

*USING STANDARDIZED PRE- POSTTESTS TO ESTABLISH  
PROGRAM EQUIVALENCY AT MULTIPLE SITES*

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Keiser College is a private, for-profit Level II institution with thirteen branch campuses throughout Florida. Most of its academic programs are offered at multiple sites. A major concern has been to establish and maintain the *consistency of its academic offerings at all campuses* as the College expands. Building on a pre- posttesting mechanism long in place, the College is now technologically equipped to assess campus programs in terms of student learning gains and to compare these results across campuses in an effort to maintain program equivalency. The session will be used to describe and discuss the workings of this process.

Over the last twenty years, accountability demands by state and federal policymakers, accreditors, and other higher education stakeholders have steadily increased. These demands focus ever more sharply on the assessment of student learning outcomes. This increased external pressure has moved institutions to look for novel ways to collect assessment data and to use it for program improvement. For multi-campus institutions, program equivalency becomes an issue. Keiser College has developed a process of standardized pre- and post-testing across campuses while delivering instruction in a time-intensive scheduling format. This process enables comparison of program results at multiple locations. Other multi-campus institutions may benefit from discussion of the details of this process.

The standardized pre-post tests are designed by program coordinators and faculty and are aligned with specific course objectives found on the syllabus and institutional course control documents. This ensures that the tests are evaluating appropriate content. Each pre-post test is 20 questions, in a multiple choice format. Students take these tests on the first and last day of the module. Scores are computed by the faculty and entered into the College's administrative computing system (C2K). This process is followed for each class on every Keiser College campus.

The pre-post test reporting system in C2K allows faculty and staff to query pre-post test results on a variety of variables. One can run a report by campus for any time period. The pre-test and post test averages are computed at the course level but can be rolled up programmatically. The difference is also provided, which allows faculty to set course level benchmarks for performance. The overall pre-test and post-test weighted average is given at the end of the report. This allows faculty and staff to see the performance of the campus on these tests over a set time frame. The utility of this report is really demonstrated when different Keiser College campuses want to compare their campus pre-post test scores with one another to address program equivalency. These

reports are also used for Keiser's distance learning programs, where we must provide compelling evidence that the learning outcomes are the same.

### THE PROBLEM

Keiser College is a multi-campus proprietary institution accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges to award associate and bachelor degrees in a variety of technical disciplines. The College currently operates at thirteen campuses throughout Florida.

Following is a complete list of the College's program offerings as of September 20, 2005:

1. AA Accounting
2. AA Business Admin
3. AA Criminal Justice
4. AA Health Services Admin
5. AA Homeland Security
6. AA Paralegal
7. AS Aquatic Engineering
8. AS Baking and Pastry Arts
9. AS Culinary Arts
10. AS Computer Assisted Drafting and Design
11. AS Computer Graphics and Design
12. AS Computer Networking and Security Mgt.
13. AS Computer Programming
14. AS Crime Scene Technology
15. AS Diagnostic Medical Sonography
16. AS Fashion Design
17. AS Fire Science
18. AS Medical Assisting
19. AS Medical Lab Technician
20. AS Massage Therapy
21. AS Nursing
22. AS Nuclear Medicine Technology
23. AS Occupational Therapy Assistant
24. AS Pharmacy Technology
25. AS Physical Therapy Assistant
26. AS Radiologic Technology
27. AS Surgical Technology
28. AS Video Game Design
29. BA Business Admin
30. BA Criminal Justice
31. BA Health Services Admin
32. BS Management Information Systems

Keiser College offers its programs in a time-intensive format. In contrast to most programs labeled “accelerated”, Keiser College’s programs adhere to a traditional number of contact hours—48 for a three-credit course—but in a compressed format. Classes are scheduled four or five hours per day, three or five days per week, twelve or twenty-five hours per week.

Keiser College’s student population by campus as of 9/20/05:

Daytona	536
e-Campus	1120
Ft. Lauderdale	1381
Jacksonville	166
Kendall	756
Lakeland	322
Melbourne	814
Orlando	510
Pembroke Pines	210
Port St. Lucie	237
Sarasota	724
Tallahassee	484
West Palm Beach	270
TOTAL	7606

As of 9/20/05, Keiser College’s total student population was 7,606.

82.3% of that number were enrolled full-time.

58.7% of the total population were age 25 or older.

83.9% of students age 25 or older were enrolled full-time.

Keiser College is a component institution of the Keiser Collegiate System.

The Keiser Collegiate System (KCS) is comprised of three colleges (Keiser College, Keiser Career College, and Everglades University) with 19 branch campuses, an

online division and a continuing education center. Keiser College is a SACS-accredited private, for-profit Level II (baccalaureate) institution with thirteen branch campuses throughout Florida. Keiser Career College is a nationally accredited associates and diploma institution with three branch campuses in Florida. Everglades University is a private, non-profit nationally accredited bachelors and masters level institution with three campuses in the state of Florida. Since 2000 the Keiser Collegiate System has grown from 3,528 students to over 9,000 and has doubled the number of branch campuses across Florida.

Keiser College's main campus opened in 1978. The first branch campus was established in Melbourne in 1989. In 1992, a third campus was added in Tallahassee. Locations in Daytona Beach and Sarasota followed in 1995. Since 2000, the period of rapid enrollment growth described above, Keiser College eight new campuses, at Lakeland (2000), Kendall (2001), Orlando (2002), Jacksonville (2003), Port St. Lucie, West Palm Beach, and Pembroke Pines (2004), and Tampa (2005).

Keiser College's growth rate over the last five years, in terms of both student population and geographic expansion, raises concerns about preserving the academic integrity and equivalence of programs across multiple campuses. The College's response to these concerns has two aspects, a *structural* aspect and a *technological* aspect.

The structural aspect of the College's response to the challenge of rapid growth takes place on two levels: the *program* level and the *institutional* level.

A) *The program level*

Every academic program at Keiser College has a program director who maintains communication with program faculty at all locations where that program is offered. Some programs are offered at a single campus, while others operate at multiple sites--as many as thirteen different locations. For all thirty-two programs currently offered at thirteen campuses, there are a total of 145 "program sites". Communication among program faculty is maintained through regularly scheduled conference calls, threaded discussion boards, and an annual Faculty Convocation that brings together faculty from locations around the state of Florida.

The faculty of the thirty-two academic programs are responsible for developing curricula, including the establishment of educational goals. They write program objectives based on the College mission statement. Intended student learning outcomes are derived from the program objectives. Additionally, the program faculty establish course objectives for each course taught as a component of the program curriculum. These course objectives are listed in Course Control Documents which serve as the basis for the syllabi used wherever the program is offered.

Based on these course objectives, program faculty develop pre- posttests for each course in the curriculum. Pre- posttests are developed specifically to measure students' achievement of the course objectives listed in the Course Control Documents. For Keiser College's thirty-two academic programs, faculty

have developed over four hundred pre- posttests. For several years now, these have been administered during each course taught at the College and the scores entered into the College administrative computer system.

The College made a significant breakthrough in the analysis and use of this pre- posttest data with the development of software to produce reports using the administrative computer system. Pre- posttest Evaluation Reports can be generated for each of the College's thirteen campuses for any time frame, from a four-week course to an entire year or more. Campus results can be compared, as can program results across the thirteen campuses. For each course taught during the time frame, the reports show the number of students who took the pre- posttests, the mean pre- and posttest scores, and the difference or learning gain. At the campus level, courses that do not meet pre- posttest benchmarks can be identified and corrective action can be taken in the form of curricular or pedagogical improvements.

Since the advent of pre- posttest reporting at Keiser College, results have been remarkably stable over time. Scores have shown a significant improvement across the College since the evaluation reports became available. The College's results help to build a compelling case for the achievement of intended learning outcomes and academic quality improvement.

Thus, academic program goals, intended student learning outcomes, course objectives, and pre- posttests measuring achievement of those objectives are systematically derived from the College's mission statement.

*B) The institutional level*

The College's second level of structural response to the challenge of accelerated growth is at the institutional as opposed to the program level.

Keiser College has institutionalized a comprehensive faculty-driven, campus-based process for the assessment of its educational programs. Intended student learning outcomes are developed by program faculty as described above. These intended outcomes are derived from the College mission statement and program goals and objectives.

Using these intended outcomes, program faculty, under the leadership of the program director, develop program assessment plans for use at all campuses where the program is offered.

Program assessment plans are reviewed for adherence to faculty-developed criteria by the Director of Quality Enhancement in the Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Assessment, which reports to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs.

After the development of program assessment plans, campus assessment committees oversee the implementation of those plans at their individual locations. Implementation of program assessment plans includes the collection and analysis of assessment data as well as the design of strategies for improvement where benchmarks are not met. Campus assessment committees report the results of all program assessment activities annually to the campus administration. The Keiser Collegiate System's Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs monitors and evaluates the College-wide assessment process as a whole.

At each campus, the assessment committee maintains program assessment record books to document the implementation of program assessment plans. The program assessment plans specify methods of assessment for each intended learning outcome and designate the parties responsible for the implementation of each stage of the process: data collection, data analysis, and design of strategies for program improvement as appropriate.

The College's pre- posttesting process is major method of assessment used by all academic programs at all locations, along with standardized graduate exit and employer surveys.

Originally, program assessment record books in print format were stored and available for review in central locations at all Keiser College campuses. Beginning in June, 2005, all of these documents have been placed on the College web portal's Institutional Research site.

C) *The technological aspect*

In addition to its structural response at the program and institutional levels, Keiser College has introduced technological innovations to help meet the challenge of rapid enrollment and geographic expansion.

Beginning in June, 2005, Keiser College began implementing, monitoring, and documenting its assessment processes using web portal technology. The College's web portal includes an Institutional Research site dedicated to assessment processes. The web portal approach has two advantages: it facilitates broad-based faculty involvement across the multi-campus institution, while at the same time allowing centralized monitoring and evaluation at the institutional level.

The site contains program assessment plans for each of the College's thirty-two current academic programs. Each program director maintains an online program plan from a personal computer. This program assessment plan is for reference by faculty at all campus locations, so that all can be sure they are using the correct intended outcomes and methods of assessment. Program assessment plans are password-protected; only the program director can modify them. At the same time, these program plans can be viewed by all College faculty and administrative staff. This helps to ensure the equivalence of assessment procedures for all programs at all campuses.

The IR web portal site also contains electronic assessment record books by program for all campus locations. Opening a campus's document library, site visitors find electronic assessment record books for each program offered at that location. These record books are the place where program faculty at each campus record the results of assessments carried out in accordance with the program's assessment plan. College-standard intended student learning outcomes are listed for each program, along with the derivation of those outcomes from the College mission statement and the program's goals and objectives. Methods of assessment for each intended outcome are enumerated. When assessment results do not meet established benchmarks, program faculty document action taken to improve results (changes in curriculum, pedagogy, etc.).

Finally, the College's web portal site provides the framework for campus assessment reporting. On a yearly cycle, campus assessment committees submit summary reports of assessment activities to the campus vice president and academic dean. These annual campus reports are stored on the IR web portal site, where they are viewable by faculty and staff at all locations. The web portal site provides opportunities for faculty at all locations to communicate, to discuss, and to participate actively in the College's assessment processes. At the same time, this technology facilitates monitoring and evaluation of the entire institutional academic quality improvement process by system-level personnel.

Keiser College's systematic pre- posttesting process has proved to be one of the most valuable components of its overall strategy for assessment and academic quality improvement to maintain academic integrity and program equivalence in a multi-campus setting characterized by rapid growth.