An English Language Center for International Students
at Purdue University

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Executive Summary

Since 2007, Purdue University has experienced significant growth in its already large international student population and is now at the forefront of U.S. universities seeking to find effective means to support campus diversity and internationalize students’ education. To address campus needs from this change in student demographics, the University is developing a model of English language support for international students. This proposal outlines the next phase of development. The goal is to create a comprehensive language support program that (1) is embedded within the University’s institutional context and constraints; (2) maximizes value and efficiency; and (3) supports all Purdue students to succeed and graduate.

Problem: Language and cultural barriers between international and domestic students, and between international students and faculty.

- The University’s enrollment model is based on matriculating nearly 1,200 international freshmen per year.
- Despite an increase in TOEFL scores of admitted students, the University still admits many students whose scores do not reach the language thresholds necessary to fully participate (TOEFL IBT Total, 100; Speaking, 25).
- Raising TOEFL requirements to desired levels would effectively eliminate this problem but would exclude about 70% of the entering international freshman class.

Solution: An English language center and a sequence of language support courses.

- An English language center will leverage and extend opportunities for support that presently exist on campus.
- All international freshmen with scores below 100 on the TOEFL and/or below 25 for the TOEFL Speaking section will be required to complete a two-course sequence of English language instruction.
- Requiring these courses as prerequisites for ENGL 106i and COMM 114 and partnering with other university programs (ISS, CIE, the Writing Center) to extend and develop services will result in a language support system comparable to those offered at peer institutions.
Introduction

This proposal outlines a plan for a comprehensive English language support program for international students embedded within Purdue’s institutional context and constraints. At Purdue, possibilities for development of English language support are complicated by (1) current legislative mandates (i.e., the 120 hour undergraduate program limitation), (2) on-line registration of incoming international students prior to arrival on campus (STAR), (3) limits on availability of faculty and instructional staff with appropriate applied linguistics/ESL expertise, and (4) historical underdevelopment of support. These conditions restrict the development of an adequate and appropriate response to the needs of our large population of international students.

In order to clarify the different forms and functions of institutional responses to the need for English language support, the proposal is organized in the following five sections: (1) introduction, (2) summary descriptions of types of English language support programs (IEIs, EAPs, ITA, MA TESL and PhD programs), (3) the current configuration of English language support at Purdue, (4) descriptions of specific institutional examples of English language support programs (UIUC and USC), and (5) a proposal for an ESL Center at Purdue University.

International Students at Purdue Today

International undergraduate and graduate students are academically successful as measured by GPA, retention rates, and graduation rates, all of which are on par with or slightly better than domestic peers. Notwithstanding, the University is matriculating more and more students from abroad who experience English language and cultural challenges both inside and outside the classroom. The majority of these students hail from China.

Many voices across campus have expressed opinions about how to deal with challenges presented by increasing enrollments of international undergraduate students. Faculty often believe the solution is to raise admission standards without fully understanding enrollment and revenue goals. Enrollment Management and Business Services areas are focused on enrollment and revenue and are content with the academic success of our students, regardless of the language and cultural issues that exist. Some faculty and staff alike believe that we should offer additional English language instruction to a certain subset of students in order to address language and cultural issues. Still others believe that our faculty need to revisit how they teach in classrooms where students now look, behave, and learn very differently than even five years ago. Each view has merit and contributes to the complexity of the issue.
Problem

The University’s current enrollment model is based on matriculating nearly 1,200 international freshmen per year. This goal requires the University to admit the best possible class as measured by academic success, English language proficiency, and diversity.

The average TOEFL score of an incoming international freshmen has increased from 88.2 in 2010 to 94.6 in 2014. For the same years, scores for Chinese students have increased from 83.7 to 91.8. TOEFL scores of non-Chinese students have increased from 93.8 to 99.5 during the same time period. Notwithstanding these good gains, we still admit and matriculate a large number of students whose entry-level TOEFL scores fall below a total score of 100 and below 25 in the Speaking section (approximately 70%). Research, along with the practice of our peers, shows that students with scores below these thresholds are in need of support in order to develop the English language skills that would allow them to fully participate opportunities for learning and engagement both inside and outside the classroom. If we believe that our international graduates should be linguistically and culturally proficient and be able to compete for jobs in an English language environment, then we need to help these students develop a better mastery of the English language through supplemental instruction. Improved English language skills will also benefit the University’s Student Integration projects as international students more conversant in the English language will be more able and willing to communicate with domestic peers.

Solution

We could raise TOEFL requirements to 100 (total) and 25 (Speaking) and effectively eliminate this problem, but if we did so we would lose more than 70% of our entering international freshman class. We propose a more realistic response -- requiring the successful completion of a two course required sequence of English language instruction for all international freshmen with scores below 100 on the TOEFL and/or below 25 for the TOEFL Speaking section. We estimate nearly 700 international freshmen will qualify for this program. While a two-course sequence falls short of comparable programs at comparable institutions, we believe we can extend support by not only introducing a required, introductory sequence but also by leveraging, repurposing, and extending the opportunities for support that presently exist on campus (106i in the 3rd semesters, Comm 114 as a capstone in the 4th semester, along with extended Writing Center conversation groups, and extended and enhanced partnership activities in collaboration with ISS across/throughout the first four semesters). Making GS100 and 101 required prerequisites for 106i and COMM 114 would result in a language support sequence comparable to the support sequences offered at our peers but would limit the requirement for additional courses to only two.
Types of English Language Support Programs

Intensive English Language Institutes (IEIs)

Many universities, regardless of size, have Intensive English Language Institutes (IEIs). These programs are pre-admission programs, designed to increase the English language proficiency of students who score **below admissions cutoffs** (typically 60-80 on the TOEFL iBT). IEIs usually require at least 20 hours of English language instruction per week, have relatively small class sizes, and can have as many as 6 levels, depending where they allow entrance. A student entering an IEI with a 60 on the TOEFL, may spend up to 4 semesters in 20-hour-per-week English language instruction to reach entry-level proficiency. IEIs may be targeted at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, although most are geared toward undergraduates.

A function of many IEIs is to facilitate enrollment into the host institution, as the IEI provides a pathway into the college/university, and students often remain where they have become comfortable. Contrary to common perceptions, IEIs at large institutions (e.g., UIUC & USC) are not needed to increase the applicant pool nor are they likely to contribute significantly to increased enrollment. IEIs tend to be self-supporting and a relatively easy way to generate revenue that can be used to support affiliated programs.

IEIs also have merit as a means of securing more successful outcomes with international students. Students who have gone through an IEI have been argued to be better candidates, and ultimately more successful, than many international students who enter with higher language proficiency but have not had the opportunity to transition and acclimate to the broader institutional context through being enrolled in an IEI. For example, Hoekje (2012) reports positive outcomes in terms of increased retention and stronger GPAs for students who were matriculated through the IEI at Drexel when compared to those who have matriculated directly and with higher entry levels of English language proficiency.

Interestingly, USC recently (2014) opened a new IEI, despite having one of the largest international enrollments in the country, and thus probably not needing to attract international applicants. The USC International Academy¹ ("Intensive. Immersive. Invaluable.") targets pre-admission English-language proficiency applicants at both the undergraduate and master’s levels. Like Purdue, USC certainly has no need for more international applicants, but providing an IEI may be a strategy for not only increasing revenue but also increasing the success of a portion of admitted international students.

¹ [http://international.usc.edu/intensive-english-program.php](http://international.usc.edu/intensive-english-program.php)
English for Academic Purposes Programs (EAPs)

Many/most universities with large international populations have English for Academic Purposes Programs (EAPs). EAPs are post-admission support programs designed to increase the English language proficiency of students who meet low-end admission requirements but are still considered in need of English language support (typically 80-100 on the TOEFL iBT). An important function of these programs is the provision of post-entry testing, the results of which are used to place students into appropriate EAP levels and content classes. Most EAPs adopt a four skills approach (reading, writing, listening, and speaking), but writing and speaking tend to be emphasized.

A comment on entry-level admission standards for language proficiency is appropriate here. Most institutions are aware that the most commonly used entry-level cutscore for English language proficiency (most often 80 on the TOEFL iBT) represents minimal language proficiency in terms of first-year academic demands and expectations; thus, the need for and provision of EAPs and post-entry testing. A total score of 80 corresponds to the 50th percentile on the TOEFL, so informed institutions or test score users (e.g., admissions officers) expect a wide range of proficiency when students enter with TOEFL total scores from 80-120. Institutions or programs that hope to avoid language-related preparedness problems require a TOEFL total score of not less than 100 (e.g., University of Chicago; University of Michigan and UIUC in selected undergraduate and graduate programs).

Each semester, EAP students enroll concurrently in one or two English language support classes and academic courses. EAP courses typically have separate undergraduate and graduate sequences, but enrollment is required for those in both groups who test in after required post-entry testing. Once enrolled, students may be required to complete the entire sequence, they may have the opportunity to test out at critical junctures, or they may be allowed to exit based on classroom performance.

International Teaching Assistant (ITA) Programs

Most universities with large populations of international graduate students also have programs to screen and prepare international teaching assistants. Purdue’s Oral English Proficiency Program (OEPP) was established in 1987 during a period when the use of international students as teaching assistants, especially for introductory undergraduate courses, had become an object of critical scrutiny by state legislatures across the country (known as The Foreign TA Problem in the relevant literature). In the late 1980s, twenty- two state legislatures passed mandates requiring oral English proficiency screening; Purdue and IU narrowly avoided being subject to a legislative mandate by establishing the OEPP.

Like EAPs, ITA programs provide both post-entry testing and English language instruction, but only for prospective ITAs. ITA programs may also be expected or required to monitor
departmental compliance with a university’s ITA policy through employment and certification status monitoring and reporting.

**Graduate MA TESL and PhD Programs**

IEIs, EAPs, and ITA Programs are often found with and are supported by graduate MA Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) or PhD programs in applied linguistics/linguistics. Graduate MA and PhD programs may be housed in English, Education, or Linguistics Departments, or they may function independently of a department, reporting to a broader university entity – a college or the provost’s office.

The association of English language programs with academic programs is mutually beneficial, as IEIs, EAPs, and ITA programs offer opportunities for funding, employment, and training for graduate students and, in turn, the academic programs supply a steady stream of instructors for the IEIs, EAPs, and ITA programs. In addition, revenue from IEIs and EAPs is often used to cover associated academic program costs. Finally, participation in English language support programs also provides the graduate students enrolled in MA/PhD programs with opportunities for research. The research conducted by graduate student researchers is cost effective and contributes to the evaluation, development, and academic status of IEIs, EAPs, and ITA service programs.

**ESL Programs at Purdue**

The ESL Program at Purdue currently consists of four independent components/programs:

1. **The Graduate Program in Second Language Studies/ESL (Grad SLS/ESL)** is a program in the English Department and has four tenure-track faculty positions. Three of the faculty members also hold the administrative positions associated with Purdue’s ESL programs (Berns, .25, Director, SLS/ESL PhD; Silva, .25, Director, ESLWP; Ginther, .50 Director OEPP Testing and Instruction). A new hire, Staples, has no administrative responsibilities. These four faculty members teach all the courses in the SLS/ESL PhD program, and three share PhD advising of the 40+ PhD students enrolled. Students in the SLS/ESL Grad Program serve as instructors for the required English Composition course (Engl 106), the ESL Writing Program (ESLWP/Engl 106i), and the Oral English Proficiency Program (OEPP/Engl 620).

2. **The ESL Writing Program (ESLWP)** offers a sheltered ESL alternative (Engl 106i) to the required undergraduate English Composition course (Engl 106). The number of 106i classes offered has increased from approximately 10 per semester in 2006-07 to 30 per semester in 2014-15. The ESLWP is limited to a single undergraduate course (Engl 106i) and a single, infrequently offered graduate course (Engl 621). If enough undergraduate
sections were offered to meet current demand for the course, we would be offering an additional 20 sections each semester.

3. **The Oral English Proficiency Program (OEPP)** is responsible for screening the oral English proficiency of all prospective international teaching assistants and offering English language instruction (Engl 620) for those students who do not pass the Oral English proficiency Test (OEPT). The number of classes offered has increased steadily from 6 per semester in 2002-03 to 13 per semester in 2014-15. The OEPP is limited to a single graduate course (Engl 620); however, we do offer a professional development section for students who have completed the course and are preparing to go on the job market. Only one section of the professional development version of the course is offered each year.

4. **Purdue Language and Cultural Exchange (PLaCE)** offers two courses that can be considered incipient EAP courses: GS 100 and GS 101. These courses are currently under development and are being piloted. Fall semester 2014, 320 eligible students (TOEFL Speaking subscale scores <23) in three colleges (Exploratory Studies, Krannert, and Science) were automatically enrolled. We had hoped that these students would remain through the intended two-semester sequence. However, approximately 200 students dropped the second course of the sequence (GS 101), despite providing excellent course evaluations for GS 100, when it becomes apparent that the course was not required and would not be accepted in their major for academic credit. Five sections were then opened to graduate students and all have filled. Enrollment for spring 2015, including graduate students, hovers around 160 (as of 1/26/15).

**Summary**

Purdue has no ESL Program in the traditional sense. However, all Big Ten universities with comparable international populations have an IEL or an EAP (usually both). Purdue’s only program that resembles a traditional English language support program is the OEPP, which is limited to a single course for prospective ITAs (about 10% of the graduate student body). While the SLS/ESL PhD Program supplies and trains graduate student instructors for Engl 106i and Engl 620, the number of graduate students enrolled is already beyond the advising capacity of its four faculty members (only three are associate or full and each has .25/.50 administrative responsibilities). At the same time, the demand for qualified TAs is increasing.

The course offerings provided by PLaCE and the ESLWP (GS 100, GS 101, Engl 106i) represent three foundational language support courses; however, these courses represent only about half of the required course offerings provided by fully fledged EAPs at comparable universities.
Given institutional constraints at Purdue, perhaps requiring these three courses in sequence, with COMM 114 as a capstone, is the best we can do at the present time.

**English Language Support at UIUC and USC**

Selected characteristics of language support programs at Purdue, UIUC, and USC are presented in Table 1, Program Comps. Institutional approaches at UIUC and USC are of particular interest as their current international enrollments are comparable to those of Purdue, but UIUC and USC provide extensive English language support.

*Post-entry testing and EAP enrollment is required, admission is conditional*

Both institutions require (1) post-entry assessment of all incoming undergraduate and graduate students who enter with a TOEFL total score less than 100, and (2) obligatory enrollment in language support classes provided by their EAPs for those students who do not pass the in-house, post-entry assessment. At both institutions, admission is conditional until students have successfully exited the EAP. Consider the testing and language requirements outlined on the UIUC English as a Second Language (ESL) and Service Programs website:

**General Principles for All ESL Enrollments:**

If a student is mandated to take the EPT (as stated in the letter of admission), then the results of the EPT determine mandatory courses as part of the student’s course of study. Until the student completes those courses, s/he is on limited admission status. The requirement to take the EPT is made by the Office of Admissions and Records, based on the student’s pre-matriculation test scores (e.g., TOEFL, IELTS, and for undergraduates, also ACT or SAT) and other application information. For graduate students, a department may require the EPT even if the campus admissions office does not.

If a student is not mandated to take the EPT, s/he may still enroll in ESL courses as an elective, without penalty. The student’s admission exemption from the EPT will be unaffected by any ESL course taken as an elective. However, the EPT is the primary vehicle to determine accurate placement in the general [ESL or academic] courses. Elective ESL students need to go through the EPT to allow us to properly advise them into ESL coursework.
Courses offered sequentially or intensively

At UIUC, students complete EAP course requirements sequentially, and students may spend as many as four semesters enrolled in EAP courses (writing, speaking, or both) before they exit the program. At USC, students are enrolled in as many as 18 hours of English language support in their first semester. The USC approach parallels the kind of exposure that students experience when enrolled in an intensive English language institute.

Programs report to a central entity or a department

Given that English language support programs serve students from across the university, it is not uncommon for them to report to a central entity. USC’s IEI reporting line leads to the Dean of the College of Arts and Letters, while both the Colleges of Education and Arts and Letters appear to share responsibility for their EAP. UIUC’s EAP is housed within the Department of Linguistics and is assumed to report to an administrator within that program.

Staffing and size

The IEIs and EAPs at UIUC and USC are staffed with a combination of continuing lecturers (CLs) with Master’s Degrees in ESL and by graduate teaching assistants in affiliated graduate programs. The programs at both institutions are large. A conservative estimate of the size of UIUC’s IEI, with 22 CLs, teaching 3 classes, and each class with 10 students, would render an enrollment of more than 600. USC’s EAP, with 14 CLs, teaching 3 classes, with 15 students each, would enroll at least 600 students. If all of the USC graduate students teach 2 courses in the EAP with 15 students in each, enrollment in the EAP would increase by almost 1000 to 1,600.

An English Language Support Center at Purdue

An English Language Center

The development of English language support program at Purdue is complicated by the absence of a tradition for support and the accompanying infrastructure that a tradition of support provides. For example, UIUC’s EAP was established in 1947, and the EAP and Linguistics Department grew together incrementally.

Adopting an English language center model would allow us to build upon existing resources and create a language program that is timely, coherent, and proactive. A center would allow the programs housed within (e.g., EAP, ITA) to share and optimize teaching, testing, and administrative resources. The same executive directors overseeing testing, administration, and
development of curriculum could facilitate the communication between the programs and improve the quality of the services provided to international students in need of language support and also the faculty and administrators working with international students. The center’s primary function would be to administer and monitor post-entry English proficiency testing, organize and monitor students’ movements through a required sequence of courses, manage and monitor instructional staff assignments, and manage and monitor instructional staff mentoring.

**Administrative Responsibilities**

- Provide pre-arrival support (Listen to Purdue);
- Administer post-entry testing (OEPT and ACE-In);
- Coordinate rater training and certify raters for the OEPT and ACE-In;
- Manage CL hiring for all programs;
- Assign CLs and TAs to courses;
- Mentor instructors—GS 100, GS 101, Engl 106i, Engl 620 (through a single, semester-long course for all prospective CLs and TAs);
- Provide on-line resources for faculty – proficiency test score use and interpretation, practical training for effective teaching and interacting with international students within the classroom;
- Contribute to the development of a Teaching Academy focused on effective teaching of international students (with the CIE).

**Program Components**

- Development and delivery of *Listen to Purdue* for all incoming students – provision of undergrad and grad LTP resources;
- A four-week intensive offering of GS 100 for incoming students who wish to get a head start;
- English language testing and placement;
- English language courses for undergrad and grad students that run throughout the academic year (GS 100 and GS 101), including:
  - individualized tutorials (within GS courses)
  - language partners (expand partnerships beyond GS/Chinese partner program)
  - weekly discussion groups (with Writing Center)
  - workshops/short courses during semester breaks
A sequence of courses that builds on and extends available offerings

- low undergrad:
  - GS 100, GS 101 > ENGL 106I > COMM 114
  - (+ individualized tutorials + conversation partner program)

- intermediate undergrad:
  - GS 101 > ENGL 106I > COMM 114
  - (+ conversation partner program)

- low grad:
  - GRADUATE GS 100, GS 101 > ENGL 620
  - (+ individualized tutorials + conversation partner program)

- intermediate undergrad:
  - GRADUATE GS 101 > ENGL 620
  - (+ conversation partner program)

Partnerships with

ISS
- A broad undergraduate conversation partner program addressing the needs for partners for GS 100, GS 101, and Engl 620

CIE
- Classroom observations and consultations for international TAs and for faculty who work with international students
- Faculty resources for internationalization and best practices (walk-in clinic, workshops, library of on-line resources)

The Writing Center
- Cooperation with staff and mentor Conversation Group leaders and Writing Center tutors.
**Issues that must be resolved**

The development an English language support program is hindered by several institutional constraints, most notably: (1) on-line course registration of incoming students during the summer before arrival; (2) the 120 hour legislative mandate restricting the number of credit hours required by undergraduate plans of study; and (3) restrictions within programs prohibiting the use of PLaCE credits (GS 100 and GS 101) for general studies or free elective credits. Each of these problems will be addressed in turn:

**On-line registration of international students** in the summer prior to arrival creates problems if students take a post-entry test and then have to add and drop.

- Do not allow incoming international students to register for classes until after post-entry testing–place into GS and regular academic courses based on results of post-entry testing;

**Or**

- Pre-register all incoming students with TOEFL total scores of < 100 into GS 100 (and the graduate equivalent) and use post-entry testing to place them out.

**120 hour legislative mandate:**

- Prepare a request for an exemption from the legislature, adding 6 required GS credit hours to all international students’ degree plans.

**Degree plan restrictions:**

- Accept GS courses as Gen Ed requirements as free electives. This option would allow students to complete their degrees within the 120 timeframe but would restrict elective options.