

CAT1 McKendree Highlighted Example for 21st Century Tool

Technological Fluency Institute delivers CAT1 – a computer assessment and tutorial program – in response to increased needs for determining the technological literacy and fluency of students and teachers.

CAT1 is a dynamic, online, diagnostic-prescriptive learning program that interacts with users to ensure they can demonstrate competence on 24 performance objectives comprising the six standards deemed most necessary for success in using computers, the Internet, and essential productivity software. CAT1 consists of four major components: an assessment program, a learning program, a management system, and certification.

- The assessment program consists of 24 performance-based items.
- The correlated learning program contains more than 100 learning activities designed to educate users in step-by-step intervals.
- The robust management system provides program administrators with access to numerous reports and forms specific to their organization.
- Successful completion of the assessment program within three attempts results in certification by TFI.

Many organizations across the United States employ CAT1 in a variety of settings. McKendree College in Lebanon, Illinois, is one such organization. This private, comprehensive college with a liberal arts tradition and focus is the oldest in Illinois, but being 175 years old doesn't stop McKendree from being on top of technology.

More than 100 McKendree students, both graduate and undergraduate, are enrolled in CAT1 each semester. According to Dr. George Fero, chair of the Division of Education, the college uses CAT1 as a program admission requirement for graduate studies in Education. It is also a component in the Technology in the Classroom course that is required for undergraduate teacher education majors. College officials have noticed that students who have completed CAT1 are better prepared to apply technology to classroom teaching.

McKendree has benefited from CAT1 in multiple ways. Fero says that CAT1 “has given us a means to document and verify that teacher candidates at least meet teacher education performance and knowledge standards related to state and NCATE [National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education] standards.” Furthermore, the Division of Education can verify “that all teacher candidates and graduate students have the same base knowledge and performance skills and that they have met minimum state accreditation standards for technology.”

McKendree students also benefit from participation in CAT1. Fero explains, “For those with minimal technology experience and skills, it has given them significant confidence.” Students who successfully complete the program receive printed certificates from TFI. Students look forward to receiving their certificates. McKendree scans student certificates and includes the scanned version in the students' electronic portfolios as evidence that they met the designated technology standards.

Student reaction to the program has been positive. This reaction, in part, is because the program is easy to use and gives each participant immediate feedback. If a participant does not satisfactorily complete a given performance measure in the assessment, the participant is directed to a corresponding learning unit of instruction.

While the learning program is accessible at all times, McKendree students typically use the tutorials after incorrectly answering a question. Additionally, the SimReality environment that facilitates the performance-based assessment benefits participants because, as Fero states, “It forces them to do actions on the computer that either they have not had the need or experience to perform.”

McKendree has multiple administrators for the CAT1 program. In fact, each section of the required undergraduate course has its own administrator. The primary administrator for the college is the Director of Teacher Education. Course instructors also serve as administrators. The college does not require program administrators to be certified in CAT1, but all have done so.

Administrators use the CAT1 management system to facilitate the program. The interface is easy to use and provides administrators with raw data and analysis about participant progress. Fero says that the most important element of the management system for McKendree is the ability to aggregate scores. The college uses the reports on a regular basis and studies the candidate completion rates as well as students’ number of attempts to complete items.

CAT1 is an affordable and reasonably priced product. Fero explains that McKendree passes the cost of the program on to its students, as CAT1 is sold through the college bookstore. The bookstore includes a small markup on the base cost of the program; thus the college recoups the initial expenditure for the program.

Fero explains that implementing CAT1 has been good for the college. “It has saved us time and resources that would have been needed to develop our own assessment instrument for accreditation needs.”