



Southern Illinois University System

ONE SYSTEM | MANY LOCATIONS | STATEWIDE IMPACT

**ANNUAL EVALUATION LETTER**

June 29, 2026

Dr. Austin Lane  
Chancellor  
Southern Illinois University Carbondale

Dear Chancellor Lane,

I have reviewed the accomplishments on your annual evaluation. Based on that review, along with frequent interactions, I am providing this formal annual review of your performance.

Enrollment and retention are a top priority for the university and the system. While enrollment was essentially flat in Fall 2025, if not for a decline in international enrollment that was part of a national trend, it would have been the third consecutive year with an increase. Moreover, there are several highlights in this area and general trend for the last several years remains very positive. In fact, Fall 2025 was up 6.1% compared to Fall 2022 enrollment and freshmen enrollment was 46.6% higher than in Fall 2019. For the third year in a row, there was also an increase in the spring enrollment. The fall to spring retention improved this spring by 2.6% and fall to fall retention is currently trending 5% better than last year. Both four- and six-year graduation rates have also improved. These retention and graduation rate increases have been led by improvements for populations with historically lower success rates and for students in the Southern Illinois region. I know there has been considerable effort in this area by you and your team to achieve these results. Overall enrollment for the fall 2026 semester is also trending more positively and the current number of freshmen enrolled for fall 2026 is already better than the final freshmen enrollment from fall 2025 with seven weeks remaining.

I continue to appreciate your active involvement in these recruitment efforts and creative ideas to help support future growth. This has included participation in recruitment activities across the state and beyond, as well as efforts to build partnerships with high schools and community colleges. I have received several unsolicited comments from leaders at these schools indicating how much they appreciate your work with them. In addition, SIU online has continued to grow, and I know more opportunities are being explored. University marketing and advertising efforts have also helped to grow student enrollment from several states, including Mississippi, Kansas, and Texas.

With flat enrollment and a small increase in state general appropriations, improving the financial position of SIU Carbondale was particularly challenging this year. However, the institution is

Office of the President

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

still on track to have a balanced operating budget and may possibly reduce the payback from the budget impasse further. The use of budget dashboards allows more people to have access to real-time data and helps to improve financial decision making. You have continued to find ways to control expenses, including the use of strategic hiring, while also prioritizing employee compensation through regular salary increases and additional increases using the results of the CBIZ study.

One of the other major costs for the university is facilities, so I want to commend you and your team on the progress made toward the completion of the campus master plan. There are significant decisions that will have to be made related to facility investments to best position the university for the future and I believe the campus master plan being developed will help the university to make the most well-informed investments possible. I also appreciate the effort made to make sure there was considerable stakeholder engagement in this process.

Another increasing challenge for universities is the growing costs of athletics, and you have been focused on finding ways to improve the financial situation in your athletic department. These efforts have involved more regular reviews and monitoring of spending and finding ways to raise additional revenue. As discussed below, fundraising has helped in several areas, including in athletics where several significant gifts were secured.

Fundraising continues to be an area of increasing strength at SIU Carbondale. The university has now raised \$471 million toward the \$500 million campaign goal, with 2 years remaining. The current estimate for fundraising for FY2026 is \$53.5 million, a new record high and over 20% greater than the previous record in FY2024 and about 3 times more than in FY2019. Importantly, the SIU Foundation provided a record \$6.9 million for scholarships - more than 2.5 times the total in FY2019. The SIU Day of Giving also set a record with donations exceeding \$5.7 million. This success has been supported by a considerable number of activities to engage alumni and other donors. The completion of the new welcome center and home to the university foundation should be beneficial in our continued efforts toward enrollment growth and fundraising.

While not directly mentioned in your self-report, there are three other highlights I would like to mention. First, there has been relative stability in leadership at the SIU Carbondale campus. While there are a couple of interim leaders, that is normal and significantly lower than it was when you arrived in 2020. Moreover, several of the current individuals have been at the university for several years, an increasing rarity in higher education. This stability has helped to support many of the successes previously discussed and was noted by Moody's as a factor in our bond ratings increase. It should be noted that you are now the longest serving SIU Carbondale Chancellor in over 30 years. This is also a factor in these successes and in the favorable view of the university from both those who evaluate and those who support the university.

Second, you developed a strong strategic plan in Imagine 2030 and the university has already achieved about half of the objectives outlined in the plan. That progress is very impressive. Third, while your primary focus is, as it should be, on moving the campus forward, you have

been a good partner with me and others at the system level in pursuing our objectives and that is much appreciated.

Again, congratulations on the accomplishments in the past year. I look forward to working with you and your team in what I hope will be another successful year for SIU Carbondale and its many stakeholders.

Sincerely,



Daniel Mahony  
President  
Southern Illinois University System

*The signature below indicates the employee has had an opportunity to review this annual evaluation letter. The employee should feel free to attach to this letter any written response which is necessary for further explanation or detail.*



Austin Lane (Jul 1, 2026 09:37:01 CDT)

Employee

Jul 1, 2026

Date