

Open Pathway Quality Initiative Proposal Institutional Template

Instructions

The institution completes the Quality Initiative Proposal by responding to the questions in each category of the template. The institution may choose to submit a brief implementation plan or supplemental charts or graphs as appendices to the template. **Proposals should be no more than 4,500 words.**

The Quality Initiative Proposal will be accepted beginning September 1 of Year 5. It is due no later than June 1 of Year 7.

Submit the proposal as a PDF file to hlcommission.org/upload. Select “Pathways/Quality Initiative” from the list of submission options to ensure the institution’s materials are sent to the correct HLC staff member.

Submission file names should utilize the following format: QIProposal[InstitutionName][State].pdf (e.g., QIProposalNoNameUniversityMN.pdf). The file name must include the institution’s name (or an identifiable portion thereof) and state.

The enclosed Quality Initiative Proposal represents the work that the institution will undertake to fulfill the quality improvement requirements of the Open Pathway.

Terry Wilkerson

10/24/2024

Signature of Institution’s President or Chancellor

Date

Terry Wilkerson, President

Printed/Typed Name and Title

Rend Lake College

Name of Institution

Ina, IL

City and State

Overview of the Quality Initiative

1. Provide a title and brief description of the Quality Initiative. Explain whether the initiative will begin and be completed during the Quality Initiative period or if it is part of work already in progress or will achieve a key milestone in the work of a longer initiative.

Competency-Based Education

Rend Lake College's proposed Quality Initiative for this cycle is Competency-Based Education. This initiative will be a significant step forward in satisfying student demand for alternate delivery methods and for enhancing RLC's relevance in higher education and workforce preparation.

Rend Lake College (RLC) plans to offer two existing welding certificates as credit-hour, competency-based education (CBE) programs, ideally leading to continued development and expansion of CBE offerings at RLC. The certificates approved by HLC are Welding Fundamentals (CIP 48.0508), 12 credit hours, which is stackable into the second certificate, Welding Technology (CIP 48.0508), 24 credit hours.

The instruction will be provided online with flexible lab hours for hands-on practice and demonstration of competencies. The progression of this program will lead to development of CBE programs in additional curricular areas. We intend for this Quality Initiative to lead to CBE-based general education core curriculum courses, enabling students not only to earn occupational certificates, but to earn a complete Associate in Applied Science Degree in a CBE format. Additional existing programs at RLC, such as Industrial Electronics and several others, are ripe for CBE delivery as this project develops and expands.

Sufficiency of the Initiative's Scope and Significance

2. Explain why the proposed initiative is relevant and significant for the institution.

Maintaining relevance remains a challenge for higher education, and today's students seek alternative delivery options which better fit their schedules and provide an opportunity for faster completion. CBE programs will allow students flexibility in their timeline of program completion, moving forward through mastery of skills. These welding certificates will comprise Rend Lake College's first competency-based education initiative.

This initiative is relevant to RLC's mission to provide educational opportunities across cultural and economic boundaries to the diverse student population we serve. CBE is student-focused, authentic and resourceful – Rend Lake College's stated values. It also has been included as an initiative in strategic planning; this coupled with increased student demand for alternative credentials makes this Quality Initiative a timely one.

Every student has unique strengths and learning styles, and our CBE approach focuses on personalized, self-paced learning experiences tailored to individual needs. Through rigorous assessments and feedback, we will empower learners to demonstrate mastery, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and real-world readiness.

3. Explain the intended impact of the initiative on the institution and its academic quality.

Competency-based education offers prospective students the opportunity not only to learn at their own pace, but also to practice and master skills directly relevant to an occupation. According to labor market data, there is a 4.5% projected growth for welders from 2023-2027 with job availability in the RLC district 16% above the national average. When hiring CBE graduates, employers will know that those graduates have proven their capabilities with specific skills; this is a more concrete assessment of ability to do the job than a nebulous letter grade can provide. Therefore, RLC will be able to supply this in-demand industry with workers who have already proven their abilities.

Institutionally, CBE can permeate throughout and result in more CBE programming. Many career technical programs are suited to this effort, and in conjunction with the planned CBE-based general education core curriculum, Associate in Applied Science degrees will result.

Assessment of skill mastery via CBE instruction will improve and solidify the rigor of instruction. Programming offered through CBE delivery will include course objectives and outcomes emphasized clearly and concisely. The expectations of the skills students must be able to perform in order to progress become more apparent.

An added benefit results in the process of converting an existing course to CBE format. The conversion process includes a thorough evaluation and assessment of the instructional methods in light of the expectation of skill mastery, resulting in better curriculum mapping.

Clarity of the Initiative's Purpose

4. Describe the purposes and goals for the initiative.

The program is designed to serve adults and working learners, full-time and part-time, seeking educational opportunities to advance their careers in a high-demand occupation. CBE programs are well-suited to working adult learners and address many barriers, such as transportation, constraints on time, and more. Even today's "traditional" students often face some of the same pressures associated with "non-traditional" students, such as work commitments, financial limitations, family responsibilities, stress and mental health, and more. The flexible pace and scheduling of CBE programming serves potential students who have limited access due to family or work commitments.

CBE is a step forward in maintaining higher ed relevance, facilitating access to a market which is different from traditional scheduling and modalities. CBE opens new potential in terms of credit mobility in such forms as transfer, certificate-to-degree, badging for specific skills, and non-credit to credit. Employers also benefit because CBE will spell out what both employers and students gain from the effort.

5. Select up to three main topics that will be addressed by the initiative.

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Advising | <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership | <input type="checkbox"/> Retention |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Assessment | <input type="checkbox"/> Learning Environment | <input type="checkbox"/> Strategic Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Civic Engagement | <input type="checkbox"/> Online Learning | <input type="checkbox"/> Student Learning |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Curriculum | <input type="checkbox"/> Persistence and Completion | <input type="checkbox"/> Student Success |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Diversity | <input type="checkbox"/> Professional Development | <input type="checkbox"/> Teaching/Pedagogy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Engagement | <input type="checkbox"/> Program Development | <input type="checkbox"/> Underserved Populations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Faculty Development | <input type="checkbox"/> Program Evaluation | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Workforce |
| <input type="checkbox"/> First-Year Programs | <input type="checkbox"/> Quality Improvement | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: |
| <input type="checkbox"/> General Education | | |

6. Describe how the institution will evaluate progress, make adjustments and determine what has been accomplished.

We will evaluate progress on the Quality Initiative by looking at the number of students enrolled in CBE programs and analyzing their retention and completion rates, both as standalone measures and as compared to traditional delivery. We will look at metrics unique to CBE delivery as well, including the number of badges awarded for skills mastered. Time to completion also will provide valuable information. If the data shows students struggling with mastering a particular skill, we will work with faculty and students to improve the pedagogy related to that skill.

In determining what has been accomplished, we will consider the number of completers of the CBE welding certificates, as well as any subsequent programs offered through CBE delivery. Students will complete in-class satisfaction surveys, and we will evaluate employer satisfaction through communication with our employer partners via RLC's Department of Workforce Development and other appropriate departments.

Evidence of Commitment to and Capacity for Accomplishing the Initiative

7. Describe the level of support for the initiative by internal or external stakeholders.

Faculty contribute to the oversight of the curriculum, quality of instruction, and expectations of student performance. They guide academic development providing evaluation of competence and comprehensive feedback to students. Full-time faculty also participate in determining qualified instructors, analyzing assessment data and improving student learning, and tracking student recruitment, retention, and completion data of their students.

The administration at RLC also is committed to the initiative, which has been part of strategic planning in recent years. In 2022, the Illinois Community College Board awarded RLC a \$200,000 grant to facilitate development of CBE programming. Several RLC employees actively participated in

an Illinois CBE consortium in 2022-2023, receiving professional development, coaching, and guidance from the Competency-Based Education Network (C-BEN).

RLC administration supports professional development in CBE by sending faculty (both CTE and general education) and staff to CBExchange, C-BEN's national conference, and through hiring of personnel to assist with development. A notable example is the recent hiring of a Director of Workforce Development, who will be heavily involved in this Quality Initiative.

Indirectly related, RLC has made significant software purchases which will enhance our ability to track student progress and be alerted to barriers and issues in a timelier fashion. These include an upgrade of our campus ERP to Colleague SaaS, and the purchase of EAB's Navigate 360 platform for student retention and communication. The ERP upgrade is being funded through bonding, and Navigate 360 was purchased as part of a Title III grant. In combination with Canvas, our learning management system (LMS), these tools will provide faster, more accurate access to student information, grades, early alerts and more.

8. Identify the groups and individuals that will lead or be directly involved in implementing the initiative.

There will be several individuals and groups involved in leading and implementing the initiative. This includes the RLC administration, in particular the President, Executive Vice President, Vice President of CTE and Student Support, Dean of Applied Science and Technology, Director of Workforce Development, and the Director of the Southern Illinois Manufacturing Academy (SIMA) at RLC. Our qualified welding faculty, one of whom will serve as Welding Faculty Advisor, will have direct involvement. Representatives of the Industrial Electronics program will participate as well. The Director of Workforce Development, the Director of SIMA, and the Instructional Design and Assessment Specialist will assist with monitoring the progress of the Quality Initiative.

9. List the human, financial, technological and other resources that the institution has committed to this initiative.

Significant resources already are committed to this CBE initiative. As noted above, there is definite administrative, faculty and staff support. Institutional, bond and grant funds all have been deployed to facilitate this project. Several examples are listed below.

Competency-Based Education Network (C-BEN): Several RLC employees have worked with C-BEN for guidance, best practices and support in the various aspects of CBE programming. Part of the ICCB grant mentioned above, this effort has included four workshops with other community colleges in Illinois covering topics such as curriculum design, financial aid, student services, business office functions, and more. Each institution, including RLC, also received coaching hours from C-BEN.

Welding Faculty: RLC's full-time Welding Technology Associate Professor will serve as Lead Faculty Advisor for CBE welding students. He is involved in evaluating and converting welding courses for CBE delivery. Adjunct welding instructors also will be involved in CBE-delivered instruction.

Colleague SaaS ERP: At an estimated cost of \$3.5 million over five years, funded through bonds, RLC upgraded its ERP system from Ellucian PowerCampus to Ellucian Colleague SaaS. A new reporting solution, Ellucian Insights, also was purchased and currently is being implemented. This institutional upgrade will provide a better experience for students, faculty and staff, and will allow for improved reporting and data analysis.

EAB Navigate 360: Partially funded through a Title III grant at a five-year cost of \$240,000, this cloud-based platform is designed to improve retention and student communication. Also through the Title III grant, RLC was able to hire a coordinator for the Navigate 360 system.

Student Success Coaches: Funded through multiple grants, these two staff members monitor the progress of students in CTE programs and intervene as needed, serve as their primary source of on-campus support, and work with students on their plans for completion and career goals.

Welding Simulator: A new welding simulator provides a portable method for allowing prospective students to identify an interest in welding. It serves as a safe way to simulate real-world welding applications and allows students to perfect skills, receiving customized feedback for improvement.

Southern Illinois Manufacturing Academy at Rend Lake College: This facility was funded in part through a \$5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration (EDA). RLC provided an institutional fund match of \$1.2 million. SIMA is a manufacturing training center, located at the RLC MarketPlace campus in Mt. Vernon about 12 miles north of the main campus in Ina. The funds were used to renovate the existing space, construct an addition, and purchase equipment. The SIMA will include instruction in Industrial Electronics and Manufacturing Technology, both of which are well suited to CBE delivery.

CBExchange (C-BEN National Conference, November 2024, Colorado): CTE and general education faculty, staff and administration will attend this conference, funded both through institutional and grant money.

Training: The Director of SIMA and the Coordinator of SIMA have both been sent to various trainings, including Amatrol's Skill Boss Manufacturing assessment system, designed to meet Manufacturing Skill Standards Council (MSSC) criteria.

Director of Workforce Development: This position, filled in Summer 2024, includes responsibility for coordination and promotion of CBE programs and microcredentials. The position also assists CTE students with gaps in soft skills by providing Employability Skills (BUSI 1202), a course designed to acquaint students with the importance of work ethics, to be offered as CBE in the future.

Essential Employability Skills (EES): This is a series of noncredit trainings offered to local industry partners, consisting of four trainings / modules (Work Ethics, Personal Ethics, Communication Skills, and Teamwork). It offers a pathway to 1 credit hour upon successful completion of all four trainings, showing a connection between non-credit and credit delivery. Earners who demonstrate mastery will be awarded a microcredential for each training, and those who complete the entire series earn the Essential Employability Skills digital credential. The trainings are being offered Fall 2024-Spring 2025. EES offers a launching point for offering general education CBE courses. Illustrating an innovative pathway for learning and potentially earning credit, it provides an example of a course grounded in critical thinking and metacognition in which competencies will be assessed much like other general education courses. Thus, it provides a roadmap for how to build, assess, and deliver a course that is more similarly aligned with general education courses than applied science / technical courses and certificates.

Canvas Credentials: RLC is adopting Canvas Credentials, a digital badging solution which is part of our LMS. Canvas Credentials allows recognition of the mastery of skills.

Administrative Involvement: Several members of the President's Executive Leadership Team and the President's Cabinet have been directly involved in the planning and implementation of CBE. Notable examples include the college President, Executive Vice President, Vice President of Career Technical Education & Student Support, and the Dean of Applied Science & Technology.

Marketing Department Involvement: RLC's Marketing & Communications staff have assisted / will assist with promotions, website, badge design, lead generation, video development, and other promotional / informational efforts.

CBE-Related Equipment and Training Through Additional Grants: RLC has received more than \$300,000 in equipment through various grants, including Strengthening Community College Training, Taking Back the Trades, Dual Credit, and others, as well as several thousand grant dollars toward training.

Appropriateness of the Timeline for the Initiative

(The institution may include a brief implementation or action plan.)

10. Describe the primary activities of the initiative and timeline for implementing them.

We began marketing welding courses for the certificates in Fall 2024 and are ready to offer them if there is early interest. There is additional work ongoing for Fall 2024. These activities include:

- Marketing Welding CBE Certificates
- Developing a CBE Industrial Electronics Certificate
- Developing additional welding courses in CBE format, pursuing the goal of offering all welding courses in this format
- Developing and designing CBE credentialing
- Continuing curriculum development for Welding and Industrial Electronics
- Recording instructional videos for Canvas (RLC's LMS)

In Spring 2025, planned activities include:

- Offering CBE welding courses / certificates
- Submitting the CBE Industrial Electronics Multi-Tech Certificate to HLC for approval and, if approved, promotion of that certificate
- Continued promotion of the CBE Welding Certificates
- Development of Employability Skills in CBE format
- Beginning development of general education courses in CBE for Associate in Applied Science Degree students

We expect CBE course development work and professional development for faculty and staff to continue during Summer 2025. In Fall 2025, we plan to begin offering Employability Skills and general education courses in CBE which can be taken by students seeking an Associate in Applied Science Degree.

In subsequent semesters, we will continue to capitalize on opportunities to develop more CBE programming, and will continue analyzing student outcomes to adjust and improve our offerings in this modality. RLC will submit its report on this Quality Initiative by the deadline date of June 1, 2028.

With the exception of the hard deadline by which we must submit our report on the Quality Initiative to the Higher Learning Commission, we will be flexible with the above tentative timeline. New developments, problem solving, periods of adjustment, and any number of other circumstances may necessitate moving timeframes forward or backward. However, this nimbleness reflects our institutional values of being resourceful, authentic, and student-focused.

Institutional Contact for Quality Initiative Proposal

Include the name(s) of the primary contact(s) for the Quality Initiative.

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