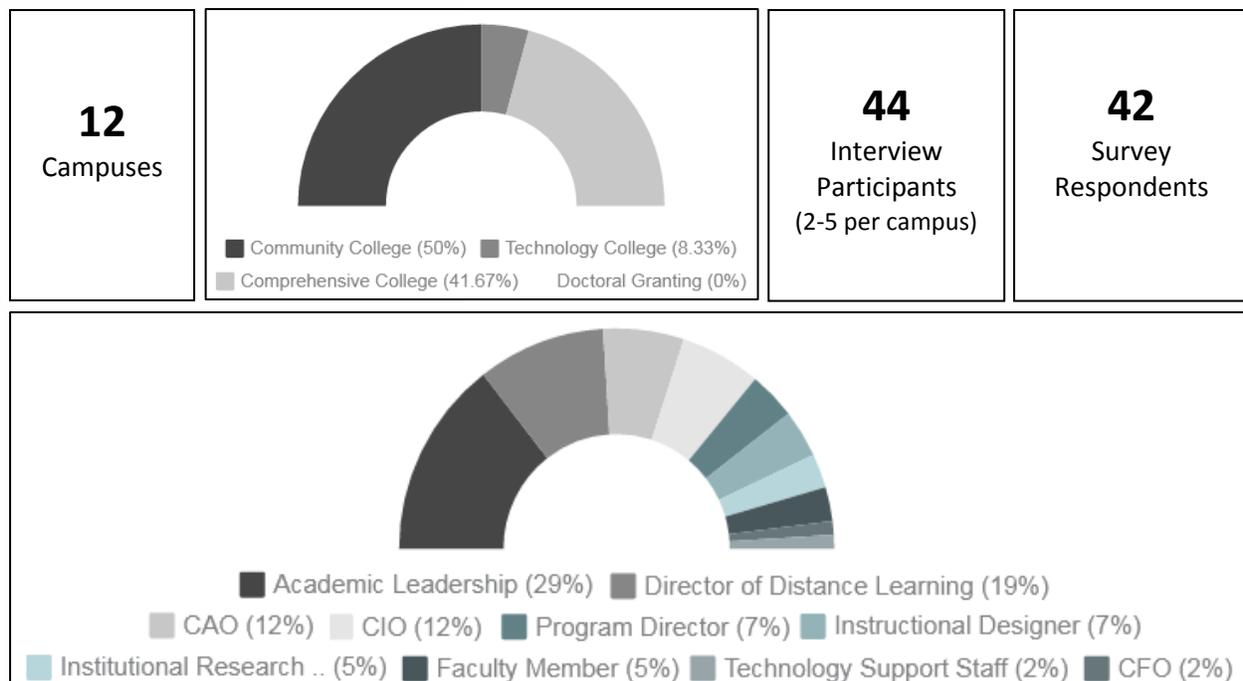# Institutional Readiness Impact Study
Spring 2017

Institutional Readiness (IR) is a three-part campus consulting engagement process designed to help campus leadership teams assess their readiness for delivering quality online learning programs. It is facilitated by expert leaders in online learning, using a nationally recognized standard for quality. The process culminates in the development of an Implementation Plan, written by key campus constituents and approved by the campus president. Open SUNY has been facilitating the IR process for SUNY campuses since April 2013. In Spring 2017, an impact study was conducted to determine how the IR process has impacted campuses and to ensure that the process is effectively meeting campus needs. The findings from that study are reported in this document. *Thank you to Pamela Youngs-Maher, of SUNY Upstate, who contributed to the development of this project.*

METHOD

The IR impact study used a mixed method design comprised of an electronic survey and group interviews. Campuses who had completed, or almost completed, the IR process were asked to participate. Ten of the 11 campuses who completed the IR process, including the approval of their Implementation Plan, participated in the study. In addition, two of the 12 campuses who completed the IR process, but have not yet submitted their Implementation Plan, participated in the study. The contact person from the IR process was emailed to ask for participation, and after they agreed to participate, they were asked to provide the names and email addresses of 2-3 additional people who were involved in the IR process on their campus. All participants were asked to complete an electronic survey and provide availability to schedule a 1-hour group interview (one interview per campus). Participants were asked to complete the survey prior to their interview date, so that interview questions could be added to clarify survey responses if necessary. The survey and interviews were completed at the beginning of May 2017.

PARTICIPANTS

12 Campuses

Community College (50%) Technology College (8.33%)
Comprehensive College (41.67%) Doctoral Granting (0%)

44 Interview Participants (2-5 per campus)

42 Survey Respondents

Academic Leadership (29%) Director of Distance Learning (19%)
CAO (12%) CIO (12%) Program Director (7%) Instructional Designer (7%)
Institutional Research .. (5%) Faculty Member (5%) Technology Support Staff (2%) CFO (2%)

Prior to their participation in the IR process, the participants had varying levels of awareness/understanding of all the factors involved in ensuring quality in online learning.

- No Awareness/Understanding 4.88%
- Some Awareness/Understanding 26.83%
- High Awareness/Understanding 41.46%
- Very High Awareness/Understanding 26.83%

FINDINGS

SATISFACTION

Overall, the participants were satisfied with the IR process.

95% Of survey respondents indicated that:
- The time allocated for engaging in the IR process is sufficient.
- The effort required for engaging in the IR process is reasonable.
- They would recommend this process to other campuses.

"Taken seriously, this is a real opportunity for guided critical self-reflection that can lead to authentic change."

"This was very eye opening. It clearly and vividly demonstrated that online programming requires infrastructure and resources. The process helped to bring everyone to the table and clarified what the issues were and action items needed to be."

"This process requires all areas to consider their role in supporting online learning."

"To have all the key players in one room to hear one another's concerns, and then to address them at that time was very important."

"I would recommend this process because it not only helps other areas of campus understand what is happening in the online world, but also helps departments to set goals related to online learning."

"Others on our campus who were part of the IR process were happy with the outcome."

*Quotes from survey responses "Would you recommend this process to other campuses? Why or why not?"

IMPACT ON CAMPUS

Biggest Benefits from IR Process

The qualitative data from the group interviews about the benefits of the IR process and Implementation Plan was first organized using a structural coding technique to separate the response by major topics. Within each topic, the responses were sorted to analyze the frequency of particular types of responses. The responses are listed below in the order of *most* to *least* frequent.

For Individuals
- Furthered personal knowledge necessary to facilitate quality online learning (almost half of the responses)
- Learned about others' perceptions about online learning
- Learned about other offices/processes on campus
- Validated good work already being done for online learning
- Clarified tasks that need to be done
- Helped make the case for resources

For Institutions
- Developed a campus-wide understanding of online learning (almost half of the responses)
- Encouraged a comprehensive view of online learning
- Provided comparison to other institutions, best practices, and standards for quality
- Helped them decide what actions/resources are needed
- Enabled them to get senior-level administrators involved in online learning
- Validated current practices
- Made the campus eligible for Open SUNY+ program designation

General Benefits from Implementation Plan
- Documented specific goals/strategies and served as a framework for actions (majority of responses)
- Provided data to benchmark against, going forward
- Encouraged prioritization of resources
- Created a starting point for future planning and may serve as an example for other campus planning efforts
- Maintained consistency through staffing changes
- Helped gain campus credibility/visibility (from documented best practices)

Specific Changes from IR Process/Implementation Plan

Several of the group interview questions asked about campus changes that occurred as a direct result of the IR process and/or Implementation Plan. The responses to these questions were analyzed and summarized in the table below. The examples of changes are listed in alphabetical order.

Some campuses noted changes that occurred during or after the IR process, but were not a direct result of the process. In some cases, discussions or meetings about that particular change occurred prior to the IR process. These changes were not included in the table.

Types of Change	% of Campuses	Examples of Change
Resource Allocation Changes	42% (5/12)	• Allocated funds in various areas directed toward online learning • Funded additional technology to address deficiencies • Invested in Quality Matters • Provided funding and support for SARA • Reconsidered budget priorities with online learning in mind
Organization or Governance Changes	83% (10/12)	• Developed concierge position • Developed new online learning committee • Developed new staff position to oversee online learning • Developed online learning office • Merged instructional technology unit and online learning unit • Restructured to ensure formal online learning representation in academic services meetings • Strengthened the online learning committee
Policy Changes	58% (7/12)	• Changed course information sheet requirements for online courses • Changed faculty compensation policy • Changed instructor evaluation method for online courses • Clarified online adjunct policies • Developed online course evaluation process • Developed policies to define faculty expectations • Enforced existing policy for all faculty to use a particular LMS • Mitigated union resistance to policy changes because the changes stemmed from the OLC Scorecard quality standards • Updated IT policies to be able to deliver items to online learners • Used OSCQR to create a course refresh cycle
Technology Changes	58% (7/12)	• Changes to LMS to support online learners • Changes to software (online tutoring, accessibility, etc.) • Contracted online student and faculty support services • Created database of prospective online students • Implemented an early alerts system to focus on online student success • Moved LMS hosting off-site • Gained more interest from faculty to take LMS training
Campus Planning Changes	67% (8/12)	• Developed assessment processes to compare outcomes of face to face versus online learning to ensure quality • Influenced campus strategic plan language about online learning • Used for Middle States process/report to show steps taken to enhance quality of online education • Used in campus enrollment plan • Used in IT strategic plan

Each campus differed not only by type and size, but also their history of online learning. Some campuses were just starting to offer online programs, while others have been delivering online learning for over 20 years. Each campus' unique circumstances influenced the degree to which the IR process and Implementation Plan directly influenced change. For example, in some cases, resource allocation and/or staffing changes were not necessary because the campus already had an established and well-supported

online program. In other cases, resource allocation and/or staffing changes were warranted, but not fulfilled because of campus budgetary constraints. Similarly, some campuses noted that they did not need to make changes to IT infrastructure because they were already using services provided by Open SUNY. Thus, it would not be fair to attribute a perceived lack of change in any category to the IR process itself.

All campuses noted that, whether they needed to make substantial changes or not, the IR process helped to document the work they were already doing and encourage discussion and collaboration with faculty, staff, and administrators across campus who are not involved in online learning in their everyday work. The participants explained that as a result of raising awareness about online learning, it made it easier to facilitate change.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The survey and group interview questions also sought to learn how each campus approached the IR process and what, if any, suggestions they have for improving the IR process. The responses to these questions were analyzed and reported below.

The OLC Quality Scorecard handbook was used by almost all of the survey respondents. Those who used it noted that the explanations and examples for each indicator were useful for the self-assessment and group discussions.

Type of OLC Quality Scorecard used:

■ Paper (43%) ■ PDF (14%) ■ Both (41%) ■ Neither (2%)
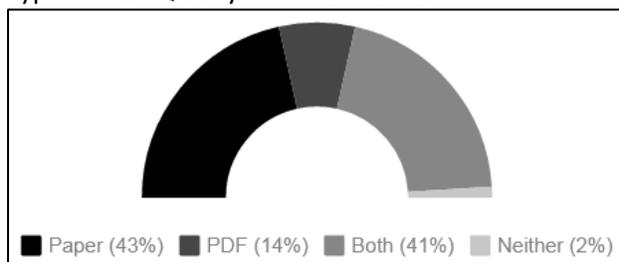
98% of survey respondents recommend that Open SUNY continues to provide the OLC Quality Scorecard handbook to every member of the campus leadership team who participates in the process.

Most of the survey respondents indicated that the categories/indicators in the OLC Quality Scorecard are comprehensive and complete. One respondent stated that it would be helpful if there are some questions added that address campus culture change and receptiveness to change. Another respondent suggested that it would be useful if some of the language in the Scorecard is modified to align with MSCHE & SED requirements. There was also one respondent who said that the categories seemed redundant, implying that some categories/indicators could be condensed/eliminated.

IR Team Composition

One of the survey questions asked respondents to indicate whether or not they believe the campus roles recommended by Open SUNY for the IR team are appropriate for the IR process. There were differing opinions on many of the roles listed, especially for CFO, CIO, CSAO, Faculty Governance Leader, and Institutional Research Coordinator. If participants selected "No" for any particular roles in the survey, a question was added to their group interview to seek further clarification. The discussion with participants revealed that the particular roles involved in the IR process depends on the campus culture and their history with online learning. For example, if the campus already has a well-resourced online program, they may not need the CFO to be present.

Altogether, the participants were uncertain about the extent to which senior level administrators should be involved in the IR process. They acknowledged that it is necessary to have the support of senior leaders, and that having them in the room sends a message that the process is important. Yet the participants were unsure if attending all three IR sessions was the best use of senior level administrators' time. Some participants argued that senior level administrators do not have enough hand-on knowledge to contribute to the discussions, so perhaps other members of their office(s) should be present instead. Other participants suggested that senior level administrators should only be involved in particular aspects of the IR process, or perhaps only involved in an additional debriefing session, to avoid them becoming disengaged. Some participants noted, however, that parsing out the IR process may reduce its ability to break down silos.

The survey also asked what additional roles should be recommended for the IR team. Respondents mentioned the following roles:
- Faculty – *Over a third of the responses noted that there is a need for more faculty involvement and a wider range of faculty from different academic areas.*
- Instructional Designers – *Four responses noted need.*
- Student Affairs Staff – *Three responses noted need.*
- Enrollment Management Staff – *Three responses noted need.*
- Technology Staff – *Two responses noted need.*
- Director of Marketing
- Academic Assessment Staff
- Disability Services Coordinator
- Chief Diversity Officer
- Instructional Technologist
- Director of Student Advising
- Registrar
- Online Students

Self-Assessment

Methods used for determining individual scores for the self-assessment (based on survey options):
- Consulted the book to be sure I was scoring correctly (83%)
- Consulted a colleague with specialized knowledge (29%)
- Met as a department, or a functional unit (27%)
- Only replied to questions of which I had knowledge (20%)
- Scored each off top of head, without much reflection (10%)
- Looked it up on the web (2%)

Recommendations to another campus about how to approach the self-assessment:
- Be clear about what IR team members should do when rating indicators that are not in their area of expertise. Some campuses encouraged their team members to rate the indicators based on their own perceptions, while others suggested that they consult with the staff on campus who are working in those areas. One campus suggested that perhaps individuals less familiar with online learning should not rate the items, but just review the Scorecard before the second session, where the indicators are rated as a group.
- Don't overthink the indicators when rating individually because there are a lot of items to get through and all of the indicators will be discussed again as a group.

- Encourage everyone to use the OLC Quality Scorecard handbook. It's important for people to have a shared understanding of each indicator.
- Make the distinction clear between assessment and evaluation to encourage IR team members to be honest with their ratings. The process is intended to shed light on opportunities for improvement, so being honest is essential. Don't be afraid to give yourself a zero.

Best Practices

Most campuses explained that they approached the documentation of best practices by having one point-person (usually the Director of Online Learning or a similar role) compile the document, but they solicited input from the staff on campus who are most directly involved with each particular best practice.

Recommendations to another campus about how to approach the documentation of best practices:
- Ask the staff on campus who are most directly involved with each best practice to document their work. You may need to leverage existing relationships with people on campus to get help.
- Convene a small taskforce to review the document before distributing it to the larger group.
- Ensure that best practices reflect established *institutional* practices – not *departmental* or ad hoc practices.
- Make sure one person, who sees the value of the process, is appointed as the project manager. They will compile the document and communicate with Open SUNY.

Improvements to the Best Practices template:
In the survey, one respondent indicated that the "Best Practices collection form was very difficult to manipulate. The numbering of the sections and the indicators made it difficult to keep track of which section you were working in. The white print on blue borders made it difficult to read as well."

Implementation Plan

Most campuses noted that the identification of possible action items and the development of the Implementation Plan began during the third IR session, where the IR team confirms the self-assessment scores and starts to discuss next steps. Each campus approached the development of the Implementation Plan a bit differently, but most campuses generally solicited input from the IR team or smaller sub-groups or a steering committee, had a point-person (usually the Director of Online Learning or a similar role) or a steering committee compile the document, and then sought feedback from senior level administrators and the larger IR team. Some campuses created a structured process to facilitate this work, while others relied on the project management skills of the point-person.

Recommendations to another campus about how to approach the identification of possible action items and the development of the Implementation Plan:
- Ask Open SUNY for examples of other campus' plans.
- Be specific with details in the plan (who, when, how, what resources).
- Be sure to include everyone who provided feedback throughout the process. They don't have to be intimately involved in the development of the plan, but they should be kept in the loop.
- Involve the appropriate budget staff so that resource requests are informed and reasonable.
- Set internal timelines to stay on track.
- Use the categories in the OLC Quality Scorecard to divide up tasks if creating smaller sub-groups to discuss action items.

Improvements to the Implementation Plan template:
- Include fields for importance, urgency, and degree of difficulty.
- Include ways to inform the campus community about the Implementation Plan and progress. Make sure there are dates/timelines associated with the action items.
- Make the spreadsheet more manageable and printable.
- Make the template electronic with autofill fields.

Overall Feedback

100% Of survey respondents indicated that:
- It was helpful to have people external to their campus facilitate the process.

The campuses who only had **Open SUNY employees as facilitators** explained that the facilitators' knowledge (about online learning and other campus' practices) was extremely valuable. These campuses thought that having one or both facilitators from other campuses, rather than Open SUNY, might not be as effective. One participant suggested that it might be best to have one facilitator from Open SUNY and one from a campus. Another participant recommended that if one facilitator is from a SUNY campus, they should be from the same type to account for campus culture differences. One campus had different facilitators throughout the process and said that having the same facilitators would have been helpful.

Characteristics that **hindered** the implementation of the IR process:
- Scheduling
- Lack of understanding and/or involvement from higher-level administrators
- Scarce availability of resources
- Staffing changes
- Opposition to online learning
- Lack of honesty in self-assessment

Some campuses were surprised by the amount of **time and effort** it took to complete the IR process, but most thought that it was manageable and worthwhile. Many participants acknowledged that the days are long, which may make staff hesitant to participate, but they did not have many ideas for improving the process. One participant emphasized that it's important for the IR team to be present in person. Another participant suggested scheduling the days closer together in the summer to help avoid stalling the momentum. One campus, who has a long history of online learning, thought that the time was not worth the benefits. For this campus, the process became less of a team effort and more of an individual burden.

Participants from multiple campuses suggested that the **documented Best Practices** should be more readily accessible to campuses. The campuses that had many best practices to document feel as though their work is not serving a purpose. One participant noted that it would be nice to know how many times, and with whom, their best practices have been shared.

Some participants noted the need for additional **follow up from Open SUNY during the IR process**. One participant explained that maintaining communication with campuses throughout the process is essential to not losing momentum. One campus said that it took two months to get feedback from Open SUNY about their Implementation Plan, which held up actions on their campus. Another campus stated that they never got feedback from Open SUNY about their Implementation Plan, which was completed a year prior.

Numerous participants expressed an interest in additional **follow up from Open SUNY after the IR process has concluded**. Several campuses suggested that on-going expectations from Open SUNY, a regular follow up process, or a refresh process, would be helpful. Multiple participants explained that, without a follow up or refresh process, Open SUNY does not know if the campus actually made improvements. One participant explained that additional follow up could not only hold campuses accountable, but also serve as justification for budgetary requests. The participants were uncertain about what this process should look like (IR process again or abbreviated process), but they felt that it would be beneficial for supporting campus continuous improvement.

A few other suggestions from participants included:
- Create a network of campuses who have gone through the IR process so they can leverage each other's experience and advice.
- Integrate the IR process and the Enrollment Planning Roundtable to help highlight the potential value of online learning.
- Make Open SUNY services and other services/solutions more obvious during the process.
- Make sure the benefits of the Open SUNY+ program designation are clear since the IR process is required for eligibility.
- Suggest that the campus facilitate their own debrief session after the IR process concludes.

Words of Wisdom
Recommendations to another campus who is beginning the IR process.

Set aside an appropriate amount of time – it's a lengthy process.	Do it! It's valuable - don't let scheduling difficulties impede the process.	Be inclusive, but decide carefully who should be involved and get them at the table.
Be honest with yourself – the process is designed for improvement.	Don't forget to celebrate the success you identify during the process.	Emphasize that it's a self-study, not an external evaluation.
Make sure high-level key stakeholders support the process – you need the process to be an institutional commitment.	Make sure the IR team uses the OLC Quality Scorecard handbook.	Make sure it is clear to everyone *why* you are doing the process.