

**The Impact of the  
Individual Learning Plan (ILP) –  
Fall 2004**

**February 2005**

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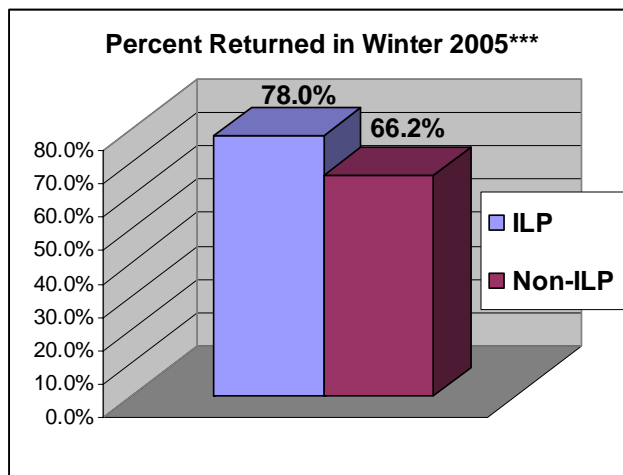
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## Executive Summary

Fall 2004 first-time students who participated in the ILP program were compared in terms of academic success and term-to-term retention with other Fall 2004 first-time students who did not qualify for the ILP program. In making this comparison, it should be kept in mind that this is a direct comparison between an “at-risk” population and a “non-at-risk” population. Previous research on ILP participants compared them to students who qualified for the ILP but did not participate, which is a more straightforward comparison. This being the case, in the present research the ILP group is at a disadvantage academically compared to the non-ILP group, particularly since the ILP group was considerably less prepared for college level work, as indicated by ACCUPLACER placement scores.

As would be expected, the non-ILP group outperformed the ILP group in terms of term GPA, success rates, and percent of classes with a grade of “W”. In each of these areas, the performance of the ILP students was considerably worse than their non-ILP peers. However, when first-to-second term retention was examined, ILP students had a dramatically higher rate of retention than the non-ILP group.



\*\*\*  $p < .001$

This increase in retention translates into about 100 additional students retained in Winter 2005, with an estimated increase of about 53 FTE for Winter 2005 that is attributable to the ILP program. Additional analysis indicated that this difference in retention is due to differences in retention for part-time ILP and non-ILP students, and that retention rates were the same for full-time students in the two groups.

Given the lower levels of college preparation and the abundance of risk factors in the ILP group, it may not be realistic to expect academic performance at the same level as the non-ILP group after only one term. When consideration is made of the odds against academic success for the non-ILP group, the increase in term-to-term retention for part-time ILP students is remarkable, and should be considered an important benefit of the program.

## The Impact of the Individual Learning Plan

In Summer 2003, the Individual Learning Plan (ILP) program was implemented by Sinclair Community College's Student Services Division in an attempt to identify at-risk students and provide them with resources to increase their academic success and term-to-term retention. Since that time, a number of efforts have been made to determine the effectiveness of the program, most notably using ILP students from Fall 2003, and comparing them to students that qualified for the ILP program but did not participate using a matched pairs design. In addition to these direct statistical comparisons, relevant statistics for all first-time degree and certificate seeking students have often been used as a reference point, although the fact that the ILP and non-ILP groups included non-degree seeking students that somewhat qualified the use of this reference point. The results of these efforts have been consistent: while no advantages were found for students who participated in the ILP program in terms of their academic success, students who participated were more likely to return to Sinclair in future terms compared to students who did not participate in the ILP.

Currently a student must meet one of the following four criteria to qualify for the ILP program:

- 1- Test into 2 DEV courses below the 100 level based on ACCUPLACER scores.
- 2- Currently be undecided about a major
- 3- Work 40 or more hours a week
- 4- Have an income below the poverty level (based on the same criteria that is used to determine eligibility for Pell grants).

Since Summer 2003, there have been a number of changes in the way that the program is implemented. For example, the criteria regarding testing into DEV courses has been relaxed, allowing more students to qualify.

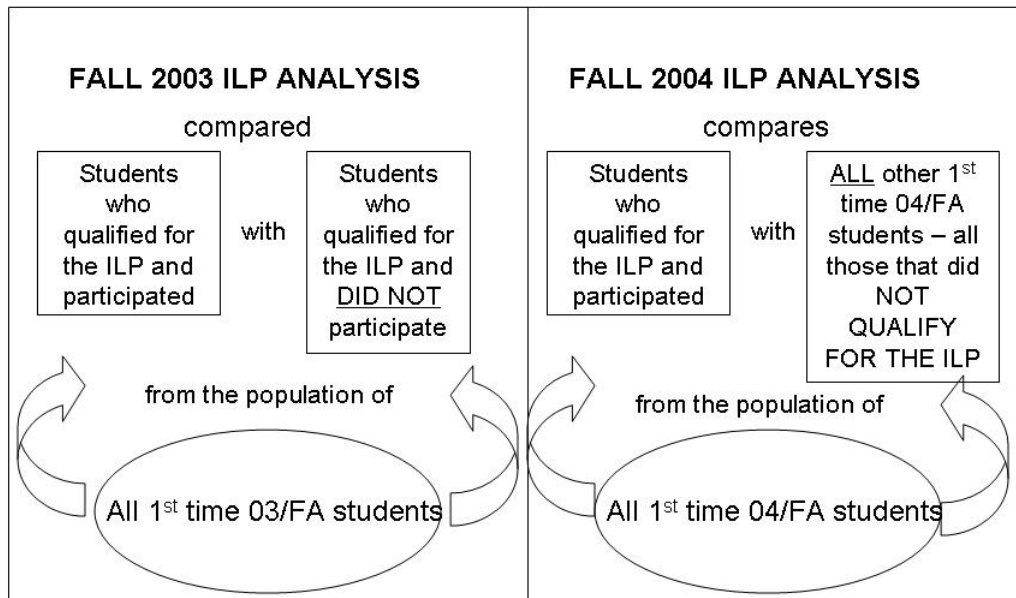
Yet another change involves the emphasis placed on participation by those that qualify. While initially students were encouraged to participate in the ILP program if they qualified, that encouragement has been emphasized more forcefully, such that Student Services now indicates that with few exceptions all students that qualify at least participate in the initial appointment that begins the ILP process. This, however, means that there is no longer a comparison group of students who qualified for the ILP program but did not participate, since now all students who qualify participate (at least with the initial appointment).

Without a comparison group of students who qualified for the ILP but did not participate, it is not possible to pursue the analysis for Fall 2004 ILP students in the same manner as was the case for Fall 2003 ILP students. Thus, the current study marks a change in the research design from that employed in previous analyses. While previous analyses compared ILP students to a carefully matched group of non-ILP students who qualified

for the program but did not participate, that research design option is not available for the analysis of Fall 2004 ILP students. For Fall 2004, the academic performance and retention of first-time ILP students is compared to other first-time students who did not qualify for the ILP program. It should be noted, however, that the ILP group would not be expected to perform as well as students who were not “at-risk”, and that the current research design puts ILP students at an initial disadvantage.

Figure 1 illustrates the difference between the current research design and that employed with the Fall 2003 ILP students.

Figure 1 Differences in Research Designs Between 03/FA and 04/FA



#### Methods:

All students with a start term of '04/FA' who were enrolled at Sinclair on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the Fall 2004 term were included in the present study. Student Services provided a list of all students that had participated in the ILP program (who had at least participated in the initial appointment), and those students from the list with a start term of '04/FA' who were enrolled on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of Fall 2004 were categorized into an ILP group. All other students who were enrolled on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of Fall 2004 with a start term of '04/FA' were categorized into the non-ILP group. For students in both the ILP and non-ILP groups, information from student records regarding academic performance in Fall 2004 was obtained, along with demographic information from student records and information regarding enrollment in Winter 2005. Of the 4,893 Fall 2004 students with a start term of '04/FA', 841 were ILP students, and the remaining 4,052 did not participate in the ILP program.

There were numerous demographic differences between the two groups that should be taken into consideration when comparing the academic performance of these groups. Table 1 lists some of these differences. It should be noted that many of these factors are known to have an impact on academic performance.

Table 1 Demographic Differences Between the ILP and Non-ILP Groups

	ILP	Non-ILP
Percent female***	59.2%	50.8%
Percent minority***	25.8%	17.2%
Percent part-time***	32.0%	59.2%
Attended DEV since start term***	79.9%	24.7%
Exclusively enrolled in DEV in Fall 2004***	19.5%	3.8%
Mean numeric placement score***	51.72	74.48
Mean reading placement score***	69.07	83.94
Mean writing placement score***	74.14	89.31
Mean credits attempted current term***	10.87	8.38
Mean credits earned current term***	7.82	6.77
Ratio of credits attempted to credits earned***	.72	.82
Mean age at start term***	22.45	26.32

\*\*\*  $p < .001$

As Table 1 demonstrates, the ILP group

- had lower placements scores across the board
- had a lower ratio of credits completed to credits attempted
- were younger
- had a higher percent of females
- had a higher percent of minority students
- had a lower percent of part-time students
- were far more likely to have attended DEV (which is to be expected, given that the ILP students had lower placement scores), and
- were far more likely to only be enrolled in DEV courses.

Many of these differences would be expected to put the DEV group at a disadvantage compared to the non-DEV group, particularly when the difference in placement scores is considered.

### Results:

Non-ILP students outperformed ILP students in terms of academic performance in Fall 2004. Table 2 displays the results. Note that success rates are defined as the percent of classes where the student earned an A, B, C, or P.

Table 2 Academic Success in Fall 2004 for ILP and Non-ILP students

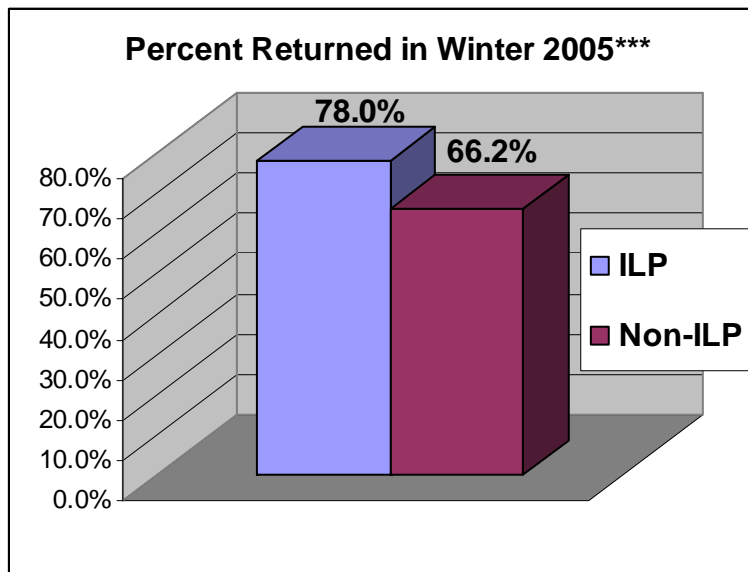
	ILP students	Non-ILP students
Fall 2004 Term GPA***	2.00	2.39
Fall 2004 Success Rate***	65.8%	75.2%
Fall 2004 Percent of Classes with a Grade of "W"***	11.0%	7.3%

\*\*\*  $p < .001$

This finding is consistent with previous research where participation in the ILP program was not associated with benefits in terms of GPA, success rates, or withdrawal rates.

It is to be expected that non-ILP students would outperform ILP students academically, given their higher placement test scores and lower percentages on a number of risk factors. There was one area, however, where ILP students outperformed non-ILP students: Fall 2004 to Winter 2005 retention. As Figure 2 illustrates, ILP students had a considerably higher percent of students that returned the following term compared to non-ILP students.

Figure 2 Fall to Winter Retention for ILP and Non-ILP Students



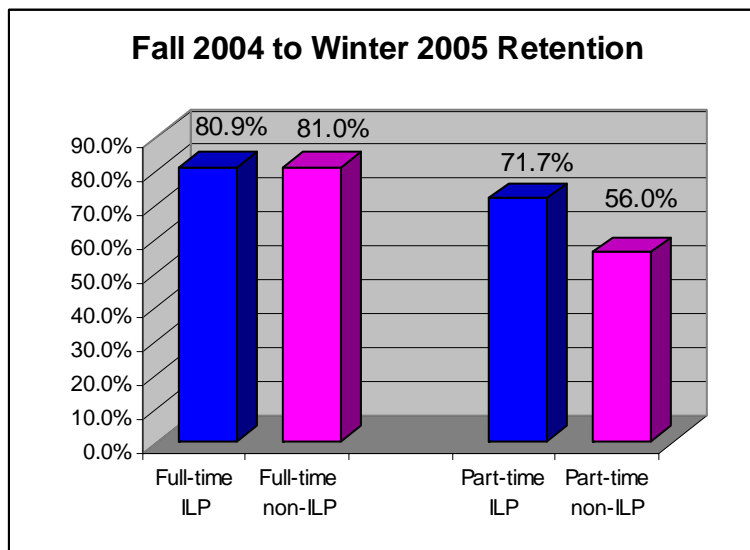
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While 656 of the 841 of first-time ILP students (78.0%) returned the next term, 2,682 of the 4,052 first-time non-ILP students (66.2%) returned in Winter 2005. This translates to a gain of 100 additional ILP students that were retained in Winter 2005 over the number that would have been retained at the lower retention rate of 66.2% experienced by non-ILP students. Based on an average load of 7.97 credits for students in Winter 2005, these

additional 100 students probably generated somewhere in the neighborhood of 53 additional FTE in Winter 2005 that appears to be attributable to the ILP program.

Further analysis indicated that it was the part-time ILP student who benefited in terms of next term retention. When only full-time students are considered, there is no difference between ILP and non-ILP students in terms of retention the next term. However, when only part-time students are considered, retention rates are much higher for ILP part-time students than for non-ILP part-time students. Figure 3 illustrates this difference.

Figure 3 Fall to Winter Retention – Comparing Full-time vs. Part-time Students



As Figure 3 illustrates, the benefits in retention for ILP students compared to non-ILP students only applies to part-time students, since the retention rate for full-time ILP and non-ILP students is essentially the same. In other words, the ILP program is most effective in increasing the next term retention of the part-time student. However, only about a third of ILP students are part-time students. As can be seen, for full-time students (ILP and non-ILP alike) the next term retention rate is relatively high, at around 80%. The ILP program appears to impact the retention of the part-time students, which is encouraging given that part-time students are in greater need of increased retention.

Academic performance for the Fall 2004 ILP group is lower than that of the Fall 2003 ILP group in terms of success rates and first-term GPA. There are several possible explanations for this. For one, the criteria that students must meet to enter the ILP program has changed since Fall 2003, which has resulted in more students qualifying for the program. The change in qualifying criteria, in addition to the consequent increase in participants, may have impacted these numbers. Moreover, the greater emphasis on participating in the first appointment may have resulted in more activity at this initial step in the process, but that does not mean that all of these students continue to participate after the first appointment. Since participation was more voluntary in nature in Fall 2003, it may be that ILP students in Fall 2004 who were strongly encouraged to attend the

initial appointment lacked the self-motivation of the Fall 2003 ILP students, and did not participate after the initial appointment. In Fall 2003, ILP students essentially self-selected for participation in the program, while in Fall 2004 students who qualified were more strongly encouraged to participate. It is not clear how many students in the ILP group did not participate beyond the initial appointment, and how that may have limited the impact that the ILP program had.

### Conclusions:

It is not surprising that the non-ILP group outperformed the ILP group in terms of academic performance in Fall 2004. With the differences in the level of preparation for college-level work, and the higher rates of a number of risk factors among students in the ILP group, it is probably unrealistic to expect that first-term academic performance of these ILP students would match that of their non-ILP peers.

On the other hand, the higher retention rates for ILP students are cause for optimism. The higher retention rate among ILP students is attributable to an increase of 100 students and 53 FTE for Winter 2005, which is a noteworthy gain. For part-time students, the ILP program appears to have a large impact on whether a student returns for a second term at Sinclair. However, when only full-time students were considered there was no difference in retention between ILP and non-ILP students.

Follow-up analyses of the Fall 2004 ILP and non-ILP cohorts will be performed in future terms. It will be interesting to see whether the disparity between ILP and non-ILP students in terms of academic success decreases, and whether ILP students maintain their higher retention rate in subsequent terms.

For additional information regarding this study, please contact:

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