

ESL Program Response to IPBT Recommendations

The ESL Program strongly opposes the IPBT recommendation to remove ESL 5 and 6 from the ESL course offerings. We believe this recommendation is an extreme action that will have a dramatic and adverse impact on our ESL student population, especially in terms of their language development and academic skills as well as their transfer/graduation goals.

First, ESL 5 is equivalent to EWRT 1A. It is a challenging course that focuses on teaching students how to read informative and argumentative articles, to draw out the tenuous assumptions underlying the arguments, provide solid research to corroborate their positions and then write a pointed, well-organized response, while applying effective rhetorical conventions and research documentation. This is no easy task especially for second language learners whose reading skills and vocabulary are still at a developmental level.

Unlike American students who have spent their high school years writing and responding to texts, ESL students are usually ill-prepared both linguistically and culturally to enter the discourse community in the American system of higher education. Integration into this community is not simply a matter of taking composition courses on the rudiments of essay writing, but in addition, learning how to communicate both orally and in writing in an unfamiliar culture. Most English teachers admit that they don't have the training or the time to address ESL language problems or to offer the kind of specially tailored instruction necessary for ESL students to understand the cultural and linguistic contexts of academic reading and writing. ESL 5 and 6 allow for this necessary development.

Second, many of our ESL students do take ESL 5 to satisfy community college graduation and/or university transfer requirements (e.g., to San Jose State). Of the 500 students who were eligible to take ESL 5 in the 2009- 2010 year, eighty percent chose to take ESL 5 as a pathway to transfer or complete their degrees at De Anza. We have also found through correspondence with our students that many of those who take ESL 5 before EWRT 1A do so because they want to succeed in EWRT 1A and they want to transfer to UC, which does not accept ESL 5 as freshman composition.

Instead of giving up two core levels, one of which always fills and is only offered once a year, the ESL Program would like to counter the IPBT recommendation with a more careful analysis of fill rates for all of its classes. The ESL chair and scheduler will look to reduce courses that do not consistently fill and offer sections that have historically filled instead. In this way, the ESL Program can raise productivity without sacrificing critical courses, such as ESL 5 and 6, which play a vital role in our students' success and goals.

Finally, we, as instructors, have heard from our students who have gone on with their studies that they were glad they had the opportunity to take ESL 5 and 6. They found that the experience of these two classes prepared them for success and were well worth their time and effort.