



HEATHER LAMPO AND PRISCILLA HAGEBUSCH

Students Present Digital Literacy Credentials to Universities and Workplace for Competitive Edge

IC³ validates computing skills necessary for high school and college students to succeed in new employment arena

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Fall 2005 was chaotic on the Gulf Coast of the United States. Two days after school started, Heather Lampo, computer technology teacher in Metairie, La., fled Hurricane Katrina. Safe in Houston, Texas, Lampo taught high school computer courses as a substitute teacher and waited for word about the New Orleans suburb that was her home. After three weeks, Lampo left her children with a relative in Houston to return home to work. School reopened for five days until Hurricane Rita threatened the area. Lampo again fled to Houston to wait out the storm with her children and relatives.

By the time life returned to normal, Lampo had evaded two major storms, received three job offers to teach computer technology courses in Houston and returned to work at Grace King High School in Metairie, despite a temporary decrease in student enrollment.



Lampo was introduced to Certiport® Internet and Computing Core Certification (IC³®) when Jefferson Parish Public Schools offered training and the certification to its teachers. From the experience, she realized she was already teaching the IC³ exam components in her course, and, in fact, IC³ validated she was teaching her students the right information.

"I teach them how to use computers, how they're made and how to fix them," she said. "The state gives us the topics to cover, but I found IC³ gives me the curriculum. And, if my students are already learning the material, why not prove it? If they can get college credit for being certified, why not?"

Lampo knows digital literacy is important to her students because she has seen a shift in the employment arena since the hurricanes. "Everything is moving toward information, rather than trade," she said. As her community rebuilds to become a "second Silicon Valley," Lampo sees individuals need computing skills to fill jobs.

Initially, the parish provided excess grant funds to subsidize student IC³ exams. Funding the exams fit well with a parish goal to support students in earning industry certifications. When the funds were gone, Lampo offered IC³ exams to students at discounted rates. She said the expense is worthwhile.

"It is so exciting for me to see students fret over the exam for 45 minutes and then see the look on their faces when they get the screen that says they passed." Lampo said. "It is priceless. They did it!"

One wall of Lampo's classroom is lined with IC³ certificates. Forty students and 30 teachers have earned the credential. "It proves to world they know what they're doing," she said. "These pieces of paper show employers and colleges these students know what it takes."

And Lampo is well aware institutions of higher education are taking note. Nearby Tulane University expects students to have computing skills and offers advanced placement credit to students who are already certified. "What Tulane does usually trickles down to other colleges in the area," she said. "Certification benefits students in college, but they can earn it at a reduced cost while in high school. IC³ may be worth \$450 worth of college credit, and students won't have to waste time in a college course learning material they already know. Graduates often come back, thank me and tell me how much their certification has paid off."



At the university level, Priscilla Hagebusch, clinical professor of information systems at the A.B. Freeman School of Business at Tulane University in New Orleans, has witnessed firsthand the need for students to come to college prepared with computing skills.

When policy changes allowed students to start business school in their freshman year rather than taking prerequisite courses to enter in their junior year, Hagebusch said Freeman School became concerned with foundational computing skills. Administrators needed a way to equip freshmen with the learning tools they would need throughout their university experience. IC³ proved to be a viable solution.



Initial IC³ results surprised Freeman School students and faculty. During sample testing the first week of school, students scored significantly lower than passing on the Computing Fundamentals and Living Online IC³ exam components. "The standard for these exams has been set by a panel of 450 industry experts from around the world," Hagebusch said. "So my students were, on average, not up to that international standard upon entering the course."

Using the Certiport Internet & Computing Benchmark™ and Internet & Computing Mentor™ tools, which assess fundamental digital literacy, students measured their initial computing skills, increased competence and took IC³ exams for extra credit.

"More and more high schools around the country and the world are adopting the IC³ and Microsoft® Office Specialist standards to ensure a uniform level of computing knowledge," Hagebusch said. "Because not every high school student goes on to college, I believe it is essential for high-school graduates to present these recognized credentials to the workplace to be competitive. We believe it is critical for A. B. Freeman School of Business students to be well armed with these skills for their academic and employment futures."

As her students pursue internships, summer jobs, work after graduation and higher education, Lampo has seen IC³'s benefits. "Although they are high school students, the certification proves they know what they're talking about," she said. "It even gives them an edge in obtaining internships over college students who don't have the certifications."

A member of the education committee of the Jefferson Chamber of Commerce, Lampo calls herself a "beacon of IC³" as she informs her community about how Grace King High School creates better employees for the parish. "I spread the word about certification," she said. "Employers see its value. IC³ gives our students skills that will take them into employment. Every job needs these skills."

In the future, Lampo plans to add other industry certifications to her curriculum and encourage her colleagues to focus more on developing advanced computing skills. She also hopes to see young people who know technology—who are natives to technology—help the "older generation"—the technology immigrants—to know the skills they need to succeed in today's digital world.

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