HIGHER EDUCATION COOPERATION ACT
FISCAL YEAR <u>2008</u> FINAL PROJECT EVALUATION
Grant Period Ending October 31, 2008

Note: An electronic version of the evaluation report is required to be completed by your external evaluator. Please send as a Microsoft Word document by **January 31, 2009** to Grants@ibhe.org.

Project Director: <u>   Jeff Newell   </u>

Project Title: Project Title   <u> Increasing Retention in Online Courses Through Peer Mentoring</u>

External Evaluator: <u>   Len Bogle   </u>

1. Executive Summary

The Increasing Retention in Online Courses Through Peer Mentoring study was conducted to determine if the use of the peer mentoring program would reduce the rate of those students who did not successfully complete the courses by 20% in seven Illinois community colleges. Inservice for the Peer Mentoring Program was provided by the Office of Technology Enhanced Learning (OTEL) at the University of Illinois at Springfield (UIS) during Fall, 2007. The peer mentoring program was implemented during Spring, 2008, with data from the 2008 classes compared to the baseline data of these same classes from 2005 to 2007. The results did not meet the targeted 20% decrease. The non completion rate was reduced by 3.48%, the number of F's was reduced by 3.28% and the number of A's and B's was increased by 7.20%. Surveys were developed to determine the level of satisfaction with the peer mentoring program from faculty, peer mentors, project coordinators and students who did and did not complete the courses. Support for continuation of the program by the faculty, peer mentors, and students who completed the course was very strong.

2. <u>Goals and Objectives</u>

- **Indicate the major goals and objectives established for this program.**

Increasing Retention in Online Courses Through Peer Mentoring was a project designed to improve student retention rates in online courses via an online peer mentoring program. The goal of this project was to increase student retention rates by 20% at targeted online courses. Under the direction of Jeff Newell, Director, Illinois Community Colleges Online (ILCCO) at the Illinois Community College Board, and sponsored by the FY2008 Innovation Grants from HECA, this program had three objectives:

1. Seven community colleges will implement a peer mentoring program, affecting 14 low retention online courses.

2. Faculty of targeted online courses will be able to identify a minimum of five key online teaching behaviors that promote student retention in their courses.

3. ILCCO will disseminate best practices for implementing a peer mentoring program that promotes improved student retention to all 48 community colleges in the state of Illinois.

The peer mentoring project partners in this study are members of the Illinois Community Colleges Online (ILCCO) consortium and the University of Illinois at Springfield (UIS). The participating ILCCO colleges in this project are Black Hawk College, Elgin Community College, Harper College, Lake Land College, Moraine Valley Community College, Triton College, and Waubonsee Community College.

This project sought to replicate the success of the peer mentoring program at UIS and adapt this program to the community college environment. Students who have successfully completed a particular online course are hired as peer mentors for students in the same course in subsequent semesters. These peer mentors model effective behavior in online courses, encourage participation by posting in the discussion board, answer student questions about assignments,

monitor student performance and participation, and initiate regular communication with students, especially those who appear to be at risk of failure. Students are contacted and issues identified that may be affecting their ability to be successful in the class. The peer mentors provide encouragement and communicate student needs to the instructor.

"UIS has provided a peer mentoring program for their online courses with lower retention rates for several semesters" (FY2008 Innovation Grant: HECA, p. 6.) The UIS program is based on the Course Wizards program that received a nationally recognized SLOAN-C award for Online Learning Effectiveness. The UIS model program has demonstrated that UIS students are less likely to drop out and have a higher rate of satisfaction with online learning in the peer mentored classes. The activities of these peer mentors include monitoring of assignments, tracking assignment submissions, responding to late students, and providing encouragement and support to those who need clarification on assignments. These activities free the instructor to concentrate on teaching and course development.

Ray Schroeder, Director, Office of Technology Enhanced Learning (OTEL) at the University of Illinois at Springfield (UIS) provided the leadership for the workshop development and the creation of training materials and web resources. Using input from the community college personnel, UIS adapted their peer mentoring training program and developed a schedule of peer mentor and faculty training for the project that was implemented in Fall, 2007. Through consistent communication and resource support, UIS provided interaction and ongoing development among all project partners throughout the duration of the grant period. A sharing community was created among all project partners, including the UIS peer mentors and staff, community college participating faculty and peer mentors, and college peer mentoring coordinators.

The Fall, 2007 semester was the developmental period for this project. The participating colleges identified two low retention online courses with retention rates consistently below the other online courses that could benefit from the use of peer mentoring and recruited the faculty for participation. A variety of factors may be attributed to the lower retention rates within these classes to include faculty and student issues.

The selected faculty nominated former students who had successfully completed their course and would likely be good peer mentor candidates. Trained peer mentors were incorporated within these identified courses to serve as a support system for the faculty learning about effective student mentoring, and assist students in having a successful online learning experience.

Bellevue Community College performed an analysis of their online success and retention rate from 2000-01 to 2005-06. Using the template that was designed for this study, Dr. Leonard Bogle, Assistant Professor, Educational Leadership Department, UIS, developed surveys (Appendix 1) to obtain data input in the following categories:

1. Student survey – completed class

2. Student survey – did not complete class

3. Faculty survey

4. Peer mentor survey

5. Local project coordinator survey

The initial surveys were reviewed by each of the community colleges in the study and adjustments to the survey instruments were made to comply with the suggestions and requirements provided by each of the institutions. The final surveys were adapted for online responses by Jeff Newell, Director, Illinois Community Colleges Online (ILCCO) at the Illinois

Community College Board and the students were notified regarding the focus of and access to these surveys.

Student ratings were designed to demonstrate the level of satisfaction with the online course delivery and the peer mentoring process. In order to widen the spread of the scores, a six point scale was used with a desired target goal of 4.5 on a 6 point scale. Faculty ratings on a post-course survey were designed to determine the level of faculty satisfaction with the peer mentoring process with the same desired mean. Similar goals were set for the mentor surveys in order to document specific online teaching behaviors that strengthen student retention.

Along with the compilation of the survey results, each of the participating community colleges provided data for grades and retention for Spring, 2008 semester. These results were compared to the baseline data from Spring 2005 to Fall 2007 within the selected classes that received the Peer Mentor Training. The stated goal for this project was a 20% increase in student retention when the Peer Mentor Program was implemented.

The participating colleges will continue to track the students in this study to determine if these students enrolled in additional courses. This data will enable the colleges to determine if the peer mentoring program provided a return on the investment in order to justify continued financial support from their respective colleges.

- **Indicate the major activities.**

Inservice for the faculty and mentors involved in this project was provided by the Office of Technology Enhanced Learning (OTEL) from the University of Illinois at Springfield. Peer mentors were provided for the seven colleges involved in this project which accounted for 14 classes.

Surveys were developed and the responses from these surveys analyzed for the following areas:

1. Student survey – completed class

2. Student survey – did not complete class

3. Faculty survey

4. Peer mentor survey

5. Local project coordinator survey

- **Indicate the completion status of those activities initiated.**

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The selected faculty nominated former students who had successfully completed their course and would likely be good peer mentor candidates. Trained peer mentors were incorporated within these identified courses to serve as a support system for the faculty learning about effective student mentoring, and assist students in having a successful online learning experience.

The mentoring did occur for the selected courses during the Spring, 2008 semester. Course evaluations were completed at the end of the Spring 2008 semester with analysis and summary of that analysis provided in June, 2008.

3. <u>Overview of Population(s) Served</u>

- **Please indicate the population(s) served by this program (e.g., elementary school students, middle school teachers, at-risk students, etc.).**

The population consisted of community college online students within the seven community colleges participating in this project. The analysis of the data for those who completed the course and responded to the survey indicates there were a total of 64 respondents out of a possible 221 for a 28.95% response rate with the demographic breakdown listed in the following table. Forty-two of the respondents had previously taken online classes and completed an average of 3.69 classes each within the last two years. This group did not complete a total of 16 classes in the past two years demonstrating that the respondents were individuals with a history of completing the courses in which they were enrolled.

- **Please provide the demographic data for each population(s) served by the program, including total numbers served, by race/ethnicity and income level: Non-Resident Alien, Black, American Indian, Asian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic, White**

Table: Demographics of student responders who completed the online courses

Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Marital Status	Employment
Male = 43	17 – 21 = 23	White non-Latino = 51	Single = 40	None = 10
Female = 20	21 – 24 = 18	Latino = 3	Single w/children = 8	Full time (40 hrs) = 21
	25 – 30 = 10	African American non-Latino = 4	Married = 8	Part time = 33
	31 – 39 = 4	Asian or Pacific Islander = 1	Married w/children = 7	
	40 – 55 = 6	Other = 2		
	Over 55 = 2			

n = 64

4. Description of Methodology for Evaluating Program Effectiveness (e.g., surveys, interviews, written tests)

- **Please indicate the methodology used to evaluate the effectiveness of the program.**

- **Please indicate the use and number of any survey instruments, interviews conducted or written tests that have been used to determine program effectiveness.**

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The initial surveys were reviewed by each of the community colleges in the study and adjustments to the survey instruments were made to comply with the suggestions and requirements provided by each of the institutions. The final surveys were adapted for online responses by Jeff Newell, Director, Illinois Community Colleges Online (ILCCO) at the Illinois Community College Board and the students were notified regarding the focus of and access to these surveys.

Student ratings were designed to demonstrate the level of satisfaction with the online course delivery and the peer mentoring process. In order to widen the spread of the scores, a six point scale was used with a desired target goal of 4.5 on a 6 point scale. Faculty ratings on a post-course survey were designed to determine the level of faculty satisfaction with the peer

mentoring process with the same desired mean. Similar goals were set for the mentor surveys in order to document specific online teaching behaviors that strengthen student retention.

Along with the compilation of the survey results, each of the participating community colleges provided data for grades and retention for the Spring 2008 semester. These results were compared to the baseline data from Spring 2005 to Fall 2007 within the selected classes that received the Peer Mentor Training. The stated goal for this project was a 20% increase in student retention when the Peer Mentor Program was implemented.

The participating colleges will continue to track the students in this study to determine if these students enrolled in additional courses. This data will enable the colleges to determine if the peer mentoring program provided a return on the investment in order to justify continued financial support from their respective colleges.

5. Evaluation of Outcomes

- **Please describe specific "outcomes" or the positive effects on students accomplished with this project.**

- **Please indicate the effectiveness of program activities in achieving stated objectives.**

The community colleges in this study provided data for the identified classes. This data was consolidated onto one page to facilitate analysis. The stated goal for this project was a 20% increase in student retention when the Peer Mentor program was implemented – a goal that was not realized. For retention assessment, those students who withdrew from the course or ended with an incomplete were listed as not completing. The total number of students who were in these categories was divided by the total number of students enrolled in the classes to determine the percentage of students who failed to successfully complete the course.

The percentage for students who did not complete the courses prior to the introduction of the peer mentoring program was 38.48% (Table 1) while the percentage of students who did not complete the courses during the Spring of 2008 when the Peer Mentoring Program was in place was 35.00% (Table 2), a 3.48% improvement. This slight improvement did not meet the stated goals of the project.

Further analysis of the student completion data shows that the percentage of students who failed the courses was reduced during the Peer Mentoring Program from 10.93% to 7.65%. There was a 7.20% increase in the number of A's and B's earned by students after the introduction of the Peer Mentoring Program. While this was not a stated goal of this project, it reflects the ongoing positive impact the Peer Mentoring Program had on students at both ends of the grading scale.

Table 1: Total student grades Fall 2005 – Fall 2007

A-B	C-D	F	Did Not Complete	% Did Not Complete	% F's and Did Not Complete	% F's	% A's - B's
223	124	75	264	38.48%	49.42%	10.93%	32.51%

n = 686

Table 2: Total student grades Spring 2008

A-B	C-D	F	Did Not Complete	% Did Not Complete	% F's and Did Not Complete	% F's	% A's - B's
135	60	26	119	35.00%	42.65%	7.65%	39.71%

n = 340

Student survey analysis – completers

The analysis of the data for those who completed the course and responded to the survey provided very strong support for the online classes and the peer mentoring program. There were

a total of 64 respondents out of a possible 221 for a 28.95% response rate with the demographic breakdown listed in Table 3. According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2009) mailed surveys have the lowest response rate of all survey types and the process used for data collection within this study would reflect this. The totals that do not equal 64 were caused by the respondent's failure to provide answers in those areas.

Forty-two of the respondents had previously taken online classes and completed an average of 3.69 classes each within the last two years. This group did not complete a total of 16 classes in the past two years demonstrating that the respondents were individuals with a history of completing the courses in which they were enrolled.

Table 3: Demographics of student responders who completed the online courses

Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Marital Status	Employment
Male = 43	17 – 21 = 23	White non-Latino = 51	Single = 40	None = 10
Female = 20	21 – 24 = 18	Latino = 3	Single w/children = 8	Full time (40 hrs) = 21
	25 – 30 = 10	African American non-Latino = 4	Married = 8	Part time = 33
	31 – 39 = 4	Asian or Pacific Islander = 1	Married w/children = 7	
	40 – 55 = 6	Other = 2		
	Over 55 = 2			

n = 64

Taking class analysis - completers

When asked why they took the online class the responses indicated that the flexibility and convenience of taking the online class was the overwhelming reason for enrolling. Table 4 lists the reasons the students took the class with the highest rated reason on the left column and the lowest rated reason on the far right column. The flexibility provided by the online class is listed

as the number one reason for enrollment with scheduling a close second. Scheduling and flexibility have similarities and support the value of these programs for many students. Flexibility exceeds the 4.5 scale and the schedule challenge is near this predetermined scale. It should be noted that students the belief that the classes would be easier had little impact on the decision to enroll in these courses.

Table 4: Completers - Factors for taking online class

Flexibility	Schedule not allow on campus	Difficult get to campus	Had taken others and prefer online	Thought would be easier	Thought less homework	On campus section full	Other
4.84	4.16	3.60	3.17	2.39	2.39	1.97	See appendix

1 = not satisfied 6 = completely satisfied n = 64

Response to peer mentoring - completers

The response to the peer mentoring program (Table 5) was very positive with one of the categories meeting and a second nearly meeting the predetermined rating of 4.5. The students strongly recommend continuing the Peer Mentoring Program with a 4.54 mean response and this was closely followed by their belief that the peer mentor communicated in a timely manner (4.45). Comments made by the students regarding the value of the Peer Mentoring Program included "relayed important test-taking tips to me in a timely fashion allowing me to study better in certain areas" and "constant reminders about due dates and class work" provide insight into why these students strongly supported this program with the entire list of comments provided in Appendix 2.

Table 5: Completers responses to peer mentoring program

I would recommend continuing the PM	PM communicated with me timely	Interaction with PM was appropriate	Made it easier to understand material	Helped me understand work	Area where PM was most useful
4.54	4.45	3.93	3.80	3.80	See appendix 2

1 = not satisfied 6 = completely satisfied n = 64

Satisfaction with online class - completers

Table 6 lists the student responses regarding their overall satisfaction with the online course. Three of the four categories exceed the 4.5 rating with the fourth category very close to this rating. The 5.06 rating for <u>Consider another Online Class</u> was closely followed by <u>Direction for Getting Started</u> (4.94) and both reflect well on the comfort level the students felt in taking classes online.

Table 6: Completers satisfaction with areas in online class

Consider another online class	Directions for getting started	Interaction with technology	Interaction with other students
5.06	4.94	4.68	4.26

1 = not satisfied 6 = completely satisfied n = 64

Student survey analysis – non completers

The response rate from those who did not complete the class was so low (4.20%) that the compilation of the data renders little information regarding to the efficacy of the Peer Mentoring Program. A total of 5 students responded out of 119 who did not complete the classes and four of these five responses came from one community college. Table 7 lists the demographics which are spread across many categories with the exception of ethnicity.

Table 7: Demographics of student responders who did not complete the online courses

Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Marital Status	Employment
Male = 1	17 – 21 = 2	White non-Latino = 5	Single = 3	None = 1
Female = 4	21 – 24 = 1	Latino = 0	Single w/children = 2	Full time (40 hrs) = 2
	25 – 30 = 1	African American non-Latino = 0	Married = 0	Part time = 2
	31 – 39 = 0	Asian or Pacific Islander = 0	Married w/children = 0	
	40 – 55 = 1	Other = 0		
	Over 55 = 0			

n = 5

Four of the five respondents had previously taken online classes with one indicating a total of four and another three taken in the last two years. All four students who had previously taken classes indicated they had dropped one class in the past two years. One student withdrew in week three, two in week four and one in week five. The five who withdrew represented four different classes removing the factor that it may have been the class that correlated with the reason for leaving.

Taking class analysis – non completers

Analysis of the reasons these students enrolled reflect those of the completers in that the flexibility of the classes was the primary reason provided. Getting to class, the ease of the class and the inability to get into the class were of minimal consequence for these respondents.

Table 8: Non completers - Factors for taking online class

Flexibility	Had taken others and prefer online	Schedule not allow on campus	Thought less homework	Difficult get to campus	Thought would be easier	On campus section full	Other
5.80	3.50	3.40	2.00	1.60	1.00	1.00	None

1 = not satisfied 6 = completely satisfied   n = 5

Reason for leaving the class

The reasons for leaving the class (Table 9) provide insight into why these five respondents chose to withdraw. Two of the five responses indicated with a six that the course was too hard with the other three rating this as a three. The personal problems reason is skewed as one person indicates a six while all others listed this as a one. Similarly, five of the six respondents listed did not know where to find the material as a one. The narrative responses from these individuals provide their reasons for withdrawing. These reasons were:

- I felt it was a course I needed to take in class (on campus) after reviewing the information and reading the first chapters.

- Very unorganized, questions were not clear and assignments were overwhelming for the points given.

- Too many homework assignments and tests took hours to complete. I did not have time to complete the work that did not aid in my understanding of the course.

Table 9: Non completers – reason for withdrawal

Course too hard	Could not handle study and work/family	Personal problems	Did not know where to find the material	Too many courses and had to cut down
4.20	3.60	2.00	2.00	1.40

1 = not satisfied 6 = completely satisfied n = 5

The reported satisfaction with the listed categories was quite similar. Directions for getting started received a mean score of 3.40 while Interaction with other students and Interaction with technology received a 3.0 score. It is of interest that despite withdrawing from the class these students indicated a likely desire (4.00) that they would register for another online class. The student comments provide additional insight into why they left the classes. One must keep in mind that these students represent 4.2% of all students who did not complete these courses. These comments are:

- There is not much interaction in the class and I did not stay long enough to see.

- Instructor did not know how to use the technology and did not respond in a timely manner.

- Instructor gave the wrong information for obtaining the reading material. The reading not helpful for the test.

- Correct syllabus not up for a week after class started.

- Difficulty finding items needed for the class due to lack of understanding on the college's part on how to put the material where they thought they put it.

- You must be very self directed and stick to the deadlines – you cannot procrastinate.

- Do not take this course. There was no flexibility. I have taken other online classes that I was very satisfied with.

Response to peer mentoring - completers

The focus of this project was to enhance student satisfaction through peer mentoring assistance. The analysis of the responses from the five students (Table 10) indicated that they felt the peer mentor communicated with them in a timely manner (4.75) but had little impact on helping with homework (2.80) helping with understanding the material (2.40) or meeting their

17

needs (2.40). These students were not positive in their responses to the peer mentoring program but one must keep in mind that these students were only in the program for three to five weeks and had a limited opportunity to interact with the peer mentor.

Table 10: Non completers response to peer mentor

PM communicated in a timely manner	I would recommend PM for online	Helped me better understand the work	Made it easier to understand the material	Interaction with PM met my needs
4.75	3.50	2.80	2.40	2.40

1 = not satisfied 6 = completely satisfied n = 5

Non completers summary

The very small response rate and the lack of representation of all of the community colleges in this study (four from one community college and one from a second) provides very limited insight into the value of the peer mentoring program. In their limited exposure to the peer mentor services they felt strongly (4.75) that the peer mentor communicated in a timely manner and that the online classes would provide the flexibility (5.80) they desired. These responses are similar to the ratings provided by those students who did complete the course with a rating of 4.45 for communication and 4.84 for flexibility. These students who did withdraw still felt favorably toward the online class structure giving indicating a likely desire to register for another online class at 4.0.

Faculty response to the peer mentor program

The faculty response to the peer mentor program was very positive with five of the seven areas of response exceeding the 4.5 target rating, one nearly reaching this level (4.45) and the other two above the mean of four. There were 12 respondents and 17 classes in the study for a response rate of 70.58%. Table 11 lists each of the required response areas with the responses

listed in descending order from left to right. These instructors strongly believed the peer mentoring program had a positive effect (5.18) on their students and recommend the continuation of this program (5.18). They also felt that the peer mentoring program enhanced their ability to meet the student (4.91) needs, created a quality learning experience (4.77), and addressed student needs to increase success (4.73). The other area can be viewed in Table 11 and it is evident that these instructors have a high regard for the program. This satisfaction is supported by the level of 3.48% reduction in withdrawals, a 3.28% reduction in the number of F's, and a 7.20% increase in the number of A's and B's after only one semester with this program.

Table 11: Faculty response to peer mentor program

I would recommend	Had a + effect on students	Enhanced my ability to meet student needs	Effective in creating quality learning experience	Effective in addressing student needs to increase success	Increased my awareness and use of successful online teaching behaviors	Increased level of communication between students	Increased quality of communications between students
5.18	5.18	4.91	4.77	4.73	4.45	4.36	4.27

1= completely disagree 6 = completely agree n = 12

Peer mentor response to the peer mentor program

Those students who served as peer mentors for these classes were highly supportive of the program and the value it has for the students, the class and the instruction. All of the rating from the 12 respondents had a mean of 5.08 or higher (Table 12). This exceeds the target goal of 4.5 in every category. As Table 12 shows, these peer mentors highly recommend (5.67) that this program continue and they strong believe (5.55) that this program had a positive impact on the students. The other areas can be viewed in Table 12 and it is evident that these students, who were previous class members and continue to be students in these institutions, believe the Peer Mentoring Program is of much value to the students and the instructor and should be continued.

Table 12: Peer mentor response to program

I recommend continuation	Had a + impact on students	Created a quality learning experience	Enhanced instructor's ability to meet student needs	Effective in addressing student needs to increase success
5.67	5.55	5.33	5.17	5.08

1= completely disagree 6 = completely agree n = 12

Summary of findings

The summary of the data provided indicates that the faculty, peer mentors, and students who completed the class and the project coordinators recommend the continuation of the peer mentoring program with ratings that exceed the targeted mean rating set for this project. The faculty and peer mentors concurred through their ratings that all areas in which they were asked to respond were improved to include better instruction to the students, meeting student needs and improving communication among the students and between the students and the instructor.

The response rate from those who did not complete the courses was so low (4.20%) that their input provided limited insight and value as to the importance of this program to their

success. Those who did respond were only in the classes from three to five weeks and one must question if the peer mentoring program was given the opportunity to assist these individuals in being successful or enhancing their understanding of these classes in such a short amount of time. Even so, these students believed that the peer mentors communicated in a timely manner (4.75), felt the online classes would provide the flexibility they desired (5.80) and confirmed they were likely to take another online class (4.0).

The target goal for this project was a 20% reduction in the number of students who did not successfully complete the identified classes. Analysis of the data shows that the classes had a non completion rate of 38.48% and a 20% reduction would see this rate fall to 18.48%. The actual reduction achieved was 3.48% and, while a great deal less than the targeted 20% reduction, this is still an improvement after only one semester. This reduction, combined with a 3.28% reduction in F's and a 7.20% increase in the number of students receiving A's and B's lends support for the value this program provides to students at both ends of the achievement scale.

6. Challenges

- **What challenges did the project encounter during the grant cycle?**

The response rate from those who did not complete the courses was so low (4.20%) that their input provided limited insight and value as to the importance of this program to their success. Those who did respond were only in the classes from three to five weeks and one must question if the peer mentoring program was given the opportunity to assist these individuals in being successful or enhancing their understanding of these classes in such a short amount of time. Even so, these students believed that the peer mentors communicated in a timely manner

(4.75), felt the online classes would provide the flexibility they desired (5.80) and confirmed they were likely to take another online class (4.0).

7. Lessons Learned/Dissemination of Outcomes

- **What did the project partners learn from this grant process?**

- **How did you disseminate project outcomes and lessons learned? If you created a website, published research findings, hosted a conference, etc., please provide those materials or web links along with your completed evaluation.**

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An evaluation report on the project findings was disseminated to the 29 ILCCO colleges and is available electronically on the ILCCO website at: http://ilcco.net/ILCCO/index.cfm?page=Resources.

8. Institutionalization

- **Indicate steps taken by your partnership to institutionalize specific elements of the program.**

While the participating colleges found the peer mentoring program to be a positive experience, only Harper College indicated they were institutionalizing the peer mentoring process. They will have a peer mentor in one course per semester, or more as funding permits. They are also developing a benchmark study focused on one course in repeated semesters to determine effectiveness over a period of time. Elgin Community College indicated they are examining funding avenues and would begin a program in Fall 2009 if successful. Black Hawk College indicated that they are not able to implement peer mentoring at this time due to budget difficulties. The remaining colleges indicated they have no immediate plans to implement peer mentors in online courses.

9. Statewide Impact

- **Indicate any steps you have taken to bring this project to scale statewide.**

- **How did this project inform public policy development?**

Illinois Community Colleges Online (ILCCO) discussed the possibility of expanding the project to a larger number of ILCCO colleges in a Steering Committee meeting. The committee felt that ILCCO did not have the funding to foster additional peer mentoring projects in additional colleges. The colleges themselves are also under tighter financial constraints and did not believe they could move forward with peer mentoring trials themselves.

The project was not designed to address public policy.

Appendix 1

Surveys Student survey – completed class

Student survey – did not complete class

Faculty survey

Peer mentor survey

Local project coordinator survey

Peer Mentor Project (Student) End-of-Course Survey

This semester you participated in an online course that provided a peer mentor to assist in the course. The peer mentor was provided as part of a grant. Please complete this end-of-course survey to assist us in evaluating the peer mentor peer mentoring grant project.

Please identify your college.

Please identify the online course you took with a peer mentor.

1. Was this your first online course?   ☐ Yes ☐ No

    If yes, go to question 4.
    If no, go to question 2.

2. How many community college <u>online</u> courses did you <u>complete</u> in the last 2 years?

3. How many community college <u>online</u> courses did you <u>not</u> <u>complete</u> in the last 2 years?

4. Please provide the following information about yourself.

A. Gender   [dropdown]

B. Age   [dropdown]

C. Ethnicity   [dropdown]

D. Marital Status   [dropdown]

E. Employment   [dropdown]

5. How important were the following factors in selecting an online course?

	Not Important (1)	Extremely Important (6)

A. It is difficult/impossible for me to get to campus.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

B. My schedule does not allow me to attend the on-campus section of this course.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

C. The on-campus section was full.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

D. I thought I would prefer the flexibility of the online delivery format.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

E. I expected the online course to be easier than the on-campus course.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

F. I expected less homework with the online course.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

G. I had taken other online courses and prefer this format.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

H. Other reasons for taking an online course.

6. Please give your response to the PEER MENTORING Program.

Not Satisfied (1)   Completely Satisfied (6)

A. The Peer Mentor helped me better understand how to work online.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4
☐ 5 ☐ 6

B. The Peer Mentor made it easier to understand the material.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4
☐ 5 ☐ 6

C. The interaction with the Peer Mentor was appropriate for my needs.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4
☐ 5 ☐ 6

D. The Peer Mentor communicated with me on a timely basis.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4
☐ 5 ☐ 6

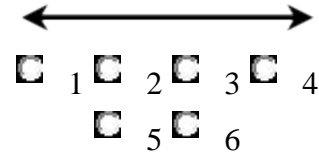E. I would recommend continuing the Peer Mentoring program for online classes.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4
☐ 5 ☐ 6

F. What was one area where the Peer Mentor was of most value to you?

7. Please rate your satisfaction with the following during this online course at this college.

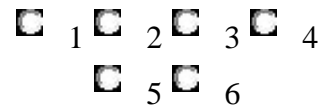Not Satisfied (1)   Completely Satisfied (6)

A. Interaction with other students in the course.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4
☐ 5 ☐ 6

Comments for a 1 or 2 rating: [   ]

B. Interaction with the technology.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4
☐ 5 ☐ 6

Comments for a 1 or 2 rating: [   ]

C. Direction for getting started in the course.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4
☐ 5 ☐ 6

Comments for a 1 or 2 rating: [   ]
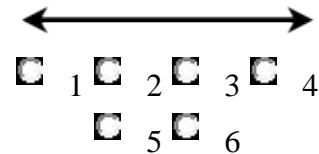
Never (1)   Absolutely (6)

8. Given your experience, would you consider registering for another course online at this college?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4
☐ 5 ☐ 6

9. What advice would you give students who are considering taking an online course?

[   ]

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your responses are very important to improving online courses and the Peer Mentoring Program.

Our special thanks to Bellevue Community College for permission to use "Student success and retention in online courses – 2006 edition," as a guide for the development of this survey.

Peer Mentor Project (Student) Survey

This semester you participated in, but did not complete, an online course that provided a peer mentor to assist in the course. The peer mentor was provided as part of a grant. Please complete this survey using the link below to assist us in evaluating the peer mentor peer mentoring grant project.

Please identify your college.

Please identify the online course you took with a peer mentor.

1. Was this your first online course?　☐ Yes ☐ No

   If yes, go to question 4.
   If no, go to question 2.

2. How many community college <u>online</u> courses did you <u>complete</u> in the last 2 years?

3. How many community college <u>online</u> courses did you <u>not</u> <u>complete</u> in the last 2 years?

4. In which week did you stop participating in this course?

5. Please provide the following information about yourself.

A. Gender

B. Age

C. Ethnicity

D. Marital Status

E. Employment

6. For each item below, indicate the impact you feel each listed item had on your ability to complete this online course?

Did Not Impact (1) — Strongly Impacted (6)

A. The course was too difficult.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

B. I could not handle the study plus my work/family responsibilities.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

C. Personal problems (health, job, child care).

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

D. I signed up for too many courses and needed to cut down on the work load.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

E. I did not know where to go to find course materials.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

F. Other reasons why you could not complete this online course:

7. How important were the following factors in selecting an online course?

Not Important — Extremely Important (6)

A. It is difficult/impossible for me to get to campus.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4
☐ 5 ☐ 6

B. My schedule does not allow me to attend the on-campus section of this course.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4
☐ 5 ☐ 6

C. The on-campus section was full.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4
☐ 5 ☐ 6

D. I thought I would prefer the flexibility of the online delivery format.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4
☐ 5 ☐ 6

E. I expected the online course to be easier than the on-campus course.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4
☐ 5 ☐ 6

F. I expected less homework with the online course.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4
☐ 5 ☐ 6

G. I had taken other online courses and prefer this format.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4
☐ 5 ☐ 6

H. Other reasons for taking an online course.

8. Please give your response to the PEER MENTORING Program.

Not Satisfied (1) Completely Satisfied (6)

A. The Peer Mentor helped me better understand how to work online.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4
☐ 5 ☐ 6

B. The Peer Mentor made it easier to understand the material.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4
☐ 5 ☐ 6

C. The interaction with the Peer Mentor was appropriate for my needs.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4
☐ 5 ☐ 6

D. The Peer Mentor communicated with me on a timely basis.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4
☐ 5 ☐ 6

E. I would recommend continuing the Peer Mentoring program for online classes.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4
☐ 5 ☐ 6

F. What was one area where the Peer Mentor was of most value to you?

9. Please rate your satisfaction with the following during this online course at this college.

Not Satisfied (1)　　Completely Satisfied (6)

A. Interaction with other students in the course.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4
☐ 5 ☐ 6

Comments for a 1 or 2 rating:

B. Interaction with the technology.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4

☐ 5 ☐ 6

Comments for a 1 or 2 rating: [text box]

C. Direction for getting started in the course.   ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4
                                                      ☐ 5 ☐ 6

Comments for a 1 or 2 rating: [text box]

Never (1)   Absolutely (6)

←——————————————————→

10. Given your experience, would you consider registering for another course online at this college?   ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4
                                                      ☐ 5 ☐ 6

11. What advice would you give students who are considering taking an online course? [text box]

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. Your responses are very important to improving online courses and the Peer Mentoring Program.
Our special thanks to Bellevue Community College for permission to use "Student success and retention in online courses – 2006 edition," as a guide for the development of this survey.

Peer Mentor (Faculty) End-of-Course Survey

Thank you for participating in the Peer Mentoring Project, part of a 2008 HECA grant.

Please complete this end-of-course survey for the peer mentored course you taught.

Please identify your college.

Please identify the online course you taught with a peer mentor.

On a scale of one to six with six being completely agree and one being completely disagree, indicate your feelings regarding the peer mentoring program implemented during this semester.

Completely Disagree (1) ⟷ Completely Agree (6)

1. Peer mentoring increased the level of communication between students in the course.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
☐ 6

2. Peer mentoring increased the quality of communication between students in the course.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
☐ 6

3. Peer mentoring was effective in addressing student needs to increase student success in the courses.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
☐ 6

4. The assistance of peer mentoring enhanced my ability to meet student needs in the course.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
☐ 6

5. Peer mentoring increased my awareness and use of successful online teaching behaviors.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
☐ 6

6. Peer mentoring was effective in creating a quality learning experience for the students.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
☐ 6

7. Peer mentoring is a program I would recommend for continuation at my institution.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
☐ 6

8. Peer mentoring had a positive impact on students in the course.   ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
                                                                            ☐ 6

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey and assist in the analysis of the Peer Mentoring Program.
This information will provide valuable data for improvement of this program for future online courses.

Peer Mentor (Mentor) End-of-Course Survey

Thank you for participating in the Peer Mentoring Project, part of a 2008 HECA grant. Please complete this end-of-course survey for the course you mentored in.

Please identify your college.

Please identify the online course you were a peer mentor in.

On a scale of one to six with six being completely agree and one being completely disagree, indicate your feelings regarding the peer mentoring program implemented during this semester.

Completely Disagree (1)   Completely Agree (6)

1. Peer mentoring was effective in addressing student needs to increase student success in the course.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

2. Peer mentoring enhanced the instructor's ability to meet student needs in the course.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6

3. Peer mentoring was effective in creating a quality learning experience for the students.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4
☐ 5 ☐ 6

4. Peer mentoring had a positive impact on students in the course.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4
☐ 5 ☐ 6

5. Peer mentoring is a program I would recommend for continuation at the institution.

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4
☐ 5 ☐ 6

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey and assist in the analysis of the Peer Mentoring Program.
This information will provide valuable data for improvement of this program for future online courses.

Appendix 2

Factors for taking online classes – completers

- Short attention span

- I go to Illinois State University and was forced to take a community college class because the desired class was not available at my university

- It should be more convenient but sometimes the instructor does not give enough feedback

- Convenience – but the instructor does not give enough attention to online students They tend to forget about us, not grade on time, or e-mail answers to questions

- I was registered for a class on campus but it was cancelled last minute because the professor was unable to teach the class

- My schedule is very busy and it is hard for me to get to campus

- It was easier for me because I have kids

- Did not want to find day care or a baby sitter

- It is a nice way to work and be able to work toward your goal and education

- Fulfilled a general education requirement not specific to my major but was still a subject I was vaguely familiar with

- I had previously taken online classes and loved the freedom of doing my assignments when I have time late at night or when I cannot sleep

- I simply didn't have enough time to take it on campus

- Good With Computers

- Flexibility, schedule and comfort of it - no time to go to campus

- I have a varied schedule and required the flexibility

- I recently moved to California until my husband is out of the military, and I would like to finish my degree with this school

Appendix 3

Completers Responses to Peer Mentoring Program

Areas where peer mentor was most useful

- Relayed important test taking tips to me in a timely fashion allowing me to study better in certain areas

- Constant reminders about due dates and class work

- When I had questions I needed answered right away, they were always there to answer

- I appreciate the concept of a peer mentor. however, I didn't ask her anything more than I could've asked my instructor or other classmates. If she were avail to meet with personally more often than the instructor, I can see how having the extra help would be beneficial. I do not think that it is necessary to have an additional person who can help via blackboard.

- None really but I am a fast learner

- Understanding and completing assignments

- Instruction

- I was able to use the peer mentor as an example as to what I was expected to do

- I really only had one question for the peer mentor. I got a real helpful answer and it was

  quick response

- I had a question relevant to material that was to be on one of the exams, and I was impressed at how quickly and thoroughly my question was answered. My Peer Mentor was obviously very knowledgeable about our subject
- Supplying step by step answers to extremely difficult CHM Problems (2)

- If I had a question about the material I could ask and she was able to work out the problem and help me understand. Also, she was able to answer general questions in a quick and timely manner. It helps because it was a former student that has already taken the class.

- I did not use the peer mentor at all

- The Peer Mentor was not allowed to give specific answers to questions but only allowed

  to lead us in the right direction

- I met the peer mentor who was very nice. However I looked at a few responses which were non-responsive, or rather, non-specific in the answers. Since the book was rather confusing, I am not sure that this was the level of support that was needed. After a few weeks, I eventually caught on to the book, but never understood the varieties of HTML presented in the back of the book (appendices) which varied substantially from the chapters, until maybe the end

- I like that she was always willing to help me when I needed it

- She helped to explain some of the lessons to me that I didn't understand or had trouble understanding just from the book

- When I had a paper to turn in and I needed help

- She offered help when she saw that I needed it. She paid attention to details

- Writing the papers

- When there was misunderstanding in the assignment

- She was there to assist with any aspect of the class

- Providing updates on deadlines

- The peer mentor was wonderful. She helped me communicate my needs to the instructor when I didn't want to directly contact the instructor with my issues. Very helpful.

- Fast responses, and also face to face makes me nervous

Appendix 4
Completers Advice to Other Students

- Make sure to have good communications with the instructors and always a way to reach them when problems arise

- Don't get behind. Make sure you keep focused

- Stay on track

- Saves time

- Don't fall behind or put things off to the last minute

- Do not procrastinate. Keep up with reading and assignments. Do all extra credit available

- If you're not responsible and don't do what is asked and interact as much as you can, you will not succeed in this course

- You will need to work on your own without much attention from the instructor or mentor

- Be ready for alot of work every week

- Online courses are good for people that have jobs or children because it is flexible and allows you to accomplish your homework when you have time.

- You must be selective with what type of class to take online. I do not feel that this course was beneficial online b/c I think this material is necessary to learn by personal instruction and interaction. I also took a psych class online and did better learning the material on my own. I feel that my education class would've been a good online class. some people might be able to learn math on their own outside a classroom, however, I don't think there are many who can do this well and I don't think that this particular class should be taken online (due to the material - not the instructor).

- They aren't as bad as you think

- It's much easier because of the flexibility of it. And if all other means are exhausted for on campus classes, this is your best bet.

- An online course (usually) requires three times the amount of work compared to a class with lectures. In the end a student will get what he or she puts into it.

- Make sure you have the time for the classes

- Be prepared to spend much time on it

- Don't slack in them. They often take just as much or more commitment because it is up to you to learn it or "go" to class.

- Be prepared

- Put as much work into your online classes as your regular classes

- If you're looking for something that is convent if you have kids then that's the best way to go

- To make sure they check on the class often, and to have good idea what the course is about before you sign up for a online class in that course.

- They are fun and you learn new things. Also, you do not have to go to campus!!

- Take a course that you are somewhat familiar with, or have a basic proficiency in. I would not have been able to handle stoichiometry in my chem class, had I not reached a level of math that allowed me to perform problems with little or no help. I would highly recommend online classes for those who are interested in or feel that they are suited for independent learning.

- Expect to work extra hard to teach yourself, plan on going to tutor center for extra help! Plan on 15 hours of work per week to complete homework and ample time to study the material! It is very tough to be very committed and discipline!

- Online courses are good if you have some experience with the materials that will be covered. Students who are new to the subject might find it difficult.

- None, because everyone has different needs, but a former course I took online, did have a general startup meeting with the instructor. This would have great, to have at least met her once in person.

- Be very self-disciplined

- Time management

- I would tell them to do it. Just make sure they are disciplined and thorough with their work. Make sure they devote enough time to each class and to not fall behind with any readings or homework.

- Go for it, you can work at your own pace and you can email the teacher personally and they will contact you back in a timely fashion.

- Don't take the course because you think it'll be easier, in fact, it will probably be a lot harder

- It's very convenient

- Be sure to make time every day to work on your class work. If you don't it is easy to be lazy

- Do it

- Make sure you have time to take out to get into peer groups because if you don't meet them on time it will be your loss

- Be consistent and disciplined

- Do not procrastinate in submitting assignments because computer glitches can occur. Read all the material especially in the text because it reinforces concepts for timed quizzes and exams.

- Check with your instructor prior to purchasing the book. I purchased my text on line, prior to the course. And because I did this, I did not receive the cd-rom the teacher put in the book at the bookstore. So, that added an extra level of headache to my situation, hunting down all the films on the cd-rom, because my instructor did not offer to provide us with a cd-rom if we didn't buy the book at the bookstore. THAT should be explained before the course so you can plan accordingly.

- It is not easier, so please pay attention. It is harder than face to face classes in some matters, and should not be taken lightly!