

## University of California Responses to the Needs of ESL Students: 1983–1996

Articulation, or the movement of students across the segmental lines of high school and community college into the University of California (UC) system has been of major interest and concern, historically as well as currently, to faculty and administrators in all sectors of public education in California. As the segment of higher education designated by the state legislature (through the Master Plan) to work with the top one eighth of high school graduates in the state, UC is well aware that its entrance policies and requirements have enormous impact on both the types and content of courses offered in other sectors of the public education system in California. The level of preparation of the students who are preparing for UC admission, as well as the special needs of particular groups of students who enter either as freshmen or as transfers, in turn, affect programs offered on UC campuses once these students are accepted into the UC system. It is within these contexts that the following question is posed:

*How has the University of California in recent years been dealing with the challenges posed by the increasing numbers of nonnative speakers (NNS) of English admitted to the system, especially those who are California residents?*

The answer: In a variety of ways—albeit somewhat differently on each of the eight general campuses offering both undergraduate and graduate-level work (i.e., Berkeley, Davis, Irvine, Los Angeles, Riverside, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz, and San Diego).<sup>1</sup>

Despite local variations within the UC system, however, there are statewide set policies and procedures which all campuses follow. This

update reports recent UC systemwide (i.e., statewide) activities and responses to meeting the needs of English as a second language (ESL) students, both after as well as before entrance to the university. These efforts are aimed at helping such students perform successfully on any general campus and have involved the following:

(a) work with all the UC campus ESL program directors to ensure that educationally sound ESL programs are provided for NNS on all general campuses;

(b) work with the UC statewide Subject A Examination Committee to ensure that the reading prompt used in this required two-hour essay examination, written after acceptance to UC but prior to initial enrollment on a campus as a freshman, is accessible to nonnative speakers of English (NNS) and, additionally, is graded consistently and appropriately within the scoring guide used to evaluate the writing of native speakers of English (see Appendix A);

(c) work with the UC statewide Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS) in shaping entrance policies, especially for freshmen, which will help prepare NNS to handle the high level language demands of UC (which, as noted, is directed by the California Master Plan to admit only students from the top 12.5% of graduates from all high schools in the state).

### Background

To understand the statewide activities and actions reported here and how they were generated, the governance system within the UC system must be explained briefly. The University of California has a somewhat unique system of "shared governance" whereby permanent faculty along with administrative officers jointly govern in academic matters, determining, for example, the credit-worthiness of courses, the approval of curricula and degree programs, the criteria for student admissions, the granting of faculty tenure, and so forth.

On each of the nine UC campuses, all local tenured and tenure-track (i.e., permanent) faculty are organized through a campus academic senate and share governance on academic issues with their local campus administration (i.e., the chancellor and staff). Such work is accomplished largely by academic senate committees, which are composed of and chaired by academic senate members who have been appointed to committee service by a campus Committee on Committees, elected annually by the tenure-track faculty at each campus (i.e., by the academic senate members).

In addition, there is a parallel statewide structure whereby tenured faculty, representing each of the nine campuses, are appointed to serve on

a statewide Academic Council and its systemwide committees. These groups work with the statewide administration (i.e., the Office of the President) on issues involving systemwide academic criteria, educational policies, and so forth.

Working within these structures has been essential to propose action and, often, to promote understanding within the UC system (both on individual campuses and systemwide) regarding NNS/ESL issues. Unfortunately, there are very few ESL-oriented tenured faculty to look after these important, but nonteaching or research, responsibilities. This is critical in that all but two ESL program directors/coordinators and virtually all ESL instructors in the UC system are on nontenured, short-term appointments, so academic senate avenues are not open to their participation in the making or shaping of academic policies affecting ESL/NNS students. This situation, plus the need to go through the sometimes lengthy maneuvers UC institutional processes most typically involve, has often proven frustrating. Again, unfortunately, this has been especially so in dealing with many of the repercussions of the steady annual increase in the NNS/ESL population enrolling at UC in recent years.

Until the early 1980s, most NNS students who entered the UC system needing further English language development found that help in programs originally designed to meet the needs of "foreign" students (i.e., NNS of English who had been educated in their home countries, entering the US on student visas usually to do graduate work). However, as in all other segments of the public educational system in the state, there has been a rise in the numbers of NNS students who are immigrant California residents and educated in California public schools (often referred to as ESL students), now entering UC as undergraduates.

On particular campuses, the rise has been especially sharp. To cite the experience of only two campuses, for instance, in 1994-95, 32.1% of freshmen admissions at UC Davis came from non-English speaking homes (compared with only 20.3% in 1988). At UC Irvine in the past three years, over 60% of entering freshmen were born outside the U.S. and speak a language other than English at home; in 1996 this population had risen to 64%! Other UC campuses have also experienced increases that are quite similar.

### The 1983 CPEC Report "Promises to Keep"

Institutional responses to the admission of increasing numbers of ESL students into the UC system, plus exploration of ways to meet their special needs once they are on a particular campus, have been slow and sporadic. In fact, "the ESL problem" was not acknowledged systemwide before the

appearance in 1983 of the seminal California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC) document, "Promises to Keep: Remedial Education in California's Public Colleges and Universities" (issued as Report 83.2). The report suggested future problems and options facing the three segments of higher education in the state (the CCC, CSU, and UC systems). To represent the CPEC report's perspective on ESL instruction in California higher education in general and at UC in particular, we cite the three following excerpts:

- One major research campus of the university [UC] has found that permanent residents who have resided in the United States on the average of four years now comprise about two-thirds of the students in its ESL program, having replaced foreign students as the majority. The failure rate in its ESL courses jumped dramatically during 1979-80 from 15% to 28% and remained almost as high for 1980-81...the topic deserves further study for all campuses and all three segments (p. 43).
- Both university administrators and respondents to the Commission survey on two university campuses noted that they do not consider ESL remedial, a viewpoint that is widely held across all segments. One campus coordinator urged a distinction between the varying levels of ESL offered on that campus as some are extremely basic and others equivalent to Subject A (p. 43).
- The questions arising from the infusion of English as a Second Language students into California's colleges and universities appear fundamentally different from those engendered by the other basic skill areas. Although only a portion of ESL may be considered remedial and thus have bearing on this study, the entire ESL issue carries import for all three segments (p. 108).

This 1983 CPEC report recommended that a careful study of ESL issues by all three segments of higher education in California be undertaken to develop a "coherent philosophy and practical strategy to meet both current and future needs" (p. 108).

### The 1989 UCUPRE Report on ESL

In spring 1985, prompted by the CPEC report, but also in part by data gathering in the CCC and CSU systems as well as by the Intersegmental Coordinating Council, the chair of the standing UC systemwide Academic Senate Committee on Undergraduate Preparatory and Remedial Education (UCUPRE) appointed an ad hoc UC ESL subcommittee. The charge was

to meet, gather data, and prepare a report addressing the following questions:

1. What should be the entrance and exit level competencies for ESL courses at UC?
2. How and when should students in need of such courses be identified?
3. What content of ESL courses should be eligible for baccalaureate credit and what content should not?
4. What provisions should be made for ESL students to assist them in preparing to satisfy the University's Subject A (i.e., English composition) requirement?<sup>2</sup>

In March, 1989, after meeting nine times over three academic years, the ad hoc ESL subcommittee submitted a report on the status of ESL students and ESL programs at UC to UCUPRE. The recommendations of the subcommittee's report were as follows:

- (a) that UC academic senate and UC systemwide administration acknowledge that nonnative speakers of English constitute and will continue to constitute a significant segment of the students at UC by ensuring that educationally sound programs are provided on all general campuses for nonnative speakers of English;
- (b) that UC systemwide administration provide the leadership to ensure that each campus meets its educational and legal responsibilities to the immigrant ESL students it admits as well as to oversee ESL-related matters dealing with admission, transfer, and articulation;
- (c) that UCUPRE continue to appoint to the Subject A Examination Subcommittee as voting members one or more recognized ESL specialists and continue to include examples of strong and weak ESL compositions, which are described as such, in its Subject A Examination information booklets;
- (d) that each general campus fulfill its responsibilities to the ESL students it admits by appointing a full-time qualified ESL specialist to be the ESL director/coordinator and by providing the necessary financial and administrative support for that specialist to carry out and/or advise on the following tasks:
  - (a) develop a long-term ESL policy that articulates the recommendations of this report in a manner appropriate to the size and needs of the local ESL population;

(b) hire and support for the long-term a support staff of ESL professionals needed to assess and meet the requirements of the local ESL population;

(c) work cooperatively with those in charge of ongoing composition programs—or with any other instructional unit where cooperation or assistance is needed;

(d) monitor and track the progress of all ESL students, especially with regard to composition requirements;

(e) meet at least once a year (preferably twice) with ESL program directors from the other UC campuses to discuss common problems, issues, solutions, innovations, etc.;

(f) participate as appropriate in the assessment of the oral proficiency of ESL/EFL students serving as teaching assistants and in the offering of instruction in oral communication and pronunciation for such students as needed.

These recommendations were subsequently approved by the statewide UCUPRE and forwarded to the systemwide University of California Academic Council (the executive committee of the systemwide academic senate), where it was negatively evaluated and put aside: The recommendations were viewed as too costly to implement given that ESL was not judged a high priority. Little attention was given to the report other than copying it and sending it to local campuses nearly two years later.

#### **Subsequent Outcomes of the ESL Report's Recommendations: Work With Campus ESL Programs and Statewide Subject A Testing**

Despite the negative evaluation of the ESL report by the Academic Council, there have been some successful outcomes. First, since 1994 all UC ESL program directors now meet once a year under the sponsorship of UCOPE to: (a) discuss issues of mutual interest and concern; and (b) forward an annual report on ESL concerns to the University of California Committee on Preparatory Education (UCOPE), the current incarnation of UCUPRE.<sup>3</sup>

A second positive outcome of the ESL report involves work with the statewide Subject A Examination. ESL programs have official representation on the UC Subject A Examination Committee. Furthermore, ESL specialists from all campuses are annually appointed readers of this university-wide exam and make final pass/fail decisions on papers presenting second language errors or problems. Also, the annual published compilation of sample essays graded at each of the six levels described in detail on the UC

Subject A Scoring Guide (see Appendix A) includes papers with evidence that the writer is a nonnative speaker of English. This booklet is distributed annually to high schools across the state to guide English teachers in helping both NS and NNS to develop the writing skills needed to do successful UC-level work. Unfortunately, the results of the Subject A Examination over time indicate a steady increase in the proportion of NNS who are admitted to UC and who fail this test. In 1987, 6.7% of the newly admitted freshmen who took the first university-wide Subject A Examination failed and were designated as ESL; however, in 1994, 12.5% of the admitted test takers who failed the test were so designated, i.e., an increase of 89%. Such an increase underscores the need for adequate and informed ESL instruction for NNS students prior to entrance to UC.

#### **Outcomes of Work with the UC Academic Senate Committee on Admissions (BOARS)**

In the last three years BOARS, the UC systemwide academic senate committee on admissions, has responded in several ways to address the language-specific needs created by the influx of ESL students into the system. BOARS actions and activities have, by and large, been prompted by Tippy Schwabe from UC Davis. Because of her campus service as a member and/or cochair of the UC Davis Admissions Committee (1989 to the present), she was appointed to BOARS in 1991 and served into 1995.

Soon after appointment to BOARS, Schwabe asked for UC review of the English and foreign language admission requirements vis a vis preparing NNS high school students for UC-level work. During her service, she documented the needs of these students and prepared guidelines whenever requested (such as the possible specifications for an advanced-level high school ESL language/reading/writing course for which elective credit might be given—see Appendix B).

Almost all such policy proposals and guidelines are first reviewed by either the BOARS Subcommittee on Freshman Admissions or the Subcommittee on Transfer Admissions before being considered in a full BOARS session, a process which often takes two to three years. This was the case with the following BOARS policy decisions on criteria affecting immigrant ESL student admissions to UC (and attendant systemwide activities handled by the Office of the President)—all made since the presentation of the 1989 UC ESL report. Briefly, these actions are:

1. BOARS reaffirmed that in meeting the *a-f* subject requirements (See Appendix A in Brinton et al., in this volume for the *a-f* requirements), one of the four required English courses (the *b* requirement) can be an ESL course—usually, although not always, the ninth grade course—and suggest-

ed that high schools guide ESL students to take advantage of an ESL course at this level because of the particular content emphases addressing their language needs.

2. BOARS voted (June, 1993) to accept a second high school ESL course as one of the two required elective courses (the *f* requirement) provided it is an advanced-level ESL course and suggested that this would be an appropriate junior or senior year course for ESL learners to further develop language skills needed to handle UC academic demands successfully. Documents presented to BOARS to facilitate their consideration of this action included the following two items:

(a) a detailed course description of such an advanced-level high school ESL course was reviewed by BOARS and forwarded to appropriate admissions personnel in the UC Office of the President for use when evaluating whether a course from a school district meets the advanced-level standing of this *f* elective requirement. (See Specification 2 in Appendix B for this description).

(b) the descriptions of the English requirement(s) used in many UC documents (including pages C3, C4, and C5 of the widely used *Quick Reference for Counselors*) were rewritten to reflect these actions and approved by BOARS.

These actions and activities, it is hoped, will help to alter the perception, often held by both ESL students and their high school counselors, that ESL coursework is entrance- or low-level work and so to be avoided—especially by UC-bound ESL students—in favor of taking “higher level” mainstream English courses. These, unfortunately, do not always address the language needs of ESL students. There was hope, too, as noted, that the *f* elective course might serve as a bridge course in the last year or two in preparing students to meet the higher (even than high school senior year) standards and demands of UC. Further, it was felt that detailing course content might prompt high school English programs across the state to include such specified work for UC-bound ESL students when taking any English course intended to meet the *b* requirement.<sup>4</sup>

These suggestions need to be monitored within the UC system in the coming months (possibly years) to assure implementation. We must also ensure correct understanding of UC policies and practices in this area. This can be accomplished via professional discussions, the work of the ESL subcommittee, and through articles published in appropriate publications.

3. BOARS voted (May, 1993) to accept content courses taught in a language other than English which fulfill any of the *a-f* requirements (except *b* English) and which meet UC (and California) curricular content standards.

Since content courses taught in other languages are accepted for UC admission from students educated in non-English speaking countries as well as from those coming from schools in the US that teach all subject content in a foreign language (such as a French lycee), it was reasoned that content work taught in a high school in California by content-qualified, accredited bilingual teachers should be similarly acceptable. High schools offering such coursework are reporting a turnaround in attitudes and performance by L2 students who had believed they could never meet the academic requirements and qualifications for UC admission.

### Issues for the Future

In addition to these recent actions and activities taken systemwide at UC (by BOARS and the Office of the President) to aid immigrant ESL students in entering the UC system and to help them perform successfully, there are other issues to examine in response to Recommendation 2 in the 1989 UC ESL Report, that is, “to provide leadership in overseeing matters dealing with admissions, transfer, and articulation.”

1. One relevant question is how the newly developed English Language Proficiency Test offered by the College Board might (and/or should/should not) be used in the UC admissions process with respect to nonnative speakers who have resided in the U.S. for two or more years. (Currently nonnative speakers of English who have been in the U.S. fewer than two years must present a TOEFL score—the Educational Testing Service Test of English as a Foreign Language—as part of the admissions process). Before any decisions are made about the test, it needs to be investigated to see how it might be used to assess ESL students' skills.

2. A question specific to articulation, one needing immediate attention, involves current collaborative interactions between the UC system and California high schools on changes in high school curricula across the state. What effects are such changes having on UC-bound ESL students? How (and how well) are the language development needs of these NNS met in restructured, innovative cross-content curricula? A related question also needs to be explored: How well (or not) do NNS fare when their work is evaluated and graded in group projects and through portfolio assessments?

3. There are also important articulation issues involving the UC campuses and community college ESL transfer students. Very frequently, ESL students, especially those who were not UC-eligible when graduating from high school, arrive on UC campuses from community colleges and are inadequately prepared to handle UC coursework successfully because of English language deficiencies. When tested upon entrance to UC (current-

ly done only at UCLA and UC Davis), ESL transfer students often demonstrate a measurable need for further language development, despite having successfully completed the one English composition course required for transfer (See Brinton, et al., this volume).

The current minimum admissions requirements and the optional, but highly recommended Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum (IGETC) listing (see Brinton et al., Appendix B, this volume), which govern transfer from community colleges to UC, require one transferable English composition course (to be raised to two courses beginning in fall, 1998). The admissions requirements additionally specify that as of fall, 1998 two English composition courses be required and that eight of a total of 56 units (to be increased to 60 units in 1998) can be ESL courses. In other words, eight units of ESL can be used as part of the general accumulation of the 56 general education units, but they do *not* substitute for the required English composition course(s). Importantly, as of fall 1998, not only must transfer students clear any deficiency in the *b* English four-unit requirement from high school; they must also complete two community college courses in English composition to be eligible for transfer to UC. ESL students at the community college level who continue to have problems using English grammar correctly and making appropriate lexical choices should ideally take the full number of permitted ESL courses before taking the two required transferable credit composition courses to strengthen their preparation for UC level work.<sup>5</sup>

### Concluding Observations

UC should be certain that immigrant ESL students are receiving appropriate and adequate language instruction while developing the necessary academic skills prior to entering—and once admitted to—the UC system. In order for ESL students to be able to handle UC work successfully, issues such as those raised in this paper need to be thoughtfully and thoroughly explored. This is especially important given that the University of California, as noted, in many ways sets standards for the preparatory work done by students in the state, both in high schools and in community colleges. In addition, the University is concerned with upholding the nationally recognized high standards of UC undergraduate degrees. ■

### Endnotes

1. The ninth UC campus in San Francisco offers only graduate work in the medical sciences.
2. The ESL subcommittee that prepared this document consisted of six members: George Gadda (Los Angeles), June McKay (Berkeley), William Megenney (Riverside), Robin Scarcella (Irvine), Tippy Schwabe (Davis), and Marianne Celce-Murcia (Los Angeles), who served as chair.
3. This name change, it should be noted, removed the word *remedial* from this statewide committee which monitors, advises, and facilitates matters relating to all preparatory education—a change in official UC stance, which could signal either (a) recognition of UC's responsibility in meeting the needs of the students it admits, including ESL students, or (b) reflection of the growing statewide consensus that no remedial coursework should be offered in any four-year segment of higher education.
4. While the description in Appendix B suggests the level and type of course content appropriate for UC-bound immigrant students in a second high school ESL course taken just prior to UC entrance, it was also hoped that it might guide course content and skill building when only one ESL course, whenever taken, is offered in the high school program for this type of ESL student.
5. Also, beginning in 1998 *all* general education coursework must be completed at a community college prior to a student's transfer to UC, which is not currently the case.

## Appendix A

### UC Subject A Scoring Guide

In holistic reading, raters assign each essay to a scoring category according to its dominant characteristics. The categories below describe the characteristics typical of papers at six different levels of competence. All the descriptions take into account that the papers they categorize represent two hours of reading and writing, not a more extended period of drafting and revision.

**6** A 6 paper commands attention because of its insightful development and mature style. It presents a cogent response to the text, elaborating that response with well-chosen examples and persuasive reasoning. The 6 paper shows that its writer can usually choose words aptly, use sophisticated sentences effectively, and observe the conventions of written English.

**5** A 5 paper is clearly competent. It presents a thoughtful response to the text, elaborating that response with appropriate examples and sensible reasoning. A 5 paper typically has a less fluent and complex style than a 6, but does show that its writer can usually choose words accurately, vary sentences effectively, and observe the conventions of written English.

**4** A 4 paper is satisfactory, sometimes marginally so. It presents an adequate response to the text, elaborating that response with sufficient examples and acceptable reasoning. Just as these examples and this reasoning will ordinarily be less developed than those in 5 papers, so will the 4 paper's style be less effective. Nevertheless, a 4 paper shows that its writer can usually choose words of sufficient precision, control sentences of reasonable variety, and observe the conventions of written English.

**3** A 3 paper is unsatisfactory in one or more of the following ways. It may respond to the text illogically; it may lack coherent structure or elaboration with examples; it may reflect an incomplete understanding of the text or the topic. Its prose is usually characterized by at least one of the following: frequently imprecise word choice; little sentence variety; occasional major errors in grammar and usage, or frequent minor errors.

**2** A 2 paper shows serious weaknesses, ordinarily of several kinds. It frequently presents a simplistic, inappropriate, or incoherent response to the text, one that may suggest some significant misunderstanding of the text or the topic. Its prose is usually characterized by at least one of the following:

simplistic or inaccurate word choice; monotonous or fragmented sentence structure; many repeated errors in grammar and usage.

**1** A 1 paper suggests severe difficulties in reading and writing conventional English. It may disregard the topic's demands, or it may lack any appropriate pattern of structure or development. It may be inappropriately brief. It often has a pervasive pattern of errors in word choice, sentence structure, grammar, and usage.

### The *E* Designation

The *E* designation indicates that a nonpassing essay includes significant linguistic or rhetorical features characteristic of the writing of nonnative speakers of English. Those features contribute to the essay's nonpassing score, usually by limiting its coherence or demonstrating inadequate command of English grammar and usage.

Any reader can assign the *E* designation in combination with a score of 3, 2, or 1. Papers designated *E* receive subsequent readings by ESL specialists, who either confirm or do not confirm the previous reader's judgment. *E* designations confirmed by ESL specialists are reported to campus Subject A and ESL offices along with the papers' combined holistic scores. Campuses look carefully at these essays and at other available information to determine whether the writers should be placed in ESL courses.

You should assign the *E* designation to all nonpassing essays that exhibit significant linguistic or rhetorical features characteristic of the writing of nonnative speakers of English.

## Appendix B

### Possible Specifications for an Advanced-level High School ESL Language/Reading/Writing Course for Which Elective Credit Might be Given re: UC Admission (prepared for use by BOARS by G.T. Schwabe, April, 1993)

1. Provide constant interfacing of reading and writing on age/grade-level appropriate concepts and themes with:
  - (a) frequent in-class and out-of-class writing assignments (majority to be unassisted writing).
  - (b) a mixture of short and long writing assignments but at least nine essays of 500 words (i.e., 4,500 words) during the course.
2. Increase ability to distinguish fact from opinion plus ability to identify and evaluate various types of evidence in analyzing expository writing.
3. Increase ability to develop and use various kinds of evidence in writing.
4. Develop skills in using authorities/outside sources as supporting evidence.
5. Develop recognition and use of external and internal coherence devices/strategies to establish cohesion in writing.
6. Further develop outlining, paraphrasing, and summarizing skills.
7. Further develop personal revising and editing skills plus extend experience in doing peer editing.
8. Continue explicit and systematic work in vocabulary development with specific attention given to vocabulary used in academic discourse.
9. Continue explicit work in grammar, giving particular emphasis to:
  - (a) controlling verb forms accurately and correctly sequencing verb tenses in written discourse;
  - (b) better understanding aspect as a function of verbs in English;
  - (c) generating simple, complex, and compound sentence structures using subordinate and coordinate connectors correctly;
  - (d) developing oral and written control of idioms, phrasal verbs, articles, etc.

10. Increase reading comprehension and proficiency by reading/reporting on a set number of books (possibly 10–15 per semester).

Similar specifications could be incorporated into an ESL/sheltered English course following the state curricular frameworks for 10th-, 11th-, and 12th- grade English. In such sheltered content courses, a further specification would be:

- (a) ability to critique the literary genre presented in the curriculum.