



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ONLINE INSTRUCTION IN THE ILLINOIS COMMUNITY COLLEGE SYSTEM

Illinois Community College Board
401 East Capitol Avenue
Springfield, Illinois 62701-1711
Voice: (217) 785-0123
Fax: (217) 524-4981
<http://www.iccb.org>

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Online Instruction in the Illinois Community College System

Research & Policy Studies

Scott J. Parke, Ph.D. Senior Director

Nathan R. Wilson, M.S. Director

Jo E. Barnard, B.A. Assistant Director

Michelle L. Dufour, B.A. Assistant Director

Candy Tempel, A.A.S. IT Technical Associate, Information Technology

Doug Lally, B.S. Applications Programmer III, Information Technology

Education Technology

Todd Jorns, M.A. Senior Director

Jeff Newell, M.S., Director, Distance Education & Support



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In recent years, the internet has become an increasingly common method of instructional delivery for Illinois Community Colleges. Based on fiscal year 2008 data, annual online enrollments in Illinois Community Colleges increased 21.9 percent from the previous year and 97.4 percent compared to five years ago. Online credit enrollment in the Illinois Community College System was 65,703, or 9.6 percent of the total fiscal year 2008 enrollment (N = 682,607). The average age for students who have accumulated online hours at an Illinois community college was 28.3 while the median age was 24.3. In fiscal year 2008, white students made up 78.9 percent (N = 51,399) of those participating in online credit coursework in community colleges, while 21.1 percent (N = 13,762) of online enrollments were minority (non-white) students. Baccalaureate/Transfer was the largest instructional program offered in the Illinois Community College System accounting for nearly six out of every ten online enrollments (N = 38,941). Close to three out of every ten (29.7 percent; N = 13,792) fiscal year 2008 completers in the Illinois Community College System had taken at least one online course in the previous five years.

There are several benefits of online instruction: flexibility of when and where students can “attend” class; an increase in the availability of diverse material; an enhanced knowledge of the technological skills that will be critical to workers in the 21st century; the facilitation of team learning through chat rooms and newsgroups; students are more likely to be drawn into class discussions; and instructors may appear to be more approachable (Coleman, 2009). Online courses are becoming more attractive to students as a convenient and cost effective way to earn college credits, certificates, and degrees. Both traditional age and nontraditional students find online courses attractive since they are not bound to traditional college meeting days and times.

Online education has recently come in to the spotlight nationally as part of the American Graduation Initiative. As part of the initiative, President Obama intends to implement a new Online Skills Laboratory which will allow students to learn, gain skills, and obtain credentials. (http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Excerpts-of-the-Presidents-remarks-in-Warren-Michigan-and-fact-sheet-on-the-American-Graduation-Initiative/) In Illinois, Race to the Top (RTTT) funds will be used to create STEM Learning Exchanges. These public-private partnerships will bring together business and industry, education, and government partners to promote the expansion of Science, Technology,



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Engineering, and Mathematics education. These statewide exchanges will provide participating school districts with a wide variety of resources and assistance including e-learning curriculum resources such as online courses, assessment and feedback systems, reference materials, databases, and software tools. (<http://www.techamerica.org/rttstemssummary>)

In this report, several aspects of online education in the Illinois community college system will be explored: enrollment trends, characteristics of online students, online course counts and enrollments by PCS, online courses with high enrollments, online hours attempted and earned, online completions, online retention rates, and online faculty.

STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS

- Based on Illinois Virtual Campus (IVC) information, there were 163,804 online enrollments in 9,082 courses during fall 2008 across all levels of higher education in Illinois. Illinois community colleges offered nearly half (48.0 percent) of all online courses and over one-third (38.5 percent) of all online enrollments. (<http://www.ivc.illinois.edu/pubs/enrollPDF/Fall08.pdf>)
- Nationwide, over 3.9 million students took at least one online course in fall 2007. (http://www.sloan-c.org/publications/survey/pdf/staying_the_course.pdf)
Nationally, at community colleges 1.9 million students enrolled in at least one online course in fall 2006. (<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2007/10/23/sloan>)
- Annual online credit enrollment in the Illinois Community College System for fiscal year 2008 was 65,703, or 9.6 percent of the total fiscal year 2008 enrollment (N = 682,607).
- Full-time equivalent (FTE) students totaled 35,287, which is 14.7 percent of the FY08 total (N = 239,881).
- The average age for students who have accumulated online hours at an Illinois community college was 28.3 while the median age was 24.3.
- Just more than half (52.9 percent) of all online enrollments were by those in the traditional higher education market who are age 24 or younger. Most traditional aged higher education enrollments were in Baccalaureate/Transfer programs (70.5 percent).
- Early to mid career students, age 25 to 39, made up an additional one-third (33.3 percent) of online enrollments. Early to mid career online enrollments were most commonly in baccalaureate/transfer programs (49.9 percent) and career and technical education programs (37.3 percent).
- Established workers, age 40 to 55, accounted for only 12.5 percent of online enrollments. Career and technical education programs had the most enrollments by established workers (46.5 percent). Baccalaureate/Transfer programs (39.8 percent) were also common for online enrollments by established workers.
- Seasoned workers, who are over 55, accounted for just 1.3 percent of all online enrollments. Seasoned workers most commonly enrolled in online courses in



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career and technical education (41.6 percent) and baccalaureate/transfer (36.6 percent).

- Two-thirds (67.8 percent) of online enrollments were female.
- Male students enrolled in online courses were more likely to be enrolled in baccalaureate/transfer courses (62.6 percent) than female students enrolled in online courses (57.7 percent).
- Overall, minority students were less likely to pursue online courses than white students.
- In fiscal year 2008, white students made up 78.9 percent (N = 51,399) of those participating in online credit coursework in community colleges, while 21.1 percent (N = 13,762) of online enrollments were minority (non-white) students.
- African American students were the largest minority group enrolled in online coursework (N = 6,322), and accounted for 9.7 percent of online enrollments among students whose ethnicity was known.
- Latino students (N = 3,968) accounted for 6.1 percent of online enrollments among students whose ethnicity was known.
- Just less than nine out of ten (86.8 percent) of online enrollments in fiscal year 2008 were by students residing within the community college district. Overall, the average enrollment of in-district students in online courses was 12.4 students per course.
- Just over one-tenth (10.4 percent) of all online enrollments were from those students who resided within Illinois but outside of the community college's district. Statewide in fiscal year 2008, the average number of out-of-district students enrolled in online courses was 2.7.
- Very few (2.8 percent) online enrollments at Illinois community colleges were by students from out-of-state in fiscal year 2008. On average, fewer than 2 out-of-state students (N = 1.7) were enrolled in online courses at community colleges statewide in fiscal year 2008.

ONLINE COURSE COUNTS AND ENROLLMENTS BY BROAD PROGRAM AREA (PCS)

- Baccalaureate/Transfer is the largest instructional program offered in the Illinois Community College System accounting for nearly six out of every ten online enrollments (N = 38,941) in fiscal year 2008.
- Career and Technical Education programs accounted for three in ten online enrollments (N = 19,727).
- About seven percent of online course enrollments were in General Associate Degree courses (N = 4,530).
- Vocational Skills programs (N = 924), Adult Education (including English as a Second Language) courses (N = 823), and General Studies Certificates (N = 758) each accounted for about one percent of the online enrollments in fiscal year 2008.



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INSTRUCTIONAL BROAD PROGRAM AREA ENROLLMENTS BY RACIAL/ETHNIC ORIGIN

- The largest percentages of students for each group were enrolled in Baccalaureate/Transfer programs: Asian (59.2 percent), Native American (55.3 percent), African American (57.9 percent), Latino (50.9 percent), White (59.9 percent), and Nonresident Alien (74.0 percent).
- Combined Minority students represented 90.6 percent of all English as a Second Language programs (ESL) online enrollments in fiscal year 2008.
- Minority students were least represented in the General Studies Certificate (12.1 percent), Vocational Skills (17.1 percent), Career and Technical (20.0 percent), and Baccalaureate/Transfer (20.2 percent) areas.
- African American students represented 18.1 percent of Adult Education online enrollments and 12.3 percent of General Associate online enrollments in fiscal year 2008.
- Nearly ten percent of online Baccalaureate/Transfer (9.4 percent) and Career and Technical (9.7 percent) enrollments were African American students.
- Latino students accounted for 83.8 percent of ESL online enrollments and 15.4 percent of Adult Education online enrollments.

ENROLLMENTS BY CAREER CLUSTER

- The five career clusters with the highest online enrollments in fiscal year 2008 were: Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (N = 24,293); Business, Management and Administration (N = 21,713); Arts, Audio/Video, Technology and Communication (N = 18,903); Human Service (N = 18,078); and Health Science (N = 16,386).

ENROLLMENTS BY SPECIFIC PROGRAM (CIP)

- Overall, the ten programs with the highest online enrollments made up nearly one-third (32.4 percent) of all online enrollments.
- In fiscal year 2008, the course with the most online enrollments was English Composition (N = 9,093; CIP 23.0401) an increase of 13.4 percent (+1,073) from fiscal year 2007 and 75.4 percent (+3,910) from fiscal year 2004.
- Other courses with large online enrollments were Sociology (N = 6,330; CIP 45.1101); Psychology, General (N = 6,121; CIP 42.0101); Developmental and Child Psychology (N = 4,574; CIP 42.0701); Economics, General (N = 4,488; CIP 45.0601); History, General (N = 4,297; CIP 54.0101); Business/Commerce, General (N = 4,190; CIP 52.0101); Computational Skills (N = 3,607; CIP 32.0104); Business/Office Automation/Technology/Data Entry (N = 3,416; CIP 52.0407); and Music History, Literature and Theory (N = 3,023; CIP 50.0902).

ONLINE HOURS ATTEMPTED AND EARNED

- In fiscal year 2008 Illinois community college students earned 71.6 percent (N = 324,288) of the 452,765 online credit hours they attempted.



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- In fiscal year 2008 Illinois community college students boosted the percent of hours earned by 0.9 percent from the previous year. From 2004, the percent of hours earned increased 0.4 percent.

ONLINE COMPLETIONS

- Close to three out of every ten (29.7 percent; N = 13,792) fiscal year 2008 completers had taken at least one online course in the previous five years.
- Over one-third (38.6 percent) of completers with online hours had under four accumulated hours. Another 27.5 percent had six to fifteen hours and 21.3 percent had four to six hours.
- Fewer than half of Baccalaureate/Transfer degree completers (43.8 percent; N = 6,087) in fiscal year 2008 had accumulated online hours.
- One-third of Baccalaureate/Transfer degree completers with online hours had fewer than four hours accumulated. An additional 29.4 percent had accumulated six to fifteen hours and 21.1 percent had 4 to 6 hours.
- Associate in Arts degree completers accounted for more than half (54.3 percent) of Baccalaureate/Transfer degree completers with online hours. Associate in Science degree completers contributed another 34.4 percent of overall Baccalaureate/Transfer degree completers with online hours.
- Completers with online hours made up only 23.1 percent (N = 7,171) of all Career and Technical Education completers in fiscal year 2008.
- Over half of CTE completions with online hours (54.8 percent) were in Associate in Applied Science.
- Slightly less than three out of ten (29.2 percent) Career and Technical Education completers with online hours were in Certificate Programs of less than one year. This is compared to the completers from Certificate Programs of One Year or More who made up 16.0 percent of all Career and Technical Education graduates with online hours.
- Overall, 42.6 percent of Career and Technical Education completers with online hours had accumulated fewer than four hours online.

RETENTION RATES

- In fiscal year 2007 first-time, full-time students who had enrolled in online courses had an adjusted retention rate of 72.4 percent which was 13.1 percent higher than the rate for first-time, full-time students not enrolled in online courses (59.3 percent).
- The adjusted retention rate for first-time, full-time students enrolled in online courses increased slightly (0.2 percent) from fiscal year 2006, which outpaced the -0.7 percent decrease in adjusted retention rate for first-time, full-time students not enrolled in online courses.
- The adjusted retention rate for all first-time online students in fiscal year 2007 was 61.0 percent compared to 48.4 percent of all first-time non-online students.



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- In fiscal year 2006, the adjusted retention rate for first-time online students (62.3 percent) and first-time non-online students (48.6 percent) were higher than in the most recent year.
- The most recent adjusted retention rate for first-time, full-time female students enrolled in online courses (72.9 percent) was slightly higher than for first-time, full-time male students (71.7 percent).
- Over the past year, rates decreased -0.8 percent for first-time, full-time females compared to a 1.6 percent increase for first-time, full-time males.
- Adjusted retention rates for first-time, full-time female students not enrolled in online courses (61.2 percent) were also higher than for first-time, full-time male students (57.5 percent).
- Over the past year, the adjusted retention rates for first-time, full-time females not enrolled in online courses increased 0.2 percent, outpacing first-time, full-time males who saw a decrease of -1.0 percent.
- In fiscal year 2007, first-time full and part-time male and female online students had similar adjusted retention rates at 61.8 percent and 60.6 percent, respectively.
- Non-online first-time male students had an adjusted retention rate of 46.6 percent and females of 50.3 percent.
- Both first-time online males (-0.8 percent) and females (-1.6 percent) saw a drop in their adjusted retention rate from the previous year.
- Non-online first-time male students also saw a decrease in of -0.8 percent. Conversely, non-online first-time female students saw an increase in adjusted retention rates (0.4 percent).
- First-time, full-time minority students enrolled in online courses had an adjusted retention rate of 68.7 percent which was lower than the adjusted retention rate for first-time, full-time white students enrolled in online courses (73.0 percent) and the overall first-time, full-time adjusted retention rate (72.4 percent).
- Overall, the adjusted retention rate for first-time, full-time minority students enrolled in online courses increased 4.4 percent over the previous year which outpaced both first-time, full-time white students (-0.5 percent) and the overall first-time, full-time rate (0.2 percent).
- The adjusted retention rate for first-time, full-time minority students not enrolled in online courses was 52.7 percent compared to 62.7 percent for first-time, full-time white students and 59.3 percent for all first-time, full-time students not enrolled in online courses.
- From a year ago the adjusted retention rate for non-online first-time, full-time minority students decreased -6.0 percent which was a substantially larger decrease than both first-time, full-time white students (-0.8 percent) and all students (-0.7 percent).
- In fiscal year 2007, the adjusted retention rate for all first-time minority online students was 55.3 percent which was lower than the rate for both white students (62.2 percent) and the overall total (61.0 percent).



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- From the previous year, the rate for first-time minority online students decreased -1.0 percent. White students (-1.3 percent) and the overall adjusted retention rate (-1.3 percent) also saw decreases from the previous year.
- First-time non-online minority students demonstrated an adjusted retention rate of 43.9 percent in fiscal year 2007 compared to 50.8 percent for first-time non-online white students and 48.4 percent for all first-time non-online students.
- From fiscal year 2006, first-time non-online minority students (0.9 percent) increased while white (-0.6 percent) and overall (-0.2 percent) students decreased slightly.

ONLINE FACULTY

- About two-thirds (64.8 percent; N = 6,916) of all faculty at Illinois community colleges who taught online courses in fiscal year 2008 were full-time faculty.
- 3,761 part-time faculty members taught online courses in fiscal year 2008.

MOVING FORWARD

Online instruction is expected to grow further in the Illinois community college system. Maximizing the value added by online courses will take continued innovation. According to Haugen, LaBarre, & Melrose (2001) effectively teaching an online class requires faculty to make fundamental changes to the way they organize and deliver classes. Christensen, Horn, & Johnson (2008) add that while individuals learn best through varying teaching methods and at different paces, instructional methods in online courses have often followed the dominant style in each subject. The authors are interested in applying disruptive approaches to learning and their primary emphasis has been on Pre-school through high school (P-12) instruction. Disruption occurs when “something innovative transforms a market where services or products are complicated and expensive into a simplified more accessible and affordable approach.” Originally online course delivery systems took traditional classroom instruction and offered it largely unchanged through the internet. Gradually, on-line coursework has become more interactive with faculty facilitated communications among students and applied group projects. Christensen, Johnson & Horn (2008) encourage further movement in this direction with an emphasis on what they call “student centric” learning that would emphasize modular units and applied “real world” problem based learning by doing. Active student engagement in learning and self-paced mastery learning are seen as key components to getting the most out of the technology. Web-based video, instant messaging and collaboration tools hold promise for strengthening online instruction. Developers of instructional technology are encouraged to pursue more of an “open source” approach to learning where students can modify materials in innovative ways rather than pursue traditional “closed proprietary source” approaches.

Online instructional delivery offers both opportunities and challenges. Significant opportunities include reaching a more diverse student population, increasing access to higher education for nontraditional students, flexibility of scheduling personal time, and reducing the need to build and maintain campus facilities. Potential challenges include



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the need for continual training and support for faculty, frustrations with technical problems, the potential for student isolation, lack of social environment of a traditional class, and the intense capital need for delivery systems and resources. (Haugen, LaBarre, & Melrose, 2001). Relatedly, increasing the level of social interaction in online courses should be pursued to reduce student anxiety and feelings of isolation (McLemore, 2009). Incorporating adaptable components of social networking software and students collaborating to solve problems through virtual learning communities hold promise for online instruction (Lohr, 2009).

In addition to the changes that must be made to the delivery and content of a course for online instruction, faculty must be very aware of the limitations and potential of the technology they are using (Haugen, LaBarre, & Melrose, 2001). The Illinois Online Network (2007) explains that “if facilitators are not properly trained in online delivery and methodologies, the success of the online program will be compromised”. User friendly, reliable technology and faculty training on how to use the technology are essential to the success of online courses.

The U.S. Department of Education’s report entitled, *Evaluation of Evidence-Based Practices in Online Learning: A Meta-Analysis and Review of Online Learning Studies* (2009), indicates that online learning outcomes today “tend to be better than conventional instruction” (Lohr, 2009). While the report acknowledges the ongoing need for traditional classroom instruction, it suggests that the prevalence of online education is likely to increase dramatically over the next few years as web-based video, instant messaging, and online collaboration tools become more refined and commonplace. (Lohr, 2009). The increased use of virtual tools and learning systems by instructors in the future will allow students to customize instruction to learn at their own pace in a way that fits with their own learning styles (Lips, 2010). Policies that foster and support the expansion of online instruction hold promise for educating and training additional individuals and position Illinois to compete successfully in the marketplace.



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