Illinois recently received the 2016 Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED) award from Insight Into Diversity magazine for its outstanding commitment to diversity and inclusion, the fourth year Illinois has been recognized for this award. As a recipient of the annual HEED Award, Illinois will be featured, along with 82 other recipients, in the November 2016 issue of Insight Into Diversity, the oldest and largest diversity-focused publication in higher education.

As Associate Chancellor for Diversity Assata Zerai noted: “In 1946 students with disabilities were provided accommodation, and the University of Illinois Board of Trustees voted to adopt a Code of Fair Educational Practice to encourage the elimination of qualifications based on race, creed or national origin. In 1968, the university recruited 565 newly admitted Latina/Latino and African American students to our campus. And in 2007, our ‘Inclusive Illinois, one campus, many voices’ initiative began.

“Today, we have a vibrant community of diversity and inclusion advocates in the Office of Inclusion and Intercultural Relations, and its related branches in the cultural houses, in the LGBT resources center, and the women’s resources center. We have strong community partnerships. It is an honor to build on this good work, and uphold the values of diversity, inclusion, and social justice by helping units to become intentional about operationalizing their commitments.”

The university is committed to making our campus an inclusive environment, Zerai said, and starting in fall 2018, every Illinois student will be required to take a course in U.S. minority culture in order to graduate.
The Diversity Realized at Illinois by Visioning Excellence (DRIVE) Committee is composed of highly respected faculty members to ensure that diversity and excellence are an inseparable part of the hiring process, Zerai added, including unconscious bias training. “Undergraduate students are engaged in DiversityEdu30, an online module that is intended to provide an introduction to the diversity of opinions, social identities, experiences that students will experience at Illinois throughout their academic career and to provide common language where conversations about diversity can begin.

“We are striving to create an Inclusive Illinois: one campus, many voices is about creating one campus of many voices. Our goal is to work towards an image of Illinois as a multi-patterned quilt -- weaved together cohesively, yet incorporating and respecting the distinct cloths and pieces of our unique identities,” Zerai said. “The Diversity Values Statement and Inclusive Illinois defines the university’s commitment to cultivating and sustaining a diverse and inclusive living, learning, and working environment.”