

EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

ICC is committed to an Academic Assessment Plan, approved by the HLC, that includes a variety of means for evaluating and assessing student learning and success. The Illinois Central College Internet online courses and programs are considered an integral part of the College's overall instructional effort.

In an online class, the achievement of objectives is primarily based on the student's written participation in course activities. Some instructors report the use of weekly required reflection essays to allow students to relate the content to their lives. This provides an opportunity to check how students are internalizing and applying the content. A combination of online and proctored examinations allows one instructor to track and compare student performance in each examination environment.

At the current time the College does not separate online courses from other delivery methods; all courses are evaluated using the same effectiveness criteria. Cumulative student learning is observed by success in future classes, since most advanced classes build on what is learned in the prior class. One teacher has reported that in an informal follow up, the top students in his online class were then the top students in a traditional class in a subsequent semester. One of his students reported that the online environment was beneficial to her because it taught her how to learn from the textbook and solution manual with support from the instructor, thus improving her learning skills for traditional classes as well.

Student Performance

At present, student performance is compared to intended learning objectives by the individual faculty members, and results are not systematically collected. All course syllabi must include objectives and expectations detailed and related to general education goals.

Student performance is measured by various formative and summative means that include:

- Homework assignments
- Participation in discussion boards
- Projects (individual and/or group)
- Portfolio development
- Student feedback
- Laboratory assignments
- Case problems

Classroom Assessment techniques (for example, Minute Papers, Muddiest Point exercises, climate surveys, and pre- and post-tests).

Many faculty find students successful in online classes. Comments concerning student success have been sampled from current online faculty:

- As measured in my own online courses by conventional testing results, assignment performance, and final course grades, online student performance compares favorably to intended learning outcomes for the courses. Assignments are created that will work with various student learning styles.
- Exams are based on homework, discussion board participation, and quizzes which are based on the Learning Objectives. Those who pass the course can perform the Learning Objectives.
- It has been my observation that students in online classes perform at a similar level to their traditional counterparts. Since many online courses include content that is cumulative in nature, their successful performance in subsequent courses shows evidence that the material has been learned.
- I found in an informal follow up that the top students in my online Intermediate Algebra class were then the top students in a traditional College Algebra class with different teachers in a subsequent semester. It is remarkable since students traditionally have a tough time transitioning from Intermediate to College Algebra.

The Blackboard Course Management System the College uses allows students to take online quizzes and exams, many of which are automatically graded by the computer based on answers instructors enter manually beforehand. Students also write papers and do homework assignments that they then submit via email. Then the papers are graded with the comments, and sent back to the student with a grade and suggestions for future reference. Faculty can also check performance of student in other ways.

Assessment of student performance and learning in online courses does not differ substantially from that of traditionally taught courses and is, therefore, integrated into the institutional overall assessment program. At this point, Illinois Central College's assessment activities at the course and department levels focus primarily on the achievement of ten distinct general education goals. Secondary assessment activities are defined by individual instructors' learning objectives. Currently, the College's Assessment Coordinator collects all course- and department-level activities and publishes an annual report on projects, findings, and evidence of integrating assessment results into classroom instruction.

The determination of differences between the instructional effectiveness of online learning courses and traditionally taught courses is a process under study by the College's Assessment Committee and academic departments. A review of the existing literature suggests the need for more carefully constructed assessment activities in order to accomplish a meaningful comparison. As assessment activities in general become a more regular practice, more attention will be given to this issue.

Additional institutional data sources are utilized to guide and to support assessment activities, most notably the results of follow-up studies of occupational program graduates, inventories of student satisfaction with college programs and services, student assessments of faculty, and institution-specific reports and analyses generated by the Office of Institutional Research.

Ultimately, assessment findings from all distance learning courses, including those offered online, are integrated into the College's planning and budgeting practices via annual program reviews. Academic program review is conducted on a five-year cycle as required by the Illinois Community College Board. A process management team at the College has recently formed around the subject of academic program review in order to educate faculty and staff on the uses of program evaluation data, to evaluate the means by which the budgeting and planning processes are informed by the program review process, and to provide a more rigorous overall review of programs by including more substantive assessment and supplemental data.

Integrity of Student Work

The College seeks to assure the integrity of student work in many ways. When proctoring is used, several options are open to both the faculty and the student. The library assists the English department as standing proctors for English 110 and 111. The only proctor allowed is a reference librarian who administers all exams in the library at a workstation adjacent to the reference desk. The student must show photo identification before receiving the exam. All materials are remanded to the care of the librarian at the end of the testing time, and the librarian then mails them through the campus mail facilities to the English Department. Libraries at other institutions are also options for online students.

Faculty may also use the College Testing Center or the Writing Lab. The Testing Center requires students to provide picture identification prior to taking the exam, as does the Writing Lab. Completed exams are mailed, faxed, or picked up by the faculty member. If the exam is computer based, the instructor may utilize the password feature in the course management feature and provide the password to the proctor. Computer-based exams can be evaluated by the course management system or by the instructor online.

Instructors who coordinate proctored exams off campus may take advantage of the Illinois Virtual Campus system which provides the contact information for testing centers in a network of community colleges in the state.

In many cases, the individual instructors proctor the examinations taken on campus. When students are located at a distance, several participating colleges offer proctoring services. ICC does not have control over their procedures for selecting proctors, verifying identities of students, or securing testing materials. One instructor interviews off-campus proctors and provides a set of instructions for the examination.

Another instructor does not rely on quizzes and examinations but utilizes projects and discussion participation. Several other instructors utilize the course management system's ability to randomly generate instruments for each student from pools of questions. Instructors report that the pools are linked to the course objectives, thereby allowing the instructor to examine content learning and objective attainment for the class and each individual student. Additionally, each time a student logs into the Blackboard administered testing process, a unique and new quiz is generated. Using randomly generated activities from question pools is also used as a formative assessment technique.

Several instructors also utilize Blackboard's ability to generate randomized tests from question pools, many of which are quite large; this makes it unlikely that the student will get the same questions twice in a row, and thus even if they print the exam out, it would be of little use to them or other students. In addition, if a test is closed before completion, the instructor must reset it; too many resets for the same student would raise a red flag that something may be going on. In one case, exam questions are structured from homework, so that only someone who has been participating in the course (i.e., doing his/her homework) will do well. Questions are almost exclusively short answer/essay, explain, describe, etc.

The integrity of student work is enforced because the Blackboard Course Management System requires students to use their individual login and password to enter the course site. An instructor may utilize the timing features of the course management system to limit the time of an exam. Time limits for proctored exams are enforced by the proctor.

Although someone could be "posing" as an enrolled student, many classes are cumulative and it is unlikely that someone could be successful in future classes without first absorbing the material in the introductory classes.

As well as requiring a student to sign an "honesty statement," several instructors report that they also disable the Discussion Board (where the class has discussed all of the homework problems) during the exam. Several instructors utilize inserting the HTML code into the first item of a Blackboard generated quiz/exam. The code prevents the student from utilizing the PRINT command.

The academic misconduct policies that assure the integrity of student work are outlined in the Student Handbook under the heading “Academic Misconduct.” Instructors often state or reference these in their course outline, syllabus, and/or procedures. Additionally, many faculty explain academic honesty in their course syllabi.

Cheating is a practice that is difficult to control in the classroom or online. One instructor constructs online exams such that the answers to the exam questions are not in the textbook. Most questions are application in nature, requiring the student to identify a legal concept and then answer the question based on the law surrounding the concept. Students are encouraged to use their texts and other written materials to help them answer. This way, the test also becomes a research assignment as well as a test. While this does not prevent cheating, it does make getting the answer tougher which in turn makes finding someone willing to assist in the cheating a little tougher also.

Personal Information

With the conversion to the PeopleSoft system, students are assigned unique identification numbers. Faculty are provided with copies of FERPA and asked to avoid using the students’ Social Security number for identification. Additionally, the Blackboard system requires students use their unique login identification and student-created password. Although initial entry into Blackboard requires students to use the last four digits of their Social Security number as a password, they are encouraged to change it immediately. Students who forget their password can contact the HELP desk for assistance in resetting their password to the default and/or directing the system to email the password directly to the student.

Blackboard only allows a student to view his or her grades assuming students aren’t sharing login information with others. Personal information requested for online courses is entered through Blackboard and is subject to the protection offered by that program.

When conducting assessments online, the Blackboard “survey mode” provides anonymity to the student. The instructor can only determine if a student has completed the task; specific responses cannot be matched to individual students. The survey responses are reported in the aggregate and examined as a group.

A student’s information is protected, yet each is able to view his or her own evaluation or progress. Evaluations of student performance are sent personally to each student via email. Student scores are posted on Blackboard and are accessible only by that student. Questions regarding grades are also handled via telephone and/or face-to-face conferences. While Blackboard only allows students to access their own information, aggregated activity information such as descriptive statistics is provided in summary.

Program Effectiveness

The success of any class or program, traditional or online, is directly related to the degree of effort expended by both instructor and student. Thoughtful development of a course can enable a student to reach their educational goals. In addition, student-centered learning that fosters development of critical thinking skills can result in an increase of student satisfaction and faculty satisfaction rates; both directly related to retention rates.

When an online course is well-developed to include clear student and instructor expectations, student performance and satisfaction are enhanced. A course should be “user-friendly” to prevent technological and communication obstacles from thwarting student learning.

The extent to which student learning matches intended goals, both general education and class specific, shows the effectiveness of the class. Expectations are outlined and detailed within the class syllabus. Homework, projects, quizzes, and exams tied directly to the learning objectives will help to accomplish achieving the objectives. Currently, the College is starting a project to relate all class objectives to general education goals and show how results are measured and used.

Comparison of the results of online student learning evaluation instruments with the pre-stated objectives of the course indicates that general and specific learning goals are being met by the online students. In many cases, the same assignments are used in the online class as the on-campus classes; since the on-campus assignments match the goals/objectives of the course/general education program, the online assignments do as well. Other instances may have assignments which are vastly different only because of the presentation method.

The extent to which student intent is met is another way of showing class/program effectiveness. To determine student intent, individual faculty members seek, at the beginning of the class, student input as to why each of them have enrolled in the course. One instructor reports that this information is utilized to update the course outline; while, another faculty member uses the expectation guide from the first day to assess the degree to which the course meets these expectations.

The use of feedback/climate surveys are a frequent method for faculty to obtain student input throughout the class. Students are provided with individual responses, when requested, and public responses to ensure questions are answered and published to the class members.

These assessment tools, administered periodically throughout the course, allow for dynamically developed courses that meet student needs. For example, questions posed in surveys and “muddiest point” assessments may lead to extra modules being

developed and inserted into the course. In addition, a variety of teaching methods, such as group discussion board/readings/quizzes/hands-on, are used to ensure that the various learning styles of students are considered.

Another area of concern in program effectiveness is the constant problem of students who are not suited for the online environment yet enroll in them, such as ones who are not self-disciplined and/or motivated. Measures are being taken to help minimize this including advisors who attempt to steer students to classes that will be appropriate for them. In addition an “Are you ready for online learning?” informational link has been placed on the students’ section of the ICC home page. Students are encouraged to review this link at before enrolling in an online course.

By a student utilizing this link, the class will have enrolled students who can benefit the most from the class. This link can be helpful to improve retention rates. Currently, program-specific retention rates are calculated based on cohorts of first-time freshmen who enter Illinois Central College in a given fall semester. These cohorts are tracked over a five-year period. Online degree programs will be tracked by a similar methodology.

Course completion rates are also calculated on a semester-by-semester basis for courses with an online component. Comparative information among each course’s instructional modes is also provided. Please see Appendix III entitled *Course Completion – Courses with an Online Component*. As can be seen by the chart, many online classes have a withdrawal rate that is higher than on-campus sections. It is hoped the screening link will help retention by encouraging only those ready for online classes to enroll.

Student and Faculty Satisfaction

Various means are used to collect student and faculty satisfaction with online courses. Some instructors collect anonymous student surveys as frequently as once per week. Informal peer review takes place during various faculty development activities. The most formal peer review process occurs during the four-day Blackboard institute where faculty design and develop online courses. During the institute, instructors are grouped and encouraged to review and comment on each other’s courses.

There is also a new mentor program that allows online instructors to share experiences with each other, and to help provide another avenue of support for solving any problems that may arise, and to increase the overall quality of online learning.

Illinois Central College participated in the Central Illinois Higher Education Consortium (CIHEC) “Assessment of Student and Faculty Perceptions of the Online Course Format” during Spring and Summer 2002. The compiled findings were distributed in Spring 2003 to the six participating central Illinois institutions.

Responses from ICC comprised 46% of the faculty responses and 60% of the student responses. The survey uncovered the major points listed below. The complete results are available in the HLC Resource Room. These regional findings mirror what is being discovered at ICC.

Students

- A significant portion of students surveyed were enrolled in their first online class.
- Students with past positive online success tend to like the format and return to take additional classes.
- Student motivation appears to play a role in success and overall class ratings.
- Students need at least minimal computer skills to be successful in the online format. In some cases, enrolled students do not meet these requirements.
- Students are more likely to access the online class from home than any other location.
- While a few students report class navigation problems, most experience little difficulty.
- Although the combined group was slightly less positive about their online learning and overall experience, most students in both samples (81% and 87%) rate their learning and experience positively.

Faculty

- Faculty in the combined survey group were more likely to have had prior online teaching experience.
- The combined faculty group gave a higher rating to student online preparedness.
- The combined faculty group was more likely to affirm the role of student motivation in online class success.
- While more faculty in the combined group require students to complete an online screening exercise, the majority of surveyed faculty require completion.

- The combined faculty reported less difficulty in contacting students. This may in part be due to their increased online experience by both faculty and students.
- The combined faculty group was significantly concerned with the level of student-to-student contact within the online course.

Access to Classes and Library/Learning Resources

An objective in offering online classes is to give students who cannot attend classes conventionally a method of taking college courses. Instructors report that many home-bound and place-bound students feel the online class provides them with opportunities for learning and earning college credit never before available to them.

One instructor reports that during “the informal introductions that I have all my students participate in the first week of class, it is evident that many would not be in the class if the only option was the traditional class.” Online students in the past included people working different shifts, mother/fathers who had to watch children, disabled people who would find it difficult to attend traditional class, and people from outlying towns who would have a long commute to attend traditional classes. One faculty member had a couple of students who ordinarily move back to Spain during the summer take two classes over the Internet; these students definitely would not have had the opportunity to take summer classes if they did not have the online option.

Access to the library resources is convenient for online students. Proxy server statistics, which indicate the number of users who have logged in remotely to licensed library databases, are provided monthly. These statistics identify which licensed products were accessed. The current system does not have the ability to distinguish detailed information about the user, including their designation as faculty, staff, or student and their status as a distance-learner.

Students in online courses, as well as those enrolled in other delivery formats, are required to use outside resources for the completion of everything from research papers, targeted written assignments, and cases to tests, and quizzes.

There has been a concentrated effort by the library staff to provide as many of the library’s materials online as possible. At this time, the College has 19,000 electronic books available online, as well as a 10,974 electronic periodicals. This provides online students with almost the same resources that students here on campus have access to. During 2002-2003, the library mediated 753,276 online electronic database searches.

Access for students is cost effective for in-district students, the online courses cost the same as campus-based classes—\$56 per semester hour. Even out-of-district students taking courses only online always pay the in-district tuition of \$56 per semester hour. Since ICC is a community college, one main goal is education that is accessible to all; therefore, the College is committed to providing a quality education at a price people can afford.

Evidence of Success

Student performance is evidenced through homework, participation in discussion boards, projects, and other activities as determined by individual instructors. In addition, each course's content can be archived and saved to disk. Specific activities submitted in electronic format can also be saved by disk and kept by the instructor.

Blackboard allows instructors to export and save the grade book to Excel. The Blackboard Course Management System keeps the student's individual quiz and/or exam which is then archived during the course archive process at the end of the semester. Discussion board postings are summarized and kept.

The institution is currently creating an online survey for end-of-course student input; however at this time, no data is kept across the institution. Individual instructors collect and utilize this information as is necessary for their own course development and enhancement. When considering course success rate by instructional mode, as indicated on the chart below, over 60% of the students enrolled in online classes received final grades of A to C.

Course Success Rate

Illinois Central College - Blueprint for the Future Key Performance Indicators Course Success Rates by Instructional Mode

Fall 2002

	<i>% A-C,S</i>	<i>% D,F,U</i>	<i>% W, I, R, NG</i>
Correspondence	57.5%	9.7%	32.8%
Independent/Internship	90.2%	2.9%	6.9%
Interactive TV	64.2%	22.6%	13.2%
Internet	63.3%	12.9%	23.8%
Television	65.7%	8.3%	26.0%
Traditional	72.6%	12.0%	15.6%
ICC Overall	72.2%	11.9%	16.1%

Spring 2003

	<i>% A-C,S</i>	<i>% D,F,U</i>	<i>% W, I, R, NG</i>
Correspondence	54.0%	14.3%	31.7%
Independent/Internship	75.1%	4.4%	10.9%
Interactive TV	59.3%	18.0%	22.6%
Internet	60.4%	12.8%	26.9%
Television	60.9%	12.7%	26.4%
Traditional	69.2%	11.9%	17.6%
ICC Overall	68.3%	12.0%	18.4%

Program and course evaluations are requested to be completed and returned; however, current programs may involve a mixture of online courses as well as those delivered via other means (i.e., face-to-face). No college-wide system for the evaluation of online courses is available at this time. Many of the online classes developed using mini-grants are reviewed prior to payment being authorized.

Instructors seek and utilize student feedback through surveys. Responses are used both throughout the semester and during the readying process for the next delivery term. Individual instructors do not report seeking cost trade-off data. Faculty discussion groups occur throughout the semester. Faculty share strategies and lessons learned in an informal setting. A voluntary informal faculty discussion group, MUSCLE (Making Use of Student-Centered Learning Experiences), also includes online course strategies in its discussions.

As a means by which to gauge whether or not the availability of online courses has increased the level of educational access enjoyed by Illinois Central College students, the Office of Institutional Research has produced a report on the numbers of students, first-time and otherwise, by term who take only online courses. This assumes that students only taking online courses would otherwise not have enrolled at ICC.

FY 01	SUMMER	FALL	SPRING
Only Online Students	106	52	109
First-Time Only Students	0	6	
FY 02	SUMMER	FALL	SPRING
Only Online Students	217	120	234
First-Time Only Students	2*	6	
FY 03	SUMMER	FALL	SPRING
Only Online Students	253	264	271
First-Time Only Students	4	11	

*Students taking courses for the first time in the summer are also considered first time in the fall.
Source: ICC Internal Data Warehouse

In all classes, both campus and online, program cost effectiveness is a major determination in the academic program review process. A recently formed process management team is examining the College's program review process. This team will focus its attention to the matter of administrative review for the purposes of budgeting and planning. Annual Accountability and Program Review documents will be available in the Resource Room.

Assessment of Online Students

All full-time students, whether traditional or online, are required to take the COMPASS as a placement test, and these test scores are available to advisors so they

may provide better class placement for students. If a student is in a distant state, they currently have one option, which is to find a local institution which administers the COMPASS placement test. In the near future, the COMPASS will be available on the Internet and a potential student will only need to find an educational institution or library willing to proctor as the test is administered.

Most online courses require good communication skills due to the nature of assignments. Teachers monitor student's communication skills throughout the course, and may recommend that they visit ICC's writing lab to obtain individual help. ICC is in the process of extending the writing lab services to include an online option. Currently, students can obtain help around the clock from the 24-hour online librarian service which answers grammar and writing questions as well as any other type of questions the students may ask.

The institution's ongoing program of assessment and improvement is developed by the Academic Outcomes Assessment Committee and conducted through the Academic Assessment Model approved by the Higher Learning Commission. The Office of Instructional Innovation and Faculty Development encourages faculty to design, develop, and improve online education at ICC by providing course development incentives as well as ongoing faculty development.

Individual instructors are encouraged to incorporate assessment activities into their classes. Each department has an Assessment Advocate to encourage these activities. Results of these assessments are reported to the College Assessment Coordinator, who shares these results in an annual report so they may be used when compiling institutional reports and planning budgets. Online activities must be specifically identified by the instructor in these reports. Additionally, pre- and post- TABE tests are administered in the adult education classes.

Online Faculty Qualifications

Instructors are encouraged to report how they changed the course as a result of what they learned in the assessment; it is hoped that the improvements will lead to improved learning outcomes and increased retention. Since the process is repeated each semester, it is hoped that continued assessment will drive continued improvement.

Traditional and online programs and classes appropriately involve academically qualified persons by having new ICC faculty stringently evaluated for appropriate content-related qualifications before hiring. Academic qualifications, certifications, and industry experience are considered when an individual is evaluated for employment.

For online teachers, ICC supports the ION program offerings leading to the Master Online Teaching Certificate. ICC instructors may enroll in these courses, with tuition

paid by ICC. Two instructors have completed certification, and several others are nearing completion.

In addition, ICC has an Office of Instructional Innovation and Faculty Development, which is staffed by a director with an MA in education and 20+ years of teaching and an Instructional Technology Specialist with an MS and 9+ years of teaching with a specialty in online instruction. Throughout the year, the Office of Instructional Innovation and Faculty Development provides seminars, mini-classes, and drop-in help for instructors who wish to improve the quality of their online offerings as well as those wanting to supplement their class with an online component.

The Blackboard Institute runs periodically as an intense, focused course designed to aid instructors in creating effective online classes. New faculty are given an overview of Blackboard as part of their initial training, and given access to a Blackboard site for new faculty. All faculty are encouraged to attend Blackboard training/seminars/discussions as they become available. A detailed listing of faculty online training activities is in Appendix II.

Program/Course/Review/Evaluation of Faculty

Faculty are directly involved in the constant review and revision of existing programs and courses; in addition, Associate Deans make suggestions to faculty as the need arises. Other than normal program review within the department and by the instructor, the institution does not specifically address online courses for scrutiny.

Career programs are involved in annual state reviews. The institution uses a five-year syllabus review process to ensure course documents are kept up-to-date. Currently, all syllabi brought to the Curriculum Committee are required to be updated to include a linking of course objectives to the institution's general education objectives and classroom assessment techniques. Findings from the reviews are incorporated into institutional planning and the "*Blueprint for the Future.*"

Needed improvements in infrastructure, materials, etc., are incorporated into the budget, and are also taken into consideration when allocating the strategic use of resources.

As this planning takes place, individual faculty members, faculty committees, members of the Office of Instructional Innovation and Faculty Development, and department personnel, including Associate Deans, are involved in the process of continued improvement as are representatives from consulting firms, local businesses, and local industries on the College's advisory committees.

This process has measurable results with one of them being that student enrollment in online classes has continued to rise, as documented earlier in the Self-Study. One contribution to the success of development of online classes is the reward that the

College received. The ICC Web Designer Program received an award of distinction from the Illinois Board of Higher Education in June 2003.

Currently, institutional evaluation of online programs is inherently connected with the regular evaluation of all academic programs. There are a variety of evaluation mechanisms in place that do not specifically target online classes but may be used in online classes.

Process Management Team 35 has been formed to create an institution-wide evaluation process for online classes. This then will be incorporated into the evaluation of all academic programs. This team is also attempting to standardize procedures to:

- Develop online courses
- Effectively train online teachers
- Determine appropriate content devices to be used
- Ensure the security of online information and evaluation documents
- Measure success of online courses
- Determine ways that areas in need of improvement can be identified and rectified
- Establish an online student survey for instructor evaluation

Although the online and traditional classes are handled in the same manner in many areas, the respective characteristics of campus-based and electronically offered programs and classes are taken into account in many areas. For example, office hours for campus-based programs must be on-campus; electronic office hours can be performed from anywhere, which gives the faculty greater flexibility in scheduling online office hours. Faculty may keep virtual or on-campus office hours. This benefits students, because there is potentially more variability in when students will be working on an online course than a traditional one.

In addition, since it is acknowledged that learning styles in online classes are different than campus-based classes, students are encouraged to complete a “self-evaluation” to determine for themselves whether they are good candidates for an online class prior to enrollment. This self-evaluation is available through the ICC Home Page.