



8888 University Drive, Burnaby, BC  
Canada V5A 1S6

TEL: 778.782.3925  
FAX: 778.782.5876

vpacad@sfu.ca  
www.sfu.ca/vpacademic

**MEMORANDUM**

<b>ATTENTION</b>	Senate	<b>DATE</b>	November 16, 2011
<b>FROM</b>	Jonathan Driver	<b>PAGES</b>	1/3
<b>RE:</b>	Report of Committee to Review EAL Supports (SCUP 11-44)		

Introduction

In fall 2010 I formed a review committee with terms of reference to report on the adequacy of our support for students for whom English is an additional language (EAL). The terms of reference and the committee's report and recommendations are attached and are also available on the VPA website. I am now seeking comments on the report and on the proposed next steps outlined in this memo. Please submit comments to eal\_report@sfu.ca by January 31, 2012.

Although we do not know the exact number of EAL students at SFU, a data gap that the review report identifies, it would not be surprising to find that 50% fall into this category. Concerns about the English language abilities of students (not all of whom are EAL) have been brought to my attention regularly by instructors and students. Both domestic and international students may have difficulties with English language, and graduate and undergraduate students need assistance. I therefore believe that we should focus on better support for language development for all SFU students, and not conceptualize this as a problem that is confined to international students.

The remainder of this document sets out some principles for SFU to follow with regard to EAL support, and defines short-term and long-term action plans. I support the overarching approach of the report that identifies a need for ongoing and systematic work at SFU to improve EAL Services and supports. The principles and recommendations have been reviewed and modified by the deans and by SCUP.

Principles for English language support

Following Recommendation 13 of the committee, a useful first step is to establish a set of principles. The following principles are modelled on Appendix C of the committee's report.

1. With the exception of a few specialized programs, the language of instruction at SFU is English, and graduates of SFU degree and diploma programs should have the language skills needed for more advanced study and/or employment in an English-speaking environment.
2. A multi-lingual campus community enhances the academic and cultural life of SFU, and we support opportunities for people from different cultural/linguistic background to contribute to and participate fully in the diversity of campus life.
3. SFU is responsible for ensuring that students are sufficiently competent in English at the start of their program to allow them to participate fully in their studies.
4. Students for whom English is an additional language and who seek to improve their English are responsible for continuing to develop their English language proficiency throughout their programs by taking appropriate credit and non-credit courses, and are encouraged to use English in non-academic situations.
5. Support for EAL and other students should include a broad range of academic skills and acculturation opportunities, not just English language skills improvement.

6. The need for appropriate language support is addressed early in a student's career, and the options for support at all levels are clearly outlined to students and their advisors.
7. Academic units should remind and encourage students to use English during all aspects of their studies at SFU, including activities such as group work, in-class discussions, field schools, faculty/student interactions, and graduate supervision.
8. SFU regularly evaluates the efficacy and outcomes of its English language support, and is committed to developing new approaches to this.
9. Provision of some English language support may require the University to levy a separate fee for non-credit programs.

#### Immediate actions

The report notes that development of adequate language support is complex, and it is likely that the needs of students will change over time. It also notes that difficulty with language may be one of a number of interrelated factors that international students in particular may face, and some support programs may have to incorporate other assistance. The proposed immediate actions are designed to build a stable structure for further development.

1. Establish a group with responsibility for monitoring and improving EAL support.  
I concur with the report's Recommendation 11 that a small group with responsibility for coordinating and overseeing EAL support will yield faster results than a drastic re-structuring of current programs. I suggest that the standing committee be supported by staff in the office of the Director, University Curriculum. The terms of reference and membership will be established in a later document.
2. Following Recommendations 2, 3, and 4, the Associate VP Students should conduct a review of the English proficiency required for admission to SFU, the process for directing non-admissible students to preparatory programs, and the process for directed admitted students to appropriate support programs.
3. The EAL steering committee should produce a document and website that outlines in a clear and comprehensive manner all of the services currently available for EAL students. There should be an accompanying piece that provides guidance to instructors and staff on how to advise EAL students who are having difficulties.
4. Following Recommendations 8 and 9 the Teaching and Learning Centre should consult with the EAL coordinating committee about provision of programs to assist departments incorporate English practice and proficiency into curricula, as well as programs to assist instructors and TAs who work with EAL students or with native English speaking students who may have language challenges, and instructors and TAs who are themselves EAL speakers.
5. It would be very useful to build a question about a student's language background into the new course and instructor evaluations that SCUTL will be developing over the next year.
6. The Director, University Curriculum, should initiate a review of the Foundations of Academic Literacy program (FAL). This should include an assessment of the benefits of the program to students, the need to expand course offerings, the possibility of courses focused on disciplinary writing styles, the need for graduate level FAL courses, the need for new courses to "bridge" students to writing-intensive courses, and the question of additive versus integral credit for FAL courses.

#### Long-term actions

1. The EAL coordinating committee should conduct a gap analysis of SFU's support for EAL students, and make recommendations for new programs (Recommendations 5, 6).
2. The EAL coordinating committee should monitor the effectiveness of various support programs and processes on a regular basis (Recommendations 10, 12).
3. The EAL coordinating committee should examine the role that Writing intensive courses play in the development of language abilities in EAL students, and integrate the W criteria and aims into EAL projects when appropriate.
4. The EAL coordinating committee should inform itself of emerging issues with regard to EAL support, and make appropriate recommendations for action.

#### Resources and other issues

A number of recommendations deal with resources. The budget of the Vice-President, Academic has many competing demands. The VPA will commit some funds from the revenues received from Fraser International

College to enhancing EAL support. However, as with other non-credit support programs, some new initiatives will require that students pay a fee for EAL programming.

The report also recommends that SFU should develop a more comprehensive plan for internationalization; although this recommendation is outside the mandate of the committee, I can report that preparations are underway to do this under the supervision of the Vice-President External Relations..



University Curriculum and Institutional Liaison  
Office of the Vice President, Academic

Strand Hall 3100  
8888 University Drive, Burnaby, BC  
Canada V5A 1S6

TEL 778.782.6854  
FAX 778.782.5876

Sarah\_dench@sfu.ca  
www.sfu.ca/vpacademic

**MEMORANDUM**

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**ATTENTION** Dr. Jon Driver **DATE** July 27, 2011  
**FROM** Sarah Dench **PAGES** 1/1  
**RE:** Review of SFU Services and Supports for English as an Additional Language

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Dear Jon,

Attached you will find the report of the committee formed to review SFU services and supports provided to students for whom English is an additional language. The committee is unanimously supportive of the recommendations presented, and we hope that you will find them useful in moving forward on this critical issue.

Following consultation with the Vice Presidents and Deans, the committee believes that consultation with the SFU community would be worthwhile to ensure that these recommendations are supported in principle. If so, we envision the next steps to be the development of a specific plan for implementation, which should include identification of timeframes, costs, and plans for the evaluation of impacts.

Thank you for the opportunity to examine this challenging issue, and to contribute to the improvement of student academic supports. The committee would welcome the opportunity to discuss this report with you, at your earliest convenience.

***English as an Additional Language  
Supports and Services at SFU:  
Review and Recommendations***

***July, 2011***

Simon Fraser University has long had a significant number of international and domestic students for whom English is an additional language (EAL). With the growth of the Metro Vancouver region as a diverse community and a destination for many immigrants from the Pacific Rim and the Indian sub-continent, and with the rapid growth of the international post-secondary educational market in BC, the challenges of teaching multilingual students and those for whom English is an additional language have again come to the forefront.

Instructors at SFU (and across the BC post-secondary system) express concerns that inadequate language skills are hampering the academic success of some multilingual and EAL students. Additionally, some instructors are frustrated with the challenges of teaching multilingual students. Specific to SFU, changes in Spring 2010 to SFU's undergraduate English language and literacy admissions requirements also contributed to the discussion around these issues.

As a result of these and other factors, in Fall 2010 the Vice President Academic established a small committee to review these issues, and to make recommendations on the following:

- (a) analysis of the needs of prospective students, and opportunities for SFU to develop/expand programs
- (b) analysis of the needs of SFU graduate and undergraduate students, and action that should be taken to meet these needs
- (c) review EAL programs (and any related activity) currently run by SFU
- (d) review the reporting relationships, business plan and budget for each program
- (e) recommendations for the most appropriate programs, business plans and organizational structures to meet the needs of intending and enrolled students

The committee formed to undertake the review was comprised of faculty and staff involved in and knowledgeable about teaching and programming for international and EAL students:

Sarah Dench, Director, University Curriculum & Institutional Liaison (Chair)  
Steve Marshall, Assistant Professor, Education, Foundations of Academic Literacy  
Lawrence McAllister, Lecturer, English Bridge Program, FASS  
Paul McFetridge, Associate Dean, FASS  
William Radford, Director, SFU International  
Colleen Wood, Director, English Language and Culture Program, Lifelong Learning  
Helen Wussow, Dean, Lifelong Learning  
Susan Rhodes, Assistant Director, University Curriculum & Institutional Liaison

The Vice President Academic invited comments to be submitted to the committee, and the committee met with a wide range of individuals from the SFU community (list of those consulted is provided in Appendix A).

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### **Current Context**

In a 2005 SFU report on language issues prepared for the VP Academic, data from Statistics Canada indicated that more than 30% of residents of the Metro Vancouver region spoke a language other than English as their first language. Statistics Canada Census data from 2006 indicated that approximately 40% of Metro Vancouver residents spoke a language other than English as their first language. Given patterns of continued and increased immigration to British Columbia, it is unlikely this proportion will have dropped over the past 6 years, and may now be higher. At SFU, data from the Office of Institutional Research and Planning (IRP), taken from a survey of undergraduate students, indicates that 25% of students surveyed in 2003 identified themselves as speaking a language other than English as their first language, and 40% reported that they use a language other than English at home. SFU does not track the growth in numbers of multilingual students year to year, but it seems reasonable to expect that the number of students registering at SFU will continue to reflect the significant linguistic diversity of the Metro Vancouver region.

SFU does track the growth in numbers of international students. Data available from IRP shows that the proportion of international students attending SFU has grown significantly, at both undergraduate (from 9.2% in Fall 2005 to 14.4% in Fall 2010) and graduate (from 15.5% in 2005 to 22% in Fall 2010) levels. Although not all international students at SFU speak a language other than English as a first language, SFU Admissions indicates that the majority of international applicants to SFU undergraduate programs provide an IELTS (International English Language Testing System) test score, information required of international applicants for whom English is not a first language. From data collected by Admissions on students admitted to SFU for the Fall 2010 semester, of 5013 admitted undergraduate students, 830 were international students on a study or other visa, and 434 were recent permanent residents of Canada. Of the 434 permanent residents, at least 267 students originated from non-English speaking countries. Data on students' countries of origin collected by IRP indicates that the majority of SFU's international students list non-English speaking countries as their home country, predominantly China, Korea, Hong Kong, and Taiwan which together comprised 72.2% of international undergraduates at SFU in Fall 2010.

Colleges and universities throughout the BC post-secondary system are experiencing growth in the populations of students for whom English is an additional language. The K-12 system has also experienced growth in the EAL student population. Of particular relevance to SFU as "feeder districts", the Burnaby and Coquitlam school districts have intentionally grown their international student recruitment programs, employing staff at the school district level specifically for this purpose. Like many domestic students in these school districts, international high school students seek to enter SFU as their university of choice. Similarly, many international students studying at local colleges seek to transfer to SFU.

SFU struggles to communicate the message to multilingual students, domestic and international, that a high level of fluency in English (as the language of instruction at SFU), and the regular use of spoken and written English, are essential to both academic success and successful integration to student life outside the classroom. This problem is compounded by the fact that the role of the English language in student lives has changed; multilingual students do not necessarily need to speak English to function effectively in Vancouver, particularly with the expanding role of social media, the internet, and other modes of communication. The particular mix of linguistic diversity within the SFU EAL student population also contributes to the challenges; unlike other multicultural universities with more diverse populations such as those in Toronto, students at Metro Vancouver universities can more easily function within relatively homogeneous linguistic groups with limited need to practice or use English on a daily basis. The lack of practice in English impacts the further development of proficiency.

The shifting demographics of metro Vancouver contribute to a widening gap between the EAL student body, and university standards and expectations. The university seems to be sending mixed messages; we admit students with a level of English proficiency that is at the lowest threshold possible for the rigours of academic life, fully expecting them to succeed, yet we do not offer the necessary core language support and services needed to foster success. For their part, EAL students interpret admission to SFU as a clear signal that they have already attained a high enough proficiency level to succeed in an English post-secondary milieu, particularly when they come to SFU with strong academic credentials. Students in this circumstance are shocked when subsequently they struggle academically, and feedback from staff (described later in this report) indicates it becomes difficult to advise these students that they do not have the language skills to be successful. Amongst instructors, there lingers the expectation or standard of the native English speaking student in teaching and assessment methods, and many instructors seem to perceive any student who struggles with academic English at SFU as "international" (therein demonstrating what we consider to be a significant misperception on the part of faculty and staff with respect to who our students are). EAL students face significant challenges; they are not a demographically homogeneous group with one set of needs, and the feedback they are given from many sources tells them they should meet our standards, while at the same time from the same sources they receive messages that they do not.

Taken together, the above indicate that academic preparedness and success of students for whom English is an additional language continue to be complex issues. Multilingual students are not a monolithic group, and, for SFU, the issues involved can be seen to fall along a continuum from preadmission to employment following graduation. Discussions of the committee followed this line of thinking.

The committee's discussions were also framed by attempts to understand the interactions of multiple language use and university literacy; how language challenges interfere with learning and the student experience at all levels; and



acculturation to the English language university environment. Deficits in English can also be a source of social exclusion, which in turn reduces the benefits of engagement and co-curricular activities.

This is not to suggest that students are not responsible for improving their own language proficiency, their motivation and commitment, their learning, and their academic achievement. However, in light of the dynamics described above, and the changes in the demographics of the university community over the past ten years, the committee believes that there is a need for a fundamental and significant shift at SFU regarding English language services and support, moving from a deficit remediation perspective to an approach of developmental support. EAL supports must move from the periphery to the curricular core, and become central to learning at SFU. It is with this in mind that we make our recommendations.

### **Pre-Admission Preparation**

For many years, SFU has offered programs designed for the pre-admission improvement of English language skills at the undergraduate level. Such programs, using varying levels of English proficiency as a starting point, are deficit remediation approaches for the improvement of English language for academic purposes up to Senate approved admissions levels. They are also intended and marketed as international undergraduate student recruitment opportunities for universities and colleges. Many universities and colleges offer such programs, and in Metro Vancouver over the past ten years there has been rapid growth in the number of private colleges offering only English as an additional language or English-for-academic-purposes programming. Length and quality of programming and instruction vary, and many private EAL colleges are unregulated. Within the BC post-secondary system, there is articulation of many courses and programs, and a specific articulation committee for EAL/EAP programs. There is little or no programming available specific to pre-admission preparation for graduate study.

The longest standing of SFU's EAL programs is the English Language and Culture Program (ELCP), operating from Lifelong Learning (formerly known as Continuing Studies). This non-credit program assists international students and working professionals to improve their English for academic, business and personal purposes. The ELCP operates primarily in downtown Vancouver, with twelve-week, eight-week, and four-week intensive programs, and competes in a market that includes many private English language schools. Some students flow from the ELCP to credit studies at SFU, but ELCP students are not given conditional admission to SFU and must meet all the normal admission requirements for international applicants. There is significant EAL teaching expertise available in the instructor complement of the ELCP. Specifically as a pre-admission support for students who meet or exceed the academic requirements for admission to SFU, yet fall shy of the English language requirements, the unit remains a resource to SFU with a structure that has potential to expand as needed.

The recently discontinued English Bridge Program began in 1998 as a joint effort between the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and SFU International, managed through the department of Linguistics. The EBP was an English for Academic Purposes program for conditionally admitted EAL students, and comprised three interrelated programs: the original English Bridge Program, Preparation in Academic Skills in English (PAS), and Academic English Skills (AES). All were offered as non-credit and operated on a cost-recovery basis. The EBP students were international or recently arrived immigrant students who were otherwise academically qualified for SFU entry but whose English language proficiency did not meet admission requirements. EBP students were given a guarantee of admission to SFU, conditional upon satisfactory completion of the program. The EBP has now been discontinued, as the number of directly admitted international students has grown, and FASS was no longer able to maintain the program due to costs. However, the PAS and AES components will be continued, offered in collaboration with Fraser International College, and run on a cost-recovery model. However, the discontinuation of the English Bridge Program presents an opportunity to refocus the expertise in teaching English as an additional language that remains in the Linguistics department. Instructors are ready and willing to identify new ways in which they can continue to support EAL students at SFU.

SFU's contract with Fraser International College continues the pre-admission pathway program for academic preparation of international students for entry into SFU. FIC is not an EAL preparation program, but does provide the opportunity for non-credit supplemental EAL instruction through PAS and AES to those FIC students with lower-level English skills, in conjunction with transferable university credit course work. The FIC pathway is a highly supportive, "high touch" environment focused on assisting student transition to academic life in a North American setting. In addition to academic coursework, the college provides focused advising, academic intervention, supplemental instruction, and support for cultural adjustment. The success of this integrated model is dependent on the teaching-intensive and personal environment, and is likely not scalable beyond a certain enrollment level. Students transferring to SFU from FIC are tracked in the aggregate by SFU, to monitor academic performance, and the data is reviewed each term.

### **Admission Criteria**

Setting appropriate admissions criteria for the university, or a particular program, is never an exact science. It involves careful consideration of institutional recruitment and retention strategies, monitoring of the education systems from which students originate, and an understanding of how previous education relates to desired academic performance at higher levels of study. The interplay of academic preparedness, developmental level, and student choice is complicated, and there is no single criterion or indicator that will guarantee academic success and degree completion. Demand levels for entry to SFU also fluctuate, and local and international demographics play a significant role in that demand.

As previously mentioned, SFU's undergraduate requirements to demonstrate acceptable English proficiency were changed in Spring 2010, raising concerns that international students would not be sufficiently well prepared for study in English. More recently, the undergraduate requirements have been tightened, raising the acceptable test score levels of IELTS (International English Language Testing System) for admission and reintroducing a requirement for a minimum of four years of previous secondary study in English for students where the principle language of instruction is not English, and a minimum of three years where English is the principle language.

For domestic applicants from high school, SFU relies on English 12 grades and the Language Proficiency Index test (LPI) as thresholds for admission and filters for placement into courses ("Foundations of Academic Literacy" FAL X99 and writing intensive courses, discussed below). Given the changing demographics in the BC K-12 school system, and the need for the high school curriculum to prepare students for a range of possible alternatives after graduation, issues related to language use and readiness for university level work should be studied further. Many domestic students entering SFU are multilingual, may find university work in English challenging for a range of reasons, and would benefit from being required to further develop their use of English for academic purposes. This is also true for many students who are native speakers of English. Many students are exempt from FAL X99 as they are admitted with sufficiently high English 12 grade levels and LPI scores of 4 or higher, the current level approved by Senate. SFU's requirement of LPI 4 is lower than both the University of British Columbia and the University of Victoria, which require scores of LPI 5 for direct registration into university English courses. The institutions do not allow for exemptions from this requirement.

Students who transfer to SFU from other post-secondary institutions are required to have successfully completed either a transferable English course or an SFU-approved writing intensive course for admission, and thereby demonstrate proficiency in English for academic purposes. For admission at the graduate level, a range of different test scores are accepted as proof of proficiency in English for academic work. According to the Dean of Graduate Studies, despite meeting acceptable test score levels (eg. IELTS 7), it is still the case that many admitted international graduate students struggle in English.

Whatever filters SFU puts in place requiring students to demonstrate readiness to study in English, no filters are perfect. Test scores, whether domestic or international, are limited in the information they provide to SFU about a candidate's abilities for academic work in English when previous education has been conducted in another language. Additionally, a student may succeed at test writing, or be proficient in English in the particular discourse of a given discipline, but struggle in English in coursework outside of that area or in everyday life. Students who believe that they will succeed academically because they achieve a particular test score are not taking responsibility for their own educational preparedness and are not fully understanding the ongoing work required for academic success. Perhaps most

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importantly, SFU as yet lacks an overarching strategy to better guide recruitment of EAL students, international and domestic, who have the necessary preparation in English for academic success.

### **Post-Admission Support and Retention**

In Fall 2006 SFU adopted new undergraduate degree requirements, including writing intensive learning. Courses at the lower and upper division are labeled “W”, and students must complete at least two such courses including an upper division W course in the major. Writing intensive courses are rigorous, and one of the criteria for a W course designation is that at least 50% of the course grade be based on written assignments to which instructors have provided detailed feedback.

### **Academic Literacy**

The introduction of W courses into undergraduate curriculum necessitated the introduction of a course designed to improve the writing and academic literacy skills of admitted students who fell short of the English 12 and LPI thresholds set for W courses. “Foundations of Academic Literacy” (FAL X99) is a four unit, additive credit, course designed in the Faculty of Education, and many sections of this course are now offered every semester. In 2008-09, there were 95 sections offered (18 students maximum in each section), with between 800-900 students enrolled. The majority of FAL-required students (80%) are so-called “Generation 1.5”, with two to five years at a BC secondary school; this creates nuanced pedagogical issues and challenges, particularly in relation to FAL-required native English speakers. A small percentage (10% - 20%) of students already meet FAL requirements at admission but take the course by choice to improve their English and writing skills. A very small number of graduate students have also taken the course. It is important to note that FAL X99 was not intended as an EAL support, but that 89% of students now required to take FAL are EAL. The curriculum is focused on academic preparedness and writing for that purpose, and the course becomes less effective when the majority of students require significant EAL support.

Feedback collected from FAL-required students has consistently shown that they find the course to be highly beneficial to their studies and their confidence, whether or not they were initially resistant to taking a course for additive credit. However, students also comment that the course should be counted for full integral credit, particularly since the grade for FAL X99 is included in the cumulative grade point average. Additionally, many students feel that the additive credit issue and the course being enrolled predominantly with EAL students creates an environment that is not a positive learning experience. The faculty member responsible for FAL X99 shares this view, and has further concerns about how this experience may interact with learning outcomes and longer-term academic success. This is the subject of a SSHRC funded research project.

From the perspective of the FAL coordinator and instructors, there is a need to provide improved advising for FAL students in terms of enrollment in follow-up W courses. Students often enroll in an inappropriate W course because of peers, which

can result in underperformance, as does course overloading. The Faculty of Education, which houses FAL, is discussing an advanced-level, W-designated, FAL follow-on course for students admitted to SFU with English 12 grades in the 75-85% range, since their needs are different from students with lower English 12 grades (or equivalencies). Other academic departments are also considering the development of post-FAL, lower level courses intended to provide further development for students in academic English. In any such courses, additive credit would present a significant obstacle because students needing further instruction may avoid taking the course if it could not be fully counted (eg. as an elective) toward degree requirements. The additive credit label may also send a mixed message to students regarding the extent to which SFU considers communication skills in English to be of central importance.

### **Student Success**

Student Services provides retention programs focusing on students at academic risk. Students in academic difficulty are distributed fairly evenly among Canadian born, recent landed immigrants, and international students. A major concern expressed by the staff from the Student Success Program (SSP) is that SFU's messaging to students is inconsistent with our admission requirements; the official stance of the university has been that SFU does not provide remedial supports and services, whereas the student needs observed by advising staff suggest such supports are warranted, and would contribute to an improved student experience at SFU.

From the point of view of SSP staff and the Associate Vice President, Students, SFU has seemed unprepared to deal with the magnitude of the challenges related to EAL students; no staff training or continuing resources have been allocated; no regular data is collected on the non-homogeneous EAL population; there is little understanding of the full scope of EAL issues, nor a clear idea of the specific issues faced by these students; the university provides only ad hoc efforts to intervene and provide support; and little direct information is collected from students about the challenges they face to academic success. SSP staff believe there is disconnection for EAL students between meeting minimum standards and understanding what is required for competency sufficient for academic success. While some attention is paid to those students known to instructors or who become known to the university because they are on academic probation or required to withdraw, there is also a larger group of students who scrape by academically and do not become known to service providers. These students choose their programs and courses carefully to avoid certain types of assessment, they are strategic with their course loads to allow themselves time needed for extra study, and they develop other such coping strategies. The general "student experience" for these students is likely much different than that of other students and less than the rich experience for which SFU wishes to be known. They cope academically at a certain level and eventually graduate, but they do not thrive. For many of these students, SFU co-curricular programs of student involvement are not an option as they are not able to function at an academic or linguistic level that would allow them to participate.

SSP staff members often come across students in the SSP “Back on Track” program with the FAL exemption (granted at admission based on grade 12 English, adequate test score, or college transferable college English or W course) but who still have language challenges for which they cannot find assistance. These students often feel alienated and disconnected at SFU, and cannot get sufficient help from faculty or TAs. As with the experience of some international graduate students, the fluency of these students in English is incongruous with their academic abilities in their home language. SSP advisors find that many EAL students perceive the biggest challenge to be gaining acceptance to the university, but are unprepared for the difficulties they face studying in English once admitted. Language challenges hamper academic success, and similarly have a negative impact on student engagement and co-curricular success.

The senior advising staff of SFU International expressed similar concerns. This group provides transitional support and assistance to help students navigate SFU once admitted, and act as cultural interpreters and advocates for SFU international students. SFU-I staff frequently encounter communication struggles for some students, and are often asked to make phone calls or proofread letters because students are not able or comfortable trying to communicate in English. However, the staff are frustrated by the SFU community perception that EAL challenges are purely an international student issue, when many of the EAL students seeking assistance are technically domestic students.

Staff members are concerned that the value of intercultural communication is not being recognized and emphasized by SFU administration, and therefore not absorbed by other students and faculty, who tend to view international students with EAL issues as “problems”. Some common and concerning student issues are presenting more frequently to SFU-I staff, such as isolation, engagement difficulties, self-blame; mental health issues from depression due to isolation and negative experiences, but students not seeking counseling because of cultural taboos; language issues that block access to work opportunities; graduate students who TA in their first term suffer extreme anxiety and embarrassment when language and communication in tutorials go awry.

Staff members in SFU International believe that if international EAL students were better prepared linguistically, they may still experience cultural and academic difficulties, but those difficulties would not be further exacerbated by language challenges. International students come to SFU expecting to succeed, particularly when they have been strong students in their home countries. Being accepted to SFU leads them to believe they will do well in their studies in English, and are disillusioned when they struggle academically. It becomes difficult to advise them that they do not actually have the language skills to be successful, nor are there resources to direct them to.

There are also issues of identity and acculturation; students who are recent landed immigrants may resist assistance and do not see themselves as international students. This plays out in the problems of domestic EAL students who do not speak English at home and do not engage in sufficient practice in the English language. As such, these students may not adequately improve in their English proficiency thereby sharing international student EAL challenges. Also problematic is the practice of recruiting international students (on study visas or recent immigrants) from local high schools and colleges based on an assumption that such students are acculturated when in fact they are not.

Suggested improvements from SFU International advisors include raising IELTS levels for admission (this discussion predated the recent Senate approval of higher levels), providing intercultural training for SFU staff and faculty, and recommending the Teaching & Learning Centre to take a lead in encouraging the incorporation of and the benefits of intercultural learning in the classroom.

### **Co-op Education and Employment Readiness**

The Co-operative Education program regularly encounters students who are academically qualified to take part in Co-op but linguistically underprepared to write a cover letter or interview with an employer. Approximately 17% of students in Co-op are international students; however, up to 60% of Co-op students have demonstrated EAL issues. Time constraints in the turn around for Co-op placements and course requirements do not allow for work on improving communication skills, and staff do not have the expertise for this.

Over the past five to seven years, employers who reliably provide placements for SFU Co-op students, and who subsequently hire SFU students into entry-level career positions post graduation, have again become increasingly concerned about the English language proficiency, and therefore the work-readiness, of SFU graduates. Such concerns from employers of SFU students and graduands were part of the original motivation for the introduction of SFU's W course requirements. Employers have communicated their concerns to Co-op, to Faculties, and to the outside community regarding the quality and language skill levels of SFU students. This creates concern about SFU's reputation broadly, and particularly with continued placements, sponsorships, and career event support.

The staff of Work Integrated Learning (WIL), the unit in Student Services responsible for Co-op, Career Services, and Volunteer & Community-Based Learning, observe a noticeable decline in communications skills, both written and oral. Cultural differences and the impact on the workplace are significant, particularly when dealing with clients and customers. Employers welcome a diverse cultural experience and multiple language proficiency, but they want good communicators. Employers are now demanding communication skills, not just grades, for Co-op placements, and will often insist on pre-interview phone calls as a filter. Demand on SFU staff time is considerable in terms of trying to provide support without the

linguistic expertise to do so. Staff members now find they spend twice as much time dealing with language issues as employment skills.

Here again there is a problem of students not using English outside of university and not taking advice to participate in language enhancement programs such as English speaking clubs or Toastmasters. Students often focus solely on their quantitative skills and do little to improve their communication skills but cannot be employed without them; they are often unaware of how poor their communication skills are and are more concerned with grades, particularly in Engineering Science, where the mandatory Co-op requirement is often problematic for EAL students.

Co-op staff members try to balance help to students while dealing with significant language issues and although staff training in WIL would help for understanding EAL issues generally, WIL staff do not regard providing EAL support as an appropriate part of their job nor are they qualified for this. WIL staff also often find themselves in ethical dilemmas around rewriting student communications sent to potential employers. Business Co-op staff direct much time to communications coaching and document editing. Students also have a high need for support regarding anxiety about interviews, and they may often either inappropriately overstate or understate their abilities. Many students come to SFU for the Co-op program because it is large and accessible to students in all disciplines. Students want Canadian work experience with large well-known companies, but when they are not successful in attaining a position, they are left anxious, frustrated, stressed, and unmotivated. The combined impact of these issues is a negative experience for staff, employers, and students.

### **Graduate Students**

The Dean of Graduate Studies provided an overview of issues faced by Graduate Studies with respect to supporting international graduate students. Approximately 50% of applicants to Graduate Studies are international, and 60% of those are at the PhD level. The Faculty of Applied Sciences has the highest proportion of international applicants, and currently, the highest number of international applicants to SFU is from Iran. The proportion of international graduate students is 22-24%, but EAL supports are minimal and the growth of international students places stress on available services.

Graduate students for whom English is an additional language have unique needs for support and development, and these tend to be much more disciplinary based than for undergraduate students. As mentioned previously, while test levels for admission to graduate study at SFU are higher than for undergraduates, graduate students may still struggle to develop their English for academic and personal purposes. The Student Learning Commons offers the "Grad Café" group for graduate students, and many international teaching assistants who are graduate students have benefited from the International Teaching Assistants Training (ITA) Program, offered from Lifelong Learning. There is significant overlap in the support needs between all graduate students for whom English is an additional language with the



needs of international TAs. A combined approach utilizing reorganized and expanded ITA workshops to include other graduate students has proven beneficial in piloting, delivered in conjunction with Graduate Studies.

The ITA Training Program began as a small-scale effort in Lifelong Learning (then Continuing Studies) in the mid-1990s serving a sub-set of the international graduate student community. The program takes a two-pronged approach working with international TAs, and international graduate students generally. Budgetary issues have consistently restricted growth and development, and ITA continues to be a non-credit optional program. The program is a seminar format, with approximately 12 students per group and runs with no charge to participants.

Changes in graduate student demographics due to university recruitment efforts has led to a much more diverse group than five years ago, which has in turn resulted in a shift in needs from purely language skills to more academic skills. The ITA Program does work on improving language, but at an academic level. It includes an instructional development component and a pedagogical comparison to assist students with the shift to a Western style of teaching.

The Director of the ITA Training Program would like to develop better crossover with other EAL services, with W courses, and with the Teaching and Learning Centre, although graduate students are a distinctive group with specific needs. Coordinating with other units would be beneficial to the program and permanently expanding the program to all international graduate students (regardless of whether or not they become TAs) would also be worthwhile. There is increased demand for the program due to more students being referred to the ITA by graduate secretaries and departmental managers, with more departments requiring their international TAs to attend. However, the ITA is not able to increase capacity due to limited resources, and accommodates approximately 150 students a year. The program is currently funded with some recurring base funding, and additional funds provided on an annual basis. This funding model hampers planning and expansion of the ITA Training program to serve more students and fully promote the program to all SFU departments, and there are insufficient resources to develop an assessment process for the program.

### **Student Learning Commons**

In addition to the development of FAL X99 to support preparation for W designated courses, the Student Learning Commons (SLC) was developed in 2006 and situated in the SFU Library. The SLC offers a wide-range of co-curricular, academic supports to all students, and all of the SLC services support EAL students, with some services specifically targeted for this group. Some EAL services have been integrated within courses and academic programs by ad hoc faculty request, while most are optional and dependent on the student's self-motivation to seek them out.

In the SLC, optional EAL services include individual English language learning plans, undergraduate and graduate conversation groups (English Conversation Group,

Grad Cafe), individual conversation appointments (Conversation Partners), and grammar and language focused workshops. There is moderate uptake of some programs, and demand greatly exceeds supply for the Conversation Partners program, reflecting that many EAL students are aware that regular use of spoken English has a beneficial impact.

Another optional service open to all students, but heavily used by EAL students, is the individual writing consultations. This is also popular, and again demand for the service exceeds supply. This is likely a direct impact of W courses in the undergraduate curriculum.

While marketing of SLC services is important, the demand for the new Conversation Partners program demonstrates that students will seek out what appeals to and works for them. In the view of the SLC Director, the challenge is to encourage students to make the other commitments necessary to improve their academic English. Part of the answer may lie in the very strong use by EAL students of the SLC's core service, individual peer writing consultations. Here there is a clear and direct motivation in working to improve written work as it will be submitted for a grade in a credit-bearing class.

There are possibilities for expanding the EAL supports in the Student Learning Commons, building on the services and expertise already in place, particularly in the area of Supplemental Instruction for EAL support and writing services. However, increasing co-curricular supports through the SLC in the absence of curricular requirements for the development of English language skills will simply continue the deficit remediation and reactive approach at SFU.

### **Instruction and Instructional development**

Instructors across the university are very concerned about an observed decline in the level of preparedness for study in English amongst undergraduate students. Faculty report struggling to assess students' acquisition of disciplinary knowledge because they cannot sufficiently separate the understanding of ideas, facts and concepts from the poor quality of expression of these in assignments.

Feedback to the review committee indicated that a number of SFU departments are considering the creation of credit-bearing courses in basic writing skills (eg. grammar, composition) with a disciplinary focus. Representatives of these departments state that this avenue is not necessarily their first choice, but given the students' needs for improved communication skills and a lack of alternatives to which students can be directed for improvement, creating new courses has become a higher priority. While the committee does not dispute that more such credit bearing courses will be beneficial, equity of access and consistency of curriculum across and between Faculties must be considered. A mixed model of curricular and co-curricular opportunities across all Faculties is worthy of consideration, with credit bearing courses recognized fully as part of degree requirements. Early intervention and more structured, credited program elements will promote student

engagement and commitment to the further development of their communication skills.

An important piece in understanding the classroom challenges in working with a multilingual student population is the degree to which instructors feel knowledgeable and supported for their teaching in the diverse classroom. From written feedback received by the committee, and in discussions with Associate Deans from a number of the Faculties, it was clearly stated that instructors do not feel well prepared for the language challenges students now bring to their courses. Instructors are also concerned that in struggling with these issues, and assigning low grades to assignments written in poor English, this may be misconstrued as being overly stringent, or convey a lack of respect for cultural differences.

Nevertheless, instructors would benefit from being able to access expertise on teaching EAL students, both for short-term support and assistance, and for longer-term training and course development. Instructors want appropriate services to which they can refer students, and improved training and information about EAL students and issues so that they are better able to make effective referrals.

### **Other Institutions**

From discussions with personnel at other universities, it is clear SFU is not alone in grappling with how to better teach and support EAL students. In BC, the metropolitan universities and colleges are uniquely placed in Canada in the degree to which international and multilingual populations seek to become students, and such institutions are impacted similarly by changing demographics amongst domestic students and increasing enrollments of international students. Service approaches vary; however, many institutions in BC are offering developmental courses in written English and communication skills as part of core curricula. The curricula are supplemented by other forms of co-curricular supports.

Many institutions in North America offer ladderized curricula, combining credit and non-credit opportunities for progressive development and skill building in English for academic purposes, with credit courses built into program requirements (eg. as required courses or electives). Programs offer practice for written and oral English, and for reading skills, and many utilize on-line learning in addition to classroom-based teaching. Many of these programs and supports are not restricted to EAL students, but are programs designed to benefit all students. Some local, Canadian, and international examples are included in Appendix B.

### **What must SFU do to improve?**

In considering the information collected and feedback provided to the review, it is evident to the committee that the complexity of EAL issues requires a multifaceted response from SFU. Of paramount importance is the principle of support for those students admitted to the university; these students have been assessed, deemed to

have potential for academic study, and by admitting them SFU has made a commitment to provide opportunities for success and credential completion.

The demographics of the students admitted to SFU have changed over the years, and in turn SFU has been and continues to be changed by these students. The culture of SFU is enriched and internationalized by our students, and the university has become a leader in Canada in reaching out internationally with education and opportunity. As a result, the university must shift from the perspective of deficit-remediation to transitional development as we strive to support and educate our students. We can mourn the perceived change in “standards” or, as an organization, appreciate the diversity and new opportunities to learn and grow with our global student body and alumni.

SFU is committed to producing graduates who are community-engaged, well prepared global citizens. Excellent communication skills are fundamental to this outcome, and it is SFU’s shared responsibility with students to further develop their proficiency in English in support of this commitment. We hope the following recommendations will assist the university to achieve that goal.

## **Recommendations**

1. To guide approaches to EAL issues, SFU urgently needs a current strategy for internationalization that provides guidance to the recruitment and retention of academically well-prepared international students, and to support improved planning of services and academic success.

*(Responsibility: Vice President Academic; Vice President External; Associate Vice President Students; Director, SFU International)*

2. SFU should ensure there is clear, consistent, and repeated communication to all applicants and admitted students regarding the standards for English proficiency and requirements (including the need to practice written and spoken English) expected for academic success, not simply for admission to the university.

*(Responsibility: Associate Vice President Students; Registrar and Executive Director Student Enrolment; Executive Director Student Affairs)*

3. SFU should request the Registrar to review and consider raising LPI levels to more appropriately screen applicants and place admitted students in courses, particularly to ensure domestic EAL students are sufficiently prepared for studies in English at the university level. At the very least, SFU's LPI levels should be set consistent with those at other BC universities, and used to consistently filter incoming students into FAL and other academic writing courses, with very limited exemptions allowed.

*(Responsibility: Associate Vice President Students; Registrar and Executive Director Student Enrollment; Senate)*

4. Academically qualified applicants whose LPI and/or IELTS scores fall short of approved admission requirements should be referred to the English Language and Culture Program to improve their English proficiency. As students prepare to re-apply for admission to SFU, academically qualified ELCP students would then be less likely to seek educational options elsewhere. If admitted, their academic progress should be tracked.

*(Responsibility: Associate Vice President Students; Registrar and Executive Director Student Enrollment; Senate)*

5. Foundations of Academic Literacy (FAL X99) should become a fully integral credit course, rather than additive credit, to better ensure student commitment to the course, and to broaden the appeal of the course beyond FAL-required students.

*(Responsibility: Vice President Academic; Dean, Faculty of Education; Senate Committee on Undergraduate Studies)*

6. SFU should prioritize the development and offering of required courses for the improvement of communication skills for academic preparedness as a core curricular component (required, credit-bearing), not merely as a support service or

supplemental (non-credit). To this end, if interested, the departments of Linguistics and English, and the Faculty of Education, should be invited to submit proposals through the normal curricular approval processes for courses at the 100 and 200 levels intended to provide students from all undergraduate programs with courses to improve their writing, composition skills, and English for academic purposes. These courses will be integral credit, and in some cases, eligible for W designation. Students will be filtered into the courses using their LPI or IELTS scores, as presented at admission to SFU. The threshold for exemptions would be set high, and therefore would be limited. Should other departments be considering disciplinary-focused writing improvement requirements, these should also be in the form of credit bearing courses, proposed and vetted via the normal curricular approval processes, and developed in close consultation with writing and EAL experts in other academic departments.

*(Responsibility: Vice President Academic; Deans)*

7. Recurring funds should be provided for enhanced and expanded supplemental instruction, and supports for writing and EAL services in the Student Learning Commons. Infrastructure already exists through the SLC in the important core services and expertise housed there, and a further investment in this area will leverage significant improvements across all three SFU campuses.

*(Responsibility: Vice President Academic; University Librarian; Director, Student Learning Commons)*

8. Supports for international graduate students should be expanded. The current International Teaching Assistants program should be reorganized, funded, and expanded to provide training and assistance for the unique disciplinary support requirements of graduate students. As with the SLC, this will leverage existing resources in a cost-effective way.

*(Responsibility: Vice President Academic; Dean, Lifelong Learning; Dean, Graduate Studies)*

9. The Teaching and Learning Centre should provide instructional development and support for instructors to keep them abreast of the issues impacting EAL students, and pedagogical issues related to teaching in the multilingual and multicultural classroom.

*(Responsibility: Dean, Lifelong Learning; Director, Teaching and Learning Centre)*

10. There is a need for improved and ongoing tracking of EAL students and more nuanced data that includes domestic and international EAL students, and a full scoping of EAL student issues including in-class and out-of-class experiences. There is an opportunity to add questions to national surveys that SFU already participates in, such as the Canadian University Survey Consortium, to collect data on our own students and benchmark against other Canadian universities, in addition to regular in-house survey work through the office of Institutional Research and Planning. Without full data on the ongoing impact on EAL students during their university experience, SFU will not be able to create and maintain effective approaches to

policies and services. This has an impact from recruitment through to graduation, and possibly an impact on our engagement with our students as alumni.

*(Responsibility: Associate Vice President Academic; Associate Vice President Students; Director, Institutional Research and Planning)*

11. There is a need for improved and ongoing coordination of services and supports for EAL students, including oversight of focused communications about these services. The coordinating function, through the appointment of a standing committee of EAL stakeholders and service providers, should have an administrative aspect to it, provide quality control, improve linkages between services, address service gaps, and some expertise on EAL issues should reside with it as a centralized resource. As credit-bearing courses are established, these would also be monitored by the committee to ensure consistency of standards across courses. We are not recommending reorganization of current units or changing distributed authority unless there are other reasons for doing this, but rather oversight and a committee mandate to ensure coherence, consistency, and quality. This will in turn assist in finding administrative efficiencies, and improve services to students.

*(Responsibility: Vice President Academic)*

12. The new EAL standing committee should identify and coordinate ongoing assessment of the impacts resulting from implementation of these recommendations. Assessment would include, but not be limited to, the following: establishment of initial baselines; annual survey of retention and completion rates where communication issues are critical factors in academic success; survey of faculty and staff opinion on levels of student communication skills; use of student focused surveys to assess student satisfaction communication indicators; surveys of Co-operative education employers.

*(Responsibility: Vice President Academic, Associate Vice President Students)*

13. SFU should consider adopting and publicizing a policy similar to Griffith University's "Good Practice Principles for English Language Proficiency for International Students", as listed in Appendix C.

*(Responsibility: Vice President Academic, Associate Vice President Students)*

## **Appendix A**

### Consultations with the committee, and/or the Chair

Louise Legris, Director, Admissions

Kate Ross, Registrar and Executive Director, Student Enrolment

Wendy Steinberg, Director, International TA Training Program

Wade Parkhouse, Dean, Graduate Studies

Tim Rahilly, Associate Vice President Students

Annette Santos, Manager, Student Success Programs

Rummana Khan Hemani, Director, Student Success

Carolyn Hanna, Senior International Student Advisor, SFU International

Muriel Lemetski, Director, Work Integrated Learning

Shauna Tonsaker, Program Manager, Business Co-operative Education

Jo Hinchliffe, Assistant Registrar and Academic Integrity Coordinator

Tim Mossman, Coordinator, EAL Services, Student Learning Commons

Elaine Fairey, Director, Student Learning Commons

Bev Hudson, Director, Fraser International College

Duncan Knowler, Associate Dean, Faculty of Environment

Craig Janes, Associate Dean, Faculty of Health Science

Malgorzata Dubiel, University Teaching Fellow, Faculty of Science

Robert Cameron, Associate Dean, Faculty of Applied Science

Andrew Gemino, Associate Dean, Undergraduate Program, Beedie School of Business



## **Appendix B**

**University of British Columbia:** Laddered first-year English curriculum, including specific courses for students outside the Faculty of Arts, and those not intending to major in English. In Continuing Studies, the Writing Centre provides services for those seeking to improve their written English, including two non-credit courses focusing on grammar and composition, on-line courses for disciplinary writing, and a course for graduate students. International House at UBC also offers English language classes for international students and their families.

**University of Victoria:** Laddered first-year English curriculum, including non-credit and credit courses focusing on grammar, composition, and writing and reading for university purposes. The English Language Centre in Continuing Studies provides social and cultural programs, and a “Conditional Acceptance to Degree Programs” preparation program.

**University of Northern BC:** Credit and non-credit courses in English for academic purposes, and general university study skills courses.

**Thompson Rivers University:** Pre-admission EAL programs, some with disciplinary focus, language labs, ESL Learning Centre, first-year English composition courses, and a Writing Centre that includes tutoring and on-line resources.

**Ryerson Polytechnic Institute:** English communication supports and practice opportunities, support with written English through peer programs, on-line modules, and language workshops, and labs for reading and listening skills. There are also specific services for graduate students. All EAL services are published in one consolidated website as “English Language Support” linked from Student Services web site. <http://www.ryerson.ca/student-services/els/index.html>

**York University:** University English Language Institute offers non-credit pre-academic and academic preparatory programs at various levels, “Skills for Everyday English” program, and pre-graduate school preparatory programs.

<http://www.yueli.yorku.ca/about/index.php>

The ESL Open Learning Centre offers a range of supports to EAL students registered in credit courses, including workshops, tutoring, a resource library, and conversation practice. <http://www.yorku.ca/eslolc/keele/default.asp>

The York Library houses a Learning Commons that includes services such as learning, research and writing skills. The Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies houses the Writing Department, which provides credit courses in writing, e-tutoring, and a writing centre.

**Griffith University (Australia):** Similar in structure and demographics to SFU, and also partnering with a Navitas pathway college, Griffith offers the Griffith English Language Institute, implementing the Griffith English Language Enhancement Strategy. This is a consolidated pre-entry-to-completion approach utilizing a Learning Centre, language and computer laboratories, non-credit English language programs and test preparation, and a credit bearing English enhancement course for degree program students. International students at Griffith are required to retake IELTS as an exit test, and students completing a full degree pay 50% of the normal fee. Griffith adheres to “Good Practice Principles for English Language Proficiency for International Students in Australian Universities” (see Appendix C).

**University College London (UK):** UCL Language Centre offers non-credit programming such as English for academic purposes and foundational courses, a diploma in English for Academic Purposes, and disciplinary university preparatory programs.

**Stanford University (USA):** Stanford offers the English for Foreign Students program in the Stanford Language Centre. Credit and non-credit programming is available to international students for English language improvement, and testing services and international TA screening are also housed here.

### **Appendix C**

#### **Griffith University; Good Practice Principles for English Language Proficiency for International Students in Australian Universities**

1. Universities are responsible for ensuring that their students are sufficiently competent in the English language to participate effectively in their university studies.
2. Resourcing for English language development is adequate to meet students' needs throughout their studies.
3. Students have responsibilities for further developing their English language proficiency during their studies at university and are advised of these responsibilities prior to enrollment.
4. Universities ensure that the English language pathways they approve for the admission of students enable these students to participate effectively in their studies.
5. English language proficiency and communication skills are important graduate attributes for all students.
6. Development of English language proficiency is integrated with curriculum design, assessment practices and course delivery through a variety of methods.
7. Students' English language development needs are diagnosed early in their studies and addressed, with on-going opportunities for self-assessment.
8. International students are supported from the outset to adapt to their academic, sociocultural and linguistic environments.
9. International students are encouraged and supported to enhance their English language development through effective social interaction on and off campus.
10. Universities use evidence from a variety of sources to monitor and improve their English language development activities.