

Accountability in Practice—Microsoft IT Academy
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Background on Microsoft IT Academy

IT Academy is a global education program for secondary and higher education students to boost technology skills and help connect learning and careers, providing schools with official learning content, online courses, digital books, software licenses, lesson plans, quizzes, and teacher prep resources to help students realize their potential and pursue industry-recognized certifications.

ITA programs are designed to provide students with college- and career-ready technology skills on a range of leading industry programs including spreadsheets, databases, word processing, presentation tools, programming, network administration, collaboration tools, etc. Built with a series of online learning courses and modules mapped to industry demand certifications, courses cover a range of technologies and subject areas, including Microsoft Office, applications development, database management, and network and systems administration with Windows Server. In total, ITA offers more than 250 courses.

Currently, program membership includes more than 12,000 member schools across K-12 and higher education in 133 countries, serving more than 7.5 million students. This includes 12 broad statewide adoptions of IT Academy across the US. In Virginia, IT Academy programs are now in more than 350 high schools. According to one popular job search engine (indeed.com), there are more than 11,000 currently advertised job openings in the Commonwealth of Virginia that prefer or require Microsoft skills and certifications (March 2013).

IT Academy: Vehicle for Accountability

IT Academy emphasizes industry certification attainment as a benchmark for achievement, giving students the opportunity to earn one of several industry-recognized credentials. The most common certification earned at the high school level is the globally-recognized Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) certification. A student can be certified on any single Microsoft Office application to be Microsoft certified (e.g., MOS Excel).

Key accountability and assessment measures available to ITA instructors include:

- Tools to monitor student progress, including quizzes and test bank questions
- Projects and activities emphasizing industry technology tools
- Practice tests
- Industry certification exams

Tools to Monitor Student Progress

Teachers have the ability to monitor student progress on modules and courses in the online learning tools. Each student has a unique identifier e-mail and login password, and teachers can monitor student participation (logins), course time, and performance on quizzes and assessments where applicable.

Rigorous Learning Formats

IT Academy content is available in a variety of rigorous learning formats, including the Microsoft Official Academic Curriculum (MOAC). MOAC utilizes a task-based approach to learning Microsoft Office skills and preparing for Microsoft Office Specialist (MOS) certification. MOAC also employs a Lesson Skill Matrix to correlate skills taught in each lesson with the MOS objectives (Certification, Workplace, and

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Internet Ready exercises) using three levels of increasingly rigorous lesson-ending activities (Competency, Proficiency, and Mastery Assessment).

Key components of learning include:

- Step-by-step instructions with software tools
- Business scenarios
- Key terms
- Reader aids tied to certification objectives
- New Feature icons focusing on new software version functions

Industry Certification Exams

For certification exams, the assessments are high-stakes, computer-based, proctored exams in which students complete a set of performance-based tasks and answer questions specific to various Microsoft technologies and applications. Exams are timed in a secure classroom with a qualified teacher serving as proctor. Students receive exam score reports upon completion.

Microsoft certification exams are globally recognized by employers, governments, and consumers. The exams are mapped to industry standards and to expectations of hiring managers and organizations for implementing technologies in the workplace. Individual exam items are regularly evaluated and scored for validity. Microsoft has a full-time psychometrician as well as an exam development group working with industry assessment standards in creating exams and exam score items based on current workplace requirements for our technologies.

Value to Industry

Industry uses certification as one vital benchmark to evaluate whether or not job candidates possess requisite skills for specific positions. Here are some data points illustrating the value industry places on IT certification:

- **Eighty-six percent** of hiring managers indicate IT certifications are a high or medium priority during the candidate evaluation process. (CompTIA, *Employer Perceptions of IT Training and Certification*, January 2011).
- **Eight in ten** HR execs verify certifications among job candidates. (CompTIA, *Employer Perceptions of IT Training and Certification*, January 2011).
- **Ninety-one percent** of hiring managers consider certification as part of their hiring criteria. (Microsoft, *Microsoft Certification Program Satisfaction Study*, April 2012).
- **Sixty-four percent** of IT hiring managers rate certifications as extremely high or high value in validating the skills and expertise of job candidates. (CompTIA, *Employer Perceptions of IT Training and Certification*, Jan 2011).
- Certification, training, and experience are **three of the top four** most important characteristics for a candidate for a cloud-related position. (IDC, *Climate Change: Cloud's Impact on IT Organizations and Staffing*, Nov 2012).

For more information on Microsoft IT Academy, see the attached slides and/or watch the video:

<http://tinyurl.com/itavideo>.