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### Authors

Fox, Karen L.

Wiley, Terrence G.

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## Postsecondary ESL Programs in California: A Profile<sup>1</sup>

- This article reports the results of a survey of postsecondary English as a second language programs conducted in spring, 1985 under the auspices of the National Association for Foreign Student Affairs (NAFSA), Region XII. Student demographics, preparation and compensation of faculty, staffing levels, placement testing procedures, number of levels and contact hours offered, and other programmatic data are compared for programs serving primarily nonimmigrant (visa) international students versus those serving permanent residents, refugees and other nonnative English speakers. Also discussed are administrative concerns such as academic credit, needs and priorities, program longevity, and budget control.

In recent years (particularly since 1975), with the influx of refugees and immigrants and the rise in language minority populations, ESL enrollment among nonvisa students in postsecondary programs has increased dramatically. These trends are expected to continue at least through the end of this century and will have a major impact on postsecondary education in California as the 1985 report by the California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC) notes:

Between 1950 and 1980, the total population of the United States grew by just under 50 percent, yet in the same period, the Hispanic population grew by 265 percent—making it without question the country's fastest growing minority. In the latter half of the 1970's the rate of immigration to this country of Asians was swelled by large numbers of refugees. The secondary effects of migrations from this influx will continue to be felt for years to come. Nowhere have the effects of these trends been more evident than in the state of California. Because race or ethnicity is an important variable affecting postsecondary participation, these trends will continue to affect postsecondary education on through the end of the century. (p. 117)

Logically, postsecondary English as a second language programs should be among the first areas impacted by these demographic changes. Originally designed to develop the language skills of nonimmigrant (visa) international students, how quickly and how well have

these programs been able to adapt to their new audience? More specifically, what programs are available to address the language development needs of the immigrant, refugee, and language minority post-secondary ESL student and in what ways do these differ from programs serving the traditional ESL audience, international students? These questions motivated the present study.

At our own institution, the response to this demographic shift has been a split ESL program serving international students and permanent residents in separate classes. Many institutions have attempted to serve both populations in one program, despite differences in prior educational experience, socioeconomic status, level of acculturation, learning/acquisition opportunities, purpose and motivation for learning English and a host of other variables that we know affect the language learning process. Still other institutions have continued to serve only the international student population, making no distinction among in-state residents regardless of native language or English proficiency.

Complicating language pedagogy decisions is the issue of funding: ESL programs for international students can be a source of revenue from tuition and higher out-of-state fees; remedial funding is often linked to programs for established minorities and new funding sources are difficult to find in this era of tight budgets. Moreover, the remedial label can be a two-edged sword: While providing temporary funds and favorable staffing formulae, it can provide justification for loss of academic credit which may result in a switch to continuing or extended education or support service status.

In setting up the study, we wanted to know:

1. Who is being served and where?
2. What population, if any, is being underserved?
3. How similar are programs which serve domestic and international ESL students?
4. What institutional attachments do such programs have?
5. What resources support these programs and are the resources adequate?
6. What needs and priorities do program administrators report?

What we found, while not entirely unexpected, confirmed that crucial differences do exist between ESL instruction and services available to immigrant and to nonimmigrant students in postsecondary programs in Region XII, differences which may well be reflected in other areas of the nation and at other educational levels.

### Method

The data for this study were supplied by a survey of postsecondary ESL programs in California. The survey instrument was developed by the New Americans Committee of the National Association for Foreign Student Affairs (NAFSA) to gather current data about the nature of the ESL population and the programs serving them in

**Table 1**  
**Summary of Findings: Student Population**

Abbreviations:

PR = permanent resident program (over 30% of students are PR)  
 INTL = international student program  
 N = number of programs reporting  
 R = range  
 M = mode

a. What percentage of your student population are permanent residents of the United States:

Aggregate (N = 57)	PR (N = 26)	INTL (N = 31)
40%	67%	10%

b. What percentage of your student population would you classify as refugee?

Aggregate (N = 57)	PR (N = 26)	INTL (N = 31)
11%	21%	3%

c. What are the approximate percentages by age group in your student population?

Age	Aggregate	PR	INTL
18-22	46%	31%	56%
23-30	33%	34%	32%
31-40	14%	23%	9%
over 40	7%	12%	3%

d. What is the approximate balance between male and female students in your program?

	Aggregate	PR	INTL
male	52%	51%	59%
female	48%	49%	41%

e. What are the approximate percentages of the following ethnic/nationality groups within your program?

Major groups all programs				Major groups	
Armenian	0.1%	Iranian	3.8%	PR	INTL
Cambodian	0.5%	Japanese	10.6%	Latino	Chinese
Chinese	11.6%	Korean	8.9%	Vietnamese	Japanese
E. European	1.9%	Samoan	0.3%	Chinese	Latino
Filipino	2.1%	Thai	3.3%	Korean	Arab
Latino	14.5%	Vietnamese	6.2%	Filipino	Indonesian
Indonesian	4.2%			Japanese	Iranian
				Iranian	

h. What approximate percentage of your students are currently employed?

	Aggregate	PR	INTL
full-time	23% (N = 40)	35%	17%
part-time	27% (N = 45)	32%	18%

NAFSA's Region XII. The instrument was modeled after several earlier studies, most notably on a 1983 cross program evaluation of major intensive English programs reported on by C. Grosse and D. Lubell at the 18th Annual TESOL Convention in Houston and a massive study of the California community college ESL programs conducted by D. Mills in 1984. The survey instrument was a four-page questionnaire which used both open and closed questions. Closed questions involving quantifiable data were tallied and averaged. Open-ended short answer questions were classified according to the similarity and frequency of response and then summarized.

Surveys were sent nonrandomly to 281 postsecondary ESL programs located in the target region and listed in the NAFSA directory; of these, 57 provided usable responses. Despite the low rate of return (approximately 20%), the sample includes a representative cross section of large and small, public and private, affiliated and independent programs covering most of the geographic region surveyed.

For the purposes of this study, programs surveyed were divided into two categories: Those serving at least 30% permanently resettled ESL students (immigrants, refugees, and other language minorities) were operationally labeled PR (permanent resident) (N = 26); programs serving predominantly nonimmigrant (visa-bearing) international students were labeled INTL (N = 31).

McGroarty (1985) points out that surveys provide a useful, if approximate, guide to concerns of a group, and the concerns and perceptions of the ESL service providers, while possibly not hard data, are nonetheless crucial to the quality of the service delivered.

Although the quality of program performance cannot be directly assessed by an essentially quantitative study, quantity in terms of contact hours, staff positions, salaries, full-time faculty, and the like can provide a valuable indication of the services provided and points of comparison across programs.

[See Table 1]

### Discussion: Student Population

Of the programs surveyed, 40% of the students in postsecondary programs are permanent residents. Although comparison figures are not available, this probably represents a major increase over 10 years ago. In the PR programs, the students are nearly equally divided between males and females, whereas among the INTL programs, the balance is roughly 60% to 40% (males over females).

Regarding ethnic representation, there appears to be cause for concern in the low representation of Latinos and Southeast Asians. The goal of equal opportunity in education is a balanced representation among ethnic groups at all levels. However, when data of ethnic populations enrolled in ESL adult basic education programs are compared with enrollment data in postsecondary ESL programs, there are major discrepancies for Latinos and Southeast Asians.

**Table 2**  
**Selected Student Populations Compared:**  
**Adult ABE ESL Versus Postsecondary**

Adult ed ESL enrollments (1982-83)	Postsecondary ESL enrollments (1985)	
Latino	46.0%	14.5%
Chinese	16.6%	11.6%
Vietnamese	13.5%	6.2%
Lao	5.9%	0.0%
Cambodian	3.2%	0.5%
Korean	2.5%	8.9%
Japanese	1.8%	10.6%

Note: These findings must be considered tenuous since the postsecondary data are based upon estimates.

#### Adult Basic Education Survey (1982-83)

Note: These data are from *VELEP (Vocational Education for the Limited English Proficient): Pattern and Prospects*, by D. Hemphill, S. Mao, T. Lee, A. Yee, & S. Chabot, 1985. San Francisco, CA: San Francisco Resources Development Center. Adapted by permission.

Given the numbers in Table 2, it would seem that more support is needed to bridge the gap from adult basic education programs to postsecondary education for these populations.

**Table 3**  
**Summary of Findings: Program Information**

	PR	INTL
a. How many levels of ESL do you offer?	4.2 (M = 3)	4.2 (M = 3)
b. Do you offer college/transfer credit?	yes = 60%	yes = 26%
c. How many levels prior to freshman composition do you offer?	4.6 (M = 3)	4.1 (M = 3)
d. What kind of placement instrument do you use?		
Standardized/commercial	64%	80%
Component of test(s):		
Grammar	76%	96%
Writing sample	64%	90%
Reading	52%	83%
Listening comprehension	44%	66%
Interview (individual)	32%	40%
Cloze dictation	8%	10%
How long does it take to administer the test(s)?:		
less than 1 hour	24%	6%
1-2 hours	64%	70%
3-5 hours	8%	23%
e. How many weeks are in one session/term?	13.9 (m = 18)	11.3 (M = 10)
f. What is the average enrollment per term?	400 (R = 15-1800)	68 (R = 15-185)

g. What is the average number of students per class?	20.6 (M = 20)	12.8 (M = 15)
h. How many class hours per week do you offer?		
At introductory level	6.9 (M = 6)	21.8 (M = 25)
At intermediate level	7.5 (No mode)	20.4 (M = 25)
At advanced level	7.1 (M = 3)	18.4 (M = 20)
i. Do you offer weekend/evening sessions?	yes = 80%	yes = 68%
j. Do you provide special contracts or short courses?	yes = 32%	yes = 68%
k. What is the relationship of your program to your department?		
ESL department	40%	33%
Extension/continuing ed	4%	30%
English/linguistics department	28%	6%
Modern language department	0	6%
Study skills laboratory	4%	0
Also: language arts division, developmental studies, communications department, liberal arts area, School of Professional and Behavioral Studies, student services division, and so forth.		
l. How many years has your program existed?	15.2 (M = 10) (R = 3-50)	9.6 (M = 3) (R = 2-40)
m. Which of the following staff positions does your program have?		
Director/department head	60%	93%
Assistant/associate director	8%	26%
Curriculum/academic coordinator	4%	50%
Activities coordinator	0	26%
Level/skills coordinator	8%	10%
Testing coordinator	20%	16%
Laboratory specialist	12%	6%
Counselor/advisor	24%	33%
Immigration technician	8%	46%
Clerical staff	36%	73%
Full-time contract faculty	92%	90%
Teaching assistants	40%	16%
n. What academic preparation do your instructors have?		
Bachelor's	32%	30%
Master's	88%	96%
Doctorate	32%	36%
Certificate	12%	6%
Average number of years in teaching	10.2 (R = 5-20)	8.0 (R = 3-15)
Average number of years in ESL	8.6	6.8
Other staff requirements:		
Curriculum development	52%	66%
Materials development	44%	63%
Committee assignments	40%	36%
Placement/level tests	36%	66%
Student advising	28%	43%
Registration/orientation	32%	40%
Publication/research	0	10%
Knowledge of foreign language	44%	33%
Experience abroad	24%	36%
o. What are the sources of your funding?		
Tuition	n = 4	n = 26
General fund	n = 19	n = 4

Government/private grants	n = 6	n = 3
p. Who oversees your budget?		
In-house fiscal officer	12%	10%
Director/department chair	24%	30%
Dean	28%	16%
Vice-president	4%	3%
Institution budget office	8%	3%
Combination of above	36%	33%
q. Approximate salary range for full-time faculty	\$28,400 (R = 17-42K)	\$20,217 (R = 12-38K)
r. Approximate salary range for part-time faculty	\$22/hr (R = \$12-35)	\$21/hr (R = \$7.50-36)

### Discussion

Both PR and INTL programs offer an average of 4.2 levels of instruction, with 3 (presumably beginning, intermediate, and advanced) being the mode. Sixty percent of PR programs offer baccalaureate or transfer credit, while only 26% of INTL programs do, possibly indicative of the origins of PR programs within degree-granting academic institutions.<sup>2</sup> Also in the area of term length, PR programs reflect this closer relationship with the parent institution, having a modal term length of 18 weeks (a typical academic semester) rather than the 10 weeks of the INTL programs. Indeed, class size and contact hours of PR programs appear to reflect staffing formulae for regular academic programs: PR class sizes average 20.6 while INTL class sizes average 12.8. Even more crucially, perhaps, the average contact hours offered by INTL programs are nearly triple the contact hours provided by PR programs (see Table 1); three PR programs mentioned increased contact hours at lower levels as among the program's most pressing needs, indicating the administrators' awareness that ESL programs require different staffing formulae than other kinds of academic programs.

Size of the programs also differs significantly, with PR programs averaging 400 students per term (with a range of 15 to 1800) compared to an average of 67.9 students per term in INTL programs (with a range of 15 to 185). Program size is thus a major concern for both types of programs, but in different directions. INTL program administrators repeatedly cite recruitment and growth as among their highest priorities, since larger programs enjoy both greater resources and, presumably, greater political clout with the administration of the parent or host institution, while PR program administrators cite the need for a floor on the English proficiency of the students they are required to serve as one means of making their programs more manageable.

The majority of both kinds of program (64% of PR and 80% of INTL) use standardized, commercially produced placement tests. By far the most prevalent is the Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency (MTELP), frequently in combination with supplements developed in-house such as writing samples and interviews.<sup>3</sup> The most common test components include grammar (96% of INTL, 76% of

PR programs), writing (90% of INTL and 64% of PR programs), reading (83% of INTL and 52% of PR programs), and listening comprehension (66% of INTL and 44% of PR programs). INTL programs appear to spend more time testing incoming students (see Table 3); some PR programs report using no test or interview only, or tests designed for native speakers (Nelson-Denny or the CSU English Placement Test).

Both kinds of programs include all academic English skills in their curricula, with special emphasis on writing. INTL programs also mentioned TOEFL preparation and cultural adjustment while PR programs mentioned survival skills—basic oral proficiency and literacy. The electives offered by both kinds of programs were also similar, though INTL programs appeared to stress ESP, particularly English for business and for computer science, while PR programs stressed advanced level skills and areas such as idioms, VESL, and accent reduction. Frequently mentioned electives include typing, notetaking, and other study skills, literature and current events classes, language laboratory, and vocabulary development. PR programs are almost five times as likely to offer weekend or evening sections than are INTL programs, but these programs tend to parallel the daytime offerings, albeit on a more limited basis. INTL program evening and weekend courses tend to be targeted to specific audiences: industry or special groups who meet on site in contract arrangements.

### Staffing

Staffing is, of course, crucial to the range and, less obviously, to the depth of services offered. Programs serving INTL students report considerably more staff positions and more differentiated staffing than do programs serving immigrant students. For example, 93% of the INTL programs have a director (73% full-time) while only 60% of the PR programs have a similar position (40% full-time). Half the INTL programs have a staff position for handling curriculum or academic coordination. About a quarter report having an assistant or associate director, whereas exceedingly few PR programs (4% and 8% respectively) have such positions. Thus, INTL programs may have an administrative group to handle planning, curriculum development, and other long-range needs, an advantage not available to PR programs. Also, more than twice as many INTL programs indicated clerical staff positions (73% versus 36% for PR programs), although some of the services for PR programs, particularly clerical, student counseling, and immigration advising may be handled by personnel shared with the parent institution.

Instructional faculty in both kinds of programs are likely to have a Master's degree and to have entered ESL from other fields, almost all reporting a greater number of years teaching experience than years in the field of ESL. However, faculty in PR programs are slightly more experienced than those in INTL programs, having an average of over 10 years' experience in teaching, over 8½ in ESL, versus 8 and 6 years

for teachers in INTL programs. Differentials in salary (see below) may be the reason behind this slight disparity in experience.

As far as noninstructional duties are concerned, both kinds of programs require curriculum and materials development as the most prevalent nonteaching activities; but INTL programs require placement testing, registration, and orientation duties while PR programs require committee assignments even more frequently than testing, reflecting perhaps the duties of non-ESL faculty in the parent institution.

An unexpectedly large differential in full-time faculty salaries was revealed by the survey data: The average academic year salary for full-time faculty in PR programs is \$28,400 (with a range of \$17,000 to \$42,000) while full-time faculty in INTL programs receive an average of \$20,217 (with a range of \$12,000 to \$38,000) per academic year.<sup>4</sup> Part-time hourly salaries (\$22/hour in PR programs, \$21/hour in INTL programs) are nearly the same, as is the general lack of benefits for part-time instructors: Only 14% of the PR programs and 17% of the INTL programs offer benefits to part-time faculty,<sup>5</sup> and reported benefits include course tuition, parking, and professional development programs, sometimes in lieu of health plans, sick leave, and other more traditional benefits. Most startling was the heavy reliance on the presumably more economical part-time faculty in PR programs, where the aggregate reported ratio in 26 programs was 43 full-time to 257 part-time faculty. Several programs reported relying almost exclusively on part-time faculty, with a single full-time faculty member performing all the testing, placement, curriculum development, budgeting, and other administrative functions in addition to teaching.

### Administration

Underlying the staffing conditions are the key administrative concerns of relationship to the parent or host institution and control of the budget. An interesting and rather disturbing survey finding was that ESL programs have yet to find an academic home: While the greatest number (40%) of PR programs constituted ESL departments and the majority of INTL programs (30%) were housed in continuing or extended education divisions, there is no general consensus as to the point of attachment to the parent institution. Crucially, many programs reported attachment to larger units—language arts division, division of humanities, School of Professional and Behavioral Studies, liberal arts area, student services division, and developmental studies, to name but a few. This appears to have two results: greater autonomy for the program but budget decisions made at a level far removed from the day-to-day operations of the program.

With the exception of the 23% of INTL programs which are independent of a parent or host institution, the budget control in most programs (36% of PR and 33% of INTL programs) is shared between levels, most frequently the director or chair and the division administrator (dean or vice-president or institutional budget officer). Less

than a third (30%) of the INTL programs and a quarter (24%) of the PR programs reported that the director or department chair alone controls the program budget.

Despite the seeming lack of institutional commitment to ESL programs suggested by the diverse points of attachment and reliance on part-time faculty, another unexpected finding from the survey data is the longevity of ESL programs: PR programs average over 15 years in existence (with a mode of 10 years) while INTL programs average over 9 years (with a mode of 3 years). ESL programs thus are not stop-gap temporary responses to immediate demographic shifts, as staffing and funding patterns imply, but rather ongoing support programs serving the needs of an important segment of the postsecondary education audience.

### Needs and Priorities

The open-ended responses to the question, "What do you see as the most pressing needs of your program?" revealed an underlying concern of both kinds of programs with what might best be described as their peripheral status. Comments focused on improving salary and benefits for faculty and, for PR programs, increasing the number of full-time permanent faculty positions, while INTL program administrators mentioned released time and recognition for extra duties. Other comments mirroring this concern dealt with better coordination with other departments and increased contact hours and classroom space for PR programs and, for INTL programs, more commitment to ESL by the host university, increased office space, and better understanding of ESL students by regular university faculty. Numbers were also a concern: PR programs spoke of better identification of ESL students enrolled in the college or university, and, as mentioned above, a proficiency floor for entrance into the college or university. INTL programs mentioned more stable enrollments for greater resources and more clout. Other concerns focused on the students, with both kinds of programs reporting the need for better counseling and better services, particularly to facilitate entrance into or success in college or the university.

Naturally enough, the future program priorities reflected the needs outlined above. Priorities for PR programs, according to the survey data, included more short-term intensive courses covering skills left untaught under present curricula and more levels, contact hours, and standardization within the program. INTL programs reflected similar needs, mentioning better coordination of levels and a more diversified curriculum with special needs courses. PR programs also specified more full-time faculty; recognition of ESL as developmental; academic credit for ESL; better coordination with freshmen writing programs, other departments, and state agencies; and better tracking of and data gathering about ESL students. INTL programs mentioned, in addition to full-time faculty positions, better salaries and benefits as well as staff development and also recruitment/outreach into new markets.

Once again, the priorities appear to reflect the feeling of ESL program administrators of both types of programs that their existence is tenuous, dependent as it is on either unstable soft funding from tuition or external political perceptions of the needs of the students they are currently serving. Clearly interrelated issues are the status of faculty and improved relations and coordination with the host or parent institution.

### Conclusions

What is not evident from our data, but is strongly implied by the responses received, is the extent to which the academic progress of immigrant, refugee, and language minority students is hampered by inadequate language skills and the sometimes inadequate resources devoted to developing these skills. A contributing problem, mentioned by several program administrators at public institutions, is the difficulty of identifying this domestic ESL population which is admitted to a college or university under the same regulations and procedures as citizens and are thus not readily flagged as needing special services.

Even where these students are carefully identified, the problem of funding an adequately staffed, adequately extensive ESL support program remains. Whereas ESL programs for international students are frequently self-supporting and even revenue producing through separate tuition or higher out-of-state fees, ESL programs for immigrants, refugees, and language minority students represent a net drain on the economy of the institution, as attempts to house these programs in units supported by ancillary funds (e.g., extended or continuing education, student services, and study skills laboratories) indicate.

At the root of these issues, as stated spontaneously by several survey respondents, is a problem of perception: From non-ESL faculty to administrators, budget managers and legislators ESL programs for permanent residents are viewed as temporary, remedial, and nonacademically credible—a stop-gap response to an immediate situation. Given the surprising longevity of ESL programs documented by this study and indicated by the future demographic projections outlined above, a complete rethinking of the position and status of ESL in postsecondary education is long overdue. ■

<sup>1</sup> This article is based on a paper presented at the Los Angeles Regional CATESOL Conference at California State University, Northridge, November 2, 1985. A portion of the data was also presented at the Region I and XII Joint Conference of the National Association for Foreign Students Affairs in Honolulu, Hawaii, November 27, 1985. We would like to thank Stephen B. Ross of California State University, Long Beach for his comments and suggestions on a previous draft of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Compared with the 46% of intensive English programs offering credit in the Grosse-Lubell (1984) study.

<sup>3</sup> This finding is confirmed by a small informal study conducted by George Wilcox at TESOL '85 and reported in the *HEIS Newsletter* (1986, January).

<sup>4</sup> These figures are in line with the Wilcox (1986) data, cited above, in which \$20,890 appears as the mean "reasonable average salary for someone teaching full-time for an academic year in a TESOL in higher education situation."

<sup>5</sup> These figures compare to the 29% of major intensive English programs reporting that part-time faculty were accorded benefits in the 1984 Grosse-Lubell study cited above.

*Terrence Wiley is codirector of the language and content enrichment project at California State University, Long Beach, where he teaches in the linguistics and American language programs. He received his PhD from the University of Southern California and specializes in educational and applied linguistics. He is coauthor of two ESL textbooks.*

*Karen Fox earned a Master's in linguistics/education from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. She directs the American Language Institute at California State University, Long Beach.*

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