Section 1—Executive Summary

The purpose of the legislation that established Title III-A is to "improve the academic quality, institutional management, and fiscal stability of eligible institutions, in order to increase their self-sufficiency and strengthen their capacity to make a substantial contribution to the higher education resources of the Nation."

A. Use this section to summarize how your grant is enabling your institution to fulfill the legislative intent of the Title III-A Program.

1. Summarize, in 1000 words or less, the impact your Title III-A grant has had this year in your institution's capacity to contribute to fulfilling the goals of the legislation.

Reflecting back on this five-year Title III-A project, it is difficult to imagine serving on-line students without the student services and library resources infrastructure implemented with these grant funds. The staff development and online learning resources provided as part of this project have strengthened our online learning environment and prepares a premier cohort of online faculty. The project activities taken together have increased our capacity for early identification of and intervention with online students at-risk of failure and subsequently our ability to support their learning needs. As a result we have increased our course retention and success rates over the baseline levels.

During this five-year project period the Consortium's enrollment tripled. During the same period of time, the number of students identified as "at-risk of failure" nearly doubled from 27% of the fall enrollment in 2005 to nearly 49% for the first eight weeks of the fall 2009 term. The Student Services infrastructure established and supported by this project has contributed to a consortium wide network of student services professionals at each of the partner colleges who subscribe to a common definition of "online at-risk leaner" and have establishes processes and practices at the individual campuses to support student advising and intervention needs. Each college establishes annual goals for service enhancement and for better serving the online learner. Such project-developed practices as the weekly student participation report provide the foundation for student intervention, and subsequently a lifeline for online learners struggling to cope with the virtual learning environment. One would anticipate burgeoning online enrollments and parallel growth in those identified as at-risk that any organization would struggle to support growing student needs and retain academically-needy students. Yet at the same time that the number and percent of our at-risk population doubled, the infrastructure (personnel, software, institutional research/decision-making capacity) established by this project have allowed the ICCOC to increase at-risk student course retention from 77% in fall 2005 to an anticipated 85% during fall term 2009 (based on first eight performance). Course success (grade of C or better) has improved from 57% in fall 2005 to 66% in spring 2009 for the at-risk population.

When asked to name at least one area of Students Services that was changed or modified at individual partner colleges as a result of this project, services from admissions/advising to bookstore functions to disability services/accommodations were named. One respondent took the global view and stated, "*student services [personnel] are more aware of online practices, classes, and I think all advisors are better at helping students understand the skills necessary for learning online. I also see a connection between faculty and students services and a better understanding of some of the issues related to students' attrition.*" This student services – faculty "connection" was nurtured, in part, by hands on and guided discussion sessions held between student services personnel and faculty attending the project-funded Summer Summits.

Project-funded faculty training impacted online student outcomes as well. An aggressive and comprehensive model for developing online pedagogy skills among ICCOC faculty was developed,

implemented and integrated into partner college operations during the course of this five-year project. A wide disparity in student outcomes was documented prior to award of this project. Funding supported establishment of a cadre of trained online master teachers employed at each partner college and charged with facilitating on-site training of those new to teaching in the virtual classroom (eRookies). These mentor-trainers also provided intensive hands-on training of eRookies during annual Summer Summits. In addition, all faculty new to the online environment must complete an online orientation course. The impact is quantifiably documented. Based on 2008 -2009 academic year data, student outcome rates for course sections taught by eRookies who attended Summer Summit and other projected-funding training now parallel those of the mentor-trainer cohort.

Finally, online student access processes to library resources have been streamlined, number of online resources have expanded, and student used has soared. During fall 2004, less than half of online students reported that their instructors encouraged them to use online library services. That number increased to 67% in spring 2009. The number of students reporting that online resources provided the necessary articles and other resources for course subject mastery increased from 57% in fall 2006 (just prior to library upgrade with grant funds) to 87% in spring 2009. Moreover, the number of students accessing Consortium library web-resources increased 437% in the same time period.

2. How has the grant helped to carry out the mission of the institution?

The Mission of the Iowa Community College Online Consortium is to offer quality educational opportunities to online students supported by a comprehensive set of student support services. This mission reflects the collective missions and core values of the seven partner colleges. The project was designed to strengthen and expand instructional and support services to improve online student outcomes. All faculty and student services staff attending one or more Summer Summit staff development opportunities were asked to reflect on the impact of this project on their teaching or ability to support student needs.

Faculty cited technology/software enhancements, improved student-faculty engagement, and expertise in assessing teaching strategies and student learning most often as ways their online teaching has been impacted by project activities. Indeed, on-campus and Summer Summit training activities focused on developing faculty skills in these areas. Student Services personnel most often cited development of on-campus structures to support online student advising and retention services.

A sampling of topics from the summer staff development experiences gives a glimpse of the breadth of skill development opportunities for Consortium online faculty. Summer 2005: Androgyny v. Pedagogy – Creating a Successful Online Learner; Understanding the ICCOC Course/Syllabus Checklist; ICCOC Advising Module – Making Your Mark; Camtasia Training; Digital Pens. Summer 2006: eRookie small group work; Working with Respondus Software and Publisher Text Banks; Research Web Sites for Course Content; Multiple Forms of Assessment; Retention and At-Risk Student Workshop; Online Advising Workshop. Summer 2007: Faculty Mentoring Best Practices, eFolio (Assessment) Workshop; Academic Integrity; Adding Audio to your Course; Communicating with Your Students; Pushing/Pulling in Content Manager; Online Financial Aid Process Improvement; Summer 2008: Student Panel; Respondus & StudyMate; Plagiarism and Cheating; Creating an Assessment Plan for Online Learning; Tips & Tricks to Designing and Teaching Online (hands-on). Summer 2009: eBooks and Alternatives to Textbooks; How do I Even Get Started (eRookie primer); To Test or Not to Test; At-Risk Students; Course Design and Layout; Web 2.0 tools to better communicate with students; Pearson MyLabs; Providing Practice Learning Opportunities for Your Students; Tying Unit Objectives/Competencies to Content.

The impact on student outcomes was discussed in [1] above. The impact on student perception with the online learning experience and satisfaction with the academic quality may also be quantified. The aggregated student assessment of course organization to facilitate learning grew from 63% in fall 2006 to 91% in spring 2009. Satisfaction with syllabus clarity grew from 77% in fall 2006 to 94% in spring 2009; and perception of the overall quality of online instruction grew from 74% in fall 2006 to 89% in spring 2009. In terms of faculty-student engagement, aggregated results of student satisfaction with the timeliness of faculty feedback grew from 69% in fall 2006 to 87% in spring 2009; and satisfaction with the quality of instructor attention to individual need grew from 71% in fall 2006 to 90% in spring 2009. These five elements were identified as characteristics an excellent online experience prior to grant award.

3. How did the cooperative arrangement aspect of the grant benefit the institutions involved?

Collaboration to do more together than any one college could do alone was the foundation upon which this partnership was built when established in 1999. Many were skeptical that this relationship could work – let alone last. This project has strengthened the bonds of collaboration and challenged each partner to transcend physical boundaries and provincial perspectives to truly serve the needs of the student. Community has been redefined. Neighbors are no longer those located across the street or down the road. Or rather, "down the road" has been re-defined to mean - literally - across the state. Academic quality and innovation has blossomed as a result of shared resources and shared programming. Meeting and working with faculty and staffs from across the Consortium is an oft quoted theme of end-of-project evaluation comments by those attending one or more Summer Summit. The final two Summer Summits added the dimension of interactions with online students. These sometime uncomfortable, but always informative, guided conversations and group activities have strengthened processes and expanded staff/faculty perceptions. Such honest and forthright interaction may not have been as effective if confined to one college. These students had taken classes from a variety of Consortium partners, and therefore could infuse an element of objectivity into their comments and experiences.

Finally, the economies of scale benefited all college purchases of equipment, software, training resources, and library web-interfaces. The power of the "group buy" leveraged resources for the benefit of all partners regardless of individual college size.

B. From the list below, select at least two questions that document your institution's experience with the grant during this reporting period. Please answer each question selected in 1000 words or less.

1. If your institution has experienced any unexpected outcomes as a result of this grant, that affect for better or worse its capacity to fulfill the goals of the legislation, tell us about them here.

The resources to support project initiatives has allowed the consortium to confront and harness the challenges of the phenomenal enrollment growth: tripled enrollment during the five-year period; number of sections (hybrid and fully online) grew five-fold from 6000 sections to 30,000 section; and the number of instructors grew from 50 to more than 600. Often in periods of such rapid growth, student attrition is a by-product. Yet because the Consortium had the Title III resources to support classroom and co-curricular needs, both retention and student success continued to improve.

The number and breadth of partnerships with other organizations was also unintended – but welcome – outcome. Following is a summary of the types of partnership opportunities this project has facilitated:

Project Year 1 (2004 – 2005): *eCollege, Inc. provided in-kind services over and above contractual services purchased by the project with an approximate value of $15,500: [a] piloted with the project a Student Participant Report (Zero Minute Report) which give information on students participant in each class and provides a tool for identifying and proactively communicating with at-risk students; [b] provided consortium-wide iSupport access for faculty developing online courses; and [c] provided consortium-wide Course Template access which facilitates establishing a consistent (uniform) look to all course syllabi/outlines – providing a very student-friendly format. These services enhanced project staff and faculty ability to accomplish the activities and goals established for project year 1 and contributed to the retention outcomes: [1] increased consortium-wide student retention from 85% to 86%; [2] At-Risk Student Services pilot during summer 2005 term exceeded pilot retention goal for 60% (73% retained during pilot).*

Project Year 2 (2005 – 2006): *The project's online advising model, Strategies for Student Online Success, was developed in conjunction with authors of the book MAKING YOUR MARK. This version will be available fully online starting spring 2007. This online module has led to interest from other colleges and universities around the nation.*

A significant impact in the area of assessing student learning outcomes is emerging. Project activities have implemented specific resources – Content Manager and Learning Outcome Manager – which will be used to measure and assess student learning

online and in the traditional classroom. There is potential in this area for making a substantial contribution to education locally, regionally and nationally.

National recognition by other consortia and numerous conferences presentations have provided the forum to share project activities and outcomes with colleagues globally. Projects with the Monterey Institute, University of Iowa, ePorfolio, Buena Vista University, and Midwest online consortia are among the unexpected opportunities.

Project Year 3 (2006 – 2007): [1] Additional partnership with eCollege resulted in the incorporation of *Content Manager* software for all current Consortium online courses, hybrid courses and web enhanced face-to-face courses. The benefits of *Content Manager are*: **[a] Reduced content creation and maintenance costs** by enabling a content object to be developed and updated once for delivery to many channels. **[b] Increased student retention** by ensuring the consistency and quality of learning content through centralized management. **[c] Facilitated ability to meet accreditation requirements** by standardizing the delivery of content, enabling more granular tracking of user learning outcomes, and providing a centralized view of program-wide content. **[d] Seamlessly integrated with the eCollege Teaching Solutions application** to enable simplified content migration and a reduced implementation effort. The Consortium is investigating adding *Learning Outcome Manager* to our menu of course management tools when it is released by eCollege. Learning Outcome Manager is "a comprehensive toolset that will provide an evidence-based approach to measuring student achievement of learning outcomes. The functionality will allow institutions to analyze mastery by outcome at the student, content, course and program levels to improve learning outcomes, which can help support accreditation requirements and drive program growth."

[2] The Consortium recognized the value of project-sponsored annual Student Services Summit as contributing to the overall quality of the learning experience and increased student performance. The Consortium will incorporate on-going costs to support an annual Student Services Summit into its operational budget beginning summer 2009. This summit was originally considered a short-term grant activity only.

Project Year 4 (2007 – 2008): At the partner (seven) college level: [a] Over the past four years of project operation, the individual colleges have recognized the need to formalize online education departments within their organizational structures. As a result, each college has hired _ with institutional resources _ a Director (or Dean) of Distance Learning.
[b] With the initial adoption of the grant dollars one college was able to meet an immediate need for professional development resources and computer and software upgrades. These grant-funded activities served as a _catalyst' to bring in a structured e-learning strategic plan to the institution. "The grant dollars, in essence, served as seed money and recognition that our institution can now grow and develop internal resources to supplement Title III. In addition, our "First Time Online Students" initiative which allows us to track the success and challenges of first time online students has developed into a campus-wide integration goal within student services where previously, this service was not offered."
[c] Another of the partners explained, "The extra training in the software applications made available by this Title III grant has increased the use of technology by instructors in the classroom, not just online classes. They have learned to apply the technologies available to their face to face instruction as well as their online classes."
[d] Yet another of the partners feels "face-to-face students are benefitting from the cooperative online grant through better trained faculty who are implementing web-enhanced strategies for classroom based instruction. Faculty who attended the Summer Summits often translate the improved instructional pedagogy. Faculty who refused to use web-enhancements four years ago, are now using it regularly.
[e] Some other unexpected outcomes for all partners as a result of faculty development through the Cooperative Title III grant include:
   i. Colleagues (grant trained faculty mentors) work with all online and classroom-based faculty to use web-enhancements.
   ii. Colleagues are hosting Lunch-n-Learn meetings to discuss pedagogy and new technologies.
   iii. Online faculty are actively sharing what is learned through shared space on network servers. When a faculty member develops a reusable learning object (RLO) it is shared with everyone.
   iv. Training videos are being prepared for all instructors to use.

At the Consortium level, project data collection/analysis and activities led to an understanding of the need for a new position to respond to changing course delivery schedules, sustained enrollment growth, and diversity of online student and faculty needs. The Consortium has recently employed a full-time Instructional Support Specialist supported entirely with institutional funds to formally address course quality continuous improvement. Parallel to this is the Consortium's continuation of eCollge Course Review Audits funded originally as a grant-funded activity in the first project years. The value of these external agency audits to continuous improvement of course quality has been supported by data collected by this project. Each of the seven colleges receives funding for two Course Reviews per year. This is a $14,000 per year commitment by the Consortium.

Project Year 5 (2008 – 2009): The Consortium voted in summer 2009 to continue to annually fund the highly successful staff development training model of the Summer Summit. This intensive multi-day training retreat for seasoned and new online faculty and student services personnel has built a cadre of master online teachers and dedicated staff striving to support online students at the level they arrive yet guide them to be competent self-advocates and self-directed learners.

2. **Has the grant facilitated or contributed to bringing additional resources to your institution, for example, new Federal, State, or local dollars that can be attributed partly to your grant activities?**

During this five-year grant period, project initiatives have facilitated numerous contributions. Following is a summary of the additional resources received:

o *ICCOC expanded the Student Services Concierge position from 50% to 100% with consortium funding.*
o *ICCOC funds purchased online tutoring services for all seven partner colleges, pilot began with fall 2005 term.*
o *eCollege provided $15,500 of in-kind services to the project that supplemented faculty development and at-risk student services components of this project. See narrative above.*
o *eCollege selected the ICCOC to beta test outcomes tracking software as a result of the increased capacity to support students and learning outcomes through establishing a full-time Student Services Concierge position.*
o *Noel-Levitz invited the consortium to pilot test a new online student perception survey as part of their Retention Management System because of project focus and Student Services Concierge capacity.*
o *eCollege Inc. has provided additional training as an in-kind contribution. This included guest speakers at the Summer Summit to share online advising statistics and strategies to improve student completion and success rates. To date the Consortium – through the project – has received in excess of $30,000 in in-kind contributions from eCollege.*
o *The library component which will allow students to authentic only once to have access to consortium-wide federated searching capabilities is coming in under budget.Web Feat Inc. will contribute access to Web Feat Xpress for all online AND face-to-face students when the project is initiated early in 2007 as a result of project collaborations. This contribution for an annual subscription is valued at $7,900.*
o In January 2007, eCollege committed resources to the project to undertake, at no cost to the Consortium, a "collaborative analytical and qualitative assessment of [Consortium] online offerings." The goals of the Program Review were "to determine how the Consortium performed historically, to identify what the drivers of that performance are, and to provide recommendations to realize the identified opportunities." Outcomes of this Program Review were presented at eCollege's national conference (CiTE) in Denver, CO (March 2007). The estimated cost of this review and the ongoing potential benefits for program and student outcomes improvement is several thousand dollars.
o In addition, eCollege contributed the staff costs to train three project staff in use of Program Intelligence Management tools for ongoing program assessment purposes. This training was part of an Online Outcomes "dashboard" pilot to continuously track Consortium outcomes related to student performance and retention.
o A partnership between Minnesota Online and the ICCOC consortium was an outgrowth of this Title III project's assessment and student services initiatives. ICCOC has partnered with Minnesota Online to pilot ePortfolios as a means to enhance online students' learning experience (see faculty pilots, #2[b]).
o Two of the partner colleges received Title III-A Strengthening Institutions individual college grants during this past year. Both projects build on needs identified from participation in this Title III grant. Both enhance the individual college's ability to provide professional development and other resources to improve the online learning environment.
o Requests for Consortium and project staff to share our project successes with other colleges and organizations, including eCollege and Blackboard, have led to collaborations with potential for further enhancing online learning outcomes.
o The Consortium is one of only five colleges, nationwide, selected to pilot the Community College Assessment of Online Student Engagement. This pilot is currently underway (fall 2009).
o And finally, *Increased revenues from growth in online student enrollment, retention and satisfaction have benefited all partners.*