University of Illinois
Fire Service Institute
Evaluation Policy and Procedures

Developed by the
Illinois Fire Service Institute
University of Illinois
Illinois Fire Service Institute

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University of Illinois Fire Service Institute
Evaluation Policy and Procedures
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I. General Information

Sound examination policies and procedures are the cornerstone upon which the Illinois Fire Service Institute (IFSI) makes determinations as to whether the student achieved the course objectives. It is the intention of IFSI to effectively measure to what degree learning has occurred through a fair and consistent examination process. This policy applies to and shall be utilized for the development, administration, evaluation, and scoring of all cognitive/written and psychomotor/skills examinations delivered as a part of IFSI programs.

II. Certification

Certification in its most simple form means that an individual has been tested by an accredited examination agency on a body of clearly delineated material and found to meet or exceed the minimum standard. IFSI provides opportunity for individuals to pursue both state and national level certification.

The Illinois Fire Service Institute has received course and/or exam approval for many certification levels from the Office of the State Fire Marshal (OSFM). IFSI has also received accreditation through the National Board on Fire Service Professional Qualifications (Pro Board). Requirements for each certification level may include specified prerequisites, successful performance of required skills and passing of the written examination.

The Illinois Fire Service Institute will only allow individuals to advance to the next level of certification when proof of prerequisite requirements is produced. This may consist of documentation verifying successful completion of acceptable educational and training programs or certification by an accredited agency. (ProBoard, IFSAC, OSFM) No request for certification will be processed by the Illinois Fire Service Institute until all paperwork has been verified. All paperwork must be completed and have all required signatures, dates, hours, scores, topics, etc., before certification will be awarded.

The Illinois Fire Service Institute does not delegate any of its certification authority to any other agency, entity, or individual at this time.
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III. Course Attendance

The staff at IFSI has worked diligently to ensure that the content taught within IFSI courses is relevant and essential to the job duties. All of the content has been determined to be required knowledge to safely and successfully complete tasks required of first responders in the line of duty. As a result, IFSI requires students to attend or make up all course content to receive their certificate of completion. Students are expected to attend class on time and to remain in class for the duration of the class session. If a student misses any portion of class with an accumulated absence of 20% or less of scheduled class time, it will be the student’s responsibility to arrange the make-up of the missed course content with the instructor(s) or program manager. The student must make up the specific course content that s/he missed, not just the hours. A student must complete all portions of a certification course, both classroom and practical, to establish eligibility to sit for the end-of-course exam, unless otherwise specified. Make-ups are limited to eight hours of absence per forty hours or 20% of scheduled class time. If a student’s absence is greater than 20% refer to “true emergencies” section below.

Instructors are required to keep a record of attendance on the Illinois Fire Service Institute Roster according to the following procedures:

- The Class Roster must be filled out at the first class meeting and reflect attendance at all class sessions. Demographic, billing, and reimbursement information should be reviewed by the student in the first hour of the first class meeting.
- Attendance is to be taken from the Class Roster at the scheduled start time of each class session.
- Should a student be absent for any reason the lecture(s) and/or practical(s) missed will be documented on the Class Roster. Be specific regarding duration of time students miss e.g. “student returned thirty minutes late from lunch.”
- The hours and dates on the Class Roster must correspond with the course schedule.
- The names should be typed or printed as they are to appear on their certificate.
- The lead instructor must turn in the IFSI Class Roster with other class-closing paperwork at the end of the course.

True Emergencies

The Director of the Curriculum and Testing Office must approve absences beyond the 20% on a case-by-case emergency basis. Some true student emergencies may occur that IFSI may choose to accommodate. A student may be allowed to make up missed classroom lecture, practical exercises, and exams if the absence is approved. The absence will be considered excused only if extenuating circumstances are documented and provided within seven (7) calendar days of the absence. A student must be able to verify such extenuating circumstances such as sickness, death in the immediate family, military deployment, certain legal considerations, or certain work-related emergencies.
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Timeliness of Initial and Make-up Exams

Tests are scheduled at the training location and are administered at the end of the course. All students are allowed twelve months from the last day of class to make up and complete any missed course content and/or written or practical examinations. After one year has passed from that date, an student must re-enroll and take the course over.

IV. Challenging of Examinations

At this time, IFSI does NOT offer challenge examinations for Illinois State (OSFM) certifications or ProBoard certifications. To obtain a national (ProBoard) certificate through IFSI, the student must take the IFSI course. If the student has already taken the course it must have been taken after the level of certification was approved.

V. Security of Exams

Exam security is maintained in all steps of development, processing, printing, storing, packing, shipping, and exam administration. Test banks, tests, and other items stored on the computer network are only password accessible by the Curriculum and Testing Staff and the IT Staff. Contact with any test material is kept to a minimum number of personnel. The back-up electronic files are secured on the server.

Individual exams are assigned a booklet number. A log is kept of each test created, and booklet numbers are assigned to maintain inventories. Any booklets retired from use are shredded and recorded in the log. A copy of each test ever created is maintained permanently in an archives folder. Only the curriculum and testing staff have access to hard copies of exams in storage. All exam hard copies are locked in either the Testing Office or exam kits. Exam questions and/or tests are never left unattended in open areas.

During the validation process the questions are projected onto a screen, members are not permitted to take notes and members are instructed to maintain strict test bank confidentiality. Exams are made available on a limited “check-out” basis to subject matter experts for supervised editing and validation. A record of disbursement of test questions is kept. Such a hard copy of the test questions shall include no more than 25% of the test bank per individual.

If at any time exam questions are believed to be compromised, such as booklets unaccounted for, those test questions will be retired and removed from circulation.

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VI. Creation and Local Validation of Written Exam Items

Test Banks

Illinois Fire Service Institute test banks are comprised of questions developed by IFSI Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) and/or from approved test banks which are based on National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) standards.

Separate test banks are maintained for each course of study. A goal is to have each bank consist of at least twice the number of questions used per test generated. Test banks are locally reviewed by a combination of test support specialists, SMEs, and Program Managers. Persons involved with test bank validation are recorded and their credentials are stored and filed. During validation of the test banks, SMEs will review each question to ensure validity of content. Every question in a fully validated test bank is cross referenced to an IFSI course objective and/or OSFM objective(s) and/or NFPA, Job Performance Requirements (JPRs).

Correlation work is done to ensure that the test bank and/or skill sheets equip IFSI with the ability to evaluate the entire standard. The test banks are reviewed by IFSI every time the edition of the NFPA standard is updated or the course curriculum is significantly changed.

Test Bank References

One hard copy of the test bank is printed and housed in the Testing Office. IFSI Program Directors, Program Managers, and Field Staff Instructors do not have copies of the finished exam or any components of the exam. Program Staff have limited access during validation work under the direct control of the Test Support Specialists. All documents associated with test development or validation are shredded upon completion.

After administration, test questions are further analyzed for ongoing validity. Any questions that are identified by the test takers and listed on the Student Feedback Form are reviewed. These questions are then analyzed by the Test Support Specialist in consultation with the appropriate Program Director or Manager for errors in language, logic, grammar, and/or factual mistakes.

VII. Development of Written Exams

Program staff identifies the number of questions per exam and the required distribution across the applicable NFPA standard. Then cognitive/written exam questions are randomly selected from a validated bank of questions to form an exam. These exams will be identified by a Test A, B, or C. The goal is to have no more than 75% redundancy between these tests. Students who retest on a given exam shall be tested off of Test B. It is recommended that examinations be administered for no more than 30 months from the implementation date.
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When developing tests for certification purposes, the test is reviewed to ensure test items representing the various components of the standard are evaluated. Any courses that are state approved will have a minimum of 50 questions and reference all OSFM objectives (Per JCAR Administrative Code Section 141.230). Once a test has been developed it is proofed and approved by the Test Support Specialist, the Program Director/Manager, and the Curriculum and Testing Director.

Ten versions (0-9) of each test are printed. The Testing Office then assigns the printed test with the appropriate booklet number. Exam booklets are housed in a restricted area of IFSI with limited, controlled access. All outdated and unusable copies of test versions are shredded. Documentation of exam booklets that have been shredded are logged.

VIII. Reliability of Written Exam Items

Reliability is ensured by an ongoing process throughout the life of a written exam. Questions are categorized by difficulty (p value) and discrimination (rpb). Questions with a p value that fall below 60% or above 90% correct response are evaluated by staff. Questions falling outside of these criteria are reviewed and compared to the lesson plan, textbook, and/or other course materials. These questions may be modified or removed from the bank.

Question statistics are updated after every administration of a test. Item Statistics Reports are generated and reviewed regularly. The cumulative statistical data for the test bank is reviewed using the Bank Listing Report. These two reports are evaluated by the Test Support Specialist and Program Director/Manager to determine question reliability.

Student feedback is reviewed by the Program Director/Manager upon receipt. Raw data collected by the testing office includes: roster, group detail report, test statistics report – percent, and test statistics report – points.

IFSI ensures that students are not penalized for errors that occur during the test development process. If the program staff confirms that an error occurred that negatively impacts a student’s pass/fail status, the student’s record will be changed.
IX. Development of Skills Evaluation Items

1. Program staff develop the objectives for the course.
2. The objectives are referenced to the corresponding state (OSFM objectives) and/or national standards (NFPA JPRs). This is done to ensure that all applicable standards are satisfied.
3. Program staff determine what psychomotor objectives will be evaluated by a skills exam.
4. Performance Evaluation Checklists (PECs) or skill sheets are developed. (The instructional materials for a given skill are developed based on the performance measures listed on the PEC.)
5. PECs are validated and piloted by other qualified members of the Program Staff with expertise in a given area. Critical performance measures are also identified at this point.

X. Selection of Skills Evaluation Items

Performance Evaluation Checklists (PECs) are identified as “critical” or “non-critical” by the Program Staff. Critical PECs are mandatory and shall be tested at every evaluation, by every student, while only a percentage of the non-critical items shall be tested. A goal of at least 35% percent of the total psychomotor/skills developed for a given program shall be tested during each evaluation for each student. Non-Critical Items shall be randomly selected one of two ways:

A. Enter the total number of skill sheets into the test-generation software, the software will randomly select which PECs to utilize for a given administration (Preferred for all examinations).

B. Write each skill sheet identifier on a slip of paper, folded in half, and draw lots until the correct number of items has been selected. Items may only be selected once. (This method is to be used only if the exam generation software is unavailable).

In addition to randomization of non-critical PECs, if all the students are not being evaluated on the same skills, student assignments shall also be randomized.
XI. General Administration of Exams

IFSI Field Staff Instructors have been trained as IFSI Proctors for written exams and Evaluators for skills exams. Examinations are administered by qualified Proctors and Evaluators, to individuals who have met all the course requirements, including completion of all course hours. Proctor and Evaluator procedures are followed in a uniform manner regardless of the testing site. Program staff is responsible for monitoring and evaluating their Proctors and Evaluators. Any immediate problems should be reported to the testing office. The Curriculum and Testing Staff also observe evaluation sessions to ensure compliance with policy.

Proctors and Evaluators should avoid even the appearance of misconduct. Staff should avoid proctoring or evaluating relatives or supervisors. The order in which cognitive/written and the psychomotor/skills requirements are met is irrelevant.

Time Limits
The maximum length of time allowed for testing is based upon the number of cognitive/written exam items, a certain amount of time will be given for every exam item. If the total exam time does not fall on a whole minute, the exam time will be rounded to the next whole minute.

XII. Administration of Written Exams

The proctor to Test Taker Ratio should not exceed 1:40, some situations and testing sites may require additional proctors. Proctors verify student’s eligible (attendance & identity) to test by checking off names listed on the Official Course Roster. A student appearing at the test site, whose name is not on the Official Course Roster or was not scheduled for a retest at the exam site, shall not be tested. The proctor must confirm the student’s identity against a government issued identification card (I.D.) and have the students sign the Exam Agreement Form. If a student is unable to produce a government issued I.D. they must not be allowed to test. IFSI offers courses through the Cornerstone Program and these classes do not require students to preregister. Walk-in students such as these will only be allowed to test if they have completed an IFSI registration form and have completed the course requirements. If a student does not show up for class or the exam s/he will be marked as a no-show on the roster.

The proctor will read the student instructions aloud to the students word for word. The proctor confirms that all students understand the exam instructions before proceeding. Students should not open the exam booklet until instructed to do so by the proctor. Students are asked to note exam letter, booklet number and version number on their answer sheet. The proctor should note the time the test started and announce when the time limit has been reached. Upon completion of the examination, the student will return all testing materials to the proctor. In the case that any student has a question or complaint about an individual exam item, the student shall make a written record of the inquiry including item number and comments on the Student Feedback Form.
Proctor Training
New proctors will complete the online proctor training program and observe at least one testing session. New proctors will be monitored during their first exam session by a qualified proctor, ideally their Program Manager or Regional Representative.

Test proctors are required to sign a memorandum of understanding outlining that they have read and understand the Illinois Fire Service Institute Evaluation Policy and Procedures and that they understand that they are responsible for administration and security of the exam. (Refer to the current Proctor Resource Manual for additional information.) Staff are informed of immediate changes or updates to policies or procedures by email.

XIII. Exam Accommodations

It is the policy of the Illinois Fire Service Institute (IFSI) to administer its end of course exams in a manner that does not discriminate against an otherwise qualified applicant. IFSI offers reasonable and appropriate accommodations for the written components of the end of course examinations for those persons with a documented disability, as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

IFSI written examinations are designed to test the knowledge of first responders to provide safe and effective service to the citizens of Illinois. As such, the content of the examinations often reflects the current National standards as well as state and local standards.

IFSI urges students requesting any accommodations to submit such requests as early as possible, ideally when he/she registers for the class. This advance notice will provide adequate time to resolve any documentation issues that may arise. The Application for Reasonable Accommodations must be completed in its entirety (click here to view the Application) and must include documentation establishing the specific disability and the reason for the accommodation. The submitted documents must provide sufficient evidence to demonstrate how their limitation impacts the student in the testing environment.

IFSI curriculum and testing office will review each request on an individual basis and make decisions relative to appropriate accommodations based on the following general guidelines:

1. To be considered for accommodation under the ADA, the student must present adequate documentation demonstrating that his/her condition substantially limits one or more major life activities.
2. Only individuals with disabilities who, with or without reasonable accommodations, meet the eligibility requirements for certification at the level of the requested examination are eligible for accommodations.

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3. Requested accommodations must be reasonable and appropriate for the documented disability and must NOT fundamentally alter the examination’s ability to assess the essential functions of an identified position/job, which the test is designed to measure.

4. Documentation demonstrating the current level of functioning of the student must be no older than three years to help ensure accommodations are based on assessment of the disability’s current impact on the student’s ability to take the examination.

5. Professionals conducting assessments, rendering diagnoses of specific disabilities and/or making recommendations for appropriate accommodation must be qualified to do so.

6. All documentation submitted in support of a requested accommodation will be kept in confidence and will be disclosed only to the extent necessary to evaluate the accommodation. No information concerning an accommodation request will be released to third parties without written permission from the student.

XIV. Scoring of Exams and Retests

After receiving the answer sheets, the Illinois Fire Service Institute uses a scanner to score the test responses. Several checks are used to ensure the accuracy of its scoring process, including hand-checking answer sheets for stray marks or incomplete erasures, and randomly choosing answer sheets for hand scoring. Results are provided to the program staff and once this data entry is complete students are automatically notified via e-mail. This process is to take no longer than six weeks. No exam scores or evaluation results will be given by telephone.

Records from exam administrations are maintained with the class file in a secure environment under the direct control of IFSI staff. These hard copy records are retained for three years; the electronic records are maintained in the database which can only be accessed by the student or certain administrative staff.

The lowest minimum passing score on an IFSI cognitive/written examination is 70 percent. Any student who fails to pass an examination has twelve months, from their date of exam, to retest. Students are afforded one initial and two retest attempts within those twelve months. The request for retest should be submitted 30 days in advance of date requested. Students are only allowed to request a maximum of two exams on any given test date. If the student does not attend their scheduled retest (considered a “no show”), that counts as a failed attempt. If a student fails their third attempt or the twelve months have elapsed they must re-enroll and take the course over.

Students who wish to appeal the results of their evaluation (their test score), part of this policy, or any part of the evaluation process should contact the testing office in writing within twelve months from their date of exam, voicing their concern. This appeal or challenge will be reviewed by the Director of Curriculum and Testing and may be reviewed by the Deputy Director. Students will be informed in writing of the decision rendered.

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XV. Breaks

Students are discouraged from taking a break during an exam. If a student must excuse themselves, he/she is required to turn in all testing materials and electronic devices, such as a cell phone. Note, a student’s time does not stop. Only one student is allowed out of the room at a given time. This break must be recorded by the proctor on the Proctor Feedback Form.

XVI. Emergencies

For emergency situations such as severe weather, the proctor has the discretion to make a decision on discontinuing the exam. In the case of acute illnesses, family emergencies, or the legitimate need to respond to an emergency call for service during the exam in which the student must leave the room before completing the exam, the student will contact the testing office to schedule a time to complete his/her exam. The proctor will document how much time into the exam was used and from what question the student left off. Students will not be allowed to view any portion of the exam they already completed. The same exam booklet and answer sheet will be provided to them and they will be allotted the remaining time available to them to complete the exam.

XVII. Cheating

The proctors are given the authority to remove any student from the testing area and testing process in the event that a violation is suspected. Proctors should document any such occurrence on the Proctor Feedback Form. Any proctor may ask a student to turn in an exam and leave the exam room for any of the following reasons:

- Looking at another student’s exam
- Talking to another student
- Use of an electronic device such as a cell phone
- Looking at notes during exam including, but not limited to: notes inside sleeves, or on eye patches, water containers, drink containers, hand, desk, or chair.
- Unauthorized admission or re-admission into the room
- Loud or disruptive behavior
- Attempting to remove an exam from the room or attempting to take items for someone
- Attempting to impersonate another student
- Any form of cheating
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XVIII. Exam Kit

Proctor Receiving Exam Kit
Exam kits will be shipped from the IFSI Testing Office approximately seven to ten days prior to exam date. The kit should only be received and opened by qualified IFSI Proctors. Upon receipt, open as soon as possible to verify contents of the kit against the materials list found in the Proctor Resource Manual. The exam kit will contain the following:

- Pencils
- Test Booklets / Retest Booklets
- Exam Proctor Instruction Sheets
- Testing Sign(s)
- Answer Sheets
- Exam Scratch Paper
- Completed Paperwork Folder
- Student Feedback Form
- Test Administration Report / Proctor Feedback Form
- Copy of the Illinois Fire Service Institute Evaluation Policy and Procedures
- Return Shipping Label, if applicable

If any discrepancy is found please note on Proctor Feedback Form and call the testing office. Upon resealing the exam kit place it in a secure location such as your locked vehicle or a locked office where others cannot access it.

Proctor Returning Exam Kit
At the end of the exam, the proctor will account for the exam booklets used and place the booklets back in numerical order. The proctor will assemble and return all testing materials to the exam kit. Any unused paperwork for the exam will be placed back into its original folder and any paperwork used during the exam will be placed in the “Completed Paperwork” folder. The proctor will then return the exam kit to the Illinois Fire Service Institute no later than one week after the date of the exam.

XIX. Administration of Psychomotor/Skills Evaluations

The Illinois Fire Service Institute evaluates students’ ability to successfully complete skills. The process ensures that all or a fair representation of the job performance requirements are tested. The establishment and enforcement of the following procedures ensures comprehensive testing is completed and that the student’s skills inventory is met through random sampling of the skills.

Performance evaluations shall be completed in a standardized and objective manner. All skill stations shall be set up in the same manner for each student. Once the evaluation begins, the configuration of the evaluation stations shall not be altered in any way. Evaluations must start and end the same for each participant. To aid in objectivity, Performance Evaluation Checklists (PEC) or skills sheets that identify the performance measures and grading criteria must be used for all students. PECs are provided as part of the program and should be available in the Instructor and Student Manuals.

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The staff evaluating a particular skill (Evaluator) cannot be the same individual that taught that skill. These staff assignments are determined by the Program Director or Manager. An instructor is obligated to present, assist, coach and help students learn the knowledge and skills required to master the content of the course. He or she must do so while in the “teaching/learning environment.” Each student should have the opportunity to practice and apply knowledge and skills during this time. The role of the evaluator is to test the student, and not provide any assistance or coaching to the student during testing. Evaluators are monitored by Program Managers on a regular basis.

*It shall be made known to the student when the teaching environment transitions to the testing / evaluation environment.*

Students shall be kept separated during evaluations to ensure accuracy and to prevent confusion by students witnessing a skill being performed incorrectly. If possible, evaluation stations should be separated so that the students taking the test cannot see or be seen by the other participants. If the station is outside, this can be accomplished by using available physical barriers or distance.

Prior to the evaluation starting, the evaluator shall give specific instructions pertaining to the test being conducted. Evaluators will ensure that all proper tools and equipment are available for the skills evaluation. In addition, students shall be advised of test security requirements and procedures for leaving the examination area prior to completion. The Evaluator shall ensure exam security, such as, ensure that students are properly staged, and that no materials other than those issued for the exam are in the staging area. In the event of a suspected breach in test security, the Evaluator shall have the authority to confiscate the alleged violator’s unauthorized materials, and terminate that student’s examination.

The Evaluator shall be directly responsible for ensuring safety of all students during all psychomotor/skills testing. Evaluators shall stop the psychomotor/skills evaluation any time if the safety of the student or evaluator is in question. Evaluations involving live fire training in acquired structures are led by members of the IFSI Burn Team which ensure compliance with NFPA 1403.

Failed Attempt(s)
All skill exams will be tested on a pass/fail basis. The pass/fail criteria for each skill are outlined on the skill sheet. Students must successfully complete 70% of the non-critical performance measure as the minimum to receive a passing score. Any student who is not able to perform the skill in the field shall not be allowed to pass. If a student is unsuccessful in their first attempt at completing a skills evaluation, the evaluator will document an explanation of the skill(s) that were performed inappropriately. The student should be told by the evaluator that he/she was unsuccessful in their attempt to pass the evaluation and will be given a second attempt with the same evaluator. If the student is unsuccessful on this second attempt, a third attempt with a different evaluator will be conducted. The new evaluator should then re-read the instructions and evaluate the student. If the student is unsuccessful in their third attempt he/she must re-enroll and take the course over.

*Any exceptions to this policy may be made at the discretion of the Deputy Director.*
Appendix I.  Proctor Qualifications

Cognitive/written exam proctors must meet the following requirements:

- Must be an employee of the Illinois Fire Service Institute.
- Read and understand the Illinois Fire Service Institute Evaluation Policy and Procedures.
- Complete Exam Proctor Training Program.
- Must observe one exam administration conducted by the Illinois Fire Service Institute.
- Must be monitored and mentored on one occasion by an existing Illinois Fire Service Institute experienced Proctor.
- Understand the possibility of being randomly audited by an existing Illinois Fire Service Institute staff member.
- Attend/complete required updates.

Appendix II.  Evaluator Qualifications

Psychomotor/Skills Evaluators must meet the following requirements:

- Must be an employee of the Illinois Fire Service Institute.
- Read and understand the Illinois Fire Service Institute Evaluation Policy and Procedures.
- Must complete Evaluator Training Program.
- Must observe skills evaluation session conducted by the Illinois Fire Service Institute.
- Must be monitored and mentored on one occasion by an existing Illinois Fire Service Institute experienced Evaluator.
- Should be part of the instructional team for the program that is being administered, but must not have instructed the skill for which he/she is evaluating.
- Understand the possibility of being randomly audited by an existing Illinois Fire Service Institute staff member.
- Attend/complete required updates.