each of the pillars. These initiatives, presented briefly below, will also be discussed in more detail as they relate to Standard 4 (see also Area 5), Standard 5, Standard 7, and the Reflective Essay.

Under Academics, the College has:

- Redesigned the Division of Arts, Media, and Design and its academic degree programs.
- Expanded online programs with a Master of Science in criminal justice, Master of Science in mental health counseling, Doctor of Education in mental health counseling, and Master of Business Administration.

- Created new associate degrees in education, criminal justice, and allied health.
- Created dual enrollment opportunities for high school students.
- Implemented an academic assessment, annual review, and four-year program review cycle.

Under Student Life, Engagement, and Support, the College has:

- Enhanced the internship database and developed experiential learning interest form to allow Career Services to assist students in finding appropriate internship opportunities.
- Created a new centralized student support resource site that connects students with resources such as food assistance, housing and shelter assistance, and clothing resources.
- Developed new residential experiences model to create smaller, more intentional residential communities.
- Signed an agreement with the Pioneer Valley Transit Authority to offer discounted bus passes to students.

Under Fiscal Growth, the College has:

- Created a five-year new program development model.
- Upgraded lighting across campus for energy efficiency.
- Created a Strategic Enrollment Management Plan.
- Signed student housing MOUs with Holyoke Community College and Springfield Technical Community College.

Under Internal and External Community Engagement and Development, the College has:

- Increased the visibility of AIC through media coverage, expanded and coordinated social media, and participation in *The College Tour*.
- Started a monthly networking program on campus.
- Created AIC's Senior Gift Program and engaged campus in a successful AIC Gives campaign.
- Begun exploring a model to systematically increase employee compensation.

Under Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging, the College has:

- Secured three grants to support an Office of DEIB.
- Created framework to attain HSI designation.
- Published website and admissions materials in English and Spanish.
- Implemented a Chosen Name and Pronoun policy and process.
- Offered Safe Zone training to faculty and staff.

Under Athletics, the College has:

- Implemented a new athletic aid model to elevate the competitive level of the programs.
- Begun a faculty and staff mentor program for each team.
- Conducted free clinics for the community.
- Raised \$312,395 through 1,210 unique donors as part of the AIC Gives campaign.

*AIC Reimagined* is the blueprint for the College's next five years. This planning and evaluation model is inclusive, methodical, continuous, and appropriate to the role of AIC as an institution of higher learning. The College now has a strategic planning process that is dynamic, systematic, connected to assessment and evaluation processes, continuously monitored, and linked to the institutional mission and to NECHE criteria for accreditation.



## Area 4: Integration of Adjunct and Graduate Faculty into Governance Structures

AIC is committed to integrating adjunct and graduate faculty into the College's governance structures and other areas of faculty responsibilities. The Graduate Council, which reports to the Faculty Senate (the "Senate") and has a Senate Liaison to the Council, is composed of faculty and program directors from each of the three schools. The Graduate Council meets monthly to address curricular and policy matters that affect graduate and doctoral students. As will be discussed in more detail in Standard 4, the Graduate Council developed a set of graduate-level competencies for all academic programs in the academic year 2021 – 2022. Additionally, the Graduate Council has recommended changes to curriculum and grading policies for the School of Education and the School of Health Sciences. Unfortunately, the Senate has frequently struggled to fill all the positions on the Graduate Council. As a result, some graduate faculty members have had to take on additional committee assignments to fill the vacancies on the Graduate Council. Additionally, there has been turn over in some program director positions over the past five years.

Beyond the Graduate Council, full-time graduate faculty members are regularly elected to the Senate. The Senate has made great strides in increasing communication with adjunct faculty. Senate meetings have been held remotely on Zoom from March 2020 through August 2023. In September 2023, the decision was made to hold hybrid Senate meetings, with the majority meeting in person and a remote option available. Since fall 2021, all adjunct faculty have received an invitation to join and participate in Senate meetings. Since fall 2022, the Senate Chair Elect shares an unofficial record of Senate minutes within 24 hours following each Senate meeting. Senate leadership updates the email lists of full-time and adjunct faculty at the beginning of each semester to increase the flow of communication between Senate leadership and faculty.

In March 2020, the then Interim Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs engaged with Senate leadership in a conversation about governance structure and other faculty concerns. The outgoing Senate Chair established and charged a working group of faculty members, both adjunct and full-time, to examine how adjunct faculty could be better engaged in the Senate and shared governance. This work group generated and administered a survey of adjunct and full-time faculty to understand faculty experiences and faculty preferences regarding inclusion in governance. The results of the survey were presented to the Senate in early 2023, and the decision was made to explore a faculty assembly model of governance that includes adjunct representation.

As part of a general restructuring of faculty governance (see Standard 3), the Senate has proposed a revised faculty assembly model that includes representation from adjunct faculty. A revised Faculty Senate Charter was presented at the September 2023 Senate meeting, and a special Senate meeting was scheduled for October 2023 for additional discussion. This Charter included a proposal to seat three adjunct faculty (one from each school) on the new Faculty Assembly. Revisions to the Senate Charter require a two-thirds vote of approval of the total Senate membership at two consecutive regular Senate meetings. If successfully voted upon, the revised Charter would clear Senate in January 2024 and move to the Board of Trustees for approval.

AIC no longer maintains off-campus locations for School of Education programs. Following the shift to remote education in response to the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 and throughout the 2020 – 2021 academic year, the overwhelming student preference was to keep delivering the programs in a remote synchronous format.

## Area 5: Institutionalizing a Data-Driven Approach to Assessment

Student learning and the assessment of that learning are essential to AIC's mission. Assessment of student learning is integrated at the institutional, program, and course levels and expands into the College's student life and support services. AIC has adopted a systematic and comprehensive student learning and institutional assessment model, enhanced by a comprehensive Institutional Effectiveness Plan which incorporates a) an administrative unit review of the major functional areas of the College in support of student learning and success (see Standard 2); and b) a comprehensive, integrated, and revised academic program review model and cycle.

In March 2022, the Office of Academic Affairs developed and implemented a comprehensive, integrated, and revised academic program review process. Each academic program of study completes an academic program review every four years. Programs are reviewed according to the following nine standards:

- Standard 1 – The program has established and clearly stated (a) program goals and (b) program-level student outcomes and methods for measurement.
- Standard 2 – The program actively collects and uses data about student learning to improve its programs.
- Standard 3 – The program has an appropriate number of students and an appropriate number of qualified faculty and staff.
- Standard 4 – The program demonstrates a climate of intellectual/professional curiosity and achievement among faculty and students.
- Standard 5 – The program has adequate facilities and resources (e.g., library research databases and print materials, audio-visual, computers, labs, practica) to meet its needs.
- Standard 6 – The program provides evidence of a coherent and current curriculum.
- Standard 7 – The program provides evidence of quality of instruction, teaching, and advising effectiveness.
- Standard 8 – The program's activity in community service and outreach is appropriate to the mission of the program and the college.
- Standard 9 – The program contributes to the College's commitment to access, opportunity, and diversity.

The Program Review process includes a self-study report prepared by the program. An external reviewer provides a report after evaluating the self-study report and conducting a campus visit where they interact with students, faculty, staff, and administrators connected with the program. In addition to addressing the nine standards, the self-study report includes a program profile, a comparison to nationally ranked and peer programs, and a discussion of future directions. The focus of the external review process is to confirm the results of the self-study and identify areas of strength, growth, and opportunity for the academic program.

The Program Review process went into effect in Fall 2022 with the following academic programs completing self-studies and external reviews: Business programs (Undergraduate: Accounting, General Business, Healthcare Management, Economics and Finance, International Business, Management, Marketing, Sports and Recreation Management; Graduate: Master of Business Administration), Nursing, Physical Therapy, and Undergraduate Psychology. Table A5.1 presents the calendar for the remaining program reviews.

Table A5.1 Program Review Calendar

AY 2023 – 2024	AY 2024 – 2025	AY 2025 – 2026	AY 2026 - 2027
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Doctoral PT (CAPTE)</li> <li>• School of Education (DESE)</li> <li>• Sciences</li> <li>• Exercise Science</li> <li>• MS Cannabis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grad Psychology</li> <li>• UG Criminal Justice</li> <li>• International Studies</li> <li>• Public Health</li> <li>• Business Programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sociology</li> <li>• Ath. Administration &amp; Leadership</li> <li>• OT</li> <li>• Educational Studies</li> <li>• Business Programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arts, Media, &amp; Design</li> <li>• Rize Programs</li> <li>• Nursing</li> <li>• Grad Criminal Justice</li> <li>• MBA</li> </ul>

Integrated into the Program Review process are annual reporting responsibilities. The Annual Report summarizes the state of the academic program; provides information addressing Standards 1, 2, and 9 of the Program Review; and identifies goals for the next academic year. A copy of the program’s Curriculum Map and Systematic Evaluation Plan (SEP) are submitted with the Annual Report. Annual reports have been generated by programs at the undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral level for the past two academic years. As of June 2023, programs had current Curriculum Maps and SEPs. The Academic Assessment Committee regularly provides workshops at Faculty Development Day and Assessment Day to assist programs with their assessment efforts.

Systemic assessment of the General Education program has been weak, until recently. The redesigned General Education program (see Standard 4) implemented in Fall 2020 mandated that all existing general education courses would need to reapply for general education status by the Spring 2022 semester if they wished to retain general education status. The Undergraduate Curriculum Committee (UCC) reviews all courses, newly proposed and existing, wishing to be designated to fulfill general education requirements. As all general education courses must address three of the five core competencies, the UCC maintains a record of the distribution of core competencies across all general education courses and ensures an even balance. Additionally, general education courses will be reviewed every five years to ensure alignment with the general education curriculum.

Due to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and frequent turnover in the role of Chief Academic Officer, the systematic assessment of the General Education program was delayed. The program included learning outcomes for both the Core Competencies and Content Categories. The program also specified rubrics to evaluate the Core Competencies. A team from AIC attended the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) 2021 Institute on General Education and Assessment and drafted a framework for a General Education Assessment Plan focused on the core competencies. A modification of this framework has been implemented for the 2023 – 2024 academic year. In this first year, all programs will evaluate artifacts from their capstone course (or equivalent) using the AAC&U VALUE Written Communication Rubric. The raw data will be included with each program’s SEP. The Academic Assessment Committee will evaluate the institution-wide data and report on the College’s overall score. In academic year 2024 – 2025, oral communication and critical thinking will be assessed College-wide. In academic year 2025 – 2026, information literacy and cultural sensibility will be assessed College-wide. A plan to assess the Content Categories is in development.

Assessment of the graduate core competencies (see Standard 4) also begins in the 2023 – 2024 academic year. In this first year, all programs will focus on the Disciplinary Expertise competency. The Graduate Council is working to establish rubrics for each graduate core competency using best practices research. The raw data will be included with each program’s SEP. The Academic Assessment Committee will then evaluate the institution-wide data and report on the College’s overall score.

## Standards

### Standard 1: Mission and Purposes

Soon after the arrival of President Benitez in April 2022, the College engaged in an extensive and inclusive strategic planning process. Representatives of faculty, staff, and administration attended several visioning and planning sessions in the spring and summer of 2022. One purpose of these sessions was to affirm, suggest revisions, and/or recreate AIC's mission and vision statements for review, consideration, and approval.

The initial day-long retreat in May 2022 included a comprehensive analysis of the internal and external factors that impact AIC's future, including historical enrollment, retention, and financial trends. Additionally, the results of a campus-wide survey identifying AIC's strengths and areas of opportunity were analyzed. The first retreat's outcomes included the presentation of three new mission and vision statements. Over the following weeks, members of the President's Cabinet met to combine and refine the mission and vision statements. These statements were presented to the campus community for feedback. The statements and the results of the feedback were presented to a group of faculty and staff at a second day-long retreat in July 2022. After lengthy discussion, one proposed change was considered and implemented. The remainder of the second retreat focused on conceptualizing goals and tactics to fulfill each of the strategic initiatives of [\*AIC Reimagined\*](#).

The renewed mission and vision statements (see Institutional Overview) were approved, along with the new strategic plan, by the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees in September 2022. From September to December 2022, several meetings were held in large and small groups to communicate the revised mission, new vision, expanded core values, and new strategic plan. Following a written communication to all employees, a Cabinet-level presentation was provided at the October 2022 Town Hall event. Additionally, every department across campus was invited to lunch with President Benitez, the area vice president, and the Chief of Staff to discuss the mission, vision, and the department's portion of the strategic plan. Students were invited to a student-focused Town Hall followed by a written communication from Matthew Scott, then Vice President for Student Affairs.

As presented in more detail throughout this report, the strategic initiatives of *AIC Reimagined* support the fulfillment of the College's mission, vision, and goals. These initiatives are aligned with six fundamental pillars:

**Academics – Revitalize** – Enhance and expand the breadth and depth of the academic portfolio that attracts and prepares students for an ever-changing world.

**Student Life, Engagement, and Support – Empower** – Create robust student experiences and strong support systems that empower learners to achieve their goals throughout the student lifecycle.

**Fiscal Growth – Flourish** – Ensure long-term fiscal sustainability.

**Internal and External Community Engagement and Development – Engage** – Develop, grow, and sustain mutually beneficial relationships with College stakeholders to enhance AIC.

**Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging – Belong** – Create a transformational community that embraces diversity and fosters a sense of belonging.

**Athletics – Champion** – Create an environment that promotes academic success and development, and competitive excellence that inspires pride in the College.

AIC's mission statement, vision statement, and core values are posted on the website. They appear in numerous publications, emphasizing the College's commitment to them.

## Standard 2: Planning and Evaluation

### Planning

As is discussed in Area 3 (see also Standard 1), AIC completed an extensive and inclusive strategic planning process in the spring and summer of 2022. The result of this work is [AIC Reimagined](#). Several areas of the College have created or are creating five-year departmental plans that align with the College's renewed mission, vision, and strategic plan.

**Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) Plan** – The SEM plan is a roadmap for achieving admissions and enrollment goals for the next five years. The goals are focused on growing institutional enrollments, increasing student diversity, restructuring the enrollment management functions at the College to better support students, and to expand external partnerships that lead to enrollment.

**Institutional Advancement (IA) Plan** – The IA plan will focus on building a foundation and creating a path for sustained long-term success, for expanding meaningful engagement avenues, increasing opportunities for impactful philanthropic support, and sustaining multi-channel communications.

**Athletics Plan** – The Athletics plan builds sustainability in the department and programs and ensures the integration of athletics into the overall educational process with a focus on academic support and success and strengthening the quality of the student-athlete experience.

**Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) Plan** – The overarching purpose of the DEIB plan is to promote and integrate DEIB practices into the College's daily functions, initiatives, and curricula. AIC is currently seeking a new Director of the Office of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging. Once a director is in place, preparation of this plan will continue.

**Institutional Effectiveness (IE) Plan** – The IE Plan is a comprehensive yearly assessment of all operational areas of the college and the progress they are making towards achieving the goals of the strategic plan and supporting the mission and vision of the college. Each area develops annual goals and metrics towards meeting their goals that are assessed and revised at the end of the year prior to developing goals for the next year.

### Evaluation

In line with AIC's newly implemented dynamic process of planning and assessment, each functional unit at the College has articulated a mission and goals linked to *AIC Reimagined*. These goals informed the development of measurable objectives, which if accomplished, demonstrate achievement of the goals. Using the standardized Administrative Unit Assessment Form, each functional unit reports the outcomes of their annual assessment plan at the end of each academic year. These reports include outcomes,

assessment reflections, strategies, measures, and suggested changes or amendments to departmental goals and objectives. Reports are submitted to the Director of Assessment, Institutional Effectiveness, and Research. The overall management and administration of the process is overseen by the Office of the Chief Operating Officer with the collaboration of the Director of Assessment, Institutional Effectiveness, and Research and the Strategic Planning Committee (SPC).

The SPC coordinates, monitors, and communicates activities associated with the College's planning process. The SPC will serve as a forum to discuss and document how assessment and evaluation findings can be included in budgeting and strategic planning processes. Additionally, the SPC:

- Promotes and facilitates continuous, community-wide dialogues related to strategic initiatives, objectives, and progress related to the strategic plan; provides a forum to reevaluate and adjust plans when needed,
- Assists in evaluating performance metrics related to the strategic plan,
- Monitors and reports on the outcomes and goals of AIC's strategic initiatives,
- Reviews assessment data that may impact AIC's strategic plan,
- Assists with the identification of new challenges or opportunities based on regular assessments of the strategic plan and with generation of an annual external environmental scan.

As discussed in detail in Area 5 (see also Standard 4), the College developed and implemented a comprehensive, integrated, and revised Academic Program Review process. The Program Review process, supported by academic program Annual Reports addressing student learning outcomes, fosters a culture of continuous improvement and learning.

The technology plan includes a 10-year capital budget of \$551,000 in 2019 for replacing all technology by category and is proposed annually by the Chief Information Officer (CIO), in consultation with the IT management team, finance, the COO and the President. The budget altered in 2020 and 2021 due to the needs of the COVID-19 pandemic response. AIC's CIO serves as the Chief Security Officer and the Chief Data Privacy Officer and has the appropriate training and background to manage IT Security and regulatory compliance for technology. In the instance of illegal or security breaches, College leadership is notified, and the College's cybersecurity insurance company provides guidance as to both regulatory and incidence response. Business continuity plans, policies, and procedures are done in-house for AIC hosted systems. The College performs daily backups, and the backups are tested at least quarterly. The College updates the virtual environment every six months. The College added cloud backups and ransomware protections in June 2020. The College continues to move more systems to the cloud and those providers carry the responsibility for business continuity and security. A new cloud backup solution/disaster recovery, Wasabi™, has been implemented. AIC and Elms College purchased Wasabi™ at the same time and both institutions were able to benefit from a Colleges and Universities of Greater Springfield (CUGS) discount.

## Standard 3: Organization and Governance

In November 2023, AIC realigned the organizational structure of the College. This included revising the structure of units that directly report to the president, and realigning departments and reporting lines under seven fundamental domains and areas of focus to execute the work that must be prioritized at AIC. These include Academic and Student Experience; Planning, Operations, and Administration; Admissions, Enrollment, and Student Success; Human Resources and Employee Development; Athletics; Advancement, Alumni Relations, and Community Engagement; and Financial Services. The revised model eliminated the vice presidents for admissions, student affairs, and athletics as the College has had them for the past several years. However, the core functions of these offices are comprehensively addressed in the new structure, intentionally promoting synergies and strengthening relationships between units. Two new positions were created (see Organizational Chart included with Data First Forms). Admissions, which previously reported to the Vice President for Admissions, now reports to the Vice President for Strategic Enrollment and Retention Management. As discussed in Standard 5, the positions formerly reporting to the Vice President of Student Affairs have been divided under the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and the Vice President for Strategic Enrollment and Retention Management. With the elimination of the Vice President for Athletics position, the Athletic Director reports directly to the President of the College. A new Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer position was created.

### Governing Board

The Board of Trustees (the “Board”) is the governing body of AIC and has full authority over the operation and financial affairs of the College and is sufficiently independent, ensuring that it acts in the best interest of the institution. Each Board member volunteers their service to the College and signs an annual conflict of interest form to demonstrate a commitment to serving the College’s best interests. The Board reviews itself annually via an electronic survey with the results shared with the full Board each fall.

Set as a goal in the 2019 Self-Study, the Board has, in that time, increased the diversity among Board members in terms of gender, background, identity, and interests in the surrounding community. The current 23-member Board has eight members who are women or Persons of Color.

### Internal Governance

In May 2021, AIC’s eleventh president, Vicent Maniaci, announced he would retire from AIC at the end of the 2021 – 2022 academic year. In April 2022, AIC welcomed Hubert Benitez as the twelfth president of AIC.

The president of the College is the official head of the administration and the chief executive officer. Where appropriate, the president delegates authority to administrators with responsibility for specific College operations. The organizational structure of the College is adjusted by senior administration and the Board as needed and is depicted in an organizational chart maintained by the Office of Human Resources.

The chief academic officer, the executive vice president for academic affairs (EVPAA), oversees the quality of all academic offerings. Since the 2019 Self-Study, the role of EVPAA has continued to be in flux. In the last five years, AIC’s academics have been led by two separate permanent hires, two interims, and one interim now transitioned to permanent hire. These transitions have hampered, and in some instances ceased, the flow of information between Faculty and the Board. While there is a mutual interest in shared governance, frequent changes in academic leadership have stalled efforts for a shared

understanding of this. With a new President and new EVPAA in place, there is hope for a more constructive relationship among Faculty, Administration, and the Board.

Faculty participate in College governance through the Faculty Senate. Beginning in February 2024, the newly restructured President's Council will contain faculty representation. Since the 2019 Self-Study, there has been an increased variety of faculty elected to the Senate. The same few individuals are not continually being reelected to serve as senators; several new members have been added each year and taken up positions of leadership. Senators new to Senate have been elected to the Chair-Elect position since the 2018 – 2019 academic year.

As is mandated in the Senate Charter, the Senate recently examined the apportionment of Senators in 2023. Due to an overall decrease in the number of faculty with Senate voting privileges, particularly in the School of Business, Arts, and Sciences, the total number of senators decreased to 14. This number is in line with the Charter which states that the Senate shall consist of a minimum of 14 and a maximum of 20 members. There are currently 6 senators from the School of Business, Arts, and Sciences and 8 senators from the School of Health Sciences.

As was mentioned in Area 4, the Senate began exploring alternative ways of organizing the faculty governance structure because, in addition to NECHE's concerns about graduate and adjunct representation in faculty governance, a portion of the faculty felt that the Senate structure was not representative of all faculty voices. These efforts, begun in early 2020 only to be put on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic, picked back up in earnest in 2022. At the end of the Spring 2022 semester, an Ad-Hoc working group of full-time and adjunct faculty was charged by the Senate Chair to explore alternative faculty governance models and understand faculty experiences and preferences regarding inclusion in governance. In response to the Ad-Hoc group's survey, the majority of respondents reported preferring an assembly model of governance. In September 2023, the Senate presented a new Faculty Assembly model of governance. If approved, the Senate model would be replaced by an Assembly of all faculty with voting privileges. The Assembly would be presided over by an Assembly Chair and Assembly Vice-Chair. Granting all full-time faculty members a vote at Assembly meetings, the assembly model is inclusive of all full-time faculty voices. Addressing NECHE's concern for adjunct representation, the assembly model proposes three adjunct faculty representatives elected each semester to represent each of the three schools. In response to faculty members serving on too many committees due to a reduced number of full-time faculty, the new model also reduces the number of Standing Faculty committees. The Graduate Council will continue under the new model as the body to address matters pertaining to policy and process for graduate programs, and the Faculty Assembly would oversee and support matters pertaining to curriculum changes, additions, and deletions.

There are a variety of student leadership positions available to undergraduate and graduate students in over 20 organizations under the Student Government Association (SGA). The SGA president sits on the Board of Trustees as a non-voting, ex officio member. Members of the SGA are assigned to certain Faculty Senate committees: Academic Standards and Policy; Academic Assessment; Academic Advising; Undergraduate Admissions and Financial Aid; Library; and Undergraduate Curriculum.

#### Standard 4: The Academic Program

In line with AIC's mission to "provide access to a holistic education in an inclusive environment that propels a diverse community of learners to personal growth and professional success," AIC's academic programing is central to this pursuit. The College provides students with an introduction to the broad



areas of human knowledge through a general education curriculum and provides students with employable skills and depth of knowledge through academic majors and advanced degrees. Programs are available at the undergraduate and graduate level for students seeking degrees or certificates through residential, commuter, hybrid, and online modalities. Degrees awarded by the College are AA, BA, BS, BSBA, BSOS, BSN, MA, MBA, MS, MSAT, MSN, MSOT, DPT, EdD, and OTD.

### Assuring Academic Quality

Each academic program has published learning goals and requirements available in the Academic Catalog, accessible from the College's website. Course-level outcomes and evaluation criteria are required on all course syllabi. Programs leading to certificates or degrees are coherently designed to ensure appropriate breadth, depth, and progression. The redesigned General Education Curriculum (see below) ensures that undergraduate students demonstrate competence in written and oral communication in English, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical thinking, and the capability for continued learning, including information literacy.

Proposals for new programs and revisions to existing programs are reviewed and approved by the Undergraduate Curriculum Committee or Graduate Council depending on the course or program level. These decisions are then sent to the Senate for approval. New programs must also be approved by the Board of Trustees. Data gathered through regular assessments of enrollment, persistence, and learning outcomes are analyzed and used to inform decisions about program changes as needed and to determine the impact of the program on the College.

As explained in Area 5, academic programs are reviewed on a four-year cycle following the schedule set by the Office of Academic Affairs. As part of the Annual Report and Program Review, each academic program has a curriculum map to show a visual depiction of the program. The map is coded to indicate the courses where program outcomes are introduced (I), reinforced (R), or emphasized (E). The map is also coded to indicate the course(s) in the program where program outcomes are assessed on an ongoing, consistent, and formal basis across all sections of the course.

The College's online offerings are included in the four-year Program Review cycle and are held to the same expectations of regular assessments and outcomes reporting. NECHE's Guidelines for the Evaluation of Distance Education are incorporated in the evaluation process for all online programming.

Additionally, externally accredited programs in Business, Nursing, Occupational Therapy, and Physical Therapy are regularly reviewed by and must meet the standards of their respective accrediting bodies.

### Undergraduate Degree Programs

AIC currently offers 40 programs and 2 certificates at the undergraduate level. Since the 2019 NECHE Self-Study, AIC has added degree programs in the following areas:

- Allied Health, AS (2023)
- Arts and Entertainment Management, BA (2023)
- Athletic Administration and Leadership, BS (2022)
- Criminal Justice, AS (2023)
- Cybersecurity, BS (2023)
- Digital Marketing Communication, BA (2021)
- Digital Media Production, BS (2023)
- Educational Studies, AS (2023)

- Educational Studies, BS (2021)
- Esports and Gaming Administration, BS (2023)
- Graphic Arts and Design, BA (2023)
- Public Relations and Social Media Administration, BA (2023)
- Speech Language Pathology, Certificate (2023)

The following programs were discontinued since the 2019 NECHE Self-Study. In instances where students are still enrolled, these programs are being taught-out in accordance with NECHE policy.

- Biochemistry, BS (2019)
- Chemistry, BS (2019)
- Communications and Public Relations, BA (2023)
- English, BA (2019)
- History, BA (2019)
- Media Communications Studies, BS (2023)
- Political Science, BA (2019)
- Theater Arts, BA (2023)
- Visual and Digital Arts, BA (2023)

### General Education

As indicated in Area 3, a goal achieved under AIC's Strategic Plan 2019 – 2024 was the implementation of a new general education curriculum. In May 2019, the Office of Academic Affairs engaged faculty to examine and redesign AIC's General Education Curriculum. A Working Group was charged with redesigning a General Education curriculum that would attract, engage, and prepare students for academic and personal success. This group of faculty members from various academic disciplines met weekly through the summer and fall of 2019 to engage in a comprehensive and intentional revision. The Working Group spent time understanding and identifying the needs of AIC students, exploring other institutions' approaches to General Education, researching best practices for student success, and engaging in discussions about how to translate this into an innovative approach for AIC students. The proposed revision was designed in response to concerns about student success and persistence through to graduation and to address issues where students were "getting stuck" in coursework. The proposed revision included learning outcomes and identified rubrics for assessment. Additionally, the proposal included a review of all existing general education courses that wished to keep that status (see Area 5). The proposed revision was approved by the Senate in January 2020 and implemented for students entering AIC in Fall 2020.

The revised curriculum is centered around five core competencies and five content categories that would comprise the General Education requirements (42 – 44 credits) for AIC students. At the core of each category and the subsequent course offerings are AIC's core competencies: Written Communication, Oral Communication, Critical Thinking, Information Literacy, and Cultural Sensibility. The Working Group identified that a General Education course should try to engage all five competencies, but at least three must be addressed. Assessment of students' growth and development in the core competencies is measured using the corresponding AAC&U VALUE Rubrics. Additionally, all academic programs and majors are to reinforce and emphasize the five core competencies.

The five content categories include:

- **Exploring the Scientific World** – equips students with fundamental principles of sciences and the application of strategic reasoning to the world around them. Students will work to strengthen

their quantitative and mathematical skills. Courses will introduce students to issues created by the complex interactions between science, mathematics, and society.

- **Understanding the Self and Others** – examines the interconnections between local, national, and global citizenship to include personal accountability and an awareness of diverse perspectives. Courses will introduce students to approaches to understand and analyze various social factors that impact and influence human activities and behaviors.
- **Exploring Interdisciplinarity** – prepares students to understand and explore the interconnected nature of problems facing America and the world today. Students will explore interdisciplinary issues beginning in their sophomore year. Courses are interdisciplinary in nature and represent emerging and complex issues today.
- **Exploring the Arts and Humanities** – exposes students to the core of liberal arts education. Specifically, this area provides students with a broad vision of humanistic and artistic themes. Courses will enable students to understand the artistic and cultural aspects of humanity while helping understand the greater global context.
- **Developing Professional Readiness** – recognizes that students need a variety of skills to be successful in their academic pursuits on campus and subsequently in their career. Courses will allow students to explore and develop skills, such as academic success, time management, civility, and civic responsibility, working with others, and financial literacy.

As mentioned in Area 5, all undergraduate programs will assess the written communication competency in academic year 2023 – 2024 as part of institutional-level assessment.

#### Graduate Degree Programs

AIC currently offers 7 doctoral level degrees, 19 master level degrees, 10 certificates of advanced graduate study (CAGS), and 5 certificates (30 – 45 credits) at the graduate level. Since the 2019 NECHE Self-Study, AIC has added degree programs in the following areas:

- ABD Program for Educational Leadership, EdD (2023)
- ABD Program for Teaching and Learning, EdD (2023)
- Criminal Justice, MS (2023)
- Exercise Science, MS (2018)
- Graduate Certificate in Criminal Justice Leadership and Administration (2023)
- Graduate Certificate in Homeland Security and Intelligence Studies (2023)
- Graduate Certificate in Social Justice and Public Policy (2023)
- Graduate Certificate in Victim Studies (2023)
- Public Health, MPH (2019)
- English as a Second Language, MEd (2023)
- Practicum Only track for MEd (2023)

AIC has expanded online programs with the following areas:

- Business Administration, MBA (2023)
- Clinical Mental Health Counseling, MA (2021)
- Clinical Mental Health Counseling, EdD (2021)
- Forensic Psychology, MS (2023)
- Public Health, MPH (2023)

As was indicated in Area 4, the Graduate Council defined core competencies for all graduate programs. These competencies, approved in 2021, include:

- **Disciplinary Expertise:** evidence-based information to achieve culturally sensitive, socially responsive, and ethically sound outcomes in professional practice, education, and research.
- **Critical Reasoning:** synthesize and articulate solutions, positions, and perspectives derived from critical analysis.
- **Professionalism:** demonstrate highly developed communication and collaboration skills in the advancement of the profession.
- **Leadership:** demonstrate skills that promote productive change at the individual, organizational, and/or community level.

As mentioned in Area 5, all graduate programs will assess the disciplinary expertise competency in academic year 2023 – 2024 as part of institutional-level assessment.

### The Major or Concentration

Each program requires in-depth coursework in the major. Courses within each program include specific learning outcomes developed by the academic departments. All programs provide students the opportunity to pursue areas of interest through electives, minors, or double majors. Over half of all undergraduate programs require an internship, practicum, or other experiential learning component. As discussed in the Reflective Essay, the College is working towards experiential learning in all undergraduate programs by end of academic year 2024 – 2025.

### Transfer Credit

AIC's policies and procedures for transfer credit are outlined on the College's website, Academic Catalogs, and in Academic Regulations. The College adheres tightly to these policies when awarding credit for courses taken at other institutions. The process of determining transfer credit may be initiated by the Admissions Office; the final determination is made by the Registrar with the Dean of the school or the EVPAA.

### Integrity in the Award of Academic Credit

AIC publishes the official policies regarding award of credit, degree requirements, minimum GPA requirements, residency requirements, along with other requirements in the Academic Catalogs, Graduate Academic Regulations, and Undergraduate Academic Regulations. Modifications to either Graduate or Undergraduate Regulations require faculty input through the Graduate Council or Committee on Academic Standards and Policy (CASP), and further approval from Senate.

All credits awarded by AIC are based on the federal definition of the credit hour. Each semester, the deans of each school collect and retain syllabi for all courses. Each Dean's office reviews syllabi to ensure they meet the definition of a credit hour and that the course description, learning outcomes, and other relevant information is included and accurate.

AIC publishes a statement of Academic Honesty in the Graduate Academic Regulations and Undergraduate Academic Regulations. A copy of the statement is also required to be included on all course syllabi. Turnitin, a plagiarism-detecting program, is integrated into the College's Learning Management System (LMS). In spring and fall 2023, faculty-led workshops have focused on the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the classroom.

## Standard 5: Students

### Admissions

At the undergraduate level, AIC attracts and enrolls a diverse body of students, including many who may not otherwise apply to or attend a private, four-year institution to prepare them for post-college success. As of the Fall 2023 semester, over 50% of first-time degree-seekers received Pell grants and over 35% of the undergraduate student body were first-generation college students. The ethnic and racial makeup of undergraduates continues to be exceedingly diverse, with 54% of undergraduate students who identify as black, Hispanic, or two or more races. In fall 2023, 49.6% of the undergraduate student population identified as male and 50.4% as female. While there are students who identify outside the gender binary, the College does not ask students to formally disclose. With a median age of 20 years (and 18 for first-time/first year), 90% of first-time/first year Fall 2023 undergraduate students enrolled in AIC directly after graduation. At the undergraduate level, AIC has enrolled over 70% of students from Massachusetts and Connecticut, with an additional 15% of the most recent classes enrolling from New York and New Jersey. Athletic recruitment impacts student recruitment, with all states outside of Massachusetts enrolling a larger percentage of student-athletes than non-athletes.

In the last five years, the graduate population has decreased and currently accounts for 42% of the current student population. The demographics of enrolled graduate students vary by program. The graduate student population is less racially diverse than the undergraduate population, with 23% of students identifying as black, Hispanic, or two or more races. There is a wide range of age diversity as well. Some students enter their program immediately after earning a bachelor's degree and others are further into their careers. Like the undergraduate population, most graduate students have permanent residence within Massachusetts and Connecticut.

International enrollments at both the undergraduate and graduate levels have shifted to be primarily supported by athletics in recent years. While AIC does receive a large volume of international undergraduate applications and a modest number of graduate applications, international student enrollment tends to be limited to student-athletes. The College has partnered with M-Square Media (MSM), a global educational services company, which will assist AIC in recovering its international presence by supporting the recruitment needs of the College globally through dedicated staff, marketing, and resources out of an in-country office, leading to an expansion of the graduate and undergraduate international student population.

As mentioned in Standard 2 (see also Area 1, Area 2), AIC has recently instituted an SEM plan as an initiative under *AIC Reimagined*. At the undergraduate and graduate level, admissions recruitment strategies attract and admit students inspired by and connected to the College's academic programs, campus culture, and sense of community. In line with AIC's goal of achieving Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) status by FY24 – FY25, Admissions information on the College's website is available in both English and Spanish. Additionally, at least one member of the Admissions staff is bilingual in English and Spanish. As part of the SEM plan, Marketing and Communications is translating key admissions and recruitment material into Spanish and expanding advertising efforts for undergraduate Hispanic/Latino populations and their families.

Admissions requirements for prospective students at the undergraduate and graduate level are published on the College's website. These criteria are routinely reviewed by the Committee on Academic Standards and Policy and the Graduate Council.

## Student Services and Co-Curricular Experiences

AIC has integrated a variety of support measures into the student experience to best support the AIC student body from entry to graduation. Current and prospective students can find guidance on policies and procedures, as well as information about student services on the College website, within the myAIC portal, in Academic Catalogs, and in the Student Handbook. Additionally, AIC's faculty and staff strive to be supportive mentors who personify AIC's values of access, opportunity, diversity, belonging, and community.

As discussed in Standard 3, AIC realigned the organizational structure of the College in November 2023. The EVPAA now oversees the domains of Academic and Student Success. The following areas report to the EVPAA: Counselling Services, Health Services, Residence Life and Student Conduct, Student Engagement, Campus Recreation, Library, APEX, and Center for Accessibility and Academic Accommodations (CASAA). The Vice President for Strategic Enrollment and Retention Management oversees the domains of admissions, enrollment, and student success. The following areas report to the Vice President for Strategic Enrollment and Retention Management: Dean for Student Success and Title IX Coordinator, Tutoring, AIC Core Education (ACE) Program, Advising, Saremi Center for Career Development (SCCD). Access to student services is included in the comprehensive fee. The College moved to a comprehensive fee system in May 2023 so that students can know exactly what to expect when they enroll at AIC, without hidden charges down the road.

Regardless of their program delivery modality, all students can access *TutorMe*, an online tutoring service, through every course shell in the College's LMS. *TutorMe* provides 24/7 access to tutors in over 300 subjects; it also has online writing help with the Writing Lab. Additionally, links to discipline-specific library resources (e.g., LibGuides) are embedded in the LMS. From within their course shell, students can connect with a librarian and access a curated collection of databases, websites, associations, books, video tutorials, and information about evaluating sources. All students located within Massachusetts, regardless of their course delivery modality, have access to Telehealth appointments with Dexter Counseling Center.

### Connections to *AIC Reimagined* Initiatives

As mentioned in Area 3, AIC has already implemented several initiatives under the *AIC Reimagined* pillars of Student Life, Engagement, and Support; Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging; and Athletics. Many of these initiatives were implemented within existing programs and departments or built on established areas of success.

**Dexter Counseling Center:** The Dexter Counseling Center assists students in dealing with life's challenges and stresses before they become insurmountable. Since the 2019 Self-Study, Dexter Counseling Center has established a Patient Portal for online self-scheduling of appointments with professional counselors. During the COVID-19, Dexter Counseling Center began offering telehealth counseling for all students within Massachusetts. They have kept this option available due to its popularity with students. Since 2019, Dexter Counseling Center has also been able to offer students same-day access to professional counseling services.

In January 2024, Dexter Counselling Center launched the *Let's Talk* program on campus. This program, developed at Cornell University and now at many colleges and universities across the country, focuses on brief (15-minute) consultations. The goal at AIC is for the counselors to move their professional skillset

outside of the counseling center to reduce the stigma and break down barriers to accessing professional mental health resources.

**Saremi Center for Career Development:** The Saremi Center for Career Development (SCCD) assists with job searches and facilitates over 180 work-study positions on campus, community-based internships, and 25 graduate assistant appointments. Emphasizing a work-ready focus and professionalism, SCCD has served 3,581 students in the past five years. SCCD staff assist in career readiness through targeted programming of open workshops, campus center events, academic camp, and classroom presentations. In the past five years, these events have reached 2,319 students across over 100 events in addition to over 500 students at career fairs. Recently, SCCD has partnered with academic programs or divisions to create Professional Days which include mock interviews with local employers and a career fair. SCCD can also connect students with local organizations that can provide professional attire at no cost to students.

Thanks to a generous donation, both the SCCD's physical space and programs will be updated. These updates include upgrades to the physical infrastructure to include meeting and interview space, technology upgrades, and aesthetic updates of the space inside and out. The SCCD is centrally located in a high traffic area of the Campus Center and is seen not only by current students, but also prospective students on tours, visitors to campus, and employers. Better branding and updated aesthetics will increase the visibility of the department and make the space more inviting.

**Centralized Support for Basic Needs Insecurity:** In Fall 2021, Student Affairs administered a Basic Needs Insecurity Assessment of AIC students. The results of the survey ( $N = 255$ , approximately 20% of students) indicated that 63% of the respondents said it was sometimes or often true that they did not have enough money to get more food; 61% said it was sometimes or often true that they could not afford balanced meals; 53% skipped or decreased the size of their meals at least once per week because they did not have enough money for food (18% reported skipping 4 or more times per week); 9% said they lived with others beyond the expected occupancy of the house or apartment; and 6% left their home because they felt unsafe. Based on these results, the College further built on the on-campus support for students. In 2022, the College launched a Student Support Resource Site within the myAIC Portal. This site includes resources on food assistance, clothing and household goods, housing and shelter assistance, mental health assistance and resources, and the application for the Student Emergency Fund, which is managed by the Dean of Students and the Student Financial Retention working group.

**Residence Life:** In fall 2022, the College opened its newest residence hall in response to graduate student requests for more housing options that align with adult education needs. The opening of the Graduate Annex added two full apartments to the Edgewood Campus which increased occupancy for graduate students by 10 beds.

During the Spring 2023 semester, the Resident Life team worked with campus partners to re-evaluate the College's housing model. After benchmarking, speaking with students, and working with campus partners, the Residence Life team implemented a new residential experience model for Fall 2023. This new model included shifting all first-year students to two, smaller communities. All sophomore students were moved into one building to create a sophomore experience building with multiple themed lounges. Themed lounges include a fitness/wellness space, quiet study, pop culture, and health sciences lounge. Additionally, the Residence Life team is working on implementing a sensory space and a flex lounge where current residents will vote on what would be best for them in the building.

The Residence Life team has also shifted their Resident Advisor (RA) model to engage with residents differently. RA's track this engagement through AIC|Connect in the form of intentional conversations and check-ins with residents. This initiative is aimed at furthering relationships between RA staff and their residents to support student retention and persistence. Identifying early-alerts for withdrawal risk, CARE issues that arise, academic issues, and other personal challenges students may be dealing with will assist the College in connecting students to services on campus and hopefully lead to a higher level of retention and persistence.

**Discounted Bus Passes:** Because many students rely on public transportation, the College signed an agreement with Pioneer Valley Transit Authority (PVTA) for discounted bus passes for AIC students. Discounted passes will help students access their internships and jobs with reliable and affordable transportation.

**Diversity Education:** Beginning in Fall 2020, Student Life increased the diversity programming for all student staff and incoming first-year students. This included anti-racism training implemented across all Student Life student employee trainings, in addition to the general introductions to diversity, equity, and inclusion trainings. Anti-racism trainings were also implemented at New Student Orientation (NSO) for all incoming first-year students. Since Fall 2020, these trainings have been held as an onboarding during NSO to demonstrate who AIC is as a community and how students are expected to treat one another.

In Fall 2020, Student Life released a commitment to enhanced support for AIC's students of color. This included increased funding for diversity education and the Students of Color Working Group, designated diversity center space, and additional staffing. These supports were implemented fully by the end of fiscal year 2021 and continue today. Additionally, in Fall 2020, the Dean of Students developed and implemented a bias incident reporting form, which is actively being used and can be found in the myAIC Portal.

In January 2023, the College pulled Diversity Education out of Student Life and elevated it into a grant-supported Office of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging. The College is currently seeking a director for the Office of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging. At the start of the Fall 2023 semester, faculty attended a day long DEIB training with one session focused on bias and inclusion, and the second session focused on micro-aggressions.

As part of AIC's commitment to LGBTQ+ students, the College implemented a chosen name and pronoun policy and process. This allows students to set pronouns consistent with their identity and set a chosen name for use within certain systems, such as email. Additionally, the College offered Safe Zone training for faculty and staff in the spring of 2023. The Safe Zone Project provides sexuality, gender, and LGBTQ+ education sessions.

**Athletics:** In 2022, the Yellow Jacket (YJ) Mentor Program was established to facilitate the interaction between faculty, key staff, student-athletes, and coaches in a setting that encourages active engagement. YJ Mentors are dedicated to building a harmonious connection between the academic, athletic, and social cultures found at AIC. Their duties include cheering the team, informing student-athletes about campus events, listening to student concerns, and referring students to the appropriate resources for dealing with the challenges encountered on campus. YJ mentors encourage and reinforce the ties between the athletic and academic pursuits of the student-athlete in accordance with the Athletic Department's core values of purpose, responsibility, integrity, diversity, and excellence. With a total of 35 YJ Mentors, each athletic team has one to two mentors for a 16:1 student-athlete to mentor ratio.



The College continues to offer Academic Camp during the fall preseason for incoming first-year student-athletes. Academic Camp, organized by the Faculty Athletic Representative, prepares student-athletes to be ready for classroom success.

**REXCEL:** In 2023, Rex's Center for Excellence and Learning (REXCEL) was created to help student-athletes complete their academic work and develop their time management skills. The program is required of first-year student-athletes until they achieve a CGPA of 2.7 or better, new transfer student-athletes with an incoming CGPA of less than 2.7, any returning student-athlete with a CGPA of less than 2.7, and any student-athlete with a semester GPA under 2.0 regardless of their current CGPA. Student-athletes who have a CGPA under 2.2 or who are first-year students without an earned CGPA are required to complete 8 hours a week, student-athletes with CGPA between 2.21 and 2.5 are required to complete 6 hours a week, and student-athletes with a CGPA between 2.51 and 2.7 are required to complete 3 hours a week.

#### [COVID-19 Higher Education Emergency Relief Funding to Students](#)

A total of 831 students received CARES funding applied to their account over HEERF II and III. Of these students, 214 graduated between Fall 2020 and Fall 2022, and account for approximately \$614,000 in funds. Currently, 674 of those students are currently enrolled, graduated, or returned for another degree, accounting for approximately \$2,048,000 of the \$2,636,000 distributed. These numbers account for 78% of the total distributed funds, demonstrating that providing additional funding had a direct impact on students remaining enrolled and heading towards degree completion.

#### [NCAA Choices Grant: Alcohol Education](#)

In the spring of 2021, Student Life received approval for year three of the NCAA Choices Grant funding, which included a roll-over of unused year two funding due to COVID. The grant, which was written by the Dean of Students in Partnership with Athletics, aimed to increase Alcohol Education programming and reduce recidivism rates on campus. The grant supplemented alcohol education programming by about \$13,000 in fiscal year 2021. Student Life has seen a reduction of high risk drinking on campus and a reduction in the recidivism rates for repeat alcohol violation documentations. Through the Athletic Prevention Training, which ran from fiscal year 2020 through fiscal year 2022, nearly 20% of student-athletes were trained as an athletic recruit host. Additionally, the data showed that student-athletes who attended Athletic Prevention Training had fewer policy violations than their peers, specifically regarding Alcohol Policy violations.

#### [Department Collaborations](#)

**Destination Registration:** Under the leadership of the Dean of Students, a new event was launched in the Fall 2022 semester. This was a test-run of a "one-stop" advising model which was developed to augment the recruit-back process. This event was held at the end of the semester to help students who had not registered for the spring semester get holds removed and get registered prior to leaving for winter break. Over 60 students attended in-person, and many others engaged via email and text. These students accounted for 25% of the students not yet registered. As a result of their attendance at the event, 26 students had their holds ended. The event had similar success in Spring 2023 and Fall 2023.

**Summer Work Program:** In the summer of 2023, the College piloted a new Summer Work Program aimed at increasing retention and graduation rates among students struggling to pay their tuition balance. The program allowed students to live on campus at no cost if they agreed to a payment plan schedule to pay down their AIC balance while working throughout the summer. This initiative helped nine students decrease their balance, lift registration holds, and return for the Fall 2023 semester.

## Standard 6: Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship

### Faculty and Academic Staff

AIC employs 53 full-time faculty and 321 adjunct faculty (as per IPEDS). The number of full-time faculty decreased through fiscal year 2022. Although there was a slight increase in the number of faculty in fiscal year 2023, the distribution across disciplines has shifted with increased enrollment in different programs. Faculty responsibilities, for both undergraduate and graduate faculty, are identified in the Faculty Handbook and include instruction and assessment, advising, scholarship and professional development, and service to the College. Part-time and adjunct faculty are invited to all Faculty Development Days and other college-wide or departmental events. Most departments welcome and seek feedback from their adjunct instructors. However, the level of involvement in departmental planning and evaluation depends on the individual instructor.

Full-time faculty express concern about the College's increased dependence on adjunct faculty. Additionally, there are opportunities to better define the roles and responsibilities of adjunct, clinical, and permanent part-time faculty. Currently the responsibilities for these roles are outlined in the employee handbook rather than the faculty handbook, which defines the roles and responsibilities for full-time faculty.

Faculty are hired for their academic credentials, teaching experience, teaching skills, and teaching philosophy. The qualifications for full-time faculty are determined by the program or department. In some instances, the level of faculty credentials may be dictated by an external accrediting body. Faculty members are included on the formal search committee for hiring new full-time faculty. Other faculty members within a school are invited to attend the presentation portion of a candidate's interview. When available, faculty within a program will assist with recommendations and selection of adjunct faculty.

AIC is committed to providing equal opportunities to all employees and applicants for employment without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, or genetics. In addition to federal requirements, the College complies with applicable state and local laws governing nondiscrimination in employment. The composition of the full-time faculty is homogeneous. One of the goals of *AIC Reimagined* is to recruit and retain a diverse faculty.

In 2022, the College readjusted the salary ranges for faculty ranks. At that time, the College made some salary adjustments to get individual faculty members within the range of their rank's band. The College is fully aware that salaries for full-time and adjunct faculty are below those of similar institutions locally and nationally. The College is developing a plan to increase faculty and staff salaries. In December 2023, a working group of faculty from BAS and SHS was formed to work with the EVPAA to develop a model for systematic increases to faculty salaries. The challenge, with AIC being a tuition-driven institution, is in developing a plan that is fair to the faculty and staff yet resilient to fluctuations in student enrollment.

After several delays due to the ongoing changes within the Chief Academic Officer position, the Faculty Senate and the Board of Trustees both agreed upon revised Tenure and Promotion Policies in the spring of 2023. These changes, collectively developed between Senate and academic leadership, clarify the processes and evaluation criteria, including a tenure and promotion rubric, necessary for faculty members to achieve tenure or promotion. The approved policies also include appeal processes for faculty members denied tenure or promotion. The new policies are published in the Faculty Handbook.

The College employs five full-time professional advisors and three graduate students within the Advising Center and the ACE Program who work with undergraduate students. At the undergraduate level, AIC uses a mixed model of Academic Advising, where students are assigned a Student Success Advisor for their first two years and then transition to a Faculty Advisor for their junior and senior years. Recently, the Student Success Advisor has remained in place during the junior and senior years to serve as another support who may be available during breaks or other times when faculty are not around. Graduate students within SOE are advised by two professional advisors within SOE. Graduate students within BAS and SHS are advised by their program directors.

### Teaching and Learning

As discussed in Area 5 (see also Standard 4 and the Reflective Essay), course-level and program-level assessment of student learning is ongoing at AIC. Faculty members use assessment outcomes to improve their academic programs and to guide their four-year Program Review.

The instructional techniques and delivery systems used at the College are consistent with AIC's values of access, opportunity, diversity, belonging, and community. Most undergraduate students are enrolled in traditional, on-campus coursework (see Standard 5). Graduate programs are offered in various formats to meet graduate students' specific needs. For instance, the School of Education programs remained remote synchronous after the College returned to in-person class for the Fall 2021 semester because of student demand. Additionally, fully online offerings of several programs (see Standard 4) were launched to fulfill student requests for greater flexibility.

Librarians are available to support faculty and students through information literacy instruction. The Information Literacy program uses a tiered, developmental model of instruction to incorporate Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) information literacy and competency standards as goals across the curriculum. Basic information literacy skills are introduced in the first year of General Education courses and are continuously developed as the student progresses through their academic program at AIC. It includes classroom instruction, collaboration with faculty to design assignments to address information literacy skills, and assessments to determine learning outcomes. Librarians teach synchronous information literacy sessions both in-person and virtually over Zoom. Librarians also create asynchronous literacy lessons as needed. Information literacy instruction is tailored to meet the specific needs identified by the instructor and students.

Librarians can also be embedded into courses through AIC's LMS. This allows students to access library resources directly in the LMS. The level of engagement in each course varies. Services can include information literacy or research support resources such as short modules, research guidance, or video tutorials.

With the transition to remote synchronous learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, IT supported both students and faculty in the learning process. For students, IT created a website listing the software tools for remote learning, providing loaner laptops for students in need of equipment, and staffed evening and weekend hours in the first week of remote learning. IT supported faculty and teaching by researching solutions and shifting computer lab access for remote students, prepared for and provided campus trainings, distributed laptops to faculty going remote, distributed loaner laptops to some part-time and adjunct faculty who did not have equipment, created LMS "practice courses" to support faculty learning new technologies, upgraded and created individual accounts in Zoom, integrated new tools into the LMS for secure test taking, and staffed evening and weekend support hours for three weeks to prepare for remote learning.

AIC transitioned its LMS from Blackboard to Canvas for the 2022 – 2023 academic year, with Summer 2022 courses piloting in Canvas. This transition came about because Blackboard would no longer support the version of their product that the College was using. As the College would need to transition to Blackboard Ultra or to a different LMS provider, a working group of faculty and administrators was formed to evaluate the features of various LMS products and make a recommendation to the campus community. The working group narrowed down the options to Blackboard Ultra, Brightspace, and Canvas. Blackboard was eliminated as an option when they began charging customers for data storage during the COVID-19 pandemic. These costs were unexpected/unbudgeted, and no other LMS did this to their existing customers during the pandemic. Ultimately, Canvas was chosen over Brightspace because Canvas makes it easier for students to know what work they need to complete and when due dates are. Given the high percentage of first-generation students at AIC students, this feature supports student success.

Since the 2019 Self-Study, AIC has transitioned to the IDEA System as a new course evaluation tool in 2020. Evaluations were not collected in the Spring 2020 semester after the transition to remote instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of student feedback from Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 evaluations that the full set of IDEA items was too time-consuming to complete for each course, the College selected the 12-item Teaching Essentials subset that would best capture the information needed. Teaching Essentials has been used consistently since Fall 2021 evaluations. Course evaluations are used for a variety of purposes. Individual faculty members can use their course evaluations to improve their teaching to achieve personal goals. Course evaluations are considered along with other application materials in promotion and tenure decisions. Course evaluations are considered when determining to re-hire adjunct faculty members.

Faculty development opportunities are encouraged at several levels. The College holds two Faculty Development Days each academic year – one mid-fall semester and the other after the conclusion of the spring semester. Full-time faculty are required to attend these days. The COVID-19 pandemic generated a significant increase in faculty development offerings. At the immediate onset in March 2020, the Center for Excellence in Teaching, Learning, and Scholarship (CETLS) offered emergency workshops to assist faculty with the transition to remote teaching. Many sessions, on teaching online, using Zoom, and maximizing the functionality of the LMS were presented by faculty members excelling in those areas. With the decision to keep most classes remote synchronous during the 2020 – 2021 academic year, there was an increase in CETLS offerings during the summer of 2020 to prepare all faculty for pedagogically sound remote teaching and use of the LMS. As faculty became more accustomed to using technology, CETLS continued to offer workshops in areas of media assignments and Universal Design for Learning and accessibility. In the summer of 2022, CETLS provided training to assist faculty in the transition from Blackboard to Canvas as the College's LMS.

Despite challenging times, the College has continued to support individual faculty development requests. The Office of Academic Affairs has approximately \$20,000 to distribute towards general faculty requests. An additional \$15,000 is available collectively across the three schools to address specific requirements made by outside accrediting bodies. In recent years, the Office of Academic Affairs has been able to fully fund 52 faculty requests in the amount of \$59,038 for different requests such as, meetings, workshops, seminars, conferences, online training, continuing education units, and events hosted by accrediting bodies. Faculty requests in AY2022-2023 varied from \$100 to \$2,500. A funding cap has been put into place for AY2023-2024 at \$1,500 per request. Also, the College presents Faculty Excellence Awards to faculty members for their commitment to bringing the College's values of access,

opportunity, and diversity to life. These awards, including monetary recognition, go to up to three full-time faculty members and up to two adjunct faculty members per academic year. The awards were suspended from 2020 through 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since the Self-Study, AIC has updated and modernized the Institutional Review Board (IRB) processes. The College has adopted the CITI Program for both student and faculty researchers. CITI is the trusted standard in research, ethics, compliance, and safety training. Different training options are provided depending on an individual's level of research involvement and oversight from student researchers through members of the IRB. AIC's IRB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. All research proposal forms have been updated to digital format accessible through AIC's Engage platform. Information about the IRB and a link for New Project Proposal Form, IRB Amendment Form, and directions are all accessible from the AIC webpage. The webpage also contains a series of Frequently Asked Questions on the IRB and IRB processes.

## Standard 7: Institutional Resources

### Human Resources

As of the writing of this report, AIC employs 562 employees, including 330 part-time and 232 full-time employees. There are no unions on campus. College policies and procedures are established by the Human Resources team and updated annually with input from senior administrative leaders and outside counsel. Within the myAIC portal, all employees can access policies, updates, notices, and forms. Previously, staff annual evaluations began in the fall with goal setting, were maintained throughout the year via supervision, and were finalized the following fall with a report on the prior year's progress. In 2023, President Benitez changed the timing of staff evaluations to run with the fiscal year of July 1 to June 30. Staff salaries are not yet on par with the market midpoint but are increasingly meeting this goal. One of the goals of the Internal and External Community Engagement and Development Pillar of [AIC Reimagined](#) is to make AIC a great place to work, and making salaries competitive for the industry and region will assist in achieving that goal.

In the spring and summer of 2020, when AIC was faced with the uncertainty of how long the COVID-19 pandemic would last and of how severe the financial impact would be, the College made the difficult decision to lay off over 100 staff members, many who have not returned to AIC. After the conclusion of the 2019 – 2020 academic year, the College terminated three tenured faculty members whose programs had been discontinued in 2019.

With a student body as diverse as AIC's undergraduate population, having an employee makeup that represents AIC students' identities has been a priority. Practices to recruit an increasingly diverse employee base have resulted in AIC's staff being more diverse than AIC's faculty. These practices will continue, as one of the goals of the DEIB Pillar of *AIC Reimagined* is to recruit and retain a diverse faculty and staff at AIC. As an additional support to the AIC student population, multilingual support in student and family facing offices is available to enable better communication with family members if Spanish-English language support is needed.

In addition to the professional development offered annually to faculty, among staff, professional development funds are distributed individually to support role-specific needs, such as software training.

## Financial Resources

AIC is a financially healthy, but not wealthy, tuition-driven institution. To reach this stable financial picture, the college has navigated significant challenges and established a sustainable base and responsible fiscal practices to maintain this status. AIC's endowment is valued at \$31,895,136 as of June 30, 2023. Over the past five years, a continued emphasis not drawing from the endowment but from revenue only has translated to significant endowment growth, from \$19,500,413 on June 30, 2018. In June 2022, \$5 million of unrestricted cash was added to the endowment. Operating expenses for FY2018 were recorded as \$53.1 million and decreased by 6.9% in FY2023 to \$49.4. During the same time, revenue grew from \$54.7 million to \$60 million. Additionally, net assets grew from \$47.3 million to \$60 million, and total assets grew from \$76.2 million to \$95 million. Land and physical holdings (including buildings, equipment, and technology) decreased from \$51.6 million to \$42 million. In 2023, AIC's Financial Dashboard passed NECHE's Financial Screening.

Revenue is solely reinvested in the College, as evidenced in FY 2023 expense reporting that shows the following reinvestments: instructional costs - \$13,174,723, student services - \$14,878,003 auxiliary services - \$2,787,779, management and general - \$17,364,247 and fundraising - \$885,860. Revenue and enrollment goals are projected within AIC's SEM Plan and establish the beginning of the College's comprehensive budget process. Based on projected enrollment, historical figures, and discussions with senior leadership, revenue and expense budgets are developed. Once approved by the Finance Committee of the Board of Trustees, the budget is presented to the full Board who sets the goals and institutional aid for the coming year.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, AIC was stagnant regarding the development of new program offerings and other revenue generating activity. Required health and safety restrictions prevented certain revenue generating activities such as in person alumni events, development trips, facility rentals, and collaboration for activities related to grant opportunities. With the launching of *AIC Reimagined*, the College is on a path towards growth. This is reflected in new academic offerings, housing structures, revenue generation partnerships, and other new and enhanced programs. The College is actively researching and submitting grant opportunities that will allow AIC to continue to invest and grow. Despite two years of minor operating deficits, the College has continued to maintain a positive cash balance, growth in the endowment, and improved its balance sheet.

## Information, Physical, and Technological Resources

AIC's campus spans 72 acres split between the Main Campus and Edgewood Gardens. Main Campus contains academic buildings, administrative offices, and three traditional residence halls. Edgewood Gardens consists of the College's athletic fields and facilities as well as upper-division and graduate housing in traditional, suite style, and apartment configurations.

In July 2023, AIC experienced an unprecedented event when a lightning strike caused a major structural fire in Cournotes Hall and the adjacent Lissa building. Having been the home for AIC's health sciences programs, the loss of these facilities has been felt deeply by all parts of the College community – especially the students, faculty, and alumni. The College acted quickly and relocated displaced faculty members and classes to different campus buildings before the start of the Fall 2023 semester. As a result, several upgrades were made to the newly occupied spaces. The areas upgraded include office and classroom spaces in Amaron Hall and office spaces in 935 State Street. AIC was able to enter a partnership with UMass Springfield to lease their nursing simulation labs for Fall 2023 and Spring 2024

classes. The Lissa building and an adjacent building at 1067 State Street will be operational for the Spring 2024 semester.

The James J. Shea Sr. Memorial Library contains the NEST, REXCEL, the Center for Financial Literacy, Information Technology (IT), and hosts the College Steps program. There are three computer labs, one classroom, eight study rooms, one conference room, two lounges, and one archive located in the library. Shea Library is staffed by four librarians, three support staff, and 12 part-time student workers. BAS and SHS are each supported by one library liaison. Shea Library is in the process of implementing a systematic and systemic review of resources by all library constituents. In February 2022, the Library Committee shepherded the first systemic review of print resources. The project took 18 months and reviewed all subjects except art, history, and literature. To maximize accessibility to resources, Shea Library purchases digital resources over print whenever possible. To address the increasing needs of students within health sciences programs, Shea Library upgraded the CINAHL database. Shea Library has a strong partnership with vendors and collaborates with Consortium members to negotiate pricing strategies. As described in Standard 6, librarians support faculty and students through information literacy instruction. Librarians teach synchronous information literacy sessions both in-person and virtually over Zoom. Librarians also create asynchronous information literacy lessons as needed.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, IT supported College offices by distributing laptops to employees going remote, creating the ability to make and receive calls and voicemail from their office phones at home, improving the Virtual Private Network (VPN) bandwidth to support the ability to work from home and access campus office files, and converting academic paper forms to online forms.

The College installed a new password management platform with multifactor authentication in April 2021. This prompts multifactor authentication each time a new device or new location is detected for a user. This provides best practice protections from phishing and other cybersecurity threats for all AIC accounts. Additionally, AIC began using a “Security Scorecard” to monitor the College’s security posture as compared to other colleges in ten key areas. The free product scans AIC’s network several times a month and notifies IT staff when the security risk has increased. AIC’s score went from 71 to 97 out of a possible score of 100 once the College started using the system and resolving issues.

## Standard 9: Integrity, Transparency, and Public Disclosure

### Integrity

AIC promotes a professional culture committed to honesty, openness, clarity, and fairness among all members of the College. AIC systematically supports these values through a series of policies and expectations published in institutional and departmental documents and handbooks. All of these are updated as necessary and available through the public AIC website or the internal myAIC portal.

### Transparency

The publicly available College website provides information for potential and current students. After the Board of Trustees’ October 2022 approval of *AIC Reimagined*, the College’s website was updated to emphasize AIC’s Core Values and specific links were added to communicate the revised mission, vision, and strategic initiatives. As part of AIC’s DEIB initiatives, several pages of the College’s website are available in Spanish.

Academic Catalogs, Academic Regulations, Student Handbooks, and links to frequently used pages are available from AIC's homepage; most information is available within a couple of clicks. Current students have access to additional information in myAIC, the College's web-based, self-service portal. In the summer of 2023, Rexbot, a communications tool powered by Jenzabar AI Chatbot, was added to myAIC to assist students, faculty, and staff. The AIC webmaster is charged with ensuring that web and print content are timely, accurate, and include required consumer information. AIC works continuously to ensure electronic access to information for all College stakeholders.

AIC strives to exemplify high ethical standards regarding transparency. The website provides student outcome data related to enrollment, retention, persistence, and graduation. Student success stories, from current students and alumni, are frequently featured on the AIC homepage or linked from the homepage to AIC's social media accounts.

### Public Disclosure

AIC makes every effort to communicate complete, accurate, timely, and accessible information to its internal and external audiences. Undergraduate and Graduate Academic Catalogs describe the College's history and explain the renewed mission, vision, and core values. AIC publishes the requirements, procedures, and policies related to admission and transfer of credit on the website and in the catalog. The catalog also provides a list of all programs and courses, and the names of all college personnel and the positions they hold. The catalogs are reviewed annually and issued in the spring for the following academic year.

The required disclosure of the College's finances, the Annual Security and Fire Safety Report, the Title IX Policy, the Sexual Misconduct Policy, and the Statement of Non-Discrimination are all accessible on the AIC website. The Student Handbook is also available on the AIC website; Faculty and Employee Handbooks are accessible from the myAIC portal.

AIC publishes the learning outcomes for each program in the Academic Catalogs and on the website. These sources also provide information regarding career opportunities related to the program. Information regarding accreditations with NECHE and additional program-specific accreditors can also be found on the College's website.

AIC publishes information regarding the total cost of education and net price on the College website and in the catalogs. The website and catalogs identify financial aid resources and explain the process for obtaining aid. The College website includes a link to a net price calculator, a tool to assist students in estimating the expected amount of debt upon graduation. The website also publishes information regarding the Federal Direct and Federal Plus loans, along with information about repayment, to help students and prospective students make informed decisions.

## Standard 8 Reflective Essay: Educational Effectiveness

After thoughtful and collaborative discussion, the Interim Report Steering Committee, in consultation with President Benitez, decided to use the alternative thematic structure for AIC's reflective essay on educational effectiveness. A subgroup of the Steering Committee met with Laura Gambino in September 2023 to discuss the College's plans to use the thematic structure.

General information on enrollment, retention, persistence, and graduation are presented in Area 1.



## Introduction

As has been mentioned throughout this report, [AIC Reimagined](#) is AIC's 2022 – 2027 Strategic Plan. Shortly after President Benitez's arrival in 2022, members of the AIC community came together to set the course for the future of the College. One result of the process was a renewed mission for AIC:

**Mission:** American International College provides access to a holistic education in an inclusive environment that propels a diverse community of learners to personal growth and professional success.

The strategic initiatives of *AIC Reimagined* are aligned with six fundamental pillars (see Standard 1). In this Reflective Essay, the following goals, which are aligned with the following pillars, will be examined in relation to student success:

**Academics:** Enhance and expand the breadth and depth of the academic portfolio that attracts and prepares students for an ever-changing world.

- Strengthen the quality and caliber of the academic portfolio by enhancing existing programs.
- Be recognized as a “student-ready” institution by supporting and fostering access, success, and persistence for students and by ensuring that policies, procedures, and systems are established to promote educational success.
- Become a leader in the community that serves the needs and aspirations of residents and businesses of Western Massachusetts.
- Develop a culture of excellence as a teaching and learning community.

**Student Life, Engagement, and Support:** Create robust student experiences and strong support systems that empower learners to achieve their goals throughout the student lifecycle.

- Develop meaningful experiences and career pathways that connect student interests to their academic pursuits and support students in achieving their career aspirations.

**Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging:** Create a transformational community that embraces diversity and fosters a sense of belonging.

- Secure Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) designation by academic year 2024 - 2025.

**Athletics:** Create an environment that promotes academic success and development, and competitive excellence that inspires pride in the College.

- Create a structure where athletics is an extension of educational processes and supports the achievement, retention, and persistence of student-athletes.

## Examination of Goals

Even in the brief time since *AIC Reimagined* was developed, progress has been made on select goals. Where noted, this progress builds upon existing systems and efforts at the College.

### *Academics Pillar*

**Goal: Strengthen the quality and caliber of the academic portfolio by enhancing existing programs.**

One of the initiatives to achieve this goal has been to create a plan to incorporate principles of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging into AIC's core and general education curriculum. While this plan is under development, the College has evaluated the foundation on which this plan can be built.

When the current General Education Curriculum (see Standard 4) was approved, a system was established whereby the UCC maintains a record of the distribution of core competencies across all general education courses to ensure an even balance. Table 8.1 shows exposure to cultural sensibility and the other core competencies by reporting the number of students completing courses addressing the core competencies from the Fall 2020 semester through the Spring 2023 semester. Completion of a course is measured as the student earning credit for the course by achieving a grade of D- or better.

*Table 8.1 Exposure to Core Competencies in General Education Courses*

	<b>Fall 2020</b>	<b>Spring 2021</b>	<b>Fall 2021</b>	<b>Spring 2022</b>	<b>Fall 2022</b>	<b>Spring 2023</b>
Cultural Sensibility	1052	1097	1307	1132	1302	1153
Written Communication	1874	1905	2258	1879	2205	1953
Oral Communication	728	944	813	995	960	1045
Critical Thinking	1440	1325	1626	1337	1607	1438
Information Literacy	1167	1234	1509	1239	1313	1226
# of Sections of General Education courses offered	103	105	135	107	119	106

As can be seen in Table 8.1, cultural sensibility is balanced across the semesters. Written communication, critical thinking, and information literacy are also balanced across the semesters. Oral communication, which is the hardest to emphasize in general education courses with larger student enrollments, is covered less frequently of the core competencies, but it has been increasing. As not all courses that fulfill general education requirements are offered each semester, this balance of the core competencies is reassuring.

Shea Library tracks their involvement in information literacy instruction. For the fiscal year 2023, there were 32 in-person reference questions, 72 in-person consultations, and 26 virtual reference interactions. The librarians held 125 in-person and 3 digital information literacy sessions, reaching 1,831 students. Librarians also provided an asynchronous information literacy session that reached 10 students. Of the information literacy sessions, 120 targeted undergraduate students.

Within the Annual Report (see Area 5), each program addresses how the program contributes to the College's commitment to access, opportunity, and diversity. The following examples come from the 2022 – 2023 reports:

- The accounting program has made a significant effort to reduce the cost of attending AIC by replacing expensive texts with free open-access (OER) books and related resources of equal or better quality. Currently, students are not required to purchase books or other related resources for Financial Accounting (ACC1201), Financial Accounting II (ACC1601), and Managerial Accounting (ACC2210).
- Access and enhanced inclusion are provided in the biology and human biology program through a proactive advising program. Beginning immediately in Biology I (BIO1400) and continuing through the program, the department communicates with advisors and faculty regarding student progress, through AIC|Connect, as well as departmental communications about specific problems with coursework, attendance issues, or lack of engagement. In these ways, the department ensures that students who are faced with challenges are supported strongly from the start and throughout their AIC experience in the programs.
- The criminal justice department accommodates all students by working with the Center for Accessibility Services and Academic Accommodations (CASAA), providing evening courses by arrangement, supervising directed study courses as needed, and advising adult learners returning to AIC to complete their degree.
- Within the economics and finance program, and business programs at large, there is an effort to accommodate the needs of diverse students and to help them with skill development, especially in areas of quantitative literacy and presentation building that are essential components of any successful business career. Courses have also incorporated modules on the economics of discrimination, including discrimination in the tax code, and human capital formation as part of a general effort to promote social awareness.
- The exercise science program discusses diversity/inclusion issues with respect to program content (e.g., issues with use of BMI: Body Mass Index). A member of the exercise science faculty is Safe Zone trained and the certificate is displayed in their office.
- The marketing program uses OER and free materials for nearly all courses. Guest speakers include people of color and/or women who own or work for successful businesses. This year, Jovan Blake, an AIC marketing major alum, spoke to students in the Sports Marketing class. Ms. Blake has held positions with the Boston Red Sox, Chicago Cubs, and Los Angeles Dodgers in marketing and community relations, and now has her own consulting company.
- Faculty within the Division of Nursing have developed a program completion survey tool, which includes students' perception of the adequacy of access and opportunity to program and college resources in addition to an open-ended question, which allows students to voice overall assessment of the Division of Nursing culture specific to access, opportunity, and inclusion. Recommendations from these surveys are integrated into the program/curriculum as appropriate.
- The most important aspect of Graduate Psychology is that students are taught by faculty who are knowledgeable, diverse in character, race, ethnicity, and experience. The faculty include individuals of Mexican, Black American, Puerto Rican, Ukrainian, and White heritage. Veteran status is also part of the faculty diversity. Faculty willingness to share their experiences in the classroom increases student exposure to scholarship in diversity, inclusion, and social justice that builds a sense of trust and fairness in support of student outcomes.
- The undergraduate psychology department surveyed students about the department's climate regarding diversity and inclusion. In brief, students rated the department as having a positive climate regarding diversity and inclusion. Psychology major's ratings trended more positively than the ratings across all students in psychology courses.

- All courses in the public health major address racism as an important social determinant of health. In addition to examining and discussing data on disparities and issues of health equity in introductory courses, students do personal assessments of their cultural and racial positioning in the Community Health Education course. Additionally, opportunities are offered each semester for students to engage with community members who are deeply involved in work around racism and health equity, through exposure to guest speakers, volunteering in the community, or internships.
- The SOE strives to prepare school personnel who can cultivate transformative change within education-related settings, supporting the learners and communities they serve. All education programs have been conscientious in ensuring students can succeed. Instructors have made course accommodations to meet the needs of students. Lectures are recorded and posted to Canvas for students who cannot attend class.
- Within the sports and recreation management program there is a wide range of opportunities to engage students with various backgrounds to participate and immerse themselves in classroom activities and the learning environment. Some favorites that are well received by students include: talk and turn, role playing, case studies, classroom jigsaw activities, classroom debates, and real-life example discussions.
- Theater, by its very nature, promotes and celebrates diversity of all kinds. At AIC, students of all faiths, races, cultural and gender identities and orientations have felt comfortable in the theater environment to exhibit vulnerability and acceptance of others. There is a strong community built around theater arts at AIC that directly reflects the experiences students need to thrive in accessible, supportive, and sustainable ways.
- The visual and digital arts program continues a commitment to anti-racist and diversity pedagogy by presenting material created by an ever-increasing range of diverse artists and sources. The faculty has worked with many College Steps students and has encouraged and supported BIPOC students with the Undergraduate Research Symposium research and presentations.

As can be seen in these examples, the academic programs embody AIC's values and demonstrate the faculty's commitment to the College's diverse student body. Access is especially important within academic programs. While only a few of the examples presented above mention the adoption of OER, many programs have adopted OERs to reduce costs for students. Shea Library has been instrumental in encouraging and supporting the use of OERs. Librarians provide two workshops to help faculty introduce OERs into coursework, and these are included as part of new faculty orientation.

**Goal: Be recognized as a “student-ready” institution by supporting and fostering access, success, and persistence for students and by ensuring that policies, procedures, and systems are established to promote educational success.**

One of the initiatives to achieve this goal has been to review and adjust AIC's academic support and early alert systems. The College adopted AIC|Connect in the fall of 2018 as a tool for tracking classroom concerns such as attendance, low grades, and remarks to withdraw. AIC|Connect can be used on a manual basis, with faculty members raising a flag when they have concerns about a student.

AIC|Connect is also used to collect Progress Surveys at week 4 each semester to capture student progress in courses. In the progress surveys, faculty can make referrals to Tutoring Services, which provides students with tutoring and writing support. In addition to raising concerns about student performance, AIC|Connect can be used by faculty to report student successes, referred to as kudos, both manually and at survey points. Table 8.2 shows the number of flags and kudos recorded for each semester since the Fall 2018 semester.

Table 8.2 AIC|Connect Flags and Kudos

	Fall 2018	Spring 2019	Fall 2019	Spring 2020	Fall 2020 <sup>a</sup>	Spring 2021	Fall 2021	Spring 2022	Fall 2022	Spring 2023	Fall 2023
<b>Flag Total</b>	<b>626</b>	<b>403</b>	<b>838</b>	<b>1784</b>	<b>3289</b>	<b>1991</b>	<b>1423</b>	<b>1428</b>	<b>1348</b>	<b>1151</b>	<b>1160</b>
Manual	580	393	703	932	965	879	635	529	611	581	483
Survey	46	10	135	852	2324	1112	788	899	737	570	677
<b>Kudo Total</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>363</b>	<b>771</b>	<b>2965</b>	<b>3497</b>	<b>1681</b>	<b>1417</b>	<b>1362</b>	<b>1162</b>	<b>1154</b>	<b>1482</b>
Manual	81	309	549	793	412	199	162	109	272	196	250
Survey	34	54	222	2172	3085	1482	1255	1253	890	958	1232
<b>Referrals</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>534</b>	<b>329</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>362</b>

<sup>a</sup> only semester with 2 progress surveys.

Examination of these data reveals an increased use of the AIC|Connect system to track student success since the fall 2018 roll out. This was due to intentional faculty training regarding the use of AIC|Connect and the adoption of AIC|Connect as the official tool to record student progress surveys. Examination of the data also shows that faculty are more likely to report both flags and kudos at survey points than to report them manually. On initial glance it may be concerning that faculty are manually raising more flags than kudos, however an examination of the survey points reveals more kudos being reported than flags since fall 2019. All members of a student’s support network are alerted when a student receives a flag. This network includes the student’s professional advisor and academic advisor. For student-athletes, the network includes their coach. The Center for Navigating Success Together (NEST), which has the responsibility for administration and management of the progress surveys, has developed protocols to do outreach and follow-up with concerns raised by faculty. With the adoption of AIC|Connect, students are more connected to campus resources, and faculty and staff can identify students who are struggling academically earlier on in the semester.

**Goal: Become a leader in the community that serves the needs and aspirations of residents and businesses of Western Massachusetts.**

One of the initiatives to achieve this goal has been to expand internships and experiential learning offerings in conjunction with Career Development. The School of Business, Arts, and Sciences (BAS) has set the goal that by the end of the 2023 – 2024 academic year, all programs within the school will require students to complete a professional academic internship. The School of BAS has clarified student and site responsibilities in tracking and completing internships. New partnerships with area organizations such as New England Public Media, The Drama Studio, Focus Springfield, MGM, MassMutual and others have and will offer students a wide array of opportunities. BAS has also developed robust internal opportunities with Athletic Communication, Marketing and Communications, Admissions, and Campus Police. A formalized partnership between BAS and SCCD has generated an Internship Planning and Resource Workshop offered every semester, beginning Fall 2023, for students pursuing an internship the following semester. In the Fall 2023 semester this workshop was offered both in-person during the day and virtually in the evening to meet students’ differing availability. The workshop includes an invitation to a Career Development Module on the College’s LMS. The module offers guidance on resumes, cover letters, and interview preparation. Additionally, there is an Academic Module that prepares students for internship goal setting, evaluations, schedule development, time management, and success tracking.

BAS plans to launch an Internship Symposium in the Spring 2024 semester where students will prepare a video or poster presentation sharing their accomplishments in their internship.

The current efforts build upon the existing emphasis that AIC already places on transformational educational experiences such as internships. Overall, at the undergraduate level, 58% of the degree programs require students to complete an internship, practicum, or similar field experience as a requirement of the degree. Of the remaining programs, 24% have students completing internships on a regular basis as part of their elective course credits. Most of the placements for these experiences have been local to Western Massachusetts, but there have also been some excellent national placements. Table 8.3 holds highlights of the internship, practicum, or field experiences by undergraduate program within the past five years.

*Table 8.3 Undergraduate Internship, Practicum, or Field Experience Placements*

	<b>Placements</b>
Accounting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internship with Gary L. Depace, CPA</li> <li>• Ernst and Young</li> </ul>
Athletic Administration and Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New York Lady Flyers – Youth Sports League</li> <li>• Springfield College Women’s Basketball</li> </ul>
Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WGBY: New England Public Media – Public Television</li> <li>• Spirit of Springfield – Non-profit organizing large-scale events in Springfield, MA</li> <li>• WWLP – NBC Affiliate Station in Springfield, MA</li> </ul>
Criminal Justice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hampden County District Attorney’s Office – Victim Advocate Program</li> <li>• Springfield District Court Probation Department</li> <li>• United States Drug Enforcement Administration</li> </ul>
Exercise Science	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conca Fitness – West Springfield, MA</li> <li>• Cooley Dickenson Wellness and Performance Center – Hatfield, MA</li> <li>• Access Family Chiropractic – Springfield, MA</li> </ul>
Health Care Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Center for Human Development – Non-profit Human Services Organization in Western MA and CT</li> <li>• Mercy Hospital – Springfield, MA</li> <li>• Commonwealth Care Alliance – Health Care Services Organization</li> </ul>
History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Connecticut Historical Society</li> </ul>
International Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• U.S. Department of Agriculture – Washington, DC</li> <li>• Massachusetts Small Business Development Center – Western Regional Office</li> </ul>
Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MassMutual Life Insurance and Financial Services</li> <li>• U.S. Commission on Civil Rights</li> <li>• Human Resources Department at Chrill Home Health Care Agency – Essex County, NJ</li> </ul>
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Walt Disney World: Disney College Program</li> <li>• Big Voodoo Interactive – Advertising Service for Attorneys</li> <li>• Glamoré Premier Events – Event Planning in Western MA</li> </ul>

Nursing - BSN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dedicated Education Unit at Baystate Medical Center – Springfield, MA</li> <li>• Partial Hospitalization Program at Baystate Noble Hospital – Westfield, MA</li> <li>• Health &amp; Outreach Fair: Chicopee Senior Center at River Mills – Chicopee, MA</li> </ul>
Nursing – RN-BSN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Never Use Alone Program at Community Support Option – Florence, MA</li> <li>• Prevention and Treatment of Ventilator Assisted Pneumonia: Baystate Medical Center, Critical Care Unit – Springfield, MA</li> <li>• Helper Technique on Pain in Children During Immunizations: Caring Health Center – Springfield, MA</li> </ul>
Political Science	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Springfield Mayor’s Office – Springfield, MA</li> <li>• New York State Assembly – Albany, NY</li> </ul>
Psychology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Massachusetts Department of Children and Families</li> <li>• Prefere Melamines – International Chemical Company</li> <li>• College Steps – College Support for Students with Learning and Social Challenges (working with their students at AIC)</li> </ul>
Public Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Martin Luther King Family Center Tobacco Prevention Program – Springfield, MA</li> <li>• Tapestry Health Needle Exchange Program – Springfield, MA</li> <li>• Office of the Director of Gambling Prevention City of Springfield Health and Human Services – Springfield, MA</li> </ul>
Sociology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internships with Denise Gagnier, LICSW</li> <li>• Springfield Public Schools – Springfield, MA</li> <li>• YMCA of Greater Springfield – Springfield, MA</li> </ul>
Sports & Recreation Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Massachusetts Pirates – Indoor Football League Team</li> <li>• 2022 USGA US Open</li> <li>• Springfield Thunderbirds – American Hockey League Team</li> </ul>
Theater Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Drama Studio – Springfield, MA</li> <li>• CityStage and Symphony Hall – Springfield, MA</li> <li>• Theater Works – Hartford, CT</li> </ul>
Visual Digital Arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capital Preparatory Magnet School – Hartford, CT</li> <li>• Springfield Thunderbirds – American Hockey League Team</li> <li>• Leah Martin Photography – Professional Photographer in Holyoke, MA</li> </ul>

Hands-on learning experiences are also a crucial part of AIC’s graduate programs. Table 8.4 holds highlights of the internship, practicum, or field experiences by graduate program within the past five years.

*Table 8.4 Graduate Internship, Practicum, or Field Experience Placements*

	<b>Placements</b>
Exercise Science	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• College of the Holy Cross – Strength &amp; Conditioning Program</li> <li>• Texas Southern University – Strength &amp; Conditioning Program</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• University of Connecticut – Strength &amp; Conditioning Program</li> </ul>
Nursing – Family Nurse Practitioner	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gateway Regional High School, Health Clinic – Huntington, MA</li> <li>• Veterans Administration Hospital – Leeds, MA</li> <li>• East Longmeadow Assisted Living – East Longmeadow, MA</li> </ul>
Nursing – Nurse Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baystate Medical Center, Case Management Department – Springfield, MA</li> <li>• Baystate Medical Center, Heart Failure Unit – Springfield, MA</li> <li>• Springfield Public Schools – Springfield, MA</li> </ul>
Physical Therapy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Integrated Physical Therapy – locations in MA and CT</li> <li>• Encompass Health – Ludlow, MA</li> <li>• CareOne at Red Stone Skilled Nursing – East Longmeadow, MA</li> </ul>
Graduate Psychology – Clinical Mental Health and Mental Health Counseling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Behavioral Health Network – Springfield, MA</li> <li>• Gandara Center – Springfield, MA</li> <li>• River Valley Counseling – Springfield, MA</li> </ul>
Graduate Psychology – Forensic Psychology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hampden County Sheriff’s Department – Springfield, MA</li> <li>• Springfield Police Department – Springfield, MA</li> <li>• Hampden County Court System – Springfield, MA</li> </ul>
Public Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women of Color Health Equity Collective – Springfield, MA</li> <li>• Northampton Health Department – Northampton, MA</li> <li>• Springfield Health and Human Services – Springfield, MA</li> </ul>

An additional initiative to achieve the goal of becoming a leader in the community has been to establish partnership agreements with area schools. One agreement is with Springfield Public Schools (SPS) to provide a “Pathway to College” program for up to 90 ninth graders and expansion of dual-enrollment opportunities at Duggan High School. A second dual-enrollment partnership was established with Springfield International Charter School. These partnerships represent a critical investment in local high-schools and demonstrate AIC’s commitment to ensuring that all students can pursue a college education. The College provided the infrastructure and support for students to complete general education or introductory level courses. At the final and official census conducted on September 13, 2023, there were 156 Pathway Students pursuing dual-enrollment courses at AIC. These students are not counted towards the general enrollment numbers (see Area 1) reported for the College.

**Goal: Develop a culture of excellence as a teaching and learning community.**

One of the initiatives to achieve this goal has been to develop opportunities for faculty-student scholarship. Building on existing structures, the College has continued to provide opportunities for undergraduate student scholarship during the academic year. This student work is showcased each spring at the Undergraduate Research Symposium (URS). The URS is an academic poster session where students are presenting their original work in their area of study. The 2023 URS marked the 15<sup>th</sup> year of the symposium. In the past five years, the number of students presenting at the URS has grown from 5 to 12; the number of programs represented at the URS has increased from 5 to 8. Although the programs represented have leaned heavily toward the sciences, there has been a growing number of students representing the humanities and the health sciences in recent years. As more programs are involved in the URS, the visibility across campus has increased, and more programs have expressed an interest in participating. Some programs, such as Nursing, have looked at their curriculum to see if there are ways to build in projects at an earlier point so student work could be included in the URS.



AIC aspires to grow the URS into a day of scholarship across the College where all programs would share the accomplishments of their students.

*Student Life, Engagement, and Support Pillar*

**Goal: Develop meaningful experiences and career pathways that connect student interests to their academic pursuits and support students in achieving their career aspirations.**

One of the ongoing efforts to achieve this goal has been the Developing Professional Readiness Content Area of the General Education Curriculum (see Standard 4). AIC received a Title III, Part A: Strengthening Institutions Program from the United States Department of Education beginning October 1, 2019 to support the AIC Plan for Excellence (APEX) Program. The APEX Program is a series of four courses combined with intentional co-curricular experiences to prepare all students to succeed in the college environment while helping them plan for their future careers. The APEX Program is structured around four major learning areas: Intellectual Development and Lifelong Learning, Personal Growth, Social and Cultural Competency, and Career and Professional Development. To fulfill the requirements of the APEX Program, students in on-campus programs must take APEX 1 or ACE, and APEX 2 – APEX 4. Students in online programs are required to take APEX for Online and Evening Programs or Leadership and Management in Nursing. Transfer students can waive out of APEX courses for each year completed at another school.

Prior to the APEX Program, the College offered an Undergraduate Experience course. Comparisons between that course and APEX 1 found that students who participated in APEX 1 have an average GPA approximately two tenths of a point higher than those who participated in the previous course. Additionally, student involvement and feedback regarding their participation in the APEX courses has been positive, with students reporting that they feel connected to the campus and have been exposed to important campus resources.

As part of the required reporting for the Title III Grant, AIC has been tracking various progress points regarding two goals of the APEX Program. The first goal is to improve student persistence, retention, and graduation rates through engagement with the APEX Program curriculum and proactive targeted academic support. Table 8.5 shows the progress made on the APEX engagement and academic support objectives.

*Table 8.5 Progress Towards APEX Engagement and Academic Support Objectives*

<b>APEX Objective</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>
Students will have completed APEX 1 focusing on transition to college, major planning, and e-portfolios.	325 students (162% above target)	100% of first-year students	
Students will have completed APEX 2 focused on setting career goals, leadership, and resumes.	227 students (51% above target)	84% of students (4% above target)	
Students will have completed APEX 3 focused on e-portfolio enhancement, interview skills, and elevator pitches.		241 students (61% above target)	
Students will have completed APEX 4.			190 students (27% above target)

First-year students will have engaged in planned co-curricular experiences, one of which is based on financial literacy.	307 students (104% above target)	100% of students (10% above target)	148 students (196% above target)
Sophomores will have engaged in planned co-curricular experiences, one of which was related to debt management.		254 students (154% above target)	148 students (196% above target)
Juniors will have engaged in planned co-curricular experiences, one of which is based on finding employment after graduation.			175 students (75% above target)
Students will have a co-curricular transcript.		100% of students (25% above target)	99% of students (19% above target)
Students will have participated in the APEX professional conduct workshops.	94 students (88% above target)	252 students (152% above target)	252 students (26% above target)
Students will have participated in a first-year interest group/learning community.	113 students (126% above target)	112 students (12% above target)	151 students (100% of target)
Students have an e-portfolio.	303 students (200% above target)	92% of students (30% above target)	98% of students (12% above target)
First-year and sophomore students placed on academic warning will have met with an academic coach in Academic Support.	76% of students (150% above target)	61% of students (21% above target)	65% of students (15% above target)

A second goal, focused on ensuring that AIC students are prepared for life after college, is to strengthen student career readiness, improve post-graduation career placement, and instill community citizenship values through the APEX Program. The College recognizes the importance of preparing students to be productive and responsible citizens. This priority is especially critical to AIC given that most students enter as first-generation or typically under-represented backgrounds and lack the skills necessary to be successful during and after college. Additionally, AIC prides itself on ensuring access and opportunity to students that might not otherwise receive a college education. At the launch of the APEX Program, less than 50% of undergraduate students complete either a credit bearing internship or other work-based experience. While many AIC undergraduates hold part-time jobs, they often lack the connection to their field of study. The students who complete work-based learning experiences (e.g., nursing and business programs) report an increase in practical and “hands on” job skills and a commitment to their field of study. Given the impact that such an experience can have on students’ long-term success, the APEX Program has been designed to provide students with the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful in the workforce through intentional and targeted classroom learning (e.g., course content and assignments) and by providing increased opportunities for work-based learning experiences. Table 8.6 shows the progress made towards APEX objectives linked to career readiness.

Table 8.6 Progress Towards APEX Career Readiness Objectives

APEX Objective	2020	2021	2022
Students will have attended an APEX internship workshop.	148 students (48% above target)	75 students (50% below target)	188 students (25% above target)
Students will have engaged in a career focused co-curricular experience based on resumes, interviewing skills, and developing and implementing career plans.	143 students (91% above target)	105 students (5% above target)	222 students (48% above target)
First-year students will have attended a major/career-focused co-curricular experience.		85 students (70% above target)	105 students (5% above target)
Sophomore students will have attended a leadership focused co-curricular experience.			50 students (100% of target)

As the first cohort to complete the full APEX Program sequence of four courses will occur in the 2023 – 2024 academic year. At that point, AIC will be able to assess the impact of the APEX Program on graduation rates.

An additional initiative to meet the goal of supporting students in achieving their career aspirations has been to create comprehensive career development that provides career guidance and support. SCCD provides students with outstanding career advising, planning, and technical and skill-building support related to resumes, cover letters, job searching, and interviews. Since 2022, SCCD has generated a database of prior internship placements and previous student interns and has onboarded a new staff member to identify experiential opportunities for students. SCCD has also increased the response for the first-destination survey to 56% of students who graduated. SCCD has also developed an experiential learning interest form to allow the center to assist students with finding internship opportunities.

As some AIC students have difficulty accessing adequate or reliable transportation for travel to internship placements, SCCD has worked with on-campus departments to provide placement options for students. On-campus placements can also be ideal for international students who face additional paperwork hurdles for working in the United States. The following offices have provided internship placements for students across different programs:

- ACE Program at AIC – students from sociology
- Admissions – students from psychology
- AIC Yellow Jacket Newspaper– students from communications
- Athletics – students from business, sports and recreation management, psychology
  - Athletics Communication – students from communications, visual digital arts
  - Athletic Training – students from psychology
  - AIC Football – students from athletics administration and leadership, visual digital arts
  - AIC Women’s Basketball – students from athletics administration and leadership
- Campus Police – students from criminal justice, psychology, sociology
- Criminal Justice Department – students from criminal justice
- Human Resources – students from psychology
- Information Technology Department – students from psychology

- Institutional Advancement – students from business
- Marketing and Communications – students from communications, psychology, visual and digital arts
- Registrar’s Office – students from psychology
- Saremi Center for Career Development – students from business, marketing, psychology
- Student Affairs – students from business, psychology
  - AIC Model Congress – students from political science
  - Campus Recreation – students from business
  - Center for Accessibility and Academic Accommodations – students from sociology
- Theater Arts Program – students from theater arts
- Undergraduate Business Programs – students from business
- Undergraduate Psychology Department – students from psychology

AIC regularly collects data related to student employability and pursuit of advanced degrees. After graduation, the College surveys its graduates. For the class of 2022, 158 students responded to the survey. Of the respondents, 95% indicated that they were employed or moving to a higher degree level. This is broken down into 47% who confirmed that they are enrolled or will be pursuing an advanced degree, 40% who are employed full time, and 8% who are employed part time. Additionally, 61% of respondents indicated having a starting salary of \$51,000 or higher.

For both 2023 and 2024, AIC has achieved recognition from U.S. News & World Report as a top performer in social mobility within the National Universities category. AIC’s ranking at 93 positions the College in the top fourth nationwide, among the top six in Massachusetts, and the leader in Western Massachusetts in the category. While there are diverse opinions and some people express reservations about the value of the U.S. News & World Report rankings, AIC believes that social mobility is fundamental to its mission and core values, and that this recognition should be highlighted.

*Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Pillar*

**Goal: Secure HSI designation.**

One of the initiatives to achieve this goal by the 2024 – 2025 academic year has been to review institutional data and develop structured strategies and a systematic model that will increase and sustain the total number of students that meet the HSI designation requirement of 25% or more. The first step in this review has been to track the percentage of AIC students who identify as Hispanic/Latino. Table 8.7 shows the percentage of Hispanic/Latino students over the past five years and projections for future years.

*Table 8.7 Reported and Projected Percentage of Hispanic/Latino Students*

Reported Percentage					Projected Percentage		
Fall 2019	Fall 2020	Fall 2021	Fall 2022	Fall 2023	Fall 2024	Fall 2025	Fall 2026
22.5%	23.3%	22.4%	24.0%	23.3%	24.1%	24.7%	25.3%

As can be seen in Table 8.7, the percentage of students who identify as Hispanic/Latino is not yet at the 25% required for HSI designation. However, the College anticipates that initiatives aimed at recruiting and retaining Hispanic/Latino students will increase the overall proportion of those students.

AIC has also been tracking the retention and graduation rates of key race and ethnicity subpopulations. Table 8.8, Table 8.9, and Table 8.10 highlight the reported and projected retention, persistence, and

graduation rates, respectively. The College defines retention as a measure of first-time, full-time students who return for their second year at AIC. Persistence is the measure of those who return after their second year.

*Table 8.8 Reported and Projected Retention Rates by Race and Ethnicity*

	Reported Retention Rates					Projected Retention Rates		
	Fall 2018 to Fall 2019	Fall 2019 to Fall 2020	Fall 2020 to Fall 2021	Fall 2021 to Fall 2022	Fall 2022 to Fall 2023	Fall 2023 to Fall 2024	Fall 2024 to Fall 2025	Fall 2025 to Fall 2026
All	69%	70%	63%	67%	68%	71%	73%	75%
Hispanic/Latino	65%	64%	52%	61%	68%	65%	66%	68%
Black/African American	68%	70%	75%	70%	62%	73%	75%	76%
White	74%	69%	68%	72%	69%	74%	75%	76%
Other								
Non-Resident Alien	100%	63%	54%	57%	79%	60%	62%	64%

As seen in Table 8.8, the drops in retention of Hispanic/Latino students follows the overall trend of student retention. The decreased retention from Fall 2020 to Fall 2021 likely reflects the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on AIC students and their families. It is interesting to note that retention of Black/African American students was highest from Fall 2020 to Fall 2021.

*Table 8.9 Reported and Projected Persistence Rates by Race and Ethnicity*

	Reported Persistence Rates					Projected Persistence Rates		
	Fall 2017 to Fall 2019	Fall 2018 to Fall 2020	Fall 2019 to Fall 2021	Fall 2020 to Fall 2022	Fall 2021 to Fall 2023	Fall 2022 to Fall 2024	Fall 2023 to Fall 2025	Fall 2024 to Fall 2026
All	77%	79%	73%	71%	76%	77%	79%	80%
Hispanic/Latino	81%	74%	76%	67%	65%			
Black/African American	75%	65%	59%	75%	71%			
White	80%	85%	85%	70%	87%			
Other								
Non-Resident Alien	92%	67%	60%	100%	70%	75%	80%	85%

As seen in Table 8.9, the shifts in persistence rate among Hispanic/Latino students follows the overall trend of student persistence. As seen with retention rates, the drop in persistence from Fall 2020 to Fall 2022 likely reflects the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on AIC students and their families. Again, it is interesting to note that the persistence of Black/African American students was at one of its highest points from Fall 2020 to Fall 2022.

*Table 8.10 Reported and Projected Graduation Rates (6-Year Cohort) by Race and Ethnicity*

	Reported Graduation Rates					Projected Graduation Rates		
	Fall 2013 Cohort	Fall 2014 Cohort	Fall 2015 Cohort	Fall 2016 Cohort	Fall 2017 Cohort	Fall 2018 Cohort	Fall 2019 Cohort	Fall 2020 Cohort
All	44%	44%	42%	37%	43%	45%	39%	37%

Hispanic/Latino	38%	37%	39%	20%	39%			
Black/African American	36%	37%	34%	36%	40%			
White	54%	51%	47%	49%	47%			
Other	38%	43%	43%	31%	35%			
Non-Resident Alien	67%	80%	71%	64%	71%			

As seen in Table 8.10, the shifts in graduation rate among Hispanic/Latino students follows the overall graduation rate trend. As was seen with retention and persistence rates, the decline in graduation rates for the Fall 2016 and Fall 2017 Cohorts likely reflects the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on AIC students and their families.

#### *Athletics Pillar*

**Goal: Create a structure where athletics is an extension of educational processes and supports the achievement, retention, and persistence of student-athletes.**

One of the initiatives to achieve this goal is to create an academic game plan for new student-athletes and a structured monitoring system. Parts of this plan include REXCEL (see Area 2 and Standard 5) and the YJ Mentor program (see Standard 5). While the plan is developed further, the College has evaluated the foundation on which this plan is built. Student-athletes represent over half of the undergraduate population. AIC recognizes the importance of examining and addressing retention, persistence, and graduation rates of student-athletes and has been tracking this information. Table 8.11 highlights these rates.

*Table 8.11 Retention, Persistence, and Graduation Rates of Student-Athletes*

	Reported Rates					Projected Rates		
	Fall 2018 to Fall 2019	Fall 2019 to Fall 2020	Fall 2020 to Fall 2021	Fall 2021 to Fall 2022	Fall 2022 to Fall 2023	Fall 2023 to Fall 2024	Fall 2024 to Fall 2025	Fall 2025 to Fall 2026
<b>Retention</b>	72%	71%	62%	67%	70%	72%	74%	75%
<b>Persistence</b>	81%	82%	74%	70%	76%	79%	81%	83%
<b>Graduation</b>	Fall 2013 Cohort not available	Fall 2014 Cohort 48%	Fall 2015 Cohort 45%	Fall 2016 Cohort 40%	Fall 2017 Cohort 43%	Fall 2018 Cohort	Fall 2019 Cohort	Fall 2020 Cohort

*Note: Graduation rates for Fall 2013 Cohort cannot be reliably disaggregated by athlete status.*

The retention and persistence rate for student-athletes generally meets or exceeds the overall retention and persistence rate for undergraduate students. The two points when student-athlete retention and persistence fell slightly below the overall rates capture academic year 2020 – 2021 when AIC held classes remotely and athletic competition was greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Athletic Director’s 3.0 club is in its second decade. Any returning student-athlete in the fall who has a cumulative GPA of 3.0 or better is inducted into the 3.0 club. The number of student-athletes inducted each year is always around 50% of all student-athletes. However, one must note that these numbers do

not include the seniors who graduate each year. Prior to COVID-19, each inductee received a scholar-athlete shirt so they could be a walking billboard for academic success. The induction ceremony was held at a mandatory event for all student-athletes and coaches. Athletics brought back the t-shirts with the Fall 2023 induction.

Overall, AIC's student-athletes have a strong record of academic success. Since 2019, four of the Valedictorians or Co-Valedictorians have been student-athletes or started at AIC as a student-athlete. Additionally, six of the Salutatorians or Co-Salutatorians since 2019 have been student-athletes.

## Plans and Goals

The information provided above reflects the achievements within the first year of the strategic plan that are built upon the existing strengths of the College. AIC will continue to develop and act on initiatives to achieve the goals presented above and the additional goals of *AIC Reimagined*.

### *Academics Pillar*

Through the information gathered from Annual Reports and Program Reviews, the College can continue to strengthen the academic portfolio's quality and caliber by enhancing existing programs. With the College's adoption of the renewed values of access, opportunity, diversity, belonging, and community, Standard 9 of the Program Review should also reflect those values. Through the Annual Reports, the College can track how programs exemplify AIC's values through curricular and co-curricular activities. Additionally, the College has taken several steps to revitalize and innovate liberal arts and sciences programs to fulfill the needs of AIC's student body. Most recently, the programs within Communication and the Arts have been revised and the area renamed the Division of Arts, Media, and Design.

AIC will continue to track the effectiveness of the AIC|Connect Flags and student referrals to the Tutoring Center and other support services. Additionally, the faculty, through the Committee on Academic Standards and Policy and the Graduate Council, will continue to review academic policies to ensure that these policies promote educational success.

AIC is continuing to grow experiential learning opportunities for students. The College is working to include internship or similar experiences in all undergraduate degree programs. These experiences establish clear major-to-career pathways for students in all programs. Since the formalized partnership between BAS and SCCD is new, BAS will track the effectiveness of the programing going forward. Additionally, AIC is exploring the development of Program Advisory Boards and Workforce Boards to engage community leaders with the College and to better understand the needs of Springfield and the communities AIC serves.

As mentioned above, the Undergraduate Research Symposium continues to grow regarding both the number of students presenting and the number of programs represented. Additionally, the College aspires to grow the URS to a day of scholarship.

### *Student Life, Engagement, and Support Pillar*

The Title III grant supporting the APEX Program runs through 2024, and AIC will continue to report the outcomes to the United States Department of Education. Already, the College has examined areas of the APEX Program that could be revised. One challenge has been the series of 1-credit courses. A revised APEX Program, which will launch in the Fall 2024 semester, will feature a three-credit first-year

experience course to strengthen students' readiness for college and their academic preparedness. The program's second phase will be a two-credit course that students will take in their junior year. The focus of the two-credit course will be on career-readiness skills, preparing for life after college, financial literacy, and pursuing graduate school opportunities.

#### *Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB)*

To achieve the goal of attaining HSI status, the College has developed several initiatives across various departments. Marketing and Communications is expanding on the availability of Spanish-language materials on the AIC webpage and is working with Admissions to develop inclusive admissions marketing materials to reach undergraduate Hispanic/Latino populations and their families. Financial Aid has developed workshops in both English and Spanish focused on financial literacy, loan repayment, and assistance with the FAFSA. Academic Affairs has identified opportunities to work with CASAA and the NEST to strengthen awareness of academic support services among Hispanic/Latino students and explore English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. SCCD has identified the potential for work study positions that support Hispanic/Latino learners. For example, new work study positions could provide translation services for other students or within College offices.

#### *Athletics*

The College will continue to create structures so that athletics is an extension of educational processes and supports the achievement, retention, and persistence of student-athletes. Athletics will monitor the success of the Yellow Jacket Mentor Program which creates a bridge between academics and athletics. AIC will continue to examine opportunities to increase communication between academics and coaches to better understand and support the student-athlete experience.

## Institutional Plans

Today, more than ever, AIC recognizes the need to be prepared and responsive to the factors impacting higher education. [\*AIC Reimagined\*](#) provides a blueprint that will guide the College towards growth and prosperity, allowing AIC to be a college of choice for students seeking a sense of belonging, innovative education, and profound student experiences. Through the six fundamental pillars, AIC will continue to fulfill its mission of providing access to a holistic education in an inclusive environment that propels a diverse community of learners to personal growth and professional success. As AIC looks ahead towards the next five years, its institutional initiatives will be grounded in achieving the goals of *AIC Reimagined*.

#### *Academics*

AIC will continue to strengthen the quality and caliber of the academic portfolio by enhancing existing programs. As was described in Area 5 (see also Standard 4) the College will continue the cycle of Annual Reports and Program Review of all academic programs. By the time of the comprehensive report, AIC will have completed a full cycle of Program Reviews and will be able to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the process. The College will also be able to address any necessary revisions to the process as it enters the second cycle of Program Reviews. AIC will also continue the cycle of assessing the General Education core competencies and the Graduate core competencies. By the time of the comprehensive report, the College will have completed a full assessment cycle of the competencies and will be able to address any necessary revisions to the process as it enters the second assessment cycle. These efforts will help inform the ongoing, long-term viability analysis of all academic programs.



The College will continue to explore and develop new academic programs to expand the breadth, depth, and scope of its academic portfolio. While still in development, these programs will likely include a) Master of Science in Supply Chain Management; b) Master of Education/CAGS in School Psychology; c) Master of Education/CAGS in Severe Disabilities; d) Bachelor of Science in Applied Lab Sciences; e) exploration of a post-baccalaureate program; and f) exploration of offering a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) program. In developing new programs, AIC will focus on addressing workforce demands, integrating experiential learning, using innovative education, and offering accelerated programs that lead to faster degree completion.

To achieve the goal of becoming a vibrant, year-round campus community for living and learning opportunities, the College is exploring the development of summer and weekend program offerings to enhance both college and academic life. These offerings could include camps and conferences, bridge programs to support incoming international and transfer students, and bridge and pathway programs to grow the pipeline of middle and high school students arriving at AIC. As funding for summer research opportunities can be attained, the College anticipates being able to offer students more opportunities for summer research.

#### Student Life, Engagement, and Support

AIC will continue to develop and strengthen internship, externship, service-learning, and student life opportunities to achieve the goal of developing meaningful experiences and career pathways that connect student interests to their academic pursuits and supports students in achieving their career aspirations. As mentioned in Standard 5, SCCD's physical space and programs will be updated, thanks to a generous donation to the College. These improvements to SCCD will make AIC more attractive to outside organizations and businesses as the College explores and implements professional mentorship programs. All new undergraduate programs proposed at the College will require students to complete an internship or similar experiential learning component.

To achieve the goal of fostering a vibrant and inclusive college community through student-centered programming, services, infrastructure, and communication, the College will review and adjust as needed AIC's student life model, including staffing and physical infrastructure, to ensure accessible, effective, diverse, and inclusive programs and services designed to provide opportunities for enrolled students to be successful in achieving their educational goals. Additionally, the College will create a plan to improve the residence halls and other student-facing facilities.

#### Fiscal Growth

AIC's fiscal growth goals are to increase revenue, identify cost efficiencies, and increase enrollment. In addition to those initiatives discussed in Area 2 (see also Standard 5), the College will explore the expansion of facility rentals and alternative revenue streams. AIC will continue to build broader public brand awareness of the College among local families, with a long-term goal of driving enrollment and positioning of AIC as a leader in the region. The College will also continue to expand its philanthropic efforts as part of its long-term financial sustainability model.

Additionally, as mentioned in Area 1, AIC recently partnered with EAB to reimagine enrollment marketing. EAB's unique approach provides a responsive and customized approach to marketing, creating unique communication flows for students and families based on their behaviors and patterns of engagement. Specifically, creating a segmented and simultaneous communications channel for parents and families of prospects, tailored to that audience rather than to the students themselves, effectively

doubles the relevant points of contact and does not impose significant burden on college staff. Bringing industry-specialized creative services, market research, data management, and a multitude of added-value benefits, partnering with EAB gives AIC access to a higher tier of expertise and resources in driving enrollment, as well as ensuring a level of stability during periods where the College's internal capacity may be overtaxed.

#### Internal and External Community Engagement and Development

As discussed in Standard 2, the College has implemented a standardized Administrative Unit Assessment Form and system of assessment within each functional unit. AIC will use this information in the process of acquiring data for informed decision making to achieve the goal of informing and supporting the College's strategy for engagement and prioritization of resources. The College also plans to establish an AIC Alumni Council and Athletics Advisory Board to build internal and external community engagement.

#### Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging

As mentioned in the Reflective Essay, AIC will continue to work to secure HSI designation. The initiatives focused on recruitment of Hispanic students include booking President Benitez for Hispanic market advertising and outreach to regional community-based organizations, continuing to participate in the National Hispanic College Fair, and potentially expanding recruiting territories to include Puerto Rico and Latin America. The initiatives focused on retention include additional professional tutors who would support English language learning (ELL) students taking courses in the sciences, supporting the Latin American Student Organization (LASO), and developing Spanish-language resources to aid in academic advising. To help students see themselves reflected in the faculty and staff at AIC, the College will continue to seek out Hispanic applicants by diversifying the number and types of platforms on which job openings are posted.

#### Athletics

AIC will continue to work towards achieving the goal of creating a structure where athletics is an extension of the educational process and supports the achievement, retention, and persistence of student-athletes. As mentioned in Standard 5 (see also the Reflective Essay), the College will continue to monitor the success of the Yellow Jacket Mentor Program and REXCEL. The College will explore collaborations between Athletics and Academic Affairs aimed at ensuring a better student-athlete experience with consistent practice times that allow student-athletes to engage more frequently in campus and community events.

In 2026, the College will undertake the development of the 2027 – 2032 strategic plan through an inclusive, data-informed process. AIC has a strong foundation from which to grow and is excited about the opportunities that lie ahead. The College looks forward to highlighting its progress in the NECHE comprehensive report and visit in five years.

## Appendix

Affirmation of Compliance Related to Title IV

Most Recent Audited Financial Statements

Auditor's Management Letter

Interim Report Forms (Data First)

Making Assessment More Explicit Forms (E Series)

DRAFT