

Excel Program Overview

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, including EXCEL.

WHAT IS EXCEL?

EXCEL is a 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 who have already been accepted to IMSA. Students will be able to build connections with peers, upper-classmen students, faculty, and staff. The mandatory attendance is by invitation only.

All students selected for admission to IMSA are qualified. Accepted students come from diverse school districts and geographic regions. Students are exposed to diverse academic 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 a variety of factors, including transcripts, prior school curriculum, selection committee recommendations, and placement test performance.

Possible outcomes after the three-week EXCEL Program:

1. Successful completion of EXCEL
2. Completion of EXCEL suggests that some support(s) will be required during the school year as outlined in the final EXCEL letter.
OR
3. EXCEL academic performance and/or behaviors that suggest successful completion would be a challenge for the student; acceptance rescinded. *The student does not demonstrate 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 essential for success in the Mathematical Investigations series, as well as in science and other IMSA mathematics courses. Additional topics designed for 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 demonstrate improvement in straightforward mathematical manipulation, performing correct algorithmic processes, and pattern recognition.

Assessment will include long-term problem-set assignments, in-class activities, problem-solving group work, quizzes, and exams.

The **Science** component is designed to introduce students to scientific thinking and experimental design, carefully examining evidence, formulating questions, and writing up observations and conclusions. Students will take an integrated science class that includes Biology, Chemistry, Physics, and Introduction to Scientific Research, and will demonstrate their understanding of concepts while practicing effective learning approaches for IMSA's science curriculum.

IMSA's **English** program focuses on literacy skills in the broadest sense (reading, writing, listening, analyzing, 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, and citing sources appropriately. Assessment of progress will include essay planning/outlining, various writing assignments, class discussion, and in-class presentations.

Success with EXCEL academics involves more than simply 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. Success is also seen in 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, and that you will accept different ways of teaching. You will work towards evaluating your progress, assessing your 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 ongoing discussions. Students will have the opportunity to meet with and question IMSA administrators and staff, developing connections that will support their success at IMSA.

GOALS OF THE EXCEL PROGRAM:

- 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 their individual needs during the academic 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 support during the academic year.

WHAT ARE THE EXPECTATIONS?

EXCEL students are expected to work hard, do their best, and demonstrate progress in developing the necessary academic and residential skills, including collaborating with others, solving problems 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 by 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's 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 playing – helps you balance the challenges and benefits of living at IMSA.

We look forward to getting to know you this summer!