



CASE STUDY

Central Michigan University

The English Language Institution (ELI)



ABOUT iTEP

The International Test of English Proficiency (iTEP) was introduced in 2008 to modernize English language assessment with on-demand scheduling, 24-hour grading, and accurate test data. iTEP provides a convenient and cost-effective testing option delivered in a highly secure test center environment or remotely at-home.

iTEP offers academic testing for secondary schools and universities for both admissions and on-campus ESL programs. iTEP also offers a range of career testing used by companies around the world to determine English proficiency needed for hiring and promotion decisions. For more information see www.itepexam.com.

CASE SUMMARY

When the Covid pandemic affected its in-person English proficiency testing methods, Central Michigan University (CMU) needed to develop a solution. In-person exams assessed international students when they arrived on campus and allowed the university's English Language Institute (ELI) to evaluate students' skills for accurate course placement. But when international students were unable to travel to the United States, CMU required an online testing method to assess students. The university chose the iTEP exam as its preferred online testing method. Students who took the iTEP exam were assessed for grammar, reading, listening, speaking, and writing while in their home country, and their exam results were sent to the ELI within 24 hours. Josh Adams, the current Director of the English Language Institute, could see how the iTEP exam streamlined the proficiency assessment process and eliminated the need for manual grading. The students' score reports provided the ELI with helpful information about incoming students, enabling them to prepare for the upcoming semester with greater confidence and efficiency.

Even though international students are now able to travel to the university campus and could potentially take an in-person exam, Director Adams plans to continue using the iTEP exam at Central Michigan University because of the benefits it provides.



THE PROBLEM

Central Michigan University (CMU) is a four-year public university with its main campus in Mount Pleasant, Michigan, USA, with smaller satellite campuses located across the state. The university welcomes learners from around the world and has a robust international student population. Many students attend CMU to study at one of the university's strong undergraduate programs such as the Business Information Systems program, which is known for its SAP software education. The English Language Institution (ELI) at CMU has also gained attention among international students since it was established in 2014. The ELI supports international student learning, both academically and culturally, offering English language instruction and opportunities for students to engage in cultural exchange. Students can improve their language skills through multiple programs including the Intensive Program, the Dual/ Bridge Program, and the Summer Language Study.

Before the pandemic, the ELI assessed incoming students using a traditional pen-and-paper exam, which tested grammar and listening skills as well as writing abilities. The ELI tested students when they arrived on campus and then placed them in classes after staff graded, reviewed, and normed the exams. "The first week would be an orientation week. We would bring the students in. We had our own tests we would give out. We would norm them together because, yeah, we had 30 people, right? Why not spend part of that prep week norming and placing students where they needed to be," said ELI Director John Adams. When the pandemic prevented students from coming to campus, in-person assessments were impossible. The university had to find an online testing method that could accurately assess students in their home country and provide instructors with meaningful results that followed industry standards.

THE APPROACH

Before Central Michigan University adopted the iTEP Academic-Plus exam in 2020, the ELI primarily received information about students via their student forms and visa paperwork. This information was often insufficient to accurately assess students' English language skills. With a lack of proper testing, instructors were uncertain about what to expect for the upcoming semester. "It was impossible to prep your courses because you didn't know who was coming and what their levels were," said Director Adams.

With iTEP's score report, Director Adams saw a significant improvement in the information the ELI received about students' abilities prior to their arrival. "I can look at what [students] actually said and how they responded. I can read their writing to the prompts. I can watch their spoken review." With this information, the director could make informed decisions about what courses to provide incoming students, and instructors could prepare for the semester with confidence. This became especially important when the ELI department had less staff available to teach classes. "I might need to offer a level two and a level four [course]. And if a student's a level three, I can't really offer level three sometimes. So, I can go in there, look [at their score report], and say, 'Okay, actually the student is three, but they're on the high end. So, I think that they're going to be safe going to level four,'" said Director Adams.

The iTEP Academic-Plus exam also simplified the assessment process by eliminating the need for manual grading, which was

often time-consuming and labor-intensive. iTEP computers graded the grammar, reading, and listening sections, and human, ESL-trained professional graders evaluated the speaking and writing sections. ELI staff no longer had to dedicate the first week of the semester to proctoring, reading, grading, and norming students' exams. iTEP's exams also followed industry standards, so results were easy to understand and incorporate into the university's system.

THE iTEP SOLUTION

Central Michigan University initially implemented the iTEP Academic-Plus as a solution for its in-person testing challenges. However, the exam provided more than the university could have expected and has revolutionized its language assessment procedures. The iTEP exam improved the process by allowing students to test prior to their arrival, eliminating the need for manual grading, and providing the ELI with accurate information about students' abilities and support needs. iTEP Academic-Plus was the best solution for Central Michigan University. ELI Director, Josh Adams, plans to continue using the exams, which have streamlined the university's assessment and placement practices. The director stated, "I don't think it makes sense to go back to doing [the testing] ourselves."

For more information about Central Michigan University, visit their website at <https://www.cmich.edu/>. To learn more about iTEP's English Proficiency exams at the university level, contact iTEP at info@iTEPonline.com.



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