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The Challenge of Articulating ESL Courses in Postsecondary Education: Policy and Legislative Issues

FARIBA I. ARRIVES IN THE OFFICE of a community college ESL faculty member during spring registration with her transcript from Foothill College in northern Santa Clara County. She wants to find out which ESL or English courses she should take in view of the advanced ESL she took at Foothill. The instructor tells Fariba that only a placement test will determine the ESL or English courses that match her skills. Fariba is concerned that her registration will be delayed and that classes she needs will be closed. Time and money are significant issues for Fariba and other students trying to move from one community college to another community college, the California State University (CSU) or the University of California (UC). The faculty member's problem is whether Fariba has attained the linguistic proficiency which she needs to succeed in her courses because no matrix exists comparing equivalent California Community College (CCC) ESL courses to each other or to courses in the CSU or UC. Moreover, no statewide ESL curriculum exists in higher education. This lack of course comparability across institutions may be seen as a barrier to ESL students' ability to move easily from one institution to another. Indeed, in 1988, the CCC chancellor's office staff believed that ". . . there is a need within the ESL discipline to develop some commonality of course content, structure and standards" (Farland & Cepeda, p. 8).

In answering the following questions, the extent of the challenge involved in developing common course content, structure and standards may be seen.

- What are the state priorities and policies that affect articulation of courses and how do they affect ESL curricula?
- Do they facilitate the movement of students between schools?

- Is a common ESL curriculum a viable means to lower barriers to transfer or should more effective ways be pursued?

In addressing such issues, this article first reviews the state priorities for curricular functions and course standards and how they developed. Second, it summarizes formal intersegmental articulation policies, other statewide efforts to facilitate student transfer, and CSU and UC credit types for ESL courses and their effect on articulation. Third, it reports on a study which investigated issues of credit and remediation as they apply to ESL courses in the CCCs. The findings indicate how credit for ESL courses has been classified with respect to the state standards for community college courses. They also describe how intersegmental articulation policies have affected transferability and General Education-Breadth Agreements for ESL courses. Furthermore, the study highlights the challenge of articulating ESL courses in the context of the usual definition of articulation.

Community College Priorities and Course Standards

One way of articulating courses is by setting statewide policies which establish priorities for college curricula. These priorities are intended to emphasize the amount of attention and resources which particular curricular functions should receive.

Curriculum Priorities

The Joint Committee for the Review of the Master Plan for Higher Education reaffirmed curriculum priorities for CCCs in its final report: "The California Community Colleges shall offer academic and vocational instruction at the lower division level for both younger and older students, including those returning to school, as their primary mission" (1989, pp. 14–15). Courses and programs must be consistent with this mission as well as reflect other educational values in order to be approved by the chancellor's office. Remedial education, English as a second language, and state-funded noncredit adult education are essential and important functions, and community service courses and programs are authorized functions. These priorities had already been incorporated in the community college reform legislation, AB1725, passed in 1988.[1]

Standards and Procedures for Assigning Credit

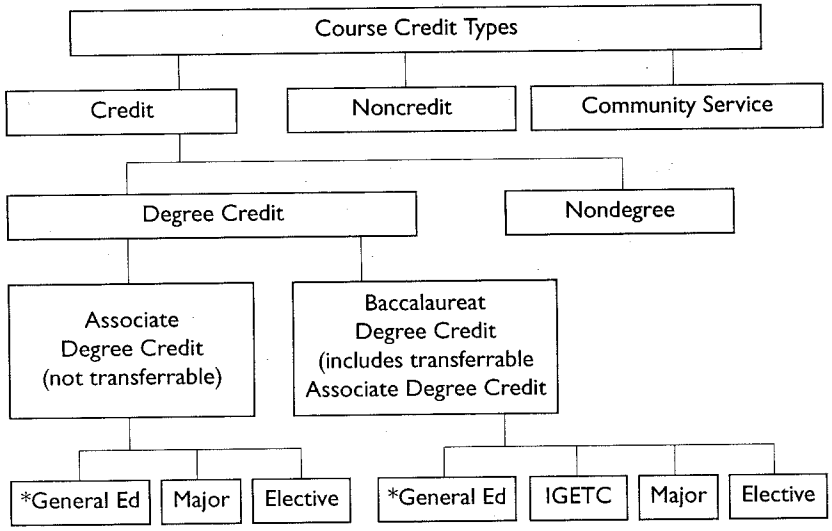
Setting statewide policies for course standards is another way of articulating courses. These standards are meant to help ensure that the quality of education is the same within the California Community Colleges, California State University and University of California. According to the

> courses approved through the local curriculum review process as suitable for the fulfillment of associate degree and general education requirements must reflect an understanding by those reviewing the courses of both the expectations of the Board of Governors and those of 4-year colleges and universities. (California Community Colleges, Chancellor's Office , 1995a, p. 19)

Course Classification by Credit Type

The curriculum standards and procedures determine whether courses are considered to be at college level or not. These standards and procedures are outlined in Title 5 of the California Code of Regulations.[2] Community colleges must use them to determine the types of courses and programs which are appropriate to the associate degree and to determine which courses should constitute the general education program. Implementation of program and course standards and oversight by the chancellor's office are intended to ensure "not only that tax dollars are being expended for programs that are as well designed as possible but also that these programs fulfill purposes that best reflect the priorities of California taxpayers and other constituencies" (California Community Colleges, Chancellor's Office, 1995b, p. iii). These standards operationalize priorities by assigning different credit types to courses (see Figure 1), thus creating a hierarchy of status for courses. Courses which meet the standards for the associate degree receive college-degree credit while courses which do not meet these standards may receive nondegree credit. Standards are also outlined for noncredit and community service courses. "Credit is higher education's coin of the realm; it designates that both the student and the courses have met certain standards" (California Postsecondary Education Commission [CPEC], 1983, p. 118). College-level credit is the most valuable "coin."

Figure 1
Classification of Credit Types



Note: GE, IGETC, major, and elective credit may overlap.

Development of Course Standards

The standards now encoded in Title 5 have evolved over time, with impetus for their development derived from fiscal as well as academic considerations. A summary of the development process shows a long-standing focus on issues surrounding remediation and indicates how policymakers intended the standards to apply to ESL courses.

Earlier minimum standards

Stewart (1982) describes the development of the early minimum standards. These standards classified courses as credit, noncredit, and community service classes not eligible for state funding (including fee-based avocational and recreational classes, seminars, lecture and forum series, workshops and conferences as well as professional and occupational in-service classes). Stewart notes that, because of the educational and monetary value of credit,

> . . . it is subject to politics as individuals and organizations seek to acquire or to influence its allocation. Students covet—and need—the credit in order to gain credentials, student financial aid, and even athletic eligibility. Colleges, universities, and other public educational institutions may emphasize credit rather than noncredit programs because the former often receive a higher level of state support. Both individuals and institutions may also pursue credit for its real or perceived prestige. (1982, p. 48)

ESL and the CCC definition of remediation

According to Stewart, following the passage of Proposition 13 in 1978, the community colleges experienced a decline in revenues of $418 million in 1978-79. While the legislature provided funds to compensate for the shortfall, it also began an intense scrutiny of community college programs to correct growth in every kind of program. "The state lawmakers seized upon the credit/noncredit dichotomy as a way to distinguish more clearly the nature of the state's financial commitments" (p. 48). In response to the legislature, Title 5 regulations were adopted in 1981 which differentiated credit from noncredit courses: "Quite deliberately, the new minimum state standards were intended to facilitate the fiscal accountability standards established earlier by the legislature" (p. 49). According to Stewart, the greatest amount of debate centered on whether to grant credit to those courses designated as developmental in the classification guidelines, that is courses emphasizing "basic skills in mathematics, reading, and English—including English as a second language at the most basic level. . ." (p. 50). The statewide Academic Senate argued that developmental courses should not be given college-degree credit because it viewed these developmental courses as remedial—designed to bring students up to college level skills, not to advance them within the postsecondary system.

Continually at the center of discussions about the development of community college course standards has been the issue of remediation (now called precollegiate basic skills), its cost to the state, its proper role in the community college curriculum, and in postsecondary education in general. With respect to ESL, policy makers have generally viewed all but the two levels carrying equivalency with freshman composition and the course immediately preceding them as sharing characteristics with other precollegiate basic skills courses—that is, as preparing students for college work. ESL faculty, on the other hand, have argued that the academic rigor of ESL courses is comparable to that of foreign language courses, and that just as native English speaking students receive foreign language credit for all foreign language courses they take, so too should English language learners receive college credit for all ESL courses they take—irrespective of any equivalency of these courses with prefreshman or freshman English

(California Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages [CATESOL], 1994a; Martino, 1992; Petersen & Cepeda, 1985). A tension exists, then, between perceptions and goals of ESL professionals and those of the constituencies which developed the Title 5 regulations.

Concern over extent of remedial courses in higher education

The development of the course standards in Title 5 continued to center on granting credit for remedial courses. In 1981, many faculty members, including the statewide Academic Senate, expressed concern that students in many degree-related courses exhibited such a broad range of skills that it was impossible to teach courses at college level and that consequently the credibility of the associate degree was being eroded (Palomar College Curriculum Review Committee, 1987). This concern was furthered by the fact that the main source of growth of the colleges over the previous 10 years had occurred in the area of remedial, college preparatory, and recreational and avocational courses. In response, community college leaders wanted a clearer definition of the term college level and requested that only courses at that level be counted towards the associate degree and certificates. They also recommended, in order to ensure continued open access, that college preparatory courses be assigned workload credit—that is, credit that is not applicable toward a degree but which enables students to satisfy minimum courseload requirements and so qualifies them for financial aid. They also recommended that these courses be fully funded.

During this same time, because of its concern about the number of underprepared students entering colleges and universities and because of state fiscal constraints, the California Postsecondary Education Commission (CPEC) identified the improvement of student preparation and skills as a top priority. The Commission committed itself to providing information on the extent of remediation in California's postsecondary institutions and thus produced its 1983 report, *Promises to Keep.*

In *Promises to Keep* , CPEC decided to use the terms *remediation* and *remedial education* despite certain difficulties in defining the terms and despite the fact that the words were highly charged. It defined remedial education as ". . . courses and support services needed to overcome student deficiencies in reading, writing, and mathematics to a level at which students have a reasonable chance of succeeding in regular college courses including vocational, technical and professional courses" (p. 3). With respect to language skills, the Commission defined *remedial reading courses* as those provided to students who read below the 12th-grade level. *Remedial writing courses* were considered to be courses below the transfer-level freshman composition course. While the Commission did not use the word remedial in reference to ESL, it did define ESL courses ". . . as English courses taught to students whose primary language is not English in order to prepare them for regular college courses" (1983, p. 4). CPEC had also recommended that baccalaureate credit not be awarded to remedial courses but rather that they be offered for workload credit.

In 1985, the CCC Task Force on Academic Quality submitted proposals to the board of governors which resulted in the standards laid out in Title 5 (Farland, 1985a, 1985b). These standards operationalized a definition of remediation and differentiated among the credit modes for associate-degree-level courses, nondegree-credit courses, noncredit courses, and community service courses.[3] In addition to meeting the Title 5 standards of rigor, associate-degree-level courses had to fall into one of these specific categories:

> (a) all lower division courses accepted toward the baccalaureate degree by the CSU or UC or designed to be offered for transfer
>
> (b) courses that apply to the major in nonbaccalaureate occupational fields
>
> (c) English courses not more than one level below the first transfer-level composition course, typically known as English 1A. Each student may count only one such course as credit toward the associate degree
>
> (d) all mathematics courses above and including elementary algebra
>
> (e) credit courses in English and mathematics taught in or on behalf of other departments and which, as determined by the local governing board, require entrance skills at a level equivalent to those necessary for the courses specified in sections (c) and (d) above. (California Community Colleges, 1995a, pp. 21 & 22)

There is some ambiguity as to how categories (a) and (c) pertain to ESL. Some colleges consider their credit ESL courses to be English courses and a part of a sequence of English courses. Some ESL courses at these colleges might be considered equivalent to the first transfer-level composition course or one level below. Other ESL courses might be considered to be below the most basic English composition course for native speakers of English (which may be two or three levels below the first transfer-level course). These colleges assign credit to their ESL courses depending on whether they fit into category (c) or not. If the courses are not considered to be equivalent to the first transfer-level English course or one level below, they are assigned nondegree-applicable credit.

On the other hand, other colleges offer ESL courses designed to transfer to and be accepted by the CSU and/or UC—category (a). Whether they are equivalent to the first transfer-level composition course or one level

below—category (c)—is not considered relevant. These colleges consider their ESL courses to have more in common with foreign language courses than with English. A course in Spanish or German is assigned associate-degree credit if it is designed for transfer or if it is accepted toward the baccalaureate degree by the CSU or UC. Since ESL is a foreign language for students in the courses, faculty members design rigorous college-level ESL courses which the CSU and UC in fact accept for transfer. Such course are assigned associate-degree credit because they can be categorized in category (a) just as Spanish or German can be.

ESL and the CCC definition of remediation

In developing its proposals for course standards, the Task Force on Academic Quality recommended that the board of governors adopt a definition of remediation appropriate for community colleges:

> Remediation is that process which is designed to assist students to attain those learning skills necessary to succeed in college transfer, certificate or degree courses and programs, and includes classroom instruction as well as other prescriptive interventions to assist students in the pursuit of their educational goals and objectives. (Farland, 1985c, p. 8)

The task force took the position that ESL should not be classified as remedial unless students were deficient in skills in their native languages or unless they had learning problems.

> ESL . . . may also be taught at the associate or baccalaureate level. For example, colleges in all segments offer an ESL course which receives credit as English 1A. Course content, criteria and evaluation are identical to the regular English 1A. The only significant differences are that this course is recommended for students whose primary language is other than English and instructors of these courses are trained to recognize special problems faced by these students, such as the use of idioms or misinterpretations brought about by literal translations. (Farland, 1985c, p. 8)

Chancellor's office staff recommended the following addition to the task force's definition of remediation:

> Remedial instruction includes courses designed to develop reading or writing skills at or below the level required for enrollment in English courses one level below English 1A, mathematics courses below Elementary Algebra and English as a Second Language courses consistent with the levels defined for English. (Farland, 1985d, p. 9)

This definition of remediation, minus the statement on ESL, was the basis for the standards and categories of courses which would define associate degree applicable courses in Title 5. The chancellor's office staff believed that one effect of this addition would be "to specify, in terms of curriculum content, the lower level courses that can be applied to the associate degree. As a corollary, therefore, it also defines credit courses below the specified levels as not applicable to the degree (i.e., remedial)" (Farland, 1985b, p. 8).

Chancellor's office staff also recommended that the board of governors "direct staff, in consultation with the Chancellor's Task Force on ESL and the colleges generally, to develop guidelines for determining what levels of ESL are equivalent to the standards applied in English for determining what is and is not remedial" (Farland, 1985d, p. 9).

The Chancellor's Task Force on ESL, appointed in 1983 to respond to *Promises to Keep*, responded that ESL as an academic area should not be categorized as remedial (Petersen & Cepeda, 1985). However, another issue the task force faced was whether ESL courses should be classified as credit-bearing given the stricter guidelines for credit being developed at the time.[4]

The task force report stated: "It is clear that ESL, like any other course offering in community colleges, must first meet the established criteria for credit and noncredit courses as mandated in Title 5, Section 55002 (Petersen & Cepeda, 1985, p. 10). The report further stated with respect to ESL courses that

> only some current offerings should apply toward fulfillment of the unit requirements for the Associate Degree. Credit courses which do not meet these stricter criteria should be offered either as noncredit or as credit courses which do not apply to the Associate Degree. (Petersen & Cepeda, 1985, p. 11 & 12)

Thus, the task force adopted the firm position that only courses equivalent to freshman composition or one level below should be accorded associate degree status.

A subsequent report, *English as a Second Language: A Progress Report on Existing Board Policy Directives,* reiterated these recommendations regarding the classification of ESL courses as to credit type. "Like any other instructional area, ESL is subject to the same criteria as specified in Title 5 of the Administrative Code" (Farland & Cepeda, 1988, p. C-1). This means that degree applicable ESL courses must fit into one of the course categories specified in Title 5.

Precollegiate basic skills

Remedial courses are now included among precollegiate basic skills courses. Title 5 defines these as the courses in reading, writing, computation, learning skills, study skills and ESL which a district designates as nondegree credit (California Community Colleges, 1995b). One of the standards for approval says that assignments in the nondegree credit courses must be rigorous enough to ensure that students who complete a required sequence of precollegiate basic skills courses will have acquired the skills needed to succeed in college-level courses (California Community Colleges, 1995a).

California Articulation Policies and Procedures

The standards in Title 5 aim to ensure that community college level courses are equal in quality to similar courses in the CSU and UC. Thus, these standards provide the basis on which articulation agreements between the segments can be made. The California Community Colleges, CSUs, and the UCs have developed policies and procedures to facilitate the transfer of students. In order to do this, colleges and universities develop and maintain documents called *course articulation agreements* which affect the articulation of ESL courses. The definition of articulation, which is the basis for articulation policies and procedures described in the *Handbook of California Articulation Policies and Procedures,* refers to

> the process of developing a formal, written agreement that identifies courses (or sequences of courses) of a "sending" institution that are comparable to, or acceptable in lieu of, specific course requirements at a "receiving" campus. (California Intersegmental Articulation Council [CIAC], 1995, p. 1)

Based on these agreements, students who successfully complete an articulated course are theoretically prepared for the next level of instruction at the receiving institution.

Course Articulation Agreements and Procedures

This section summarizes the kinds of course articulation agreements and the general articulation procedures which have been developed between the community colleges and UCs and the CSUs as set forth in the *Handbook of California Articulation Policies and Procedures.*

Articulation agreements are classified as follows: courses accepted for baccalaureate, general education-breadth, lower division major preparation, and course-to-course.

Courses Accepted for Baccalaureate Agreements

These agreements identify courses "that are baccalaureate level and therefore acceptable by a receiving institution (or system) to fulfill both admission and baccalaureate elective credit" (CIAC, 1995, p. 4).

CCC courses accepted by the UC system.

In the UC system, the UC Office of the President develops and annually updates the list of courses accepted for baccalaureate credit called the Transferable Course Agreement (TCA) with community colleges for all UC campuses. The TCAs are developed according to policies of the Board of Admissions and Relations with Schools (BOARS), a committee of the UC Academic Senate which is charged with developing undergraduate admissions requirements (see Celce-Murcia & Schwabe, this volume). The basic principle used to determine the transferability of community college courses is whether the course is comparable to a lower division course offered at any of the UC campuses in scope, level, and prerequisites. If the course is not comparable to any offered at UC, it must be baccalaureate level in terms of its purpose, scope and depth. "ESL transfer credit is awarded for courses . . . which emphasize writing. Courses which focus on listening, reading, or speaking skills are not considered appropriate. Also, it is expected that the writing required will be (at least) at the paragraph level" (CIAC, 1995, p. 52). Presently, the University of California accepts eight units of ESL courses in this category.

CCC courses accepted by the CSU system

In contrast to how lists of transferable courses are developed between community colleges and the University of California, the responsibility for developing agreements for courses accepted for baccalaureate credit between the CSU system and community colleges rests with the articulation officer at each community college. In consultation with the individual community college curriculum committee, the articulation officer at each campus identifies courses appropriate for the list of transferable courses, also called baccalaureate-level courses. Executive Order 167 issued by the Chancellor's Office of the California State University states the CSU system's general policies and procedures that govern articulation of transferable courses. It states that courses designated by the faculty of accredited institutions as baccalaureate credit shall be accepted by any campus of the CSU. The appropriate authorities at the CSU campus shall determine the extent to which the courses satisfy the particular requirements of a degree. Those courses not otherwise applied are acceptable as general electives to the extent that the particular degree objectives permit.

General Education-Breadth Agreements

These agreements indicate "those courses that a student can complete at a sending institution to satisfy the general education requirements at the receiving institution" (CIAC, 1995, p.5). These agreements include a list of courses which are taken from the transferable course agreements.

CCC courses accepted by the UC system

For the UC, responsibility for developing these agreements rests with each individual campus. Only ESL courses which are the equivalent of freshman composition meet the terms of these agreements.

CCC courses accepted by the CSU system

For the CSU, individual community college campuses have the responsibility for certifying the agreements between their campuses and those of the CSU. Executive Orders 595 and 405 issued by the CSU system establish policies and procedures which apply to the development of the agreements. Whether community college ESL courses meet general education requirements at CSU campuses depends on whether a particular community college has certified the courses as meeting the requirements. (See Table 1 to compare CCC articulation processes for CSU and UC.)

Table 1
Articulation Processes for CCC and CSU and UC

RECEIVING INSTITUTIONS		
Type of Agreements	California State University	University of California
Transferable Course Agreements	Developed by CCCs in compliance with the CSU Executive Order 167. (Baccalaureate List)	Developed by the UC office of the President for each CCC. (Transferable Course Agreement)
General Education Breadth Agreements	Developed by CCCs in compliance with CSU Executive Orders 405 and 595.	*Campus/College Specific* Developed between CCC and UC by each UC campus.

Note. From *Handbook of California Articulation Policies and Procedures* (p. 6). California Intersegmental Articulation Council, 1995, Sacramento: Author. Reprinted by permission.

Generally, ESL courses which meet general education requirements are either equivalent to freshman composition or satisfy credit requirements in Category C (usually called the Humanities category in community colleges), established in CSU Executive Order 595 (CIAC, 1995) which includes the arts, literature, philosophy and foreign languages. Two criteria in the executive order could affect the classification of ESL courses. Part IV, Entry Level Learning Skills, states

> Title 5 of the California Code of Regulations, Section 40402.1, provides that each student admitted to the California State University is expected to possess basic competence in the English language and mathematical computation to a degree that may reasonably be expected of entering college students. Students admitted who cannot demonstrate such basic competence should be identified as quickly as possible and be required to take steps to overcome their deficiencies. Any course completed primarily for this purpose shall not be applicable to the baccalaureate degree. (CIAC, 1995, p. 52)

Some community colleges classify their transferable general education ESL courses in the humanities category along with foreign languages. In respect to this category, Executive Order 595 states that

> foreign language courses may be included in this requirement because of their implications for cultures both in their linguistic structures and in their use of literature; but foreign languages courses which are approved to meet a portion of this requirement are to contain a cultural component and not be solely skills acquisition courses. (CIAC, 1995, p. 80)

Lower Division Major Preparation Agreements

These agreements specify the courses at the sending institution that fulfill lower-division major requirements at a receiving institution. The agreements may be initiated at either sending or receiving institutions. ESL courses are not articulated under these agreements because they are not part of a major.

Course-To-Course Agreements

These agreements include courses at a sending institution "which are

'acceptable in lieu of' a corresponding course at a receiving institution" (CIAC, 1995, p. 5). Few ESL courses have been articulated in this way except for ESL courses which are considered to be the equivalent of freshman composition. However, since most ESL courses transfer as electives, this means of articulation is seldom relevant.

Intersegmental Curriculum Agreements and Common Numbering System

Two other means of smoothing the transferring of courses from community colleges to the UC and CSU are the Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum (IGETC) and the California Articulation Number (CAN) system.

Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum

The IGETC is a series of courses that community college students can use to satisfy general education requirements at any CSU or UC. However, completion of the IGETC is not a requirement for transfer to CSU or UC. Under IGETC, only freshman English can be used to satisfy the general education writing requirement. English as a second language courses "cannot be used to fulfill the English composition requirement" (Academic Senate for California Community Colleges, 1995, p. 44). This means that even if transferable courses identified as ESL can meet the freshman composition requirement at a community college, they do not fulfill the IGETC English composition requirement.

California Articulation Number System

The statewide CAN system implemented in 1985 identifies community college courses that are transferable and are considered comparable in content and academic rigor. The system "streamlines the articulation process by eliminating the need for every [CCC] campus in the state to articulate their course with every other campus in order to provide needed transfer and articulation information to prospective transfer students" (CIAC 1995, p. 46). However, no community college ESL course which is not designated as freshman composition is identified with CAN numbers.

Types of Credit for ESL Courses at the CSU and UC

The kinds of credit awarded to ESL courses in the CSU are diverse, and this diversity affects attempts at articulating ESL courses with community college courses. The *Report of the English as a Second Language Workgroup* (California State University, Office of the Chancellor, 1988) indicates that ESL courses at the CSU are offered for baccalaureate credit, and workload credit and without credit. ESL courses at community colleges are not generally articulated with ESL courses at the CSU on a course by course basis. As a result, community college ESL courses below the level of freshman composition may transfer as electives or with general education credit in the humanities category to some CSU campuses. Ironically, many of those campuses only grant baccalaureate credit to their own ESL courses which are the equivalent to freshman composition. Also, these ESL courses are not officially called ESL courses.

English as a Second Language at the University of California (University of California, Office of the President, 1989) indicates that ESL courses at the University of California are offered for baccalaureate as well as workload credit. Again, community college ESL courses may transfer to a UC campus which may have similar courses that do not apply to the baccalaureate degree. The catalog of one community college indicates that some ESL courses which do not apply to the associate degree do, however, transfer to the CSU and UC.

The situation that emerges from the transfer agreements is a confusing one, at best. There are ESL composition courses which meet the CCC freshman writing requirement for the associate degree but do not fulfill IGETC freshman writing requirements at the CSU or UC (since no composition course with ESL in its title meets the IGETC writing requirement). Hence, a student who has taken an *ESL* freshman composition course at a CCC would have to take an English freshman composition course to meet IGETC requirements. In such a situation, what incentive do students have for taking a course designed to meet their linguistic needs but which does not advance them towards a baccalaureate degree?

It seems apparent that California's formal standards and mechanisms intended to facilitate articulation of courses between the community colleges and the CSU and UC do little to assist an ESL student in both satisfying English requirements and achieving academic proficiency in the L2. The ways that ESL courses develop at the community colleges, CSU, and UC do not facilitate comparison or equivalence. In addition, the role of ESL is seen, in many ways, to be outside the mainstream of courses that college students are expected to take. Thus, ESL courses fall outside the measures taken by the system to make transitions between institutions easier.

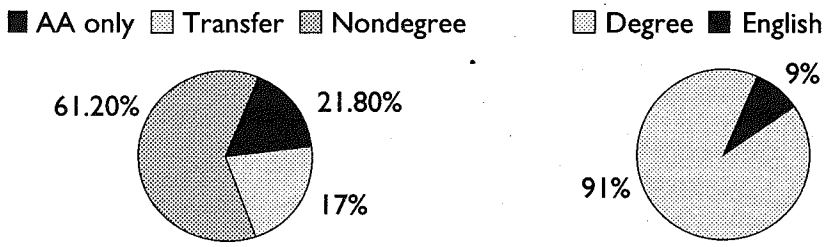
A Survey of Credit and Articulation in California Community Colleges

To illustrate how colleges are applying state standards to award credit to community college ESL courses and how intersegmental articulation

policies on transferable course agreements are being applied, a census (Garlow, 1995) was taken of all of the credit courses in the 106 California community colleges as printed in current college catalogs (see Figure 2).

While 61.2% of the 1,378 credit ESL courses were offered for nondegree credit, 21.8% were offered for associate degree only, and 17% transferred and received baccalaureate credit. Only 9% of all degree-credit ESL courses were identified as English courses, either equivalent to freshman composition or one, two, or three levels below. Evidently, degree credit has been assigned to most ESL courses without defining them in relation to English courses.

Figure 2
Credit Type Assigned to Community College ESL Courses



Note. From "The Academic Worthiness of ESL Courses in the California Community Colleges as Indicated by Credit Status" by Katheryn Garlow, 1995. Unpublished manuscript.

Articulation agreements between community colleges and the CSU and UC generally consist of Baccalaureate Level Course Agreements and General Education-Breadth Agreements (see Table 1). Since articulation agreements between community colleges and the CSU and UC are made through different processes, courses that transfer to one institution do not necessarily transfer to the other. One hundred forty-eight baccalaureate degree-credit courses transferred only to the CSU, nine only to the UC and 76 to both.

ESL courses which apply to a degree can either meet General Education-Breadth requirements or are applied to a degree as elective credit. Relatively few ESL courses meet general education/breadth requirements at any level.

Of those 301 associate-degree courses which do not transfer, only 2% satisfy general education requirements while 98% can be used as CCC elective credit.

With respect to the 148 courses that can be applied to both the associate degree at the CCC and baccalaureate degrees at the CSU, one would expect that consistency would exist in the way that credit can be applied to the two degrees. That is not the case, however. More of these courses meet general education and English composition requirements for the associate degree than for the baccalaureate degree (see Table 2).

Table 2
A Comparison of How Tranferable Credits Are Applied to the Associate and Bachelor's Degrees by Segments

	Credit Types		
	Courses transferable to CSU[a]		
Segment	Elective	GE	English Comp
CCC	82.4%	14.2%	3.4%
CSU	98.6%	.7	.7
	Courses transferable to UC and CSU[b]		
	Elective	GE	English Comp
CCC	63.1%	15.8%	21.1%
CSU	84.2%	07.9	7.9
UC	97.4	0	2.6

Note. From *The Academic Worthiness of ESL Courses in the California Community Colleges as Indicated by Credit Status* by (Garlow, 1995).

[a] $n = 148$, [b] $n = 76$

More ESL courses satisfied English composition requirements for the associate degree because of two practices in community colleges. One practice is to allow an English course one level below freshman English to meet composition requirements for the associate degree. The other practice is that some colleges offer a nontransfer associate degree for students who want to earn a degree with an emphasis on major or occupational courses rather than general education courses and who have no plans to earn a baccalaureate degree. Such a degree might include both transferable and nontransferable courses.

Only nine courses were listed in college catalogs which transferred to the UC but not, apparently, to the CSU. These courses all transferred as electives.

Seventy-six courses met associate degree requirements and transferred both to the CSU and UC. Again there was inconsistency as to how credits could be applied at different institutions. All ESL courses, except those which were equivalent to freshman English, were applied to the baccalaureate degree as electives at the UC.

To summarize, then, approximately one third of community college credit ESL courses may be considered to meet the standards for college credit set forth in Title 5. However, fewer than half of these courses have been designated as transferable. Credit for most courses in all segments was applied to the degree as elective credit, but credit for writing courses was more likely than credit for other kinds of courses to be applied as general education-breadth credit. All courses which transferred to the CSU and UC received more general education credit at the community college level than they did at the CSU and UC. More courses transferred to the CSU than to the UC, perhaps, at least in part, because the community colleges prepare the lists of transferable courses to the CSU, whereas the president's office prepares the lists for the UC. Few courses were explicitly linked by notations in the catalogs to a hierarchy of English courses. More ESL courses satisfied composition requirements at community colleges than they did at the CSU or UC and more satisfied composition requirements at the CSU than at the UC.

Discussion and Implications

Where do California's course standards for community colleges and articulation policies and procedures leave Fariba and her fellow students in their quest to attain their educational goals efficiently? Their routes to achieving the linguistic proficiency and the skills in English needed to earn an associate degree or to transfer are very different, depending on the community college they enter. There is great inconsistency and diversity in the kinds of credit that may be awarded to the very wide variety of ESL courses. If ESL courses were uniformly viewed as English courses by all community colleges, then only those courses considered to be at the level of freshman composition or one level below would be granted degree credit. Since this is not the case and slightly more than one third of the courses can be applied toward an associate degree, baccalaureate degree, or both, institutions are not applying criteria in the Title 5 regulations in a consistent way. Thus, a variety of courses may be given college level credit in one community college district while similar courses in a neighboring district may not.

In addition, if ESL courses were defined as English courses, it would also make sense that only those ESL courses at the level of freshman composition would transfer. However, this is not the case. Courses identified by course prerequisites and graduation requirements as being one, two, or even three levels below freshman English transfer to the CSU, UC, or both. The fact that both the CSU and UC themselves have offerings of ESL courses makes it easier for the community college to argue that ESL courses should transfer.

What future course should ESL articulation efforts take? Nearly a decade ago, CCC and ESL professionals made recommendations to improve articulation which still make sense today. In 1988, the CSU ESL Workgroup made several recommendations concerning criteria and standards for granting baccalaureate and general education credit to ESL courses at the CSU and for accepting CCC ESL courses for transfer. The Workgroup also made this recommendation in its report:

> Efforts should continue to better articulate ESL course content and exit performance expectations among the postsecondary segments in order to facilitate coursework transfer. The California State University should play a lead role in regional and statewide conferences and projects designed to promote the more standard and efficient offering of competency-based ESL instruction in California. (California State University, Office of the Chancellor, 1988, p. 10)

In addition, the community college ESL task force recommended in 1985 that more uniform practices be facilitated "through the establishment of an ESL committee to review and correlate various language assessment instruments, recommend assessment and placement procedures and act as a clearinghouse for research on language testing conducted by local districts" (Petersen & Cepeda, p. 2). Toward this end, a group of ESL practitioners and assessment experts developed *ESL Placement Tests for Community Colleges: A User's Guide* (Farland & Cepeda, 1988). However, since that time, regulations to implement the California legislative mandate known as *matriculation* set out the policies and procedures for the evaluation of assessment instruments used in the colleges (California Community Colleges, Chancellor's Office 1995b). "Matriculation in the community colleges is a process that promotes and sustains credit students' efforts to achieve their educational goals" (California Community Colleges, Chancellor's Office, 1995b, p. 1). Now all placement tests must be

approved by the chancellor's office, and those tests which were reviewed and correlated in 1986 can no longer be used. The only commercially developed ESL test which has received full approval by the chancellor's office is the Combined English Language Skills Assessment (CELSA). Although many colleges now have locally developed assessments which are in some stage of review, none of them have been compared to each other. In addition, correlations have never been established between the assessments used at community colleges and those used at the CSU or UC. What has become of all of the work on articulation which has already taken place?

Recommendations and actions taken in the past to promote articulation should provide at least a starting point for current efforts. In view of the diversity of content and credit designations at the various institutions in all segments, the only realistic way to articulate ESL courses seems to be through widely communicated, clearly stated expectations. These need to include concrete examples of student work that demonstrate the linguistic and academic proficiency required for a particular level. Ideally, assessments should be available which can be used at all institutional levels to measure both kinds of proficiency. These ideas were part of the recommendations made in previous reports on ESL mentioned above. Descriptions of levels of proficiency and examples of level-appropriate student work are available (see Browning, this volume); however, what is lacking is the means to disseminate information and to achieve uniform practices.

ESL practitioners at all levels have developed services for their students which they have tried to match to their students' needs and the requirements which are imposed by their institutions and systems. These services may do much to help students reach their educational, vocational, and personal goals. In addition, faculty in various parts of the state have made attempts to improve articulation across segments; however, up to now, the work of these groups has not widely affected articulation practices statewide. Without the cooperative financial and organizational support of the various segments, the chances of ESL professionals themselves being able to bring about a viable way of comparing or articulating courses within and across segments are slim. Meanwhile, students may continue to be served well by local programs but may be frustrated when moving or transferring to other institutions. ■

Endnotes

1. AB1725 was passed in 1988 and placed in law recommendations of the Commission for the Review of the Master Plan for Higher Education which were contained in its report *The Challenge of Change: A Reassessment of the Community Colleges.* Concerns about the educational needs of California's population and the extent to which the CCC, CSU, and UC were meeting them had given rise to legislation (1984, SB1570–Neilson–ch. 1507) which established the Commission. At the same time SB2064 (1984–Stiern–ch.1506) mandated a special Community College Reassessment Study as the Commission's first priority.

2. Title 5 is the part of the California Code of Regulations which governs the administration of education in California. The California Code of Regulations emanates from over 200 agencies to implement California law.

3. The standards are set forth in §55002 (a) through (d), §55805.5 and §84711(a)(1-9) of Title 5.

4. This issue arose because 57 colleges offered ESL only under the credit program and might not have the option of offering them as noncredit classes since in some of these colleges' districts, noncredit offerings were the sole purview of the K-12 districts. The concern centered on the ability of colleges to meet the demand for ESL instruction throughout the state. Students might not continue to be served unless the courses at these colleges met, at a minimum, the standards in Title 5 for credit courses that would not apply to the associate degree.

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