

EXCEL OVERVIEW -- SUMMER 2014

At IMSA you will be immersed in a rigorous academic curriculum and residential program among bright and talented young people from all corners of the state. You will be supported by faculty and staff who will encourage you to challenge yourself and grow. There are many resources and programs at IMSA, and one of these is Excel.

WHAT IS EXCEL?

Excel is a three-week pre-enrollment program that focuses on skill development and problem solving in mathematics, science, and English, as well as residential living. The Excel program is held on IMSA's campus for three weeks in July for students already accepted to IMSA. Students will be able to build connections with peers, upper-class students, faculty and staff. It is by invitation only. There are between 40 and 50 Excel students and 10 upper-class Excel Tutors.

All students selected for admission to IMSA are qualified. Accepted students come from diverse school districts and geographic regions. Not all are exposed to equally challenging opportunities. The Excel program is an opportunity for incoming sophomores to encounter the academic and residential experiences, resources, and support that will enhance their three-year IMSA experience. Students are selected to attend the Excel program based on factors that include SAT scores, transcripts, previous school performance, past curriculum, selection committee recommendations and placement tests administered in June.

Possible outcomes after the three week Excel Program:

1. Successful completion of Excel
2. Completion of Excel with specific expectations designed to support continued progress during the school year

OR

3. Did not successfully complete Excel; denied enrollment in IMSA. *This is determined when academic or behavioral performance indicates that student does not have the preparation necessary for success in IMSA's academic and/or residential programs.*

EXCEL CURRICULUM

The **Mathematics** component of Excel is a review, extension, and "polishing" of topics that are essential for success in the Mathematical Investigations program, as well as in science and other IMSA mathematics courses at IMSA. Additional topics designed to practice discovery-based learning (where students are encouraged to make connections for themselves) will be introduced.

Students will be expected to demonstrate progress in analyzing problems, identifying and applying connections between topics, and using various technologies as appropriate tools. In addition, they are expected to show improvement in straightforward mathematical

manipulation, performing correct algorithmic processes and pattern recognition. Assessment will include long term problem set assignments, daily activities in class, problem solving group work, quizzes and exams.

The **Science** components are designed to introduce students to scientific thinking and experimental design, carefully examining evidence, formulating questions, and writing up observations and conclusions. Students will have both Biology and Chemistry each day, and will demonstrate their understanding of concepts while practicing successful learning approaches for IMSA's science curriculum.

IMSA's **English** program focuses on literacy skills in its broadest sense (that is, reading, writing, listening, speaking, and viewing). Excel English introduces students to the daily habits of critical reading and oral and written expression that enhance their ability to communicate their ideas. Students will engage in the writing process to develop ideas, provide evidence and organize their thoughts for a finished product. Written assignments will require drawing conclusions and substantiating ideas based on readings, discussions and academic field trips, and citing sources appropriately. Assessment of progress will include papers, class discussion and presentations.

Success with Excel academics involves more than just earning passing grades. It also involves providing evidence that you can and will collaborate both in and outside of the classroom with classmates, tutors and teachers, that you are willing to ask for help, that you will persist in your work and not give up when faced with a problem you cannot solve at first, that you are willing to try different strategies and approaches to learning, that you will accept different ways of teaching. You will work towards evaluating your own progress, assessing your level of understanding and taking appropriate steps.

The **Residential** curriculum is designed to introduce students to living and learning away from home, among a diverse community of bright and talented students from many different parts of Illinois. Rights and responsibilities of living as a member of a community (at IMSA and beyond) will be part of on-going discussions. Both the residential and academic components will involve field trips in the greater Chicagoland area. Students will have the opportunity to meet with and question IMSA administrators and staff, developing connections that will support their success at IMSA.

The goals of Excel are as follows:

- To help students acclimate to the IMSA academic and residential environment.
- To provide disciplined study and learning experiences that will encourage strong academic commitment and performance during the school year.
- To provide students with early access to resources necessary to meet individual needs during the year.
- To provide students with a broad network of faculty, staff, peers and upperclassmen who will continue to be supportive resources during the school year.
- To provide an evaluation and assessment of each student's Excel performance that will help faculty and staff provide appropriate supports during the academic year.

WHAT ARE THE EXPECTATIONS?

Excel students are expected to work hard, do their best, and demonstrate progress in developing necessary academic and residential skills, including working collaboratively with others, problem solving in new contexts, completing assignments and seeking appropriate help from other students and staff. We expect you to become better aware of yourself as a learner. In short:

- **Work hard, and do your best.** *Success is not determined by what you already know, but from your willingness to work, take on new challenges and collaborate with others to master concepts, identify and solve problems, and to develop all aspects of yourself as a learner.*
- **Be open-minded.** *Reflect on your own strengths and interests. Listen to others' perspectives and try new approaches. Make new friends, explore new ideas and learn more about yourself.*
- **Respect the rights of others.** *You will encounter many diverse individuals at IMSA. Respecting each person with their values and beliefs, as well as their right to privacy and self-esteem is critical. No matter what you achieve, your leadership skills will be dependent on your ability to work well with others*
- **Be honest.** *There will be many times during your IMSA experience when you will need to exercise good judgment and positive decision-making. We recognize that you will make mistakes; accepting responsibility for your actions in these instances is critical. Integrity is a must.*
- **Have fun.** *Finding enjoyment – while learning and while playing – helps you balance the challenges and benefits of living at IMSA.*

We look forward to getting to know you this summer!