

From: James Jenkins
To: Bill Scroggins
Cc: Irene Malmgren, Madelyn Arballo
Date: 1/08/2016
Subject: Re: LA Times Opinion on ESL

Bill,

This certainly continues to be one of our biggest challenges, and I believe that our non-credit ESL program continues to innovate very well in response to some of these issues; from the English Department side of things, I have always been very impressed with what they and AmLa continue to do to address these issues.

As the article suggests, success for these students is a combination of funding *and* effective program structure, including the creation of appropriate learning communities/cohorts. (The author uses the creation of "double-barreled" [linked] course/lesson plans--which I think our ESL program is already doing!)

In our division, we have certainly had many challenges when it comes to program limitations for AmLa. Although both the raw numbers and the percentage of students placing into ESL or AmLa classes over the last 5-6 years has been very consistent (a total of 10% of students placing into ESL and AmLa, with 80% of those students placing into AmLa), AmLa has struggled to maintain the continuity of its program—consistent enrollment in not just writing classes but reading and speaking classes. Years ago, when we were able to require students to enroll in a writing, reading, **and** speaking course at the same time, not only did we have robust enrollment, students enjoyed much more consistent success as they matriculated. These *ad hoc* learning communities were highly effective because not only were they the only choice for students, they were a comprehensive approach to English language acquisition that filled the gap (quoting the LA Times) "between survival English and the level of proficiency needed to excel in the United States, the kind of English that allows newcomers to live up to their full potential and help their children live up to theirs." Since then, we've been trying to experiment with different links and cohorts, even modifying course curricula, but we have yet to find a way to duplicate the success that ESL has with programs like their VESL program, where students take a "package of classes" that increase their language skills and with a focus on how these skill increase their success in the workplace. It's possible that the motivation for those students is much different than the students who take our credit second language classes—and it is clear that the pay-off seems much more immediate for those in VESL.

We can offer "packages" like that—and we've even tried with links like AmLa 43W and 67 and ENGL 67/68 and AmLa reading classes; but those links rarely fill.

However, many AmLa students still tend to matriculate successfully, although we think we can increase that number if we could get the message out that, even though reading and speaking classes are not required for transfer, they are certainly vital components of success as you move forward; lack of reading skills remains one of the single biggest factors in lack of future

academic success. But right now, there is very little incentive for them to take something that is not "required."

All of this is to say that, although the author of the article states that the "best lever for change is funding," I would modify that to focus on the program and pedagogy: "effective pedagogically-driven programs are the best lever for student success and a consistent, clear institutional message that supports that pedagogy is vital to inspire student motivation and secure participation." Although funding is always helpful, much of what we're talking about can be done with minimum of increased funding—and funding can't, by itself, address the fundamental issue of motivation.

Thoughts on Implementation

Now that we have had our initial successes with the GE pathways, I'm thinking that we could package reading, writing, and speaking into cohorts with the incentive that, if they pass the courses, they will be guaranteed seats in subsequent AmLa and English classes as well as work with a Tutor in the Classroom—just like the basic Pathways model. Not having to compete for seats in English classes should be a significant incentive to get students into those reading and speaking classes. Once there, they will do well because that pedagogy is very solid and has been very successful in the past. So, I believe we know how to close the gap—we just need to get them into the classes.

I think another piece of getting the students there is that we need to be encouraging them to get into these classes from the beginning of the application process (or even before)--make it part of our advertising, make sure they see it in the app process, in the orientation process, hear it from every counselor, so that they begin to see taking these clusters as something that is expected of them instead of just a series of options that they can take or leave.