Title

A Portrait of a Community College Post A.B. 705: Investigating Ideologies of Key Stakeholders at a Local Community College

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A Portrait of a Community College Post A.B. 705:
Investigating Ideologies of Key Stakeholders at a Local Community College

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For my unconditionally supportive and adoring family, Chad, Mom, and Charles

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Abstract

Recent policy changes like AB 705 and 1705 have drastically changed curriculum, course offerings, and placement practices in community college ESL departments across California (Rodriguez, et al., 2022; Shaw, et al., 2018). Though many large-scale studies have examined transfer, completion and throughput rates (David & Kanno, 2021; Hayward, et al., 2022; Park, 2019; Rodriguez, et al., 2022), few studies have conducted qualitative research to investigate the implementation of these policies during a global pandemic. In a longitudinal mixed methods exploratory case study of a Northern California community college (NCCC), I noted patterns across multiple sources of data and created a portrait of the institution (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). First, I compared the changes from before and after AB 705 and 1705 and emergency remote instruction in ESL course curricula to understand how the bill was implemented at this community college. To understand students' goals for enrollment, I administered a survey (n = 120) to ESL students at the college. I also conducted interviews with students, faculty, staff, and administrators and analyzed student written work to uncover their perceptions and underlying ideologies about higher education and ESL. The findings provide implications for policymakers as well as educators in the wake of the bills.

Keywords: AB 705, policy, language ideology, portraiture, community college, ESL

Chapter 1: Introduction

As a result of recent policy changes such as Assembly Bill 705 (Irwin), and Assembly Bill 1705 (Irwin), community college English as a Second Language (ESL) programs have gone through large-scale transformations to eliminate their lower-level course offerings, integrate their reading and writing courses, and institute guided self-placement practices. This is because A.B. 705, which was introduced into legislation in 2017 by two California state representatives Jaqui Irwin and Jose Medina, required that community colleges, "maximize the probability" that ESL students can enter and complete transfer-level coursework within a three-year period and use U.S. high school coursework and grades to bypass ESL programs all together. Additional bills such as A.B. 1705 require the implementation of "guided self-placement" tests in ESL programs which allow students to choose their own level (A.B. 1705).

Though three years may seem like enough time for an average student to complete all their coursework, the bill specifies that ESL students must be able to finish all their major and transfer requirements in addition to any ESL instruction that they might need within three years. This has left ESL departments with the herculean task of devising course sequencing options that offer 1) no more than six levels of ESL, 2) more transfer-level ESL courses, and 3) integrated reading and writing courses (Shaw, et al., 2018). In other words, ESL departments have been forced to eliminate their lower levels of ESL, condense different courses in the same level into one course, and accelerate their sequence to allow students to finish in three years. This has created vastly different experiences for ESL students who come into the college with different English levels. Those students who place lower, despite knowing very little English, may feel pressured to enroll in other transfer-level or major courses early on so that they may still complete their requirements within three years. Other students who place higher may only take one ESL course

with no listening, speaking or grammar courses. Those Generation 1.5 students who graduated from high school in the United States may bypass ESL courses altogether and enroll directly in transfer-level English and math.

Perhaps due to the fact that ESL as a subject was added to A.B. 705 at the last minute (Shaw, et al., 2018), there have been major implications from how this bill was enacted, not just for ESL programs across California community colleges, but for English and math programs, adult education programs, universities, and most importantly, community college ESL students (Bunch, 2019; David & Kanno, 2021; Nazzal, et al., 2020; Rodriguez, et al., 2022). It is very challenging to account for ESL students in policy decisions, as they are an extremely heterogeneous group, ranging not only in language background, but also in previous educational experiences (in the L1 and L2), age, length of time in the United States, and above all, reasons for enrolling in a community college (Rodriguez et al., 2019; Rodriguez, et al., 2022). These reasons for attending community college can vary from achieving a non-credit bearing degree for employment, improving their English for social or employment opportunities, transferring to a four-year university, or building community (Davaasambuu et al., 2020).

Compounding all these complications is the fact that A.B. 705 was implemented in many ESL departments just before the Covid-19 pandemic forced all courses to be moved online and caused a large shift into what many have dubbed “pandemic pedagogy” (Schwartzman, 2020). Despite the pandemic being an unintentional complicating factor in the implementation of A.B. 705, it has caused and is continuing to cause major complications in how students access, engage with, and learn the material, due to the fact that many students had little or no experience with technology prior to the pandemic (Rodriguez, et al., 2022). This further exacerbated the inequities that instructors, students, and community colleges faced, given that almost half of the

ESL student population across California community colleges withdrew from courses in spring 2020 due to other commitments such as work or childcare, or a lack of access to technology (Rodriguez, et al., 2022). Those students who remained enrolled in courses that shifted to emergency remote instruction may not have mastered the material due to last-minute changes in pedagogy which many instructors were not prepared for (Schwartzman, 2020; White, et al., 2021). In ESL departments specifically, many of these brand-new integrated skills courses were being piloted for the first time during spring and fall 2020 when the pandemic caused everyone to shift to emergency remote instruction (Shaw, et al., 2018).

Despite these major changes in pedagogy and many cases of documented challenges with emergency remote instruction (Rodriguez, et al., 2022; Schwartzman, 2020), course completion rates at community colleges hardly changed from fall 2019 to spring 2020, going from 72% to 69% simply due to the large number of withdrawals from students (Bulman & Fairlie, 2022). This minimal change in completion rates suggests that despite potentially not learning as much of the material or being as engaged in the course, students were still passing their courses at roughly the same rates as before. Thus, it is crucial to examine how A.B. 705 in conjunction with the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted ESL students, faculty, staff, and administrators, and how all parties feel about these impacts.

My study aims to fill many gaps, given that community college ESL as a field is understudied in the literature. There has been little research investigating adult ESL students' experiences as a heterogeneous group in community colleges (Hartman, et al., 2021), as most research concerns larger-scale studies that focus on policy, program structure, and curriculum development (David & Kanno, 2021; Hartman, et al., 2021; Hayward, 2020; Rodriguez, et al. 2022). There is also little research concerning how educators and other stakeholders at

community colleges or other institutions were prepared for A.B. 705, and how its implementation has impacted their enactment of the bill in their classrooms (White, et al., 2021). It is important to investigate how this decision has impacted on-the-ground experiences for both educators and students specifically to address how they may experience this policy outcome differently, based on their positionality and individual characteristics. Given that educators felt the brunt of this policy decision and were additionally burdened to resolve the issue through "best practices" or "responsive teaching" (Kretz & Newell, 2020; Rodriguez, et al., 2019) during a pandemic, it's important to examine how they accommodated the changes differently and how those differences affected students. Though there is more research about how the pandemic has influenced community college instruction (Hayward, et al., 2022; Kretz & Newell, 2020; Rodriguez, et al. 2022), there is little examining it as a factor in the implementation of A.B. 705. Finally, there is little research that investigates or compares, using a case study approach, how different departments within a community college have reacted differently to A.B. 705.

To address these gaps, I created a portrait of one particular ESL department at multiple levels, starting at large-scale policy changes, moving towards curriculum changes, and eventually culminating in a discussion of how these impacted faculty and students across courses. In creating a portrait of this institution, I captured the attitudes of faculty, students, and administration regarding these changes. These attitudes also signaled important information about the language ideologies of the teachers and how those ideologies related to policy (Ramanathan & Morgan, 2007). These underlying ideologies about ESL and higher education most certainly impacted how students, faculty, administrators, and staff approached the implementation of the bill, yet there is little research which investigates buy-in or feelings about these changes (White, et al., 2021).

The purpose of this explanatory sequential mixed methods longitudinal portrait is to discover the effects that Assembly Bills 705 and 1705 as well as the Covid-19 pandemic have had on the students, faculty, and administrators who are in or work with the ESL department at Northern California Community College. In completing this research, I revealed some of the consequences of large-scale policy initiatives on multiple stakeholders who felt the brunt of the policy the most. In particular, I uncovered how certain ideologies about higher education and ESL in particular influenced how policy changes were played out within a given institution. This type of situated investigation is important to provide nuance and further explanation for existing large-scale quantitative studies which focus on completion and throughput rates without more closely examining what is contributing to these patterns.

Chapter 2 goes more in depth about the history of community colleges, covering topics such as accountability politics, language learner erasure, second language writing and the effects of the pandemic, with a conclusion of the gaps in the literature and the theoretical framework that structured my thinking. Chapter 3 introduces my central research questions and provides quantitative data about the setting and participants of the study, as well as the data collection and analysis procedures I used. Chapter 4 provides an in-depth analysis of the policy documents for A.B. 705 and 1705, along with a discussion of how the policy language impacted the curriculum redesign specifically in the English and ESL departments. Chapters 5 and 6 relate the faculty and student perspectives, experiences, values, and ideologies respectively, concerning A.B. 705, 1705, and the pandemic. Chapter 7 concludes the research project with a summary of the findings, and the subsequent implications of those findings for policymakers and educators.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

It is important to understand the larger context surrounding the creation and eventual adoption of A.B. 705 and 1705 in the community college context. These bills, like most other educational policy bills, were well-meaning and designed to address many problems with which community colleges were struggling: low graduation, transfer and completion rates. As reported in 2018 by the U.S. Department of Education, only 32% of students enrolled in A.A. programs nationwide were completing their degree within three years (What Works Clearinghouse, 2019). Disaggregated by race, this statistic paints a harsher picture in California: between 2014-2015, only 13% of Latinx students, and 7% of African American students were completing their degree within four years, when compared with 14% of Asian students and 15% of white students (Weissman, 2021). These numbers were lower than the national average, with a longer time to completion.

The three-year timeline was significant for completion rates because most federal and state financial aid, such as the California Promise Grant and Pell Grant, are limited to a range of two to six years of consecutive schooling. Nearly two thirds of community college students receive a combination of financial aid from multiple sources, with 75% of African American and 70% of Latinx students receiving a combination of the California Promise Grant, the Pell Grant, and other aid (Kurlaender, et al., 2021). With longer completion rates and more need for financial aid, African American and Latinx students were in danger of using up their federal or state financial aid eligibility before transferring to a four-year university, where the costs would rise considerably.

Thus, in attempting to shorten completion and transfer rates for students so that they could maintain their financial aid eligibility for the four-year institution when the costs increased

exponentially, policymakers removed remedial coursework and placement tests that could have slowed down a student's trajectory. In theory, removing remediation and placement tests that could have enforced remediation would move students through their pathway much more quickly, saving their precious financial aid for transfer-level courses and eventually for university credits. However, there were many other unintended consequences of removing remediation and placement tests, especially for English learners. In reviewing the historical context for the implementation of this bill, I will describe the other factors that influenced the reasoning and enactment of A.B. 705 and 1705 at local community colleges.

A History of Community Colleges and ESL

The public reason given to justify the creation of community colleges, junior colleges, and other post-secondary two-year institutions after World War II was to provide alternative paths towards social mobility for students who, for a multitude of reasons, were unable to enroll in a four-year university (Century Foundation Working Group, 2019; Mellow & Heelan, 2008). However, California community colleges have a long history of serving the elite to funnel "the masses" into the workforce and military projects and therefore keep them away from four-year universities (Mellow & Heelan, 2008; Stanley, 2010). It wasn't until the late 1980s that the accountability movement in politics began to attempt to close the then-termed "achievement gap" with the publication of *A Time for Results,* an education bill co-authored by seven Democratic and Republican governors (Alexander, 1986; Mellow & Heelan, 2008). The goal of this five-year plan was to increase funding and work more closely with educational institutions to "persuade citizens that better schools…mean better jobs" (Alexander, 1986, p. 204). This was the first time that community colleges were rebranded as a way to provide students with an opportunity to receive an A.A. degree and therefore have access to jobs that were unavailable for

those with just a high school diploma. Low transfer and completion rates for African American and Latinx students were seen as a barrier to social mobility: Full time workers with an associate's degree were paid 17% higher than workers with a high school diploma, while full time workers with a bachelor's were paid 40.3% more than workers with an A.A. (Torpey, 2018). Providing a pathway from an A.A. to a B.A. would have translated to an enormous increase in social mobility for a population where two thirds of the students were on financial aid.

Around the time of the implementation of this bill in the 1990s, there was a huge wave of immigrants who came to the United States and enrolled in community college ESL classes. Mellow & Heelan (2008) reported that in the 1990s, only 40% of community colleges nationwide even had ESL programs, but as time went on and immigrant students began to make up one quarter of all community college students, in 2004 it was estimated that 90% of all community colleges had an ESL program. In California, the situation was more extreme: Between 1980 and 1990, California experienced an 89.9% increase of Spanish speaking immigrants, and a 100.8% increase of Asian and Pacific Islander immigrants who spoke English either "not well" or "not at all." However, California only had enough community college ESL programs to serve 25% of that population (Ignash, 1992). Thus, more and more California community colleges began to expand their ESL programs, focusing on "transitional" or "workplace literacy" programs to help immigrants learn the language quickly and get a job (Ignash, 1992). The promises of the accountability bill did not apply to ESL programs, which were largely not for credit and therefore had little oversight or rigor to help students complete the coursework in a timely manner or transfer to a university (Mellow & Heelan, 2008).

Indeed, other more recent research has shown how fragmented and differentiated ESL programs can still be across the United States, partly because of the heterogeneous populations found even at each local community college, with wide-ranging levels of education even in their first language, let alone in English (David & Kanno, 2021). ESL has also long been deemed a "discipline" or a "skill" rather than a major that can be transferred to a four-year university, which has contributed to this lack of oversight and many times an inability to receive financial aid for its study (Century Foundation Working Group, 2019; Mellow & Heelan, 2008). There is also a lack of national data on ESL students, either because they are erased from their ESL department due to their declaration of a major in addition to their ESL classes (Evans & Andrade, 2015; Hayward, et al., 2022), or because data are not collected at that local community college in its ESL program (Mellow & Heelan, 2008), as is the case with the site where this study takes place.

Prior to A.B. 705, ESL programs had something of a "wild west" reputation due to the vast variation in types of courses offered (credit, non-credit, and a combination of the two), course sequencing (anywhere from three to nine levels of ESL at a given institution), and inconsistent course offerings (some integrated skills, some discrete skills, some more trade-based, academic vs. non-academic, etc.) (David & Kanno, 2021; Shaw, et al., 2018). Due to this inconsistency in ESL programs, many ESL professionals hailed A.B. 705 as a way to finally gain some recognition (and funding) in the larger community college discussion (Shaw, et al., 2018). The three faculty members who had ensured ESL was added to the bill co-authored an article in the *CATESOL Journal* designed to prepare other ESL professionals at community colleges for the changes that A.B. 705 would bring. In particular, Shaw et al. (2018) noted that their impetus for adding ESL to the bill was threefold: 1) to ensure that ESL was no longer considered

"remedial" but in fact as its own discipline at all California community colleges; 2) to integrate existing ESL curriculum so that there was more uniformity across California community colleges that aligned with existing literature about best teaching practices; and 3) to create a more organized and uniform placement structure which had previously been promised but then was never implemented. In other words, Shaw et al. (2018) noted that they wanted to increase accountability and to legitimize community college ESL programs statewide by expanding their measurements and increasing funding.

The reasoning behind including ESL in A.B. 705 was to solve the similar completion and transfer-rate dilemma that Latinx and African American students were facing, but on a larger scale. By legitimizing ESL as non-remedial, students could now take it for credit, receive financial aid, and have access to transfer-level coursework. Providing more access to transfer-level courses, improving teaching practices and limiting the power of the placement test could ensure that more immigrant students would be able to transfer to a university in three years. Similarly, policymakers reasoned that lower-level remedial courses and mandatory placement into those courses could act as barriers slowing down a student's time to completion or graduation. Prior to the enactment of A.B. 705, 42% ESL students were placed into lower-level ESL courses, and a similar percentage of students did not complete their transfer-level coursework (Rodriguez, et al., 2019). Furthermore, Latinx students were once again disproportionately impacted. According to transcript data, Latinx Generation 1.5/2.0 ESL students were less likely to complete their transfer-level coursework than international students (Hayward, 2020; Park, 2019; Rodriguez, et al., 2019). Thus, policymakers and many ESL professionals determined that the biggest barrier to completion for ESL students, particularly Latinx students, was lower-level ESL courses.

California is not the first state to enact policies designed to increase completion rates and streamline transfer rates for community college students. A program called Accelerated Study in Associate Programs (ASAP) was piloted in the CUNY system to help full-time associates-seeking students earn their degree within three years (What Works Clearinghouse, 2019). Participants were provided with financial, academic, and personal support in the form of weekly meetings with an assigned supervisor who would help with anything from federal financial aid applications to tutors and career development specialists. Isserles (2021), in her book *The Costs of Completion: Student Success in Community Colleges,* documented her own experiences as a CUNY professor during the implementation of the ASAP program. She defined the program as a push to rebrand community college success as completing the sequence within a shortened amount of time. The public reason, which was to increase completion and graduation rates, was only part of the justification for the program. For Isserles, the "completion crisis" was manufactured as a way to secretly cut costs for the system, with more precedence being given to market-driven concerns such as, "increasing tuition, increasing the low-paid contingent faculty workforce, decreasing tenure-track lines of full-time employment, increasing administrative managerial positions [and] reshaping the public university into an ostensibly privatized, profit--driven company," (Isserles, 2021, p. 10).

Similarly in California, and at the site where this research was conducted, the enactment of A.B. 705 has led to an increased over-reliance on support services to comply with the six-semester course sequencing timeframe written into the bill, as discussed in Chapter 5 (Hayward, et al., 2022; Rodriguez, et al., 2019). Like the ASAP program, students are being pushed to seek individualized support, such as corequisite courses and tutoring labs. Students must now enroll in extra corequisite courses alongside their transfer-level English and math classes, affecting their

financial aid more drastically if they fail. Rather than hiring tenured or adjunct faculty to teach remedial courses, colleges are now hiring more instructional assistants (IAs) and tutors who earn a much lower salary to meet this need. Departments have been cut and reshaped with the creation of new administrative positions and the removal of all remedial courses. Assessment and placement services which had previously been tested for validity and reliability have also been cut, replaced with a guided self-placement procedure which was, in many districts, developed in less than a year, untested, and distributed online. All students, including non-native English speakers who have no knowledge of the American educational system, are now left to their own devices in many districts with placing themselves using an online tool that shows them reading and writing samples to choose from.

As a result of pressures from the bill to pass students through within six semesters, the additional funding that has been provided to ESL has gone towards restructuring course sequencing, rewriting curriculum to create more integrated skills courses, and providing additional pathways for students to achieve certificates in other departments (Hayward et al., 2022). In other words, in ESL, students who enroll with a combination of 1) higher levels of English, 2) a plan to transfer to a four-year university, and/or 3) full-time student status will have increased opportunities to transfer to a university. However, this is a very small fraction of ESL students who enroll at community college (Hayward, et al., 2022; Rodriguez, et al., 2019). The question then remains: what will happen to those students who come to community college with limited English, a full-time job or other responsibilities, or without a plan to transfer to a university?

Accountability and Barriers to Completion

The ideology prevalent in A.B. 705 and much of the accountability paradigm that has dominated recent history is rooted in the belief that "equity" is defined in terms of opportunities for *access*. Thus, now that access has been granted to all students equally, "success" is defined in terms of 1) "completion rates," which note whether a student passes a transfer-level course with a 70% or higher, and 2) "throughput rates" which determine whether students complete these courses in three years (Brohawn, et al., 2021; Education Trust, 2022; Hern, et al., 2019; Kretz & Newell, 2020). For example, the Campaign for College Opportunity, a proponent of A.B. 705, defines equity in this case as "the right for students to enroll in courses where they have the best chance of completing the English and math requirements for a bachelor's degree" (Hern, et al., 2019, p. 4). Similarly, The Education Trust – West published what they titled an "Equity Alert" which framed A.B. 705 as a bill that "address[es] the long-standing equity issue of remediation, which keeps students – predominantly Black and Latinx students – in a cycle of spending tuition on remedial coursework…putting degrees and institutional transfer further out of reach" (p. 1). Developmental and remedial classes in these portrayals are characterized as barriers to transfer or completing an associate's degree, rather than as additional supports to help students be able to operate on a level playing field once they get to those transfer-level courses.

This reasoning that remedial coursework is the biggest barrier to completion is not supported by statistical evidence. According to the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 63% of students in two-year institutions completed all their English and reading remedial coursework, while 16% of those students completed some of that coursework in 2016. In other words, only 21% of students enrolled in remedial coursework completed none of those courses. Most students were able to complete their remedial coursework

with few problems and go on past it to their mainstream courses. In fact, it is once students get to their *mainstream* courses that they may drop out, and speeding up the curriculum and removing remedial courses is *more* likely to push them out. Attewell, et al. (2006) found that *lengthening* rather than shortening the timeframe of degree achievement narrows the racial and ethnic gaps that shorter time frames magnify. Shapiro, et al. (2019) similarly found that national completion rates reach 60% when the time frame for completion is extended to eight years, which brought a 5.6% increase from a six-year completion rate, and these completion rates showed significant increases across racial and ethnic groups.

It may seem counterintuitive to *extend* the time to encourage higher completion rates for community college students, but there are several factors to explain this phenomenon. To begin, community college students (and ESL students in particular) come from a vast array of diverse backgrounds. Many students experience situations like delayed enrollment due to lack of residency and thus financial aid, delayed enrollment between high school and college, part-time enrollment status, full-time employment, child rearing, single parenting, and financial independence (Isserles, 2021; Wirt, et al., 2003). To accommodate for these factors, it makes sense to *lengthen* the time to completion, so that students can go at their own pace, and not fail and retake multiple classes, potentially losing their motivation, because they can't balance all their responsibilities.

Additionally, many community college students, like their four-year counterparts, go to college to learn about what their interests are, and to explore who they are and what fields interest them (Isserles, 2021). They may not be in a rush to finish quickly because they may not be ready to declare a major right away. More importantly, many community college students – again, like their four-year counterparts – may not have an accurate picture of their abilities.

According to the Center for Community College Student Engagement (2016), 86% of students believed they were academically prepared for college, but 67% of them enrolled in remedial coursework. This discrepancy is partly due to the fact that high school "college preparatory" courses may not actually prepare students for college, given that there is no one definition of "college preparatory" or "college-level" coursework between high schools or colleges (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000). In fact, a large proportion of students who are enrolled in remedial education are above 25 years old and have returned to school after a large gap in their education, and in the case of ESL students, after moving from one country to another and encountering all new academic standards (Merisotis & Phipps, 2000). Thus, many community college students have an inaccurate perception of their abilities, or the requirements of college, and may need remedial coursework more than they know. How could a student know whether they are academically prepared for a course that they have yet to take? Many students may fail their courses or need to repeat them multiple times before they pass because they aren't truly aware of the gap between their own abilities and the expectations of college (Adelmann 1999, 2006; Rosenbaum 2001). Allowing extra time would allow for students to get the support they need and feel less pressure to finish quickly in these cases.

Perhaps the *most* convincing reason to extend the time to completion for students, and ironically the real reason why it won't happen, is the real barrier to completion rates: financial aid. Financial aid and affordability are the single strongest predictors of noncompletion, followed by student integration, academic preparation, student demographics, work obligations, and remediation (Isserles, 2021). Given that community college students tend to be part-time, less prepared academically, from lower-income backgrounds, and with work and family obligations, it makes sense that money would be the number one concerning factor for most of them. The

paradox of A.B. 705 is that it was enacted in part due to the restrictions of financial aid, because many of the major student aid programs, like the Cal Grant or Pell Grant, are only valid for four or six years respectively (Cal Grant Programs). For instance, ESL students who enrolled at the lowest level of ESL would need a minimum of three years in community college to finish the ESL sequence and transfer requirements, plus at least two additional years at a four-year college of their choice to get a bachelor's degree. This would translate to a minimum of five years of higher education that students would need to secure aid for.

Additionally, the four-to-six-year timeline meant that students who qualified for the Cal Grant and/or Pell Grant had to use that money within that four- or six-year period and could not take a break from school in the interim without filing for a two-year leave of absence. Students could theoretically take courses part time to stretch out this timeline, for instance enrolling in nine units and therefore only using 75% instead of 100% eligibility for a semester (Cal Grant Programs). Though the transfer credits themselves didn't expire, and students could complete an Intersegmental General Education Transfer Curriculum (IGETC) agreement allowing students to use their community college credits in lieu of taking general education requirements at UC/CSUs at any time, students who used up their eligibility for Cal and Pell Grants in community college could very easily run out of eligibility if they wanted to transfer to a four-year institution. But this was the true impetus for students to get through the program quickly: with such a strict timeline, there was little wiggle room for students on a Cal Grant and/or Pell Grant to be able to qualify for aid beyond their four or six years of using that aid.

Speeding up the course sequence and pushing students through faster may actually cause them to use up or *lose* their financial aid more quickly. Students who come in unprepared – either academically or in terms of their knowledge of the American education system, or both –

and/or with family or work obligations may not have the bandwidth to succeed in an accelerated curriculum. For instance, a student could easily use up his/her California Promise grant funding in two years by failing and repeating his/her courses, as students are no longer eligible for financial aid once they have completed 150% of units required for their degree or certificate program, and these units include ESL courses, as well as units for any repeated courses (Satisfactory Academic Progress). In other words, retaking a failed six-unit ESL course would not only count towards a student's GPA for satisfactory progress, but also towards the two-year limit for the California Promise Grant, or the six-year limit for the Pell Grant. Failing a six-unit course *twice* would not only use up two semesters' worth of financial aid but would also fast-track that student to an early dismissal, causing them to lose all eligibility for that funding stream (and others) in the future.

Allowing for students to slow down and take remedial courses if they chose to do so could have provided students with a stronger foundation that didn't necessarily count towards their financial aid. Even after the implementation of A.B. 705, students are still theoretically allowed to take up to thirty units of remedial courses that do not count towards their total number of units attempted for financial aid (Satisfactory Academic Progress). However, because of A.B. 705, most colleges removed all remedial courses from their course offerings, which has left students with no option to slow down and attempt to succeed in these tougher transfer-level courses without any consequences for their financial aid.

Though remediation was indeed considered a barrier to completion for some students, it was neither the only, nor the biggest, nor the most consistent barrier to completion. Many times, the ineffectiveness of remediation had more to do with individual professors or college programs and the unregulated and underfunded nature of remediation programs than the overall concept of

remediation (Mellow & Heelan, 2008). Though not all remedial courses were covered by financial aid, many students balanced their loads so that they could take remedial courses in skills they needed to improve alongside general education requirements (Mellow & Heelan, 2008). Assuming the ultimate goal of A.B. 705 is really to help prepare students with foundational knowledge they will need to successfully transfer, it would have made more sense to provide *more* funding, and *more* regulations and support for remediation programs, rather than to cut them entirely.

However, as noted before, the main goals of the college are not to prepare students for an eventual transfer to a university, but rather simply to get them to that point. "Student success" is defined only in terms of completion, not an ability to succeed once they complete their transfer requirements. Aside from financial aid, students are also pressured by the college itself to finish in two or three years because community college funding is dependent on their trajectories. California community colleges receive their funding through three direct means: 1) a base allocation reflecting enrollment, 2) a supplemental allocation based on the number of students receiving the College Promise Grant, the Pell Grant and students covered by A.B. 540, and 3) a "student success" allocation. This "student success" allocation is defined in part by, "outcomes that include the number of students earning associate degrees and credit certificates, the number of students transferring to four-year colleges and universities, [and] the number of students who complete transfer-level math and English within their first year" (California Community Colleges, 2024).

This accountability paradigm, in which "student success" is defined in terms of student completion rates, puts pressure on colleges to improve their performance-based measures by gaming the system and essentially shutting out the academically more vulnerable students

(Isserles, 2021). Given that the biggest barriers to student completion are in reality financial aid and other student demographic factors, both of which are out of the control of the college (Isserles, 2021), in order to receive funding, colleges have to collect data creatively in order to show that their completion rates are increasing. For example, in a recent presentation given by the California Community College state department, recent data showed that in English courses before A.B. 705, white students were passing their courses at a rate of 59% while African American students were passing their courses at a rate of 31%. Now, white students are passing their courses at a rate of 80% while African American students are passing their courses at a rate of 56% (Lowe & Hetts, 2023).

During the presentation, Lowe and Hetts both marked these statistics as significant triumphs, as completion rates were up in both cases. Given that the main impetus for A.B. 705 is to close the achievement gap between Black and Latinx students and white students, these statistics demonstrate a 4% reduction in the achievement gap, which though small, is still a significant change in such a short amount of time. However, this data sample also obscures several important factors. Given that A.B. 705 was enacted largely in 2019 and 2020 during the pandemic, the switch to emergency online instruction could have accounted for the large increase in completion rates. Enrollment data during the pandemic from California community colleges noted that when disaggregated by race, Black and Latinx students experienced larger decreases than all other racial groups. During that same time period, colleges reported giving a higher percentage of As (almost 40%) with drops in the numbers of Bs and Cs awarded to students (Bulman & Fairlie, 2022). Students most likely to withdraw were continuing students who had other responsibilities, such as work or childcare, or faced health problems due to the pandemic (Bulman & Fairlie, 2022; Rodriguez, et al., 2022). Therefore, the data gathered about completion

rates during the pandemic would have been taken from non-representative percentages of Black and Latinx students, who were more likely positioned to succeed well as first-time students who had few other responsibilities. Additionally, it was noted during the presentation that these completion rates did not reflect the number of students who had previously failed the course and were repeating it for a second time, nor did they reflect students who had been dismissed from the college for low GPAs.

Isserles (2021) noted that community colleges have a long history of working around funding requirements by gaming the system in specific ways, like inflating their enrollment numbers or admitting only certain students for certain amounts of time. Data collection practices today that are centered around completion rates are no different from previous ones, but what is perhaps more concerning is the fact that data is not only being collected to tell a specific story to get funding, but that certain groups are not being accounted for at all during the data collection process.

Language Learner Erasure

What is telling about the way in which most reports about A.B. 705 are written is the way that ESL is relegated to its own isolated section or, as is more often the case, completely absent from the discussion (Armstrong, et al., 2020; Hayward, et al., 2019; Kretz & Newell, 2020; Lowe & Hetts, 2023; White, et al., 2021). Some data has shown that A.B. 705 has had little effect on the gap in completion rates between racial or ethnic groups (Hayward, et al., 2022; Rodriguez, et al., 2022). However, most colleges are not collecting data about ESL students at all. This is due mostly to the fact that the language of the bills, as will be discussed in Chapter 4, does not specifically require the collection of language background, immigration status, or even home languages. This virtual absence of English learners from the data collection process or

larger conversations about the bill means that this is not a population that is being monitored for "accountability" the way that other groups are.

Furthermore, the research that is conducted about ESL students usually makes large-scale assumptions about their reasons for enrolling at the college. For instance, there is little examination about ESL students' goals for taking ESL, and whether they are interested in transferring to a four-year institution, which could significantly impact their completion and throughput rates (Hayward, 2020; Park, 2019; Rodriguez, et al., 2019). The numbers on this statistic vary considerably from one third of the ESL population (Rodriguez, et al., 2019; Rodriguez, et al., 2022) to 85.9% of the ESL population (Hartman, et al., 2021). It is important to determine what percentage of community college ESL students want to transfer, given that those students who are only interested in gaining a certificate and are taking ESL classes to improve their English may not prioritize completing transfer-level courses in a timely manner, or completing them at all. In other words, whatever the reason for not including ESL in the majority of conversations about A.B. 705, the ultimate consequence is that they are erased from the conversation. The implications of this erasure from data collection and research practices will be discussed further in Chapters 3 and 4.

One group that researchers do focus on is Generation 1.5 students. Generation 1.5 students are students who immigrated to the United States sometime before adulthood, whose spoken English and cultural identity may be partially or fully entrenched in the United States (Ferris & Hedgcock, 2023; Inoue, 2019). Generation 1.5 students are not a monolithic group, as they may or may not identify as language learners depending on the amount of time they've spent in the U.S., as well as a variety of other factors, such as what language they speak at home, or whether they identify as multilingual or bilingual rather than "language learners," (Ferris &

Hedgcock, 2023; Ortmeier-Hooper, 2008). Indeed, other research in second language writing has found that Generation 1.5/2.0 students widely vary in their feedback preferences, their previous formal grammar instruction, and the errors that they make in their writing, and do not fall neatly into the English learner category nor the native speaker category (Bitchener & Knoch, 2008; Ferris, et al., 2013; Foin & Lange, 2007).

The research on how well Generation 1.5 students perform either in mainstream English or ESL courses varies, most likely depending on the individual characteristics of those students. Some research has noted that Generation 1.5 students tend to have higher completion rates when they enroll directly into transfer-level coursework and bypass the ESL pathway all together (Hayward, 2020; Park, 2019; Rodriguez, et al., 2019), while others have argued that Generation 1.5 students placed in transfer-level *ESL* courses outperform those students in the English pathway (Harklau, 1999; Rodriguez, et al., 2022). Despite the heterogeneous nature of Generation 1.5 students and mixed findings about which courses best serve them, many researchers advocate for placing them directly into the English pathway and bypassing ESL all together (Hayward, 2020; Park, 2019). However, the racial gap persists even in transfer-level courses, as Latinx students with the same GPA and coursework are still completing their transfer-level coursework at much lower rates than Asian or white students (Hayward, et al., 2022). This assumption that Black and Latinx students will enter community college with a command of standard academic English to be able to enroll directly into transfer courses erases the intersectionality or plurality of identities with which students – particularly Generation 1.5 – may enter the community college sector (Kroskrity, 2004), which will be further discussed in Chapter 4. In other words, this policy and the public reason given for this policy assumes a “one

nation, one language" ideology, in which everyone speaks a standard variety of English (Piller, 2015).

In addition to the fact that language learners are not being considered in community college data collection practices, the placement test (or lack thereof) has provided another level of erasure for this population altogether. A.B. 705 has mandated that *all* students, regardless of language learner status, should have the right to enroll in transfer-level English and math courses. This means that any language learner, with any level of English skill, can place themselves into transfer-level English or math. Because the colleges are not collecting data on language learner status, there is no way to know whether language learners are completing their transfer-level coursework. Additionally, if language learners want to take ESL, their only recourse is to take a guided self-placement test, which at this point is no longer reliable, because students can theoretically choose to place themselves at any level that they wish, including out of ESL all together. This means that as a college, it is virtually impossible to collect data on language learners, because we can only collect data on them if they are enrolled in ESL courses. The minute they place themselves out of ESL, or choose to take a transfer-level course, there is no way to collect language background data about that student, and no way of knowing whether the ESL program helped them learn enough English to succeed. How can the college know if A.B. 705 is helping ESL students attain higher transfer rates, when we don't know 1) which students are language learners that are completing, and 2) whether ESL is helping those students complete their courses?

What is problematic here is that those who do not identify as native English speakers are being erased from the data collection process. English learners can enroll directly into transfer-level English and math courses where the data is disaggregated by race rather than first language

(Lowe & Hetts, 2023), thus erasing their language learner status. Otherwise, adult immigrants, international students, or other populations classified as English Learners have the option to go to ESL courses which are consistently understudied (Rodriguez, et al., 2022). In either scenario, there is a gap in the literature studying English learners' progression and completion rates through community college ESL courses and beyond. Treating ESL as an inconvenience is not an option because English learners take classes in all majors and in all departments, and at many colleges, can make up one quarter or up to one third or one half of the complete student body (Mellow & Heelan, 2008). While A.B. 705 as a bill has for the first time in history differentiated ESL as a non-remedial subject which should be studied on its own terms (Shaw, et al., 2018), there is a lot of work still to be done in gathering data on credit-bearing ESL programs and specifically tracking English learners' progression through transfer-level courses once they leave those programs.

Second Language Writing

As previously noted, ESL students are erased from data collection procedures with their enrollment in non-ESL transfer-level composition and rhetoric courses, and with the guided self-placement test, it is impossible to know their levels even in transfer-level ESL writing courses. Horner & Trimbur (2002) argued that the representation of a student's language (and therefore nationality) is determined by the degree to which a learner's writing embodies "proper academic English." Thus, students' writing categorizes them on a sociopolitical scale of achievement. Stanley (2010) in her detailed history of University of California, Berkeley's constant battle with remedial courses and the "Subject A" writing requirement noted a long history of denying most English learners the right to gain college credit for their "remedial" writing courses. Denying credit for remedial coursework was a way to simultaneously segregate English learners from the

"top drawer" applicants and therefore boost the reputation of the university as being rigorous or having high standards. In this way, starting in the 1970s the university could essentially put about half of their admitted population (which ended up being the majority of their English learners) on a similar one-year timeline to complete their writing requirement before being allowed to take credit courses.

This pattern is markedly like A.B. 705, which also gives ESL students only about one year to complete their language requirements before pushing them towards transfer-level credit courses. In both cases, students who do not pass the writing requirement or are placed in the ESL sequence are encouraged to take credit courses in other areas and continue to try to complete their degree requirements, but the marked difference is that because community college was *designed* to be an institution that accepts all students regardless of ability, there is no way to hold students to the one-year timeline rule, other than through financial aid. In other words, while the University of California still can enforce their time limit to complete the writing requirement with dismissal from the university (Stanley, 2010), community colleges cannot enforce their one-year timeline because there are so many students that enroll part-time or take time off from studying, and they need students to enroll to pay the bills. Community colleges are thus stuck in a quandary in which they want to raise their standards and admit more students to transfer-level courses to rebrand themselves as being rigorous or preparation for four-year institutions but cannot enforce their strict timeline without losing a large number of students.

As a way to increase their rigor and attempt to meet the one-year timeline rule, A.B. 705 took the opposite approach from the University of California: rather than forcing students to take remedial courses and denying them college credit as a way to make them pay more money, community colleges are now removing the option for remedial courses and forcing students to

take college credit courses which are extremely high stakes to make more money. A.B. 705 encouraged ESL departments to integrate their reading and writing courses (making them worth more units) and make their higher-level ESL courses UC/CSU transferable to fulfill the writing requirement. This has had the unintended consequence of privileging writing as being the only skill that can count as a prerequisite for transfer-level English. This is reinforced even further with the inclusion of *only* reading and writing samples on the guided self-placement test, with nothing assessing grammar knowledge or listening and speaking ability. The result is that now, in academic settings that see second language writing through a composition lens, writing as a skill is often privileged over reading, speaking, and listening (Horner & Trimbur, 2002; Shaw, et al., 2018), despite the reality that all four skills are generally integrated in any academic setting.

However, despite this tightening of standards in ESL departments, tensions between English or composition departments and ESL departments have been well-documented in showing how again, students whose native language is English are privileged in mainstream composition courses (Atkinson & Ramanathan, 1995; Matsuda, 2006; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999; Silva, 1997; Tardy & Whittig, 2017). With more language learners now opting to enroll directly in transfer-level courses, or potentially placing themselves incorrectly in ESL, or bypassing grammar courses which are worth college credit but are nontransferable, English composition departments may be faced with even more English learners who are unprepared for the realities of college. Transfer-level English courses then will be flooded not only with native English speakers who may be unprepared for transfer-level writing, but also with non-native English speakers who are also unprepared. English composition instructors will bear the burden of addressing a potentially enormous gap in abilities and have the potential to burn out even more quickly. This is also unhelpful to English learners, who will need to master grammatical,

standard English (primarily in their writing) to succeed in academic settings (Canagarajah, 2021; Ferris, 2021; Horner, 2021; Tardy, 2021).

Thus, A.B. 705, which encourages all English learners to enroll directly into transfer-level English but does not differentiate their English learner status in the data collection process, has created a system in which there is no way to determine whether English learners are succeeding in these transfer-level English courses when compared with their native speaker counterparts. There is ample research demonstrating that English learners may struggle when they reach transfer-level coursework that is taught in non-ESL departments due to language barriers in all skills – listening, speaking, reading, writing, and grammar (Atkinson & Ramanathan, 1995; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999; Rodriguez, et al. 2022; Silva, 1997; Tardy & Whittig, 2017). There is also little research investigating or comparing transfer-level composition courses that are taught in ESL departments vs. composition departments in the wake of A.B. 705, though there is research about completion rates in these courses (Rodriguez, et al., 2022). The Covid-19 pandemic privileged written communication even further, because without face-to-face interactions in which listening and speaking would be crucial, many students could rely on technology to listen to recordings multiple times, turn on subtitles, or type their answers rather than voice them aloud in an online environment (Schwartzman, 2020). This "pandemic pedagogy" (Schwartzman, 2020) that was enacted in writing courses across English and ESL departments vastly influenced how students learned writing and other skills altogether.

The Effects of Covid-19

To complicate matters further, A.B. 705 was largely enacted in ESL departments during the Covid-19 pandemic. At many colleges, A.B. 705 was implemented in the ESL department in Spring 2020, which was interrupted halfway by a switch to emergency remote instruction. This

shift changed everything in the brand-new curricula that teachers were piloting for the first time after A.B. 705 was implemented. Language learning is a social practice which requires complex sets of authentic interactions between learners, other humans, environments, and a multitude of texts (Atkinson et al., 2007; Mitchell, Myles & Marsden, 2013; Tomlinson & Masuhara, 2021; Van Lier, 2004). In-class interactive activities such as discussions, peer review, grammar instruction, writing practice, etc., which normally would have allowed for instantaneous feedback from professors or other students, were eradicated. Instead, most of the instruction was done on Zoom or asynchronously, which did not allow for instantaneous interactions as easily. Though spoken and written corrective feedback could still be given consistently due to technological advancements allowing for electronic feedback and virtual conferencing (Cavanaugh & Song 2021; Hazelton, et al., 2021; Woodard, 2016), many students may not have been accustomed to accessing this feedback or felt unsure of how to implement it due to a lack of experience with technology (Rodriguez, et al., 2022). In this "pandemic pedagogy," faculty pivoted to 100% emergency remote instruction, many times without any training or any inkling of how to do so, and thus experienced high rates of burnout (Schwartzman, 2020). In other words, second language teaching pedagogical practices that over time had been proven to be more effective with some sort of in-person follow up for understanding feedback or writing (Ferris, et al., 2013; Han & Hyland, 2019; Liu & Sadler, 2003; Patthey-Chavez & Ferris, 1997) were no longer available, with no time for teachers to learn new and effective ways to adapt their teaching styles to a completely virtual environment.

The pandemic of course was unavoidable for everyone and impacted all teachers in similar ways. It is significant to this research because the implementation of A.B. 705 coincided with the pandemic, making it difficult to determine which effects were from the pandemic, and

which were from the bill, as other researchers have noted (Rodriguez, et al., 2022). For instance, the new online teaching practices led to changes in departmental policy which impacted teachers' ability to assess their students' levels. Many ESL departments that had previously implemented timed writing or in-class writing exams to ensure that students did not use online translators or dictionaries could no longer use this metric, as there was no in-person or timed option that did not involve a computer. Outside of just using translators, many colleges reported a steep uptick in plagiarism and cheating due to a lack of motivation and widespread panic among students who were unsure of how to complete their assignments in this new online space (Jenkins, et al., 2022). Teachers were no longer able to discern what level of English their students really had, with no in-person interactions with which to compare the virtual ones (Schwartzman, 2020). Perhaps due to this inability to engage with the material or learn from emergency remote instruction, Rodriguez, et al. (2022) also noted that at the beginning of the pandemic, the number of enrolled ESL students declined steeply, almost to the point of half of their previous enrollment. Fields of study that were more effectively learned in an in-person environment, such as foreign language learning and ESL, experienced higher drops than other fields which were easier to learn online (Bulman & Fairlie, 2022). Most ESL students who withdrew exhibited "at risk" factors, such as working full time, having children, or being enrolled part-time, and thus had to prioritize those responsibilities and could not manage home-learning as well (Rodriguez, et al., 2022).

It is thus difficult to parse out whether high completion rates were due to the implementation of A.B. 705, or due to pandemic pedagogy. The presence of pandemic pedagogy coupled with the steep decline in enrollment for at-risk students suggests that those students who initially dropped at the onset of the pandemic may have done so because they could not complete

their courses without the support services that they needed, while those students who remained enrolled and completed their coursework were already statistically more likely to pass. This could explain the record high completion rates that have been reported across California (Bulman & Fairlie, 2022). Only Rodriguez, et al., (2022) so far has acknowledged that the record high pass rates and completion rates for ESL students that were achieved in the pivot to emergency remote instruction did not signify learning and may in fact be evidence of faculty and student burn-out rather than engagement.

This leads to another glaring gap in the research, which is the lack of qualitative data investigating faculty and student attitudes concerning how individual colleges implemented the bill at their schools, particularly given the rapid implementation of the bill with little oversight due to the pandemic. White, et al. (2021) conducted 70 interviews with 83 individuals from 14 colleges who were some of the first to implement the bill. Though 86% of colleges reported a positive increase in successful course completions, many faculty noted that this data did not indicate that learning was actually taking place, and many felt that they were setting their students up for failure in future courses by passing them. Furthermore, implementing corequisite courses was a challenge for most colleges, with only 64% implementing them at all, and even fewer (36%) of colleges *linking* the corequisite course curricula to the transfer-level course curricula (White, et al., 2021). The pandemic only exacerbated the lack of access to support services, moving them all online or eliminating them all together (Rodriguez, et al., 2022). Many ESL students didn't have access to technology or didn't understand how to use it, and thus *couldn't* access support services even if they tried because they did not know how.

It's alarming that more researchers have not acknowledged the very real role that the pandemic played in the implementation of A.B. 705. These record high completion rates

occurred during the same time in history when community colleges had record low enrollment, when faculty burnout was at an all-time high, and when student cheating and plagiarism was at an all-time high due to lack of motivation. Though it was an unintended consequence of the implementation of the bill, the pandemic needs to be taken into account as a very real factor which influenced how brand-new courses, curricula, and policies were enacted on the ground.

Gaps in the Literature

Throughout this review, I have identified several gaps in the literature which I aim to address in this study. To begin, there is very little research which investigates how A.B. 705 has impacted ESL departments – from the curriculum, to the faculty, to the students. Specifically, there is little qualitative research that examines how A.B. 705 and the pandemic have impacted ESL instruction for students and faculty. The majority of research has focused on lauding the effects of A.B. 705 in English or math (Armstrong, et al., 2020; Hayward, et al., 2022; Kretz & Newell, 2020; Lowe & Hetts, 2023), or on larger-scale quantitative measures such as completion and throughput rates with little investigation into what changes were made as a result of A.B. 705 or how students, faculty, and staff felt about those changes (Hayward, 2020; Park, 2019; Rodriguez, et al., 2019). However, this data consistently neglects or erases the ESL student experience and does not address how specific institutions or departments have complied with A.B. 705 (White, et al., 2021).

In addition, there has been little investigation into student, faculty and staff ideologies concerning language, higher education, or ESL as a field in community college. It's important to investigate how the ideologies of different stakeholders at the community college impacted the way A.B. 705 was enacted in a variety of spaces, from counseling appointments to ESL, English, and math departments and eventually classrooms. There is also little research that has

investigated how A.B. 705 or other policies have privileged writing as a skill, and how that affects curriculum, faculty attitudes, or student attitudes and experiences. Finally, almost no research to date has acknowledged the role of the pandemic, or investigated how it affected the implementation of A.B. 705 at specific sites, or on a statewide scale.

Theoretical Framework

My theoretical orientation in this work is closely connected with my positionality as a teacher-researcher. I intend to examine how large-scale policy decisions influence day-to-day practices at a local community college. Therefore, my approach is both *top-down* in my analysis of policy documents, and *bottom-up* in my examination of policy implications from my position on the ground. Particularly regarding researching how language ideology influences policy decisions, Ramanathan & Morgan (2007) called special attention to the need for increased study of *locality* not just because local sites may be representative of larger patterns, but more importantly, because the people at local sites gain experiential knowledge of how the policy's enactment (or resistance) affects an entire system. Ideologies about language feed into policies, and policies feed into existing ideologies about language (Blommaert, 1999; Ramanathan, 2002; Ramanathan & Morgan, 2007). These ideologies that continue to develop or emerge over time are important to examine because of those local contexts and how they drive *enactments* of policy. In other words, it is important to examine *how policy is enacted locally* and how local sites may resist or accept certain aspects of that policy based on their own complex ideologies.

Locality is an important aspect of my theoretical framework, but it is incomplete without examining my own positionality and participation in multiple *thought collectives* that are found at the local site. Ramanathan (2002) defined thought collectives as socially constructed patterns of thinking in localized subcultures, which "center on the (development of) thoughts and

professional cognitions of people who participate in them, so texts, sites, and groups are seen to primarily emerge from collective cognitions" (p. 20). Though one's own individual experiences, ideologies, and histories can influence one's positionality and knowledge in a thought collective, these individual aspects of a participant are also distributed across the collective, becoming part of the activities, tools, or viewpoints that influence a local thought collective's knowledge. However, dominant ideologies may also obscure individual experiences within a thought collective, driving cognitions or activities. In the field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) specifically, Ramanathan (2002) called for a closer examination of some basic "assumptions" that we may hold within our thought collectives:

> "When particular facets of TESOL [thought collectives] – genres, programs, curricular materials – get systematically aligned in certain ways to promote particular worldviews, it becomes imperative for us as participants to question not just the ideologies themselves but the very facets that hold them in place. It is not just that our [thought collectives] create and provide categories by which to organize, distill, and interpret our professional cognitions; in addition, there are groups of "intellectuals" – scholars, researchers, mentors, professors – who employ and give legitimacy to the categories, thus contributing to the acceptance of the [thought collectives'] (sub)ideologies as "normal" and neutral." (p. 31)

California community college ESL genres, programs and curricular materials *have been* systematically aligned to promote a particular worldview; one that rewrites the very mission statement and purpose for a community college and makes certain assumptions about the students who must attend it. In this research, as a participant of a TESOL thought collective at a local California community college, I want to question the ideologies and underlying assumptions beneath them that govern how groups of "intellectuals" in the field of community college TESOL conduct research, pass legislation, and continuously sway the thought collective to be more in accordance with or against A.B. 705. However, I also want to give voice to those who enact the policy on the ground, whose experiences may be silenced or ignored within the

larger global TESOL thought collective. This includes teachers, students, administrators, and other staff members who work in the local community college setting and deal with the consequences of A.B. 705 every single day.

One danger in examining thought collectives is making assumptions that participants within thought collectives are uniform or heterogeneous, which is never the case, much less for TESOL professionals (Ramanathan & Morgan, 2007). It is therefore important to examine how all participants in this local site – educators, staff members, administrators, and students – may embody conflicting ideologies, given how their previous experiences and histories may interact with their current situations or goals. In this research, which focuses on *enactment* of policy rather than merely the policy itself, I will use a *nexus analysis* framework that places primacy on *action* as the unit of analysis rather than language or thought collective participation (Scollon & Scollon, 2007). Therefore, in analyzing data, rather than only examining *what* participants of thought collectives may say, I will also examine *how* they enact policies, and how their particular ideologies influence their actions within the larger thought collective. This will allow me to follow the actions of individuals and look at how particular ideologies influence their actions and how they justify them. For instance, while several educators may claim that they feel strongly against A.B. 705 for similar reasons, examining how they have *enacted* those ideologies and feelings in the classroom differently will provide a more nuanced understanding about how their underlying ideologies may be influenced by their own individual experiences. Additionally, I will examine the conflicts between how instructors characterize their ideologies compared with the actual documents or coverage about the bill as well.

Thus, though it is difficult to situate this work within a particular theoretical framework, I will use both top-down and bottom-up analysis to enter this research through an on-the-ground

perspective of how a local site enacts A.B. 705. To do this, I will investigate how the actions of members of thought collectives are influenced by their own and collective ideologies and experiences as participants at the site. I will conduct a nexus analysis which focuses on what actions participants take, as well as their justifications for doing so, to understand the nuance of how individual and collective ideologies and experiences may influence the overall experience of participants at this site. This nexus analysis must include the actions of participants at several levels: 1) from the level of the policymaker in the actual written policy document as well as the public reason given for that policy, 2) to the individual districts and people interpreting that policy at the district level, 3) to the administrators who enact the district's interpretation in course sequencing and curriculum, 4) to the educators who deliver the curriculum to 5) the students, who learn the curriculum and privilege certain knowledge from it.

My goal in seeing the connections between policy changes and how they affect administrators, faculty, students, and staff at a particular location is to accurately portray the real-time implementation of educational policies at a real school. Many times, the positive intentions behind policies are lost in their on-ground implementation due to restrictions in funding, time, professional knowledge, resources, or all of the above. This research is meant to demonstrate how a well-intentioned bill designed to help students complete their college trajectories more quickly and thus provide equity across racial groups might actually have the opposite effect.

Chapter 3: Methods

I conducted an explanatory sequential mixed methods longitudinal portrait of NCCC to discover the effects that Assembly Bill 705 and the Covid-19 pandemic have had on the students, faculty, and administrators who are in or work with the ESL department. I created a portrait (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) to understand how all participants interact with each other on multiple levels, and how their ideologies are manifested in their work and how those manifestations may have changed over the course of three semesters. I collected both quantitative and qualitative data over the course of three semesters (fall 2022, spring 2023, and fall 2023) to explain larger patterns at the college and what different explanations there may be behind those patterns.

Research Questions

1. What are ESL students' stated reasons and goals for attending community college and enrolling in ESL?
2. What are the perceptions and experiences of students, faculty, staff, and administrators in a community college ESL program following the enactment of A.B. 705?
    a. What are participants' perceptions of how the pandemic has impacted their experiences?
3. What are the ideologies and values of various participants at this California community college concerning higher education and ESL?
4. How are those ideologies and values manifested in policy and curricular documents?

Setting

In order to create an accurate portrait of Northern California Community College (NCCC), the pseudonym for the college at which this study was conducted, it is important to first

describe certain contextual factors that influenced the data collection and data analysis process. This section of the methods will provide numerical data about how A.B. 705 and the pandemic influenced course offerings, enrollments, and practices at the college as well as in the ESL department.

NCCC is the largest community college in the Northern California District and is located in a large metropolitan area. According to internal data collected within the college and reported on an internal website known as Precision Campus, in fall 2022, student enrollment at the college was approximately 21,944 students, with white students making up the largest portion of the student population at 37% (n = 8,304), followed by Hispanic/Latino students (n = 5,890), Asian students (n = 3,126), African American students (n = 1,786) and Multi-Race students at (1,564). Surprisingly, none of the internal statistics in the college noted English learner or immigration status. During the fall 2022 semester, there were 989 students (approximately 4.5% of the student population) enrolled in ESL courses out of the total 21,944 student body. Though this number signifies enrollment in ESL courses, it does not signify the number of English learners or immigrant students attending the college at that time, given that many students could have bypassed ESL altogether or may have graduated from the program and moved into mainstream courses. Given the lack of statistics on the English learner or immigrant student population, it is extremely difficult to determine what percentage of students at the college were English learners or immigrants outside of ESL classes, effectively erasing them from statistical calculations at the college. Thus, race/ethnicity numbers may be misleading, given that most immigrant students were classified as white, as they hailed predominantly from Middle Eastern or Eastern European nations, such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Ukraine, or Russia.

Total enrollment at the college was in a steep decline in fall 2022. The difference between fall 2020 and fall 2022 was significant, going from 24,400 down to 21,944. According to Burke, et al. (2022) who reported on the thirty-year record low enrollment for the *Los Angeles Times*, this steep decline in enrollment was noted across the country, with an average of an 18% total decline in enrollment severely impacting California community college funding. Nguyen et al. (2022) conducted a statewide college attendance survey to investigate factors affecting enrollment decisions and noted that the top barriers for prospective students for enrolling in the college were an inability to afford college (32%), having to prioritize work (29%), considering another college/university (29%), or having to delay college plans (24%). Similarly, formerly enrolled students who had dropped out noted that their top barriers were having to prioritize work (33%), having to prioritize their mental health (30%), and being unable to keep up with the pace of the classes online (29%). However, previously enrolled students who were making decisions about whether to re-enroll in fall 2022 noted an additional factor that influenced their thinking: the presence of online courses. 19% of previously enrolled students noted that there weren't enough online courses for them to choose from at their campuses, and an additional 14% noted that they preferred in-person courses and did not want to take online courses. These low enrollment numbers had a large impact on the way that the bill was implemented at the college and thus impacted faculty and student perceptions of the bill as well.

With the transition to more in-person classes, from fall 2022 to fall 2023 enrollment at NCCC increased to approximately 24,061 as reported by Precision campus online. However, this transition was gradual, and low enrollment had an impact on teaching modality in the courses offered at the college. In terms of course modality, despite an attempt at a gradual transition back to face-to-face courses, at the beginning of spring 2023 asynchronous online courses across the

campus still had the highest total enrollments (approximately 26,000), followed by face-to-face instruction (approximately 13,000). Hybrid and synchronous online courses had the lowest enrollments, with about 5,000 for hybrid and 2,000 for synchronous online respectively. These figures demonstrate that the majority of courses outside of the ESL department were still predominantly taught asynchronously online, but that students were beginning to enroll in more face-to-face courses across campus. Taken with Nguyen et al.'s (2022) survey results and the increase in enrollments in fall 2023, it appears that many students were still prioritizing work, or figuring out how to transition gradually back to in-person classes given their other personal commitments. The continued presence of online course offerings, coupled with students' own personal priorities and opinions of online learning, had an additional effect on faculty and student attitudes about the pandemic, and the implementation of A.B. 705.

Like other community colleges, NCCC employed many adjunct faculty members to teach its courses (Century Foundation Working Group, 2019). In fall 2023, with the loss of one full-time faculty member to part-time status, 12 full-time faculty members and 22 adjunct instructors taught 68 courses. Adjunct faculty taught only slightly more courses (55.9%) than full-time faculty. This is important to note, because it's somewhat unusual – many other departments at other colleges may have much higher percentages of courses taught by adjunct faculty.

As a result of A.B. 705, NCCC redesigned their curriculum to offer six integrated levels of ESL, described in Table 1 below, as well as separate grammar and listening courses. While many courses were listed as being UC/CSU transferable, they did not all necessarily fulfill the transfer requirement which was equivalent to transfer-level composition. Students were limited to eight units that they could transfer over to a four-year institution for credit to fulfill the writing requirement. Similarly, while ESL 315 and ESL 325 purported to be "transferable," they were

only transferable as elective units, and not to fulfill the writing requirement. ESLW 340 and ESL 350 were the only two courses which fulfilled a transfer-level writing requirement and were the equivalents of ENGWR 300 and ENGWR 301, respectively. Therefore, many students prioritized writing courses in order to bypass the writing requirement and many times did not transfer their college credit listening and grammar courses.

Table 1

Course Sequencing for ESL Department in Fall 2023

English Level	Integrated Reading and Writing (6 units)	Listening (3 units)	Grammar (3 units)	Writing (4 units)
Novice-High	ESL 37	ESLL 31	ESLG 31	–
Intermediate-Low	ESL 47	ESLL 41	ESLG 41	–
Intermediate-Mid	ESL 55	ESLL 51	ESLG 51	–
Intermediate-High	ESL 315 (UC/CSU transferable)	ESLL 310 (CSU transferable)	ESLG 310 (CSU transferable)	–
Advanced-Low	ESL 325 (UC/CSU transferable)	ESLL 320 (CSU transferable)	ESLG 320 (CSU transferable)	–
Advanced	–	–	–	ESLW 340 (UC/CSU transferable)
Critical Reading, Research and Writing through Literature	ESL 350* (UC/CSU transferable) *4 units	–	–	–

The ESL department also had an ESL Lab which was both online and in-person for which students could opt to take .5 - 1.5 extra units to practice their English on their own time

for a certain amount of hours per week. The in-person lab was in the Learning Resource Center on NCCC's campus near the Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) and Reading Across the Disciplines (RAD) offices but also offered virtual sections for speaking practice or homework help as needed.

By spring 2023, the ESL department at NCCC had received probationary approval to create an A.B. 705-compliant guided self-placement test that also had a writing component that faculty could use to place students more accurately. However, outside of the ESL department, the placement test was relatively meaningless. Given that a sister college had their own guided self-placement which provided students with their results online and within minutes, as opposed to an exam that needed to be proctored, this placement test proved to be more widely used. Additionally, because of A.B. 705, all students – English learning students included – could enroll directly into transfer-level English (the equivalent of ESLW 340) as well as transfer-level math courses, regardless of what placement a student was given on an assessment, or even if the student hadn't taken an assessment at all. Students who had placed at ESL 37 (the lowest level) or who were recommended for adult school to improve their English could still enroll in transfer-level English outside of the ESL department at any time. Thus, if a student wanted to take a certain level of ESL, they had to be placed at a given level and work their way through the courses to advance within the department but otherwise could bypass ESL and enroll directly in transfer-level English at any given time. Both the new course sequencing and the revised, relatively superfluous guided self-placement test were direct results of A.B. 705.

Low enrollments and the pandemic impacted the course offerings in terms of level and modality in the ESL department. In fall 2022 there were 62 courses offered in the ESL department, with an increase to 69 courses in fall 2023 due to the increase in enrollment during

that year. In terms of course offerings, as can be seen in Table 2, between 65-66% of ESL courses offered in fall 2022 and fall 2023 were at least three levels below transfer-level, at the mid-intermediate 50 level or below. Given the sharp increase in enrollment, followed by the implementation of a guided self-placement, it's interesting to note that the course offerings were mostly stable, with a slight increase at the lower levels (30 and 40) and the advanced low (320) level. Because course offerings reflect student enrollments and their levels, these numbers suggest that many of the newly enrolled students placed themselves in the lower levels, or one level below transfer, rather than at transfer-level or higher. In both fall 2022 and 2023, only 14%-16% of courses were offered at transfer level or one level below. This pattern is typical for community college ESL programs (Rodriguez et al., 2019).

Table 2

Number of ESL Classes Offered by Level in Fall 2022 and Fall 2023

	Novice High 30 level	Intermediate Low 40 level	Intermediate Mid 50 level	Intermediate High 310 level	Advanced Low 320 level	Transfer level writing 340 level	Transfer level writing 350 level
Fall 2022	15	13	13	12	6	2	1
Fall 2023	16	15	14	13	8	2	1

Low enrollment and the pandemic also both influenced course offerings by skill – listening/speaking, grammar, or integrated skills. Table 3 below shows that in fall 2022 and 2023, grammar and listening/speaking courses only made up about one quarter of courses each, whereas integrated reading and writing courses made up almost half (48.4%) of course offerings. Still, it's significant to note that in fall 2023, with the transition to higher enrollments and more

in-person classes, more students opted to enroll in grammar and listening/speaking courses, whereas the general enrollments for integrated reading and writing skills stayed the same.

Table 3

Number of ESL Classes Offered by Skill in Fall 2022 and Fall 2023

	Integrated Reading and Writing (6 units)	Grammar (3 units)	Listening and Speaking (3 units)	Transfer level writing 340 and 350 levels (4 units)
Fall 2022	30	16	14	3
Fall 2023	30	18	17	3

During the fall 2022 semester, NCCC had begun its transition back into in-person offerings, and in fall 2023 there were more in-person classes offered overall. As is clear in Tables 4 and 5, only seven courses were offered fully in-person in fall 2022, whereas in fall 2023 that number more than tripled to 26. However, even in 2023, 62% of classes were offered online in a multitude of ways: *Synchronous* meant that students had to meet via Zoom at least twice a week and attend a virtual class, *Fully online/partially synchronous* meant that students only had to meet via Zoom once a week and that the rest of coursework would be completed asynchronously, and *partially online* referred to courses that met once or twice a week in person and then completed the rest of their units online asynchronously. *Asynchronous* courses, of which there were only three, meant that there were no mandated synchronous class meetings, and students could complete their work on their own time at the pace of the instructor. By fall 2023, the number of in-person courses also changed based on skill level, as the lowest 30 level offered ten of its sixteen classes in-person, whereas the highest levels offered two or no in-person options.

Table 4

Number of ESL Classes Offered by Modality and Level in Fall 2022

Fall 2022	Novice High 30 level	Intermediate Low 40 level	Intermediate Mid 50 level	Intermediate High 310 level	Advanced Low 320 level	Transfer level writing 340 level	Transfer level writing 350 level
In Person	3	3	0	1	0	0	0
Synchronous	5	6	5	3	0	0	0
Fully Online, Partially Synchronous	6	3	5	7	5	1	1
Partially Online	1	1	3	1	1	0	0
Asynchronous	0	0	0	0	0	1	0

Table 5

Number of ESL Classes Offered by Modality and Level in Fall 2023

Fall 2023	Novice High 30 level	Intermediate Low 40 level	Intermediate Mid 50 level	Intermediate High 310 level	Advanced Low 320 level	Transfer level writing 340 level	Transfer level writing 350 level
In Person	10	7	5	2	2	0	0
Synchronous	4	3	3	3	2	1	1
Fully Online, Partially Synchronous	1	2	2	4	3	0	0
Partially Online	1	3	3	3	1	1	0
Asynchronous	0	0	0	1	0	0	0

Changes were made in course offerings from fall 2022 to fall 2023 in terms of skill rather than level as well. As detailed in Table 6, in fall 2022 with the recent return to in-person classes,

the seven in-person classes were divided amongst three listening/speaking and integrated skills courses each, with one grammar course. In fall 2023, the in-person courses dominated in the listening/speaking and grammar courses, with ten in each, and the additional six being offered in the integrated skills courses. Listening and speaking courses in fall 2023 also transitioned entirely away from partially online or fully online, partially synchronous courses.

Table 6

Number of ESL Classes Offered by Modality and Skill in Fall 2022 and Fall 2023

Fall 2022	Integrated Reading and Writing	Grammar	Speaking and Listening	Transfer level writing (340 and 350)	Fall 2023	Integrated Reading and Writing	Grammar	Speaking and Listening	Transfer level writing (340 and 350)
In Person	3	1	3	0	In Person	6	10	10	0
Synchronous	1	11	7	0	Synchronous	1	7	7	2
Fully Online, Partially Synchronous	20	3	3	2	Fully Online, Partially Synchronous	11	1	0	0
Partially Online	5	1	1	0	Partially Online	11	0	0	1
Asynchronous	0	0	0	1	Asynchronous	1	0	0	0

All together, these tables and trends indicate that the increase in enrollment from fall 2022 to fall 2023 also brought with it opportunities to offer more in-person courses, particularly at the lower levels and with the listening/speaking and grammar courses, to provide lower-level students with more ability to practice those skills in person rather than in an online environment. Thus, while I was collecting data from fall 2022 to fall 2023, students and faculty were experiencing a transition period, going from mostly online teaching to a higher number of in-person courses, with higher enrollment numbers overall. Though online courses were still prevalent even in fall 2023, students were beginning to more actively opt for in-person classes, as there were many students enrolling at the college who had not taken courses during the pandemic and had avoided doing so purposefully so that they could enroll in fully in-person courses. These changes, coupled with the new guided self-placement test and course sequencing which were both being adapted to in-person formats for the first time, marked this period in the college as one of transition and uncertainty, not only for faculty and students, but for administrators and staff as well.

Participants

During the course of this research, there were three major categories of participants who participated in my study: faculty/administrators, students, and me, the researcher and primary instrument.

From the fall 2022-fall 2023 semesters, I interviewed ten full-time faculty members (one of whom was retired) and five adjunct ESL faculty (one of whom no longer worked at the college), for a total of fifteen faculty members. I also interviewed the former dean of Humanities who had recently retired and who had been dean during the transition to A.B. 705. Additionally, I interviewed an instructional assistant (IA) working in the ESL lab who had previously worked

in Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) and had experience working with the English department at the college. In total, I interviewed seventeen faculty and staff (n = 17) working at the college who had or currently worked for or with the ESL department.

I also interviewed twenty-three students (n = 23) who had enrolled in a minimum of one ESL course or ESL lab at NCCC. Twenty of these students had taken a variety of different classes with me as early as spring 2022 up to fall 2023, one had bypassed ESL but still made use of the ESL lab, and two were current ESL Lab tutors who hadn't been my students but elected to participate in the study because they were interested in the subject. In addition to interview participants, 120 students elected to participate in a survey (to be detailed in the Data Collection section of this chapter) that was distributed from fall 2022-fall 2023. Therefore, a total of 143 students participated in this research.

As a practitioner-researcher with my own biases and lens for reviewing this data, I must acknowledge my own role as the primary instrument of data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I had been an adjunct faculty member at NCCC since spring 2019 and was hired as a full-time assistant professor at the end of spring 2024. During my time at the college, I have taught a wide variety of ESL courses, and given my previous history with the college and my existing relationships there with full-time and adjunct faculty as well as staff members, I leveraged my positionality to gain access to data from those participants. Likewise, as an instructor, I collected data from my own students after grades were submitted with their consent in the form of interviews, written documents, or in-class discussion observation notes to contribute to my understanding of this phenomenon. Of course, my positionality as a faculty member influenced all the data that I collected, as well as how participants framed their narratives with me, which I took into account in my analysis (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). During the data collection

portion of this research, I taught at least one transfer-level course during each semester of data collection to maintain my access to the college and to continue to keep my finger on the pulse of the on-ground enactment of A.B. 705.

Data Collection

To capture the nuanced, multifaceted reality of this community college and all of its moving parts, I used an ethnomethodology called *portraiture* which aims to paint a portrait of a place or person through the use of contextualized narrative and analysis of many parts that make up an experience (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). To create a portrait of NCCC, I needed to draw on several different sources of data that all could be triangulated to create a rich, complex, and authentic narrative of all impacts of A.B. 705 on all the participants. I used the explanatory sequential mixed methods design to capture quantitative data which could act as an entry point in understanding the phenomenon, and then be elaborated on using qualitative data (Cresswell & Guetterman, 2019). I used a combination of convenience sampling and snowball sampling to gather participants by asking colleagues as well as my own former students or students who attended the ESL center to participate or point me in the direction of anyone else at the college who wanted to participate in my research. I distributed the survey to faculty members at the college and asked them to send the link out to students with the informed consent email which I had created for students to understand that their participation in the survey was optional.

Quantitative Data: Survey

Following the explanatory sequential mixed methods design, I distributed a survey of ESL student experiences as an entry point to understanding student reasons for taking ESL classes and their preliminary experiences with coursework when entering the community college. Surveys were administered on a rolling basis from fall 2022 through fall 2023 to all students

enrolled in ESL courses or the lab at NCCC. Though there may have been duplicate participants, as the same students may have completed the survey from semester to semester, this duplication was expected and even helpful, in that it provided information about whether and to what extent students' goals or values changed as they advanced through the levels and spent more time at the college. Appendix A includes a copy of the survey instrument.

The survey contained fourteen base questions with several follow up questions depending on how they responded to certain questions. The questions concerned the following subjects: 1) current course enrollment (three questions), 2) experiences living in the United States and taking classes at NCCC (three questions), 3) reasons for taking ESL courses and intentions for transferring to a four-year university (five questions), 4) experiences with integrated ESL courses specifically (three questions), and 5) attitudes towards online learning (four questions).

I first piloted the survey in my own class with a small group of students to ensure that the questions were easily understood, made changes based on their feedback, and then distributed the survey to faculty for them to disseminate to their students.

Qualitative Data: Interviews

I conducted interviews with faculty, students, staff, and administrators who were working or had recently worked at the college. These interviews were semi-structured with an interview protocol (Emerson, et al., 2011) but based on the conversations with participants, I deviated from the protocol as necessary to gain information about their underlying experiences or ideologies. Student, faculty, staff, and administrator interviews took place largely on Zoom. Interviews were recorded and automatically transcribed in Zoom. Interviews also took place on the phone or in person based on individual participant preferences, and those interviews were recorded on a

phone and transcribed by hand. I used these interviews to understand faculty, student, administrator and staff perceptions and experiences with teaching during the transition to A.B. 705 and emergency remote instruction. The interviews were the basis for much of the findings in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 concerning faculty and student perspectives and experiences with the bill. The faculty interview protocol, attached in Appendix B, was aimed at understanding participants' general roles at the college, including which classes they had taught or additional service they had provided, and how the implementation of A.B. 705 or the pandemic impacted their roles. The student interview protocol, in Appendix C, was designed to understand students' backgrounds and goals for attending NCCC at large. Generally, the questions focused on students' perceptions and experiences both in ESL as well as mainstream classes, whether they planned to transfer to a four-year institution, and what were the major barriers they had encountered at the college during their time there. For those participants who had taken a course with me and learned about A.B. 705, I asked them about their opinion of the bill and how they felt it had affected their trajectory personally.

Qualitative Data: Student Writing

For those seventeen student participants who had taken an advanced writing course with me during fall 2022-fall 2023, I used their writing as an additional data point to understand larger ideologies or understandings of A.B. 705 and its implementation. I gathered these writing samples from the 325 level (one level below transfer) in fall 2022, spring 2023, and fall 2023, as well as from the ESLW 340 level (transfer-level) in spring 2023 and fall 2023 from a total of seventeen students. I analyzed this writing to note how students framed A.B. 705 for a reader (e.g. as a positive or negative policy for ESL students), and how they defined it overall (e.g. to avoid remediation, to get through the sequence faster, etc.). I used these documents to triangulate

specific personal experiences students may have cited to describe their thoughts and opinions about A.B. 705, as well as to prompt them during interviews to expand on certain ideas more. Given that their writing did not necessarily reflect their true opinions, I only used writing samples in Chapter 6 to provide further context for students who had already participated in an interview.

For the 325 level, the writing prompts included a personal history statement about their experiences at NCCC, as well as two versions of a persuasive essay, one using personal experience and the other using research, about whether A.B. 705 was helpful or harmful for ESL students. For the transfer-level ESLW 340 course, the writing prompts included a synthesis paper that turned into a ten-page research paper concerning the effects of A.B. 705 on ESL students, in addition to an annotated bibliography and a final reflection paper about what they learned in the course. Appendix D includes a more detailed list of which kinds of writing I collected from the different courses.

Qualitative Data: Curricular and Policy Documents

To note patterns or discrepancies between what was enacted in the classroom and what was written in the curriculum, as well as what changes were specifically enacted because of A.B. 705, I analyzed the original and revised curricular documents, sample syllabi (including my own), and student learning outcomes of courses in the ESL department. I also examined the original A.B. 705 and A.B 1705 policy documents, the previous iterations of those documents, and any other crucial third-party policy working group documents concerning A.B. 705. This analysis was used to detail the major changes brought by A.B. 705 and how they were enacted on a system-wide or departmental level, as detailed in Chapter 4.

Qualitative Data: Observations

I took observation notes in my roles as both a participant-observer in the ESL Lab as well as in my role as an instructor of my own classes during the fall 2022 and spring 2023 semesters. The observations helped me understand how A.B. 705 and 1705 were being implemented in day-to-day interactions, both in my own courses as well as in the ESL Lab. I used the participating-to-write style (Emerson, et al., 2011) in which I took "head notes" to later jot down or leave myself jottings to construct further fieldnotes. I took notes of initial impressions, followed by what was significant or unexpected to move beyond and comment on what was significant or important in that setting (Emerson, et al., 2011). Given my *emic* positionality as a faculty member who was teaching at the college, it was important for me to focus on what was significant or unexpected and discuss my patterns and notes with others outside of the institution to note what patterns I may not have seen because they were normalized for me (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I also took observation notes about ESL Department faculty meetings or updates, campus-wide events, and email exchanges that pertained to A.B. 705 or the ESL department. These observation notes were used mainly to corroborate or complicate the curricular and policy document analysis, interview and survey data in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. Table 7 below summarizes all the data that was collected, along with its justification.

Table 7

Summary and Justification of Data Collected

Data Collected Fall 2022 – Fall 2023	Justification for Collection
Student Surveys	This data acted as an entry point to understanding student reasons for taking ESL classes and their preliminary experiences with coursework when entering the community college.
Interviews from 1. Students 2. Faculty 3. Staff 4. Administrators	This data helped me gain a deeper understanding of ideologies, values, thoughts and experiences with taking courses/teaching/working during the transition to AB 705 as well as emergency remote instruction.
Observations from 1. My own 325 and 340 classrooms (virtual and in-person) 2. ESL Center 3. Other emails or events that pertain to A.B. 705	This data gave me more information about what was being enacted on the ground as a result of ideologies and policy implications of AB 705 and the pandemic. I was able to see how these enactments differed in my own classroom, the ESL Center, and other virtual or physical places on campus.
Curriculum documents such as 1. Course descriptions and student learning outcomes across all ESL courses 2. Sample syllabi and course assignments from ESL 325 and ESL W340	This data facilitated my ability to note patterns or discrepancies between what was enacted in the classroom and what was written in the curriculum, as well as what changes were specifically enacted as a result of AB 705 or the pandemic.
AB 705 Policy documents such as 1. A.B. 705 (Irwin) 2. A.B. 1705 3. Third party interpretations or	This data showed me the exact language and intentions behind the original AB 705 as well as how third party sources interpreted and reacted to the policy. These documents can be connected to particular attitudes or enactments within the community college space itself.

representations of A.B. 705 4. Media documents concerning the implementation of A.B. 705	
Student Writing from interview participants 1. ESL 325 (fall 2022, spring 2023, fall 2023) 2. ESLW 340 (spring 2023, fall 2023)	This data fulfilled two roles: 1) additional testimony about student ideologies, thoughts, experiences about AB 705, and 2) demonstration of skills I was teaching or emphasizing for my students at different levels or classes in the final projects, as well as what my students were able to produce in different kinds of classes (fully asynchronous online vs. partially synchronous online vs. fully in-person).

Data Analysis

Connecting back to my theoretical framework, I used portraiture to conduct a *nexus analysis* to focus on how policy is enacted on the ground by different groups based on their differing ideologies. *Nexus analysis* is used to create a nexus of inter-connected entities within a site, and to understand how *action* makes those connections (Scollon & Scollon, 2007). In understanding how the action of incorporating A.B. 705 during a pandemic made changes across faculty, students, and administrators, my analysis focused on finding connections across data sources, as well as participants. My focus for analysis was understanding how actions and participant experiences led to their perceptions and ideologies about the bill and community college. The process of creating a portrait similarly places great importance on perspective-taking by noting the researcher's own perspective, as well as how that perspective influences the perspectives of participants in the study (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Following portraiture and nexus analysis, I used each piece of data to provide different perspectives which complicated each other but overall contributed to a nuanced understanding of the site.

Quantitative Analysis: Survey

Survey data was exported from Qualtrics into an Excel spreadsheet, which I then separated into several sub-sheets, and deleted any incomplete survey responses. I divided survey responses into two levels: "upper" (students who were enrolled at the mid-intermediate 50 level or higher) and "lower" (students who were enrolled at the lower 30 and 40 levels). I made this division so that I could understand whether there was any relationship between student level and their subsequent answers to other survey items, given that lower-level ESL students are an understudied population (Hayward, et al., 2022). I then conducted several Chi-Square tests of independence to determine whether there was a relationship between the categorical data of student level and 1) their desire to transfer and goals for enrolling at the college, 2) their experiences with the newly integrated skills courses, and 3) their experiences with online courses. In understanding students' desire to transfer, responses were coded as "yes" = 1 "no" = 0 or "maybe" = .5. In understanding their experiences with integrated skills and online courses, responses were coded as "too easy" = 1 "too difficult" = 0 or "manageable" = .5.

I also used the "CountIf" function in Excel to determine the number of responses to specific questions, such as why students answered "yes" "no" or "maybe" regarding transferring. I first re-coded those answers and calculated the number of instances of a particular code. For example, in answer to "why do you want to transfer", answers such as, "I want to transfer to four-year university to get my bachelors" and "Due to the fact that I am majoring in civil engineering, I am a four-year transfer student. It is necessary for me to transfer to one of the universities once I have completed my associate degree" were both coded as "bachelor's" because in both instances, students mentioned getting a bachelor's or continuing their education as the main reason why they wanted to transfer.

Qualitative Analysis: Interviews, Observations, and Student Writing

Interviews and all other qualitative data were transcribed and coded using MaxQDA 2022, but in three separate files. Faculty interviews and observations were coded in one file, curricular and policy documents were coded in a second file, and student interviews, observations and writing samples were coded in a third file. For each interview or recorded observation headnote, I listened to determine the accuracy of the transcript. In each file, I used elements of grounded theory to code the data using gerunds that described what was happening without preconceived categories (Charmaz, 2006). Across the three files – faculty, student, and curricular documents – I generated a whole new set of codes that emerged from the data. After I finished coding each piece of data, I used the constant comparative method to collapse codes and re-code previous interviews or observations when new patterns emerged (Charmaz, 2006). For instance, for student interviews, the larger parent code "describing goal at NCCC" had several subcodes which emerged from interviews, such as "desire to learn about American system" or "wanting to transfer to a university". Depending on a participant's reasoning for giving that answer, a subcode such as "wanting to transfer to a university" could have several other subcodes, such as, "unsure of when to transfer", "finish general education", or "save money". If I noticed a duplicate code under multiple parent codes, I combined them into one so that they could be collapsed.

In looking for patterns in the data, I would begin by highlighting larger parent codes, selecting all of observations, interviews, and writing concerning that code, and searching for relationships. For instance, under the parent code "describing course experiences" I highlighted "seeing improvement from taking ESL classes" and "describing non-ESL courses" to determine whether there were any patterns that arose when both of those codes were highlighted, to see

how students felt that their ESL classes may have prepared them for their mainstream courses. Even though the interviews came directly from the participants themselves, they were still being interpreted and coded by my own voice, as I am the primary instrument of this research (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Therefore, I also used *illumination* to differentiate between my own voice and the voice of the participants (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). For instance, when detailing students' opinions about A.B. 705 in Chapter 6, many of which I disagreed with, I noted how my impressions or understandings changed as I gathered more data from their writing or surveys, and asked students more questions during the interview.

Qualitative Analysis: Curriculum and Policy Document Analysis

I also used MaxQDA 2022 to create codes using the grounded theory approach to analyze curriculum and policy documents, as described above (Charmaz, 2006). However, given that the documents were more formulaic and followed a general pattern, I first generated parent codes for each section of the document, such as "assessment" and "course curriculum". Then, I used the "in vivo" coding technique of using specific language that emerged from the text, such as "emphasis on reading skills" or "promote academic success" to note patterns across levels in the program. I then compared these codes between pre- and post-A.B. 705 iterations of the documents to determine what changes had happened as a result of the bill. Finally, I made connections between the documents and other collected data by comparing the codes between the three files: faculty, student, and curricular and policy documents. For instance, I noted that "vocabulary development" was prevalent in pre-A.B. 705 curricular documents, but not post. Likewise, I noted that "vocabulary development", though mentioned by faculty and students as a code, was generally discussed as something they wished they had more time for.

The data analysis procedures outlined above yielded several important findings which will be discussed in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. In Chapter 4, I will outline the findings from the curriculum and policy document analysis, which demonstrate how ideologies present in the bills, such as accountability, rigor, and a push to transfer-level coursework, impacted the English department's and ESL department's curricula revision. In Chapter 5, I will outline the findings from the faculty and administrator interviews, and how the enactment of the curricular changes, coupled with the pandemic, had many unintended consequences for the classroom. Finally, in Chapter 6, I will describe the findings from the student interviews, observations, and collected writing, and their perceptions regarding the policy itself as well as their experiences at the college following the enactment of the policy.

Chapter 4: Framing the Terrain with Legislation and Curriculum Analysis

In a portrait of an institution, the beginning of the findings is designed to "illuminate" or "frame the terrain" of the remaining findings chapters. The portrait that I will compose of this institution can be situated within multiple contexts: the physical setting, the historical context, the significant symbols and metaphors of the college, and finally my own perspective and positionality within the college. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Unlike the methods section in Chapter 3 where I provided key statistics about NCCC to understand the site during fall 2022-fall 2023 when I was gathering data, I will use this chapter to qualitatively contextualize not only the portrait of this institution, but also my own involvement and relationship with the institution as the portraitist. To do this, I will couch much of my analysis in a vignette describing a pivotal two-day retreat, where A.B. 705 was first introduced to me, as well as to the other adjunct faculty in the department. In the vignette, I will analyze the language of A.B. 705 and 1705, as well as the interpretations of those bills by third parties. I will then describe in detail the real on-the-ground changes that took place as a result of these bills, starting with curricular changes and ending with other larger structural changes that affected not only the ESL department, but the larger college as a whole.

Northern California Community College (NCCC) is the largest college in the district, with four locations spread throughout the city. The main campus is located off a busy freeway intersection, surrounded on the south and east sides by secluded, more expensive homes, and on the west by apartments. Though the area itself is quiet, the area immediately around the campus is not walkable, and much traffic can be heard on the perimeters of the iron gates surrounding the college. Across the street from the college there is an Islamic Center where many of the students frequent and an adult ESL charter school where many ESL students transferred from. The

college itself, in California style, is a mostly outdoor complex, with most of the buildings dating back to the 1960s, including the building where the ESL department had previously been housed which was suddenly and with less than 24-hour notice closed, supposedly due to “seismic event” structural concerns in September of 2023. Though the college was not the first to be founded in the district, it did precede the creation of the district.

Two significant mantras that are consistently employed throughout the physical as well as virtual space of the college, omnipresent in all the different buildings as well as in the historical recounting of the college’s construction, are the words “equity” and “inclusion.” According to the school district’s website, the first college in the district was initially founded in 1916 by a woman, Belle Cooledge, with an inaugural all-female graduating class, with “the spirit of inclusion at its very heart.” (Our History). When walking around campus and into many different buildings, there are signs up around campus that tout their commitment to “equity” and “inclusion” either through upcoming transfer workshops, services offered in the building, or supposedly just as reminders to what the purpose of the college is for. The logo for the college may similarly represent concepts of equity and inclusion of Native American tribes. The logo is a large blue oak tree within a red box above the initials for the college, potentially representing the protected oak trees on campus, some of which predate the formation of the United States of America (Walsh, 2015) though the explanation of this representation is not clearly stated on any official websites. Ironically, perhaps symbolizing the college’s constant internal battles resulting from the implementation of various policies, the college’s mascot is a Beaver, a natural enemy to trees, as they are known for gnawing them down to build dams or consume them for food. Bucky is generally portrayed as being red, white, and blue, as red and blue on a white background are the school’s brand colors (Color Guide).

In terms of my own perspective and positionality of the college, it has changed multiple times throughout the course of this research, but for the purposes of framing the terrain for this findings chapter, I will describe my positionality during the ESL Department Retreat which took place on January 15, 2020. This was one day of a two-day retreat that provided a stipend to adjunct faculty who could attend to help prepare them for the upcoming curriculum changes that A.B. 705 would bring. Throughout this chapter, I will use this pivotal meeting as a grounding point in the research, as it was my entry point into understanding this new bill which would forever alter the course of my teaching and research career at the college. What became significant about this retreat only emerged two years after the fact, when I began collecting data for my dissertation. To begin, the retreat represented some of the only professional development provided for each educator in the department to understand this new bill, and almost every faculty member I interviewed mentioned it as the only touchstone they had in relation to the bill. Other aspects of the retreat have surfaced in my data collection stream in faculty interviews, observations, student interviews, student surveys, or student writing samples. Even seemingly nonchalant notes that I scribbled down during this meeting have been imbued with new significance in the aftermath of the implementation of this bill.

Of course, because the retreat happened before March 13, 2020, there is no mention of the Covid-19 pandemic or online teaching in this meeting. Despite the fact that the pandemic played an important role in the implementation of A.B. 705, its absence from this meeting is an accurate representation of how it was considered *before* the pandemic, and thus depicts the original intentions with which it was enacted, given that no one could have predicted the global shutdown that Covid-19 caused. The discussions of A.B. 705 are the closest I can get to what the faculty attitudes and thoughts of this bill were before the pandemic, given that all the data I have

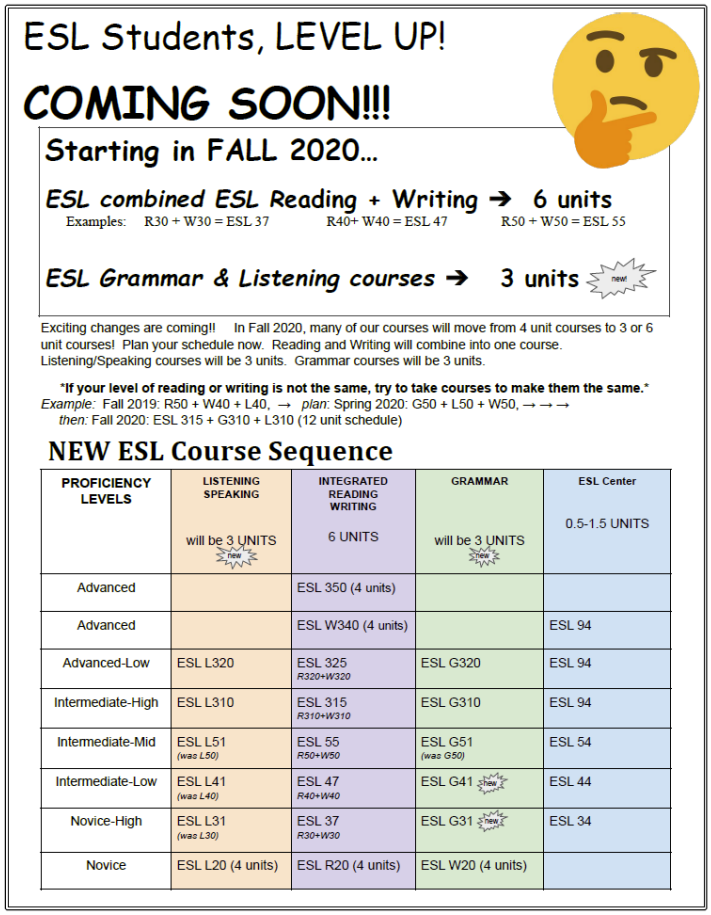
since gathered is dated during and post-pandemic. Thus, the retreat provides important context for understanding how A.B. 705 was implemented at this college.

I came to this retreat with a vague understanding that the bill would require some large-scale curricular changes, but with no previous understanding of what the implications would be of this bill, nor about how it would impact the college as a whole. I had only taught at NCCC for one semester when A.B. 705 was to be implemented in the ESL department. As an adjunct, I was focused mainly on getting through the courses that I was teaching both at this community college as well as another one, while simultaneously applying for a PhD program at UC Davis for the upcoming fall 2020 quarter. My connection to the college was tenuous at best, with a nebulous goal of becoming a full-time faculty member eventually at some teaching institution. I attended the retreat because of the promise of extra pay and free food more than my actual interest in learning more about the implications of the bill. To me, the unknown curricular changes were not intimidating, nor were they foreign concepts in my then five years of teaching experience. In all honesty, at the time, my biggest thought was, “What’s the big deal?”

Adjunct and full-time faculty were invited to attend the ESL Department Retreat in an email to the whole department. In the email, attached to the invitation to the retreat was a flier to be distributed to students (seen in Figure 1 below).

Figure 1

ESL Department A.B. 705 Student Flier



ESL Students, LEVEL UP!

COMING SOON!!!

Starting in FALL 2020…

ESL combined ESL Reading + Writing → 6 units

Examples: R30 + W30 = ESL 37 R40+ W40 = ESL 47 R50 + W50 = ESL 55

ESL Grammar & Listening courses → 3 units new!

Exciting changes are coming!! In Fall 2020, many of our courses will move from 4 unit courses to 3 or 6 unit courses! Plan your schedule now. Reading and Writing will combine into one course. Listening/Speaking courses will be 3 units. Grammar courses will be 3 units.

If your level of reading or writing is not the same, try to take courses to make them the same.

Example: Fall 2019: R50 + W40 + L40, → *plan*: Spring 2020: G50 + L50 + W50, → → →
then: Fall 2020: ESL 315 + G310 + L310 (12 unit schedule)

NEW ESL Course Sequence

PROFICIENCY LEVELS	LISTENING SPEAKING will be 3 UNITS new	INTEGRATED READING WRITING 6 UNITS	GRAMMAR will be 3 UNITS new	ESL Center 0.5-1.5 UNITS
Advanced		ESL 350 (4 units)		
Advanced		ESL W340 (4 units)		ESL 94
Advanced-Low	ESL L320	ESL 325 *R320+W320*	ESL G320	ESL 94
Intermediate-High	ESL L310	ESL 315 *R310+W310*	ESL G310	ESL 94
Intermediate-Mid	ESL L51 *(was L50)*	ESL 55 *R50+W50*	ESL G51 *(was G50)*	ESL 54
Intermediate-Low	ESL L41 *(was L40)*	ESL 47 *R40+W40*	ESL G41 new	ESL 44
Novice-High	ESL L31 *(was L30)*	ESL 37 *R30+W30*	ESL G31 new	ESL 34
Novice	ESL L20 (4 units)	ESL R20 (4 units)	ESL W20 (4 units)	

This flier was designed to be distributed to students to get them excited about the new curricular changes that were to come. The first line reads, “ESL students, LEVEL UP!” next to a confused or skeptical emoji. Below it is more text: “COMING SOON!!! Starting in Fall 2020…ESL combined ESL Reading + Writing → 6 units, ESL Grammar & Listening courses → 3 units (new!)” Below the text was a table detailing the new ESL course sequence, with changes highlighted in the different courses: Listening/Speaking, Integrated Reading and Writing, Grammar, and the ESL Center. Despite the text reading “Exciting changes are coming!!” the emoji, overshadowing the exclamation points and seemingly excited displays of information,

betrayed the feelings of skepticism and confusion that many of my colleagues had felt about this new policy. The flier, with its contradictory messaging, ended up being a perfect encapsulation of what was to come: a policy which was branded as being only for the good of all students, but which brought with it certain feelings of unease from the instructors.

The ESL retreat took place in the ESL Center, a large circular room with several small connecting rooms located in the Learning Resource Center (LRC) on the main campus. The ESL Center, or Lab, is characterized by some as a "catch all" and others as the heart of the ESL department, fulfilling additional needs other than merely academic ones for our student population. It has served as a gathering place for many meetings, parties, or other academic tasks such as assessments or tutoring to occur. In the aftermath of the ESL Department building's closure three years after the two-day retreat occurred, the Center became imbued with additional significance as the only space on campus where ESL faculty could meet with students in makeshift office hours when they had no other place to go. There is no door to the ESL center, but the entrance is well hidden, tucked into the far-right side of the building. Many students miss it when looking for it, as one must take a sharp turn to the right upon entering the LRC, followed by a short walk down a carpeted hallway, by which one passes the Reading Across Disciplines (RAD) and Writing Across Curriculum (WAC) offices. The center itself is made up of several circular and rectangular tables where students can complete extra individual activities in whatever skills they would like to practice in English: reading, writing, speaking, listening, or grammar.

On January 15, 2020, while rushing into the LRC and making my way to the ESL center where I had only been once before, I remember being struck by the tension in the room. As an adjunct, I had not been privy to the worried meetings happening behind closed doors about this

brand-new policy that was to be fully implemented this coming fall 2020. Grabbing some coffee and a blueberry muffin, I took a seat at one of the circular tables and was immediately handed a binder, now an important source of data, with a full agenda and copies of all the PowerPoints that were to be presented at the meeting.

The Language of A.B. 705 and A.B. 1705

The meeting began with Dolores, the chair of the department, introducing a new policy, Assembly Bill 705, that had been passed in 2017 and taken effect in the English and math departments during spring and fall of 2019. Looking at the binder and the PowerPoint where Dolores was presenting, I noticed that the image on the title slide of the PowerPoint was one of Gromit, a claymation character from Wallace and Gromit, laying down train tracks as he was riding on the train. Dolores at the beginning of the presentation joked that the process of revising this curriculum and adopting this bill felt like a similar procedure. The joke and ensuing laughter immediately broke some of the tension in the room, and Dolores was able to provide more context about the bill, which she noted during her presentation stressed a "strong push towards integration of skills, a significant push towards acceleration, and success measured by completion of transfer-level composition (TLC)." She also noted what she branded as "significant achievements" which were: 1) ESL is no longer viewed as remedial English, and 2) ESL got an extended 3-year sequence vs. 1 year for native speakers. In my binder that I kept from the retreat, I had underlined these points and written, "ESL → foreign language learning process; given more legitimacy" next to it. Overall, while Dolores was realistic about the implementation of the bill and lack of preparation or support she had received, her tone during the meeting was matter of fact and slightly hopeful, which she later confirmed in an interview was an intentional choice to create buy-in among faculty. Up to this point, there had been so

much tension in the department that Dolores felt it was her job to create a feeling of unity among them rather than further disconnectedness. Later, while conducting my own research, I read A.B. 705 myself to confirm these changes were indeed mandated. In the bill itself, the language Dolores had described reads:

> "This bill would require a community college district or college to maximize the probability that the student will enter and complete transfer-level coursework in English and mathematics within a one-year timeframe, and use, in the placement of students into English and mathematics courses in order to achieve this goal, one or more of the following: high school coursework, high school grades, and high school grade point average. The bill would authorize the board of governors to establish regulations governing the use of measures, instruments, and placement models to ensure that these measures, instruments, and placement models achieve the goal of maximizing the probability that a student will enter and complete transfer-level coursework in English and mathematics within a one-year timeframe…" (A.B. 705, Irwin)

The English department and math department thus could only use high school coursework, grades, or grade point average to place students into their correct courses, or otherwise use a previously approved placement test that would still enable students to complete those requirements within one year. The significance for ESL was in a continuation of that same sentence, almost added as an afterthought to the entire bill, in which we were now also relegated to a time frame:

> "The bill would authorize the board of governors to establish regulations governing the use of measures, instruments, and placement models to ensure that these measures, instruments, and placement models achieve the goal of maximizing the probability that a student will enter and complete transfer-level coursework in English and mathematics within a one-year timeframe, **and that a student enrolled in English-as-a-second-language (ESL) instruction will enter and complete degree and transfer requirements in English within a timeframe of 3 years**." (A.B. 705, Irwin)

According to A.B. 705, ESL students must have the ability to complete all their ESL courses, as well as their transfer and general education requirements, within a three-year time period. Because of A.B. 705, ESL is now considered as separate from remedial education, which is where certain colleges may have previously categorized it. In other words, ESL courses now by

law *must* have some kind of pathway for ESL students to eventually enroll in transfer-level courses. As Dolores noted, far from eradicating ESL as a discipline, this law has almost solidified its existence as something distinct from remedial education, allowing for ESL to integrate more fully with the rest of the college. As previously noted in Chapter 2, this was a significant milestone for ESL, as prior to the implementation of this bill, ESL departments were haphazardly designed and connected to the colleges where they were housed, with few options for students to transition out of the program and into mainstream credit courses (Mellow & Heelan, 2008; Shaw, et al., 2018). It is also important to note that the language of the bill specifically noted that the goal of taking ESL was to "maximize the probability" of completing transfer requirements but did not mandate specifically a certain number of courses in each ESL sequence, nor did it mandate the eradication of any given level. In fact, the bill specifically had a clause in which remedial education, or non-transfer level courses were allowed to be maintained:

> "The bill would prohibit a community college district or college from requiring students to enroll in remedial English or mathematics coursework that lengthens their time to complete a degree **unless placement research that includes consideration of high school grade point average and coursework shows that those students are highly unlikely to succeed in transfer-level coursework in English and mathematics.** The bill would authorize a community college district or college to require students to enroll in additional concurrent support, **including additional language support for ESL students, during the same semester that they take the transfer-level English or mathematics course, but only if it is determined that the support will increase their likelihood of passing the transfer-level English or mathematics course.**" (A.B. 705, Irwin)

According to the bill, remedial (or non-transfer level) courses were in fact allowed to remain at the college if it was clear that those students would be unlikely to succeed in transfer-level coursework in English or math, and that ESL students could receive additional support or corequisites as well.

Returning to the two-day retreat, the ESL department's initial plans aligned with the bill's stipulations about timeline, as later in the same presentation, there was a bullet point under the "Notes on Placement" slide that read almost begrudgingly, "We won't be able to place students in the 20s…" Comparing the plain language of the bill with its implementation in the ESL department, it is clear that remedial education, though discouraged, was permitted and could be considered to help students pass their transfer-level courses. In alignment with the bill, the ESL department had been planning to keep the lowest 20 level but remove it from the placement process so that students could *opt* to take it, rather than be forcibly placed there. However, what was also clear in all these segments from the bill was that the role of additional assessment tools could no longer be used to mandate that students take certain classes, but that they be used as "advisory tools" to guide students into proper classes.

Several years after this retreat, after the pandemic had taken a firm hold on our world, Assembly Bill 1705, a bill designed to further constrain and elaborate upon A.B. 705, was enacted. On July 1, 2023, A.B. 1705 further limited the role of placement testing or the presence of remedial courses for high school graduates, but still did not ban them completely:

> "This bill would require all new and continuing United States high school graduate students and those who have been issued a high school equivalency certificate, who plan to pursue a certificate, degree, or transfer program offered by a California community college, to be directly placed into, and, when beginning coursework in English or mathematics, enrolled in, transfer-level English and mathematics, as provided. By July 1, 2023, **the bill would prohibit a community college district or community college from using specified factors as justification for placing a student in a pretransfer-level course.**" (A.B. 1705, Irwin).

Now, though community colleges could no longer mandate that students with a U.S. high school diploma take pre-transfer courses, they could still have those courses available for students to

elect to take. Additionally, the role of assessment was still relegated to an advisory one which required approval from the board of governors, but was not outlawed completely:

> "(a) A community college district or community college shall not use any assessment instrument for the purposes of this article without the authorization of the board of governors. The board of governors may adopt a list of authorized assessment instruments. (b) The board of governors shall review all assessment instruments and shall consider for approval those that meet all of the following requirements: (1) Assessment instruments shall meet established standards of validity and reliability. (2) Assessment instruments shall be sensitive to cultural and language differences between students, and shall be adapted as necessary to accommodate students with disabilities. (3) Assessment instruments shall be used solely as an advisory tool to assist students in the selection of appropriate courses. (4) Assessment instruments shall not be used to exclude students from admission to community colleges." (A.B. 1705, Irwin)

According to the language of these bills, remedial courses and assessments have become optional, non-mandatory courses that students may choose to take but will be strongly discouraged from doing so by counselors and community college administrators. They have been neither banned nor outlawed but have been greatly reduced in their role which they may have previously played at a given community college. However, the designation of courses as "optional" raises budgetary concerns. The Century Working group in their chapter "Estimating the Real Cost of Community College" noted that many times, colleges are forced to make choices about how much to spend "inefficiently" on student costs that may not directly contribute to a desired outcome that they are trying to measure. One of these major costs brought by individual students that community colleges specifically must address but cannot control is a student's "under-preparedness" for a college education (The Century Working Group, 2019).

Before A.B. 705, one of the main outcomes that drove community college funding was enrollment. Remedial courses addressed the real problem of student "under-preparedness" by helping provide additional support for students who needed it, which meant that in budgetary terms, paying for the cost of remedial education was "efficient" in that it could indirectly help

colleges have higher enrollment numbers. Now with A.B. 705, policymakers have determined that the new outcome driving community college funding is high completion and transfer rates within a one-to-three-year period. Thus, "optional" remedial courses, which hinder that outcome by extending the timeline, are now inefficient costs that the colleges can't afford to spend money on. Additionally, in this new paradigm, there is no longer any such thing as a student's "under-preparedness," as A.B. 705 now suddenly dictates that *all* students are prepared for transfer-level composition and math, regardless of their previous background. Thus, remedial education is inefficient not only because it hinders accelerated curricula, but also because it takes up precious funding addressing a problem that *no longer exists*.

One final piece in A.B. 1705 is the mandate of data collection for accountability purposes. The bill specifically denotes which groups will have data collected about them, and consequently, which groups will be absent from that data collection process:

> "(a) Beginning July 1, 2023, the Chancellor's Office of the California Community Colleges shall make available on its internet website a dashboard containing multiyear data, beginning from 2015. The dashboard shall be updated annually pursuant to subdivision (b) and shall contain data submitted to the chancellor's office by community colleges on student progression and completion of **transfer-level** English, mathematics, and **ESL courses**, disaggregated by community college and by all the following: (1) Age group. (2) Whether the student received corequisite support. (3) Receipt of disability services and programs for students. (4) Receipt of extended opportunity programs and services. (5) Ethnicity. (6) Foster youth status. (7) Gender. (8) Discipline–relevant high school performance bands. (9) Mathematics, Engineering, Science Achievement (MESA) program students. (10) Puente students. (11) Umoja students. (12) Veteran status." (A.B. 1705)

Notably, language learners, country of origin, immigration status, or any key markers that may identify immigrants are absent from this list. The only ESL courses about which data must be collected are transfer-level courses. Only students who may be Spanish-speakers, most likely Generation 1.5 or later, may qualify for data collection through the "ethnicity" label, Puente, primarily serving Mexican American and Latinx students (Puente History) or Umoja, primarily

serving African American students who may also be immigrants from other countries in Latin America, the Caribbean, or Africa (Umoja Mission and Vision Statement). Otherwise, immigrant populations who either do not qualify as Latinx or African American, or those students who may enroll in ESL, will not be accounted for in this new accountability paradigm which concerns them.

Given that the original impetus of this bill was to serve Generation 1.5 students and specifically African American and Latinx students (Hayward, 2020; Park, 2019; Rodriguez, et al., 2019), this data collection structure makes sense. However, this section of A.B. 1705 is partly what explains the language learner erasure in data collection and research that has happened at the college level and research level, both of which were mentioned previously in Chapters 2 and 3. With the new inclusion of ESL, and the plurality of identities that come with being an ESL student that are many times not quantifiable through the "ethnicity" designation, A.B. 1705's data collection structure essentially erases large swaths of the population from existence. Irvine & Gal (2000) defined this "erasure" as a language ideology which "renders some persons invisible" (p. 38) by imagining that a linguistic group is homogenous. It is entirely possible in this data collection structure, for instance, for an immigrant student from Nigeria to self-designate as "African American," thus erasing their language learner status and immigration status, as that student would not be considered "American" by any means. It is also possible for a Dominican or Brazilian student to designate as "biracial" "Latinx" "African American" or "white" depending on that student's own culturally-based understanding of race from their country, given the complex colonial histories of the Dominican Republic and Brazil (Chasteen, 2016). Any of those designations except for Latinx would erase a student's language learner status. It is also possible for a student to be the child or grandchild of Mexican immigrants, select

the “Latinx” category, and not identify as a language learner or even have the ability to speak another language. These categories reach further complications with the additions of “Native American” and “Asian and Pacific Islander.”

Rosa (2019) in his ethnography *Looking like a Language, Sounding like a Race* addresses the ethnoracialization of language that happens with first, second and third-generation Puerto Rican and Mexican high school students in Chicago. He noted that Spanish and African-American English index certain speech communities in the United States, and that positioning “Black” and “Spanish” or “African American” and “Latinx" as distinct racial categories erases Afro-Latinidad as an option. Though the “biracial” option may address this false dichotomy, research overwhelmingly ignores this category, favoring instead “African American” and “Latinx” as being clearer cut. Of course, this does not address the complicated realities of Muslim students, who do not have a federal race designation, and thus are relegated to the “white” category. Despite the fact that Muslim refugees are consistently racialized in the United States, and can come from Europe, the Middle East, Northern Africa, and even parts of China and Russia (Abu El-Haj, 2015), there is no way of distinguishing who those students are outside of their “white” designation, and they too are erased from the data collection process.

Interpretations and Implementation of the Bill

During the two-day retreat, I was never given a copy of the bill to read and review. In fact, throughout my interviews with faculty members or other representatives of the college, very few of them read the language of the bill at all. Rather, faculty members were told and given *interpretations* of the bill, from different stakeholders such as the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office (CCCCO) or other district officials. My colleagues and I, rather than reading the documents ourselves, were instead being told the public reasons and

justifications for these bills, which Waldron (2015) notes is to try to persuade those with political power in the community that the reasoning behind policy is just rather than oppressive. Ramanathan (2013) noted in the introduction to her edited volume, *Language Policies and (Dis)Citizenship: Rights, Access, Pedagogies* that these top-down language policies, despite having good intentions, can act as homogenizing forces that erase differences and force assimilation into the dominant group. She also noted that different social groups, with their own histories and worldviews, unwittingly imbue those histories and worldviews into whatever policy they are interpreting, and then demand assimilation into.

In the interpretations of A.B. 705 and 1705, as well as the data collection procedures that ESL was to forcibly become a part of, the ESL department was being assimilated into English and math, because that was the *original* orientation and purpose of this bill in its inception (Shaw, et al., 2018). Districts with little or no frame of reference for what ESL is or what kinds of students are enrolled in it were given interpretations of the bill from the Chancellor's office, which they in turn transformed into implementation plans given to their local community colleges, with almost no thought as to how these implementation plans would affect ESL. However, given the focus on English and math, even most districts offered little or no guidance for how to implement these bills in ESL, as can be seen from CCCCO's website explaining A.B. 705 and A.B. 1705, where ESL is not mentioned once on the entire web page:

> "AB 705 is a bill signed by the Governor on October 13, 2017 that took effect on January 1, 2018. The bill requires that a community college district or college maximize the probability that a student will enter and complete transfer-level coursework in English and math within a one year timeframe and use, **in the placement of students into English and math courses,** one or more of the following: high school coursework, high school grades, and high school grade point average."

Community college ESL faculty members were recommended "best practices" to help them implement these vague bills, with strong recommendations to do three major things: 1) integrate their courses so that they could shorten their course sequences to six or fewer levels, 2) create clear pathways for ESL students to bypass or transition directly into transfer-level coursework, and 3) create a guided self-placement that does not mandate that students take a certain course, but instead strongly suggests that students enroll in certain levels based on their high school coursework and GPA (Hayward, et al., 2022; Kretz & Newell, 2020; Rodriguez, et al., 2019). ESL students and their linguistic status were being erased and assimilated into a larger monolingual context, with assumptions being made about their ethnicity, race, and even citizenship or ability to participate in this new school culture (Irvine & Gal, 2000; Kroskrity, 2004; Ramanathan, 2013).

To ground the interpretations and implications of A.B. 705 and 1705 into on-ground enactments, I will return to the ESL retreat. During the two-day event, Dolores outlined these implications in relation to our own program: the ESL department would now be offering six-unit, integrated reading and writing courses rather than two separate four-unit writing and grammar or reading courses. In the flier, this change was represented by, "ESL Reading + Writing → 6 units" where before taking reading and writing at the same time would have been 8 units. The listening and speaking courses, which were originally four units, would now be three units only, and the faculty would create additional grammar courses for the lower levels, removing them from their writing courses, and changing the more advanced grammar courses from four units to three.

At the time of our meeting, the department still had the "remedial" 20 level in the program, which was technically outside of the three-year timeframe for students, and for this

reason, was to remain as an optional, non-integrated course for students to elect to take if they chose. However, the department could no longer place students into that course, following the mandate of A.B. 705 and 1705. Two years later in fall 2022, during the pandemic and the year that I started collecting data, certain individuals in the district demanded the removal of the 20 level so that it was no longer available for students to take. As previously noted, the budgetary constraints meant that the college could not pay for the optional 20 level, given that it was now hindering the three-year timeline, and addressing an "under-preparedness" problem that supposedly no longer existed. The final change was the revision of the 340 level and addition of the 350 level, both of which were transfer-level composition, with only 340 being a requirement of UCs and CSUs. The 350 level, equivalent to English 301, therefore did not count outside of the six levels students were permitted to take in ESL. The sequence, thus, changed twice, as summarized in Table 8 below:

Table 8

Curricular Changes Made to ESL Program from Fall 2019 - Fall 2022

Skill	Pre-AB 705, fall 2019 and prior		Post-AB 705, spring 2020	Post-AB 705, fall 2022 (removal of 20 level)
Reading (R) and Writing (W) or Integrated (ESL)	R20 – 4 units R30 – 4 units R40 – 4 units R50 – 4 units R310 – 4 units R320 – 4 units R340 – 4 units - = **7 levels total**	W20 – 4 units W30 – 4 units W40 – 4 units W50 – 4 units W310 – 4 units W320 – 4 units W340 – 4 units W350 - 4 units = **8 levels total**	R20 and W20 – 4 units ea. ESL 37 – 6 units ESL 47 – 6 units ESL 55 – 6 units ESL 315 – 6 units ESL 325 – 6 units ESL 340 – 4 units ESL 350 – 4 units = **8 levels total**	- ESL 37 – 6 units ESL 47 – 6 units ESL 55 – 6 units ESL 315 – 6 units ESL 325 – 6 units ESL 340 – 4 units ESL 350 – 4 units = **7 levels total**
Listening and Speaking	L20 – 4 units L30 – 4 units L40 – 4 units L50 – 4 units L310 – 4 units L320 – 4 units = **6 levels total**		L21 – 3 units L31 – 3 units L41 – 3 units L51 – 3 units L310 – 3 units L320 – 3 units = **6 levels total**	- L31 – 3 units L41 – 3 units L51 – 3 units L310 – 3 units L320 – 3 units = **5 levels total**
Grammar	- - - G50 – 4 units G310 –4 units G320 – 4 units = **3 levels total**		- G31 – 3 units G41 – 3 units G51 – 3 units G310 – 3 units G320 – 3 units = **5 levels total**	- G31 – 3 units G41 – 3 units G51 – 3 units G310 – 3 units G320 – 3 units = **5 levels total**

The binders we were given during the retreat contained copies of the new revised curricula for all the newly integrated skills courses: ESL 325, 315, 55, 47, and 37. As an example, I will review the curricular changes enacted in one level, the 320 level, which is the level just before transfer-level composition. I will begin by comparing the student learning

outcomes (SLOs) and course descriptions of the separate reading and writing courses with the newly combined integrated skills course. I will then describe the changes made to the listening and speaking and grammar courses after the transition from four units to three. All these changes to the ESL department curriculum can be viewed in Appendix E. After reviewing the changes to the 320 level, I will also review the changes to the transfer-level English course, ENGWR 300, and the equivalent course in the ESL department, ESLW 340, which similarly underwent an overhaul partially in response to A.B. 705, as can be viewed in Appendix F. I will conclude the discussion of curricular changes with detailing the 20 level, and what was removed from that level in response to A.B. 705, and instead what the new "bottom level", ESL 37, was expected to cover, as can be viewed in Appendix G. After covering curricular changes, I will then detail two major structural changes which happened as a result of A.B. 705: the revised placement test, and the new role of the ESL Lab. To conclude the chapter, I will describe how these changes all were significant in regard to faculty and student interviews, detailed in Chapters 5 and 6.

Curricular Changes: The Integrated Skills Courses

The four-unit R320 course was a reading course designed for the low-advanced level of ESL, the last level before transfer, and thus imbued with the importance of preparing students to transition out of the ESL department and into mainstream composition. As can be seen in Appendix E, in its course description, the goals of the course were to refine academic reading skills, concentrating specifically on three elements: speed, vocabulary development, and analytical comprehension. Additionally, the course description also stressed the importance of conducting research and synthesizing sources to prepare students to potentially enroll in transfer-level composition the following semester. The SLOs of the course, last updated in 2015, were mostly focused on reading skills, with some additional writing skills, such as synthesis and

paraphrasing. The W320 course description in contrast focused on the "production of focused, developed and organized essays on a variety of topics" with a special emphasis on argumentative essays. Additionally, the course description also noted that analysis and use of readings were an important aspect of the course, with special additional focus on sentence variety and mechanics of English in the 6,000 words that would be produced over the course of a semester. The SLOs of the course were similarly mostly focused on writing skills, with some focus on using readings as evidence for writing.

In theory, these course descriptions and SLOs lent themselves to an easily integrated course, with the incorporation of writing skills (synthesis) in the reading course and reading skills (as evidence) in the writing course. The first iteration of ESL 325 from 2018 included in the binder distributed at the retreat did indeed incorporate the exact same SLOs combined into one course. However, in its later iteration in 2021, it is clear from the SLOs of the ESL 325 integrated skills course that writing has become the predominant skill to be measured. Of the six student learning outcomes for the integrated skills course, only two of them focused specifically on reading skill development: "analyze complex, college-length texts for context, audience, purpose, structure, and genre" and "apply and adapt appropriate reading strategies in order to critique complex, college-length texts for reliability and credibility." The rest of the SLOs focused on the development of writing or using readings to write. Reading speed and vocabulary development, previously two of the three main tenets of the R320 course, were nowhere to be seen in the new student learning outcomes for the integrated skills course.

At this advanced level of ESL, just before transfer, research has shown it is imperative for students to have a high reading speed and strong basis of vocabulary to be able to read successfully. Grabe & Yamashita (2022) note that word recognition through vocabulary

development is one of the most important processes for contributing to reading comprehension in an L2 which can even predict later reading abilities, and that insufficient word recognition processes can hinder second language learner reading development. This is because reading speed, vocabulary development, and reading comprehension are closely connected: automaticity is important for fluent reading because it allows for readers to engage in multiple processes simultaneously, such as storing the information gained from the reading into long-term memory. Rather than spending the mental energy or time on decoding vocabulary, or guessing from context, which slows the speed of the reading and therefore heightens the cognitive load of the reader, knowing more vocabulary and being able to process readings quickly, with a reading speed of 250-300 words per minute, will allow for readers to learn from what they read, and think critically about it, which are both important SLOs for ESL 325 as well as ENGWR 300. Hedgcock & Ferris (2018) in their book *Teaching Readers of English* stressed that when developing a syllabus for a reading course, one of the major tenets teachers should consider is, "creat[ing] a vocabulary-rich environment by helping learners build a large vocabulary and develop robust word recognition skills" (p. 268). They also noted to "aim for both fluency and speed to build reading efficiency" in the SLOs of the course to develop reading capabilities. With neither outcome listed in the SLOs, teachers may not have paid special attention to these significant building blocks but rather focused more on higher-level processes that students may not even be ready for.

Timed writing, similarly a major tenet of the W320 course, was also no longer present in the new integrated skills writing course. Two new additions had become important in the new integrated skills course: the inclusion of "college-length" texts, and MLA format, both of which were designed to prepare the students for transfer-level composition, as is specifically noted in

the course description. Thus, ESL 325, the final course in the ESL sequence designed to prepare students for transfer-level composition courses, focused almost entirely on writing development with little attention paid to reading development.

Curricular Changes: Listening and Speaking

The only change made to the listening and speaking series was to reduce the number of credits from four to three. However, this did translate to curricular changes, due to the change in number of instructional hours over the course of the semester. The course description for both L320s was the same (as seen in Appendix E), noting that this course was in preparation for U.S. college courses, stressing activities such as listening to extended lectures, refining note-taking skills, participating in in-depth discussions, and giving oral presentations, with some pronunciation help. However, in the four-unit course, the SLOs were much more specific and pinpointed specific skills, such as "choose appropriate intonation to convey intended meaning." In contrast, the three-unit course was much vaguer and more open-ended, using language such as, "compose and present dialogues and reports with appropriate pronunciation, grammar, organization, and lexical choice." In her interview, Sonya, the curriculum designer for the L230 course, noted that this use of vague language was intentional, and allowed for more creative license from the instructor to determine what to cover in the course. Intonation, the one SLO specifically connected to pronunciation, was removed, as was the one specific listening comprehension SLO. Rather, the SLOs did not mention any specific listening comprehension or pronunciation strategies before but did now include mention of idiomatic and academic vocabulary, notably absent from the integrated skills courses. It seems then that due to the constraints of the fewer instructional hours, pronunciation and specific listening comprehension

skills had to be cut in order to maintain more academic activities, such as giving oral presentations or taking notes while listening to a lecture.

Curricular Changes: Grammar

Prior to A.B. 705, as previously noted, separate grammar courses were only available for the three highest levels of ESL: 50, 310, and 320. The lower levels (20, 30, and 40) all had grammar integrated into the writing portion of their courses, with SLOs specific to particular grammar elements (as will be demonstrated in the 20-level curriculum). Thus, the final curricular change that the department made in response to A.B. 705 was a twofold change to the grammar courses: 1) grammar would be removed from the lower-level writing courses and instead turned into separate courses, and 2) all grammar courses, existing and new, would now be three units instead of four. Similarly to the L320 course, the G320 descriptions did not change much from pre-A.B. 705 to post, with both courses including mentions of form and meaning of major grammar structures used in spoken and written English, with an emphasis on clause structure. However, the pre-A.B. 705 G320 SLOs were clearly more writing-dominated, with no mention of speaking ability whatsoever. In contrast, the revised G320 course for three units maintained the same specific list of skills, but with additional mention of oral competency, and the removal of editing for clarity and correctness. Thus, one example SLO went from, "write and edit to achieve clarity and correctness" before A.B. 705, to "demonstrate skill in using targeted, level-appropriate grammar when speaking, listening, and writing." Thus, the revised G320 course, previously much more focused on writing ability (due to its partial integration with the writing courses), was now perhaps ironically the most integrated skills course offered at the 320 level, with mentions of listening, speaking, writing, and grammar in the revised SLOs.

Curricular Changes: Revision of ENGWR 300 and Addition of ENGWR 94

Aside from the large-scale curricular changes brought by A.B. 705 in the ESL department, as previously mentioned, the English and math departments also underwent large-scale curricular changes to accommodate the requirements of the bill (as seen in Appendix F). The English department changes in particular had an impact on our own curricular changes. A return to the ESL retreat can provide some context as to why ESL and English were closely connected.

Because the bill explicitly stated that ESL students must be given a pathway out of ESL and into transfer-level English, during the ESL retreat, Dolores invited a representative from the English department to give a talk about the changes that her department had made as a result of the bill. At the time, her presence surprised me, given that she was not in the ESL department. However, after conducting my research, the two main reasons why we invited her to the retreat became clear: 1) as a guiding light for us to follow and learn from in our own approach to redesigning our curriculum, and 2) as a norming mechanism for us to see what our students would be expected to do once they left our program.

The representative from the English department, Professor Stacy, entered the room just after Dolores finished introducing the PowerPoint and purpose of the retreat. She graciously thanked us for having her, and immediately directed our attention to the ENGWR 300 curriculum, with the newly added ENGWR 94 corequisite course, in which students would be strongly urged to co-enroll if counselors felt, using their high school transcript and grade data, that they were not ready for ENGWR 300 without additional support. It is important to note that this ENGWR 300 course has since undergone a similar curricular overhaul because of A.B. 705 and 1705. In the version of the course in the binder given to me in January 2020, reading and

writing were strongly integrated into the course, and both reading and writing skills were needed to satisfy the course outcomes. I had scribbled next to the SLOs, “reading = rehearsal for writing” and next to the course description, “synthesizing sources, argumentation about texts” to emphasize the importance that reading played in the SLOs of the course. Three of the SLOs concerned reading development: “assess complex text for audience, purpose, tone, and development,” “evaluate arguments for logical consistencies and fallacies,” and “synthesize concepts and evidence from complex texts and sources.” However, in the most recent version of the course, edited as of 2022 after the implementation of A.B. 1705, only one SLO clearly addressed reading skills: “analyze and synthesize complex oral and written sources from multiple perspectives and traditions to build comprehension, think critically, and share learning.” The rest all concerned writing, one example being, “compose college-level writing for multiple and diverse audiences using a variety of rhetorical strategies and sources (including the student’s own community knowledge or lived experience).” Though sources were mentioned in this SLO, the student’s own community knowledge and lived experience were specifically cited, diminishing the role of reading.

After going over the curriculum for the ENGWR 300 course, Professor Stacy then turned our attention to the curriculum for the corequisite course, ENGWR 94, which was a two-unit support course designed to be “very tightly integrated with 300.” The focus of the course was to provide additional teacher support to students, offering a space to conduct peer review, learn research skills, or draft essays. ESL faculty were interested in this new corequisite course because the department had been considering including our own corequisites, using the ESL Center, as a way to provide additional support to our students to ease their transition to the new six-unit integrated skills courses. Professor Stacy then gave us a sample syllabus and assignment

list from the ENGWR 300 course, in which students would be required to write 6,000 words in three or four essays in a variety of genres: summary, exposition, argument, and research. It was at this point that I scribbled on my paper, “high rigor, high support” and “scaffolding initially, then gradually let go” to mean that while students were expected to perform well, they would be provided with a lot of support initially and then pushed to learn on their own.

Up until this point in the presentation, the atmosphere in the room had been tense, but congenial. However, upon her transition into how their grading practices had changed because of A.B. 705, the feelings in the room shifted to bristling defensiveness. Her department had adopted Inoue’s (2019) labor-based contract grading as a way to provide the high rigor and high support that the course purported. Inoue’s system is designed to counter the white supremacist and racist standards that he argues traditional grading practices reproduce. Inoue’s system grades students based on the reading and writing labor they complete for the class instead of the quality of their writing. His process requires students to track their hourly labor, both qualitatively (how they labor) and quantitatively (how long they labor), and for students to then reflect metacognitively on their labor to encourage them to have agency about their own learning practices (Inoue, 2019). Inoue stresses the importance of divorcing the teacher’s own judgments about the writing from the grading of the writing. In some sample language for a grading contract he had written, he clearly explains the importance of providing grades based on the labor rather than the professor’s opinion of the work: “It will not matter what I or your colleagues think of your writing, only that you are listening to our feedback compassionately. We may disagree or misunderstand your writing, but if you put in the labor, you are guaranteed a B (3.1) course grade” (Inoue, 2019, p. 146).

Inoue (2019) also addresses concerns about whether students are able to meet SLOs in this new system, given that they are no longer being evaluated based on their ability to achieve those outcomes, but rather on their effort to do so. He argues that traditional grading practices may have little to do with reflecting whether students have actually achieved the learning outcomes, but instead will reflect the teacher's own subjective understanding of whether those outcomes were met. Instead, Inoue urges scholars to think of outcomes as course aims or goals, which are more in line with emergent learning and thinking, and rewarding any labor produced by students as being part of the learning process. In theory, in a classroom utilizing labor-based contract grading, students should be able to earn a grade entirely divorced from the quality of work that they produce but rather based on the quality and quantity of labor and self-reflection in which they engage throughout the learning process.

Despite Inoue's (2019) teachings and the English department's adoption of contract grading in their ENGWR 300 curricula, not all essays were being treated equally in the classroom. After explaining what labor-based contract grading was to us and providing us with a sample grading contract, Professor Stacy then went on to show the ESL department what a "fully developed" essay looked like, written by a native English speaker, and what a "less developed" essay looked like, written by a non-native English speaker. On the non-native English speaker's paper, I had written, "struggled with expressing complex thoughts" and "passing 300 but with grammar and other errors." In other words, based on the grading contract, the student had passed the course, but the quality of their writing was still being judged by the professor, which had negatively impacted the student's grade. Underneath this, I had written, perhaps to myself: "Contract-based grading ≠ what our students experience." As will be discussed in Chapter 6, students touched on the impacts of contract grading in their interviews, and though they may not

have all felt ethnolinguistic bias, there was an understanding among interviewees that ESL professors were better equipped to address their specific needs than mainstream English professors.

It's not surprising that the English department had an underlying ethnolinguistic bias against ESL students. Composition departments historically were not created for immigrant students and have a long history of linguistic containment through remedial courses or simply filtering them out of the admissions process (Matsuda, 2003; Stanley, 2010). Today's composition departments still are not generally tailored for to adult immigrant, international, or even Generation 1.5 students. In this case, the changes in the curriculum (as per A.B. 705) were an attempt to address the needs of BIPOC students, potentially including Generation 1.5 students. As previously noted, the bill through its lack of data collection assumes the linguistic homogeneity of BIPOC students, which can lead to unhelpful teaching practices (Matsuda, 2006). In the edited volume *Generation 1.5 Meets College Composition: Issues in the Teaching of Writing to U.S.-Educated Learners of ESL*, Harklau, et al. (1999) compiled a series of chapters addressing the unique challenges that Generation 1.5 students face, particularly regarding their unacknowledged second language learner status. Many authors found similar trends: composition instructors were less likely to address the linguistic needs of Generation 1.5 students in all aspects of the classroom, from feedback practices, revision expectations, and even in-class discussions and activities (Blanton, 1999; Ferris, 1999; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999; Stanley, 2010).

The adoption of labor-based contract grading was similarly predicated on a curriculum designed for linguistically homogeneous BIPOC students to help build self-efficacy and confidence in themselves as writers (Inoue, 2019). As such, composition departments may focus

more on issues of developing student voice, and tend to have a macroscopic focus, working on larger-scale techniques such as unity, coherence, or genre-driven writing, all of which were pointed out as being “problems" during the discussion on the non-native student’s essay during the retreat (Atkinson & Ramanathan, 1995; Silva & Leki, 2004). Additionally, composition professors may harbor an unwitting ethnolinguistic bias against the grammatical errors present in non-native speakers’ writing and may lack the training to offer helpful guidance on how to address those errors, even if they want to (CCCC, 2020; Lindsey & Crusan, 2011; Silva, 1997).

In contrast, writing that is produced within an applied linguistics or ESL context may have an international and multicultural lens, with a much more microscopic view of writing that breaks it down into individual pieces to be evaluated objectively, and from a grammatical perspective. This focus on grammar and highly structured writing may disadvantage ESL students when they transition out of the program because their writing will be evaluated more on individuality, voice, and breaking out of these structures that they had previously been drilled with. Professors from an ESL department may have limited experience with the conventions of teaching composition, and though they may be aware of the large gap between their program’s requirements and those of the composition department, they may be ill-equipped to address that discrepancy (Atkinson & Ramanathan, 1995). This, of course, was why Professor Stacy had come to our retreat: she wanted to help us learn about the conventions of teaching transfer-level composition, and to help us understand what their expectations were once our students transitioned over to their courses.

Despite the presence of labor-based contract grading, which was implemented to help professors grade students holistically and through the lens of completed labor and potentially level the playing field for ESL students (Lindsey & Crusan, 2011), ethnolinguistic bias was still

strong in the evaluation of the sample essays with which we were presented. ESL students were still being discriminated against based on their ungrammatical writing as much other previous research has found (Atkinson & Ramanathan, 1995; Cox, 2011; Silva & Leki, 2004). This large gap in theoretical approaches to teaching writing can be harmful in programs such as the one at NCCC in which students are expected to transition between the two programs, or worse, never take any ESL courses at all and place directly into mainstream writing. Silva (1997) noted that this gap can lead to a lack of respect for ESL students within a composition department, resulting in harsher grading (even with labor-based contract grading) or lack of attention to linguistic skills.

Along these lines, there has been little research investigating whether labor-based contract grading is effective with adult immigrant students, with most research focusing on international students or Generation 1.5 or 2.0 students in first year composition programs at four-year institutions rather than community colleges, where the student population is vastly different (Hosman, 2023; Inoue, 2019; Larson, 2021; Sims, 2021). Though results are promising that many multilingual students in FYC departments benefit from the incorporation of labor-based contract grading and may gain an increase in self-efficacy, metacognitive thinking, and agency in their writing (Hosman, 2023; Larson, 2021; Sims, 2021), these results may not translate to immigrant adults who are starting a new life, balancing a job, raising kids, and striving to fully integrate into their new society. Carrillo (2021) in her critique of labor-based contract grading noted that the hidden inequities within the system may tax students' mental health or erase their intersectional identities. Though labor-based contract grading does not prohibit providing linguistic or linguistic feedback, Inoue's (2019) framing of the practice itself is roughly akin to translingualism, in that its overarching goal is to combat white supremacy by

decentralizing academic English as the only acceptable form of writing in the classroom and instead encouraging students to use non-standard varieties of English, or even other languages in their writing process (Horner, et al., 2011).

Translingualism is another pedagogical theory which has created rifts between composition departments and ESL departments, additionally causing rifts in the field of second language writing (Silva & Wang, 2021). At the Symposium for Second Language Writing (SSLW) in 2023, there was a colloquium titled *Reconciling Translingualism and Second Language Writing: An extended dialogue* hosted by Tony Silva and Zhaozhe Wang, the editors of a book by the same name. During that colloquium, scholars came to a tentative consensus that translingualism as a methodology may be best to incorporate during the writing process rather than in the final writing product, or in certain multilingual contexts in which plurilingualism is the norm. However, scholars from the linguistics side of the camp still feel that a translingual approach may not be best for ESL students. At best, translingualism could disadvantage students by depriving them of grammar correction in contexts where there is a clear dominant language holding power (Canagarajah, 2021; Ferris, 2021; Gevers, 2018; Horner, 2021; Tardy, 2021). At worst, translingualism could act as a sort of "linguistic tourism" in which ESL students are made to be othered even further through the encouragement of using their foreign language in their writing as something akin to a party trick (Matsuda, 2014). In fact, research on adult language learners has noted that students want and need more explicit error correction in order to learn the language (Bitchener & Ferris, 2012; Ferris, 2004; Manchon & Polio (eds.), 2021).

And although labor-based contract grading does not preclude the inclusion of linguistic feedback, given the focus on labor rather than accuracy, it may set the stage for an increasing lack of attention to linguistic feedback in a grading system where composition instructors already

feel uncomfortable giving linguistic feedback based on its potential ties to white supremacy or racism (Gevers, 2018; Horner, et al., 2011; Schreiber & Watson, 2018). The irony is that while teachers might feel that commenting on academic language for BIPOC or Generation 1.5 students in writing may be unethical, the ethnolinguistic bias present in the department against immigrants' writing may still result in lower grades for those students, perhaps not in the courses with labor-based contract grading, but beyond when academic English is a requirement for writing. Thus, without the addition of feedback for them to potentially improve their grade or learn the language, ESL students have the potential to be underserved by labor-based contract grading used in composition courses.

Returning to the ESL retreat, the sample feedback that was given about the student writing was not the only thing to cause faculty to bristle. In addition to ethnolinguistic bias, the assignments themselves were culturally biased to require a certain amount of background knowledge from the students. Many professors who come from a composition background may have limited experience with second language learners. As a result, those professors may potentially provide writing prompts which require cultural background information that ESL students may lack (Silva, 1997). The assignment Professor Stacy distributed during our retreat was one about mandatory minimum sentencing in the United States, in which students were required to answer "existential questions" such as "how is justice best served?" and "should legislatures assign mandatory minimum penalties to certain crimes, or should judges be free to impose sentences that take into account all of the factors of the case?" The sources that students were required to use in their essays had to do with race in America, such as Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow* and Ta-Nehisi Coates' "The Black Family in the Age of Mass Incarceration."

The national, macroscopic leaning in this prompt was clear: students with background knowledge about this topic, who were born and raised in the United States, would be more likely to perform well on this assignment than a recent immigrant from a country where dictatorships or undemocratic governments rule, and citizens are unused to questioning their government, or answering questions about justice or race because injustice and sexism or religious prejudice is the norm. Research has found that culturally biased assignments like this one can disadvantage immigrant writers in a composition classroom (Cox, 2011; Hedgcock & Ferris, 2018). Hedgcock & Ferris (2018) noted that advanced reading happens in a larger context, and that the reader's own background knowledge in addition to cultural knowledge will impact a reader's reading comprehension or understanding of a text. Given that this sample student's writing was being evaluated based on their understanding of the text, this gap is significant to note. And while it is important to educate immigrant students about the history of race in America, as its consequences may also affect their daily lives personally, it is also not surprising that this student's "complexity of thought" was not judged to be as strong as the native-English speaker's, given that they had one semester to learn about a topic which the majority of the class had most likely been exposed to for their whole lives.

Curricular Changes: Revision of ESLW 340

Though there was some tension in the room following Professor Stacy's presentation about the revised ENGWR 300 curriculum, it was ultimately extremely helpful for those of us in the ESL department who wanted to understand the scope of changes that the English department had made because of the bill. Additionally, we were able to see what kinds of assignments our students would be faced with when they left the program and get a better idea of how to prepare them for those expectations, especially in our own transfer-level writing course, ESLW 340.

Given that the impetus for A.B. 705 was to increase students' likelihood of transferring to a four-year institution within a three-year timeframe, the ESLW 340 course, the equivalent of transfer-level composition, was a significant course for the department to offer for several reasons. Joanna, the subsequent chair of the department following Dolores, redesigned the curriculum for ESLW 340. In opening her presentation, she described ESLW 340 as being one of the only courses that gives the ESL department "credibility" at the college level, due to its transferability to a UC or CSU in the wake of so many new policies which define student success solely in terms of completion rates which lead to transfer. A.B. 705 now dictated that students no longer were required to take any ESL courses and could in effect bypass any placement "recommendations" all together and enroll directly into ENGWR 300, the transfer-level composition course. Thus, this caused a predicament for the ESL department: students were electing to skip ESLW 340 and instead enroll directly into ENGWR 300. ESLW 340 was the equivalent to the ENGWR 300 course in the ESL department in that it fulfilled the same requirement, but it also was *not* equivalent at all in terms of 1) the fact that it had ESL 325 as a prerequisite where the English course had none, and 2) in the sheer amount of work that students were required to complete in order to pass the course.

Before A.B. 705, ESLW 340, the "equivalent" to ENGWR 300, was anything but: rather than be responsible for 6,000 words, our students were required to write 8,500 words, or about six to eight essays. Of those six to eight essays, four of them were required to be timed writing, completed in class to "properly assess" students' levels. Joanna, in revising the curriculum, wanted to level the playing field, and encourage students to enroll in our courses, because indeed, despite completing much more work in ESLW 340, students still felt that the course was valuable because they were going to potentially learn more than they would in ENGWR 300 and

get the language attention they needed. In her presentation, Joanna paraphrased some student responses from her own ESLW 340 course, in which they said things like, “We know we’ll get attention to our language skills. In ENGWR 300, we won’t get that attention” and “The reading in ENGWR 300 is too hard for us. ESL students get lost and don’t understand. Here we will understand the readings.” Both comments echo previous points from the presentation from Professor Stacy: students were aware of 1) the underlying ethnolinguistic bias combined with a refusal to correct their language, and 2) the culturally biased readings and assignments that were challenging for them to complete or understand. Underneath these testimonies, I wrote, “more sense of community, ESL focus” to signify that students did indeed feel that their needs were being addressed more in our ESLW 340 course, despite the increased workload. My own student interviews, described in Chapter 6, would also corroborate these statements.

Thus, ESLW 340 was given an overhaul to entice students to take it and not “jump ship” to the easier and more tantalizing ENGWR 300. As Joanna pointed out, she made some key changes to the curriculum and SLOs to focus on macro-level skills and thus align more closely with its companion, ENGWR 300. Two SLOs in particular, “identify and employ genre-specific style and rhetorical choices across a variety of assignments, such as pathos in literacy narrative or logos in an analytical research paper” and “assess the credibility of online and print sources and integrate them in writing through effective paraphrase and quotation using MLA citation formatting standards” were in direct response to ENGWR 300 and designed to mirror their SLOs about research papers. The revised course would also take the place of the R340 course, which had been subsumed into this one because of A.B. 705. Though the course would not change from its four-unit designation, the workload would shift drastically, through the eradication of timed

writing and incorporation of macroscopic elements to better align with the ENGWR 300 course's expectations.

Curricular Changes: Removal of the 20 Level

The final curricular change to note is the removal of the 20 level, which though it was implemented in 2022, is significant in the remaining chapters, as the interviews were all conducted after its removal. According to faculty interviews, the 20 level had originally been added to the curriculum in the early 2000s to address a large population of students who were coming straight from adult school and largely unable to pass at the 30 level. Arthur, a faculty member who had been at the college since 2001 and had been in charge of the placement test for several years, noted that he felt the addition of the 20 level was akin to a "cash cow" for the administration to make more money off of students who would normally have failed at the 30 level who could now have a "foundation" level to enable them to pass and go to the next level without failing and therefore impacting their financial aid or motivation to continue. Again, the characterization of the 20 level as a way to make money for the college closely aligns with the aforementioned reason why remedial education was valued before A.B. 705. With enrollment as the primary outcome that provided community colleges with funding, remedial and lower-level courses were easy ways to expand the enrollment population and help "under-prepared" students succeed. Now, with accelerated transfer as the outcome that provided more funding, these lower-level courses were seen as hindrances and solutions to problems that no longer existed.

Originally, the 20 level served as a transition level between adult school and community college, to give students what Arthur referred to as a "jump start on their academic path." There were three classes at the 20 level, four units each, to equate to twelve units that students could take and therefore qualify for financial aid. As Appendix G shows, the R20 and W20 courses

both used the word “basic” and “simple” repeatedly in their SLOs to emphasize that this was a course designed to help students make the transition from adult school to community college. For instance, in the Reading 20 course, students needed to “read simple words, sentences, and readings” while in the writing course students needed to “write simple sentences with correct capitalization and punctuation.” The listening/speaking 20 course similarly used the word “basic” but focused more on comprehensibility and an ability to express oneself and communicate effectively, with some pronunciation work around syllable stress, consonants and vowels.

Without these courses, the new ESL 37 course, a 6-unit integrated reading and writing course, became the new “floor” for students to enter the college from adult school. The SLOs, revised as of 2024, were markedly more focused on academic rigor, with a long list of parts of speech for students to identify, in addition to expectations of skimming and scanning readings and writing multiple paragraphs rather than sentences. Students were also expected to be able to produce simple and compound sentences. Despite the presence of an additional G31 course designated solely for grammar, there were a high number of SLOs dedicated to grammar and language in this integrated skills course. One example SLO to demonstrate the high academic rigor and presence of grammar was, “recognize and understand the simple present, present progressive, simple past of basic regular and irregular verbs in reading and use these constructions in writing.” The listening/speaking 31 course, now three units, was similarly more rigorous than the L20 was. Students were now expected to engage in critical conversations, master question formation and word order, take notes on listening passages, recognize reduced speech in English, and deliver oral presentations. Of course, the ESL 37 and L31 courses were designed with the assumption that R20, W20, and L20 would continue to be offered to students.

Without the presence of the 20 level, ESL 37 and L31 became the floor and had a very clear academic expectation of students, setting the stage for a stark contrast between adult school and community college: academic rigor.

In reviewing the curricular changes of A.B. 705, a common theme was that academic rigor and college-level writing were emphasized throughout the newly integrated sequence. The integrated skills courses began prioritizing writing skills over reading skills, while the listening and speaking and grammar courses had units cut from them and focused on broader SLOs to accommodate that change. The ESLW 340 course, the major transfer-level composition course that the ESL department offered, became imbued with additional power as being the only course that gave the ESL department "credibility" and was overhauled to resolve an ongoing tension and the major discrepancies between itself and the ENGWR 300.

It is important to note that all these changes were implemented en masse during the pandemic, oftentimes without any previous experience or knowledge from the instructor in how to implement these curricular changes, much less in an online environment. As mentioned previously, the ESL retreat was for many faculty the only point of reference that they had for how to teach these courses, and though some of the higher levels such as ESL 315 and ESL 325 had been piloted successfully, none of the listening and speaking, grammar, or lower level integrated courses had been piloted in an in-person environment, much less a fully online one. The courses, designed for rigor, college transfer preparation, and in-person learning were designed to be tough and challenging for students. The move to fully remote instruction had ramifications for everyone, of course, but the added implication of teaching brand new, never-before-piloted rigorous curriculum in a fully online setting had significant impacts on the quality of teaching and therefore learning in the department. In addition to the curricular changes that the

ESL department made, two other larger structural changes were made to the institution to accommodate A.B. 705: the placement test, and the role of the ESL Center.

Structural Changes: The Placement Test

With the eradication of placement testing as a legitimate measure to be able to place students into the ESL sequence, the ESL department felt a threefold impact. First, of course, was the fact that any and all students, despite their level of English, could enroll in ENGWR 300, because this course no longer had any prerequisites. Second was the fact that the placement test given in the ESL department no longer held any power in determining what classes students could take, *except* in the ESL sequence. So, a student could theoretically be placed at the 20 level, with a recommendation to go back to adult school, and have multiple options to choose from: 1) go back to adult school, 2) enroll in ESL 37, L31 or G31, or 3) take ENGWR 300. A student who had failed ESL 37 and did not have the capacity to write in full paragraphs or identify all of the parts of speech, could enroll directly in ENGWR 300 and be expected to write a research paper about mass incarceration in the United States.

The third impact was more subtle and played out more as a result of A.B. 1705, but its effects were felt all the same. Because English and math no longer required assessment tools for students to take transfer-level courses, the assessment office at the college was shut down, and ESL had to fight to maintain an assessment tool. The department was eventually forced to create a guided-self placement, in which students would take a language background questionnaire, and then look at sample reading assignments and writing assignments from the various levels to determine what level they felt they could manage. Finally, students would be asked to complete a writing sample in response to a question about their personal background which would be scored by two or three faculty members, depending on whether there was alignment with the placement.

These measures, along with the inclusion of academic advising or faculty liaisons to help guide students, were aligned with research recommending best practices for guided self-placement (Rassen, et al., 2021; White & Newell, 2022). As A.B. 705 was also enacted during the pandemic, assessments had to be completed online through Zoom, and only with faculty from the ESL department and without assessment professionals.

Guided self-placement or directed self-placement implementation for multilingual students at four-year institutions has been successful, resolving issues of cost as well as providing students with more agency over their own learning (Ferris et al., 2017) but generally would still be best to implement with an additional external placement instrument. Crusan (2011) compared a placement test score with directed self-placement choices for international students from China at a four-year university. While over half of the students did not place themselves at higher levels than their placement test indicated, 39% did place themselves higher, and 20% of students were two or three course levels off from where they should have been placed based on the placement score. There has also been concern that relying on high school GPA and guided self-placement may disadvantage students who have high GPAs but are still not ready for college. In preliminary research investigating the effects of A.B. 705, Nazzal, et al. (2023) found that there was a very weak relationship between high school GPA and a student's score on a standardized writing exam. This meant that there were many students who had higher GPAs that, with guided self-placement, would have been recommended to take transfer-level English, who had in fact scored far below proficient on a standardized writing exam. This preliminary research implies that relying on high school GPA and student self-awareness may lead to unprepared students enrolling in transfer-level writing courses.

At NCCC, the curricular changes further complicated the issue of guided self-placement: the increase in rigor, coupled with the removal of the 20 level as the floor, made an inaccurate placement potentially have more extreme consequences for students. Given the vast differences between the levels in this ESL department because of the curricular changes, a self-placement even one level off in a six-unit course weighed more heavily on a student's GPA and therefore could potentially jeopardize a student's financial aid status. Most studies about guided self-placement have been conducted at four-year universities, and little research has investigated the effectiveness of guided self-placement in community college ESL programs, where students' English levels will typically be lower, and where students will have less time and bandwidth to devote to their studies.

Structural Changes: The ESL Lab

The last structural change to happen as a result of A.B. 705 was very subtle, but again, had ramifications that touched every other aspect of the department. As previously noted, due to the removal of the 20s, as well as the increased workload in the now-integrated six-unit courses, the ESL center was expected to provide more support because it was the only ESL-controlled student support service offered on campus. Though there were tutors, instructional assistants (IAs), RAD, and WAC programs on campus, few of those professionals had the training to address ESL students' needs. Thus, pre-pandemic, the ESL Center was tasked with renumbering all their course offerings to correspond with a particular level and create an entire new sequence of courses in which students could enroll. Each level, starting with the 30 level, now had two courses in which students could enroll for .5-1.5 credits: a reading/writing/grammar support course (ESLLAB 30, 40, 50, 60, 70, and 80) and a listening/speaking support course (ESLLAB

31, 41, 51, 61, 71). Theoretically, students would enroll in the corresponding number which was associated with their level to gain additional credits for taking the lab.

However, the renumbering of the courses did not change the way that the lab operated. Any student who enrolled in any level could come to the lab and work on whatever they wanted: listening, speaking, reading, writing, or grammar. During the pandemic, this quickly changed, as the lab had to shut down and became 100% remote. Given that 90% of what the lab offered was photocopied workbooks sequenced and organized by skill, a fully online switch was devastating for their daily operations. Lab enrollment, previously at around 400 students, dropped to less than one hundred during the pandemic. The ESL lab, a once vibrant place of support for all ESL students, was rendered useless during the pandemic despite the tutors and IAs that were available on Zoom because of a lack of a viable online option for students to practice their reading, writing, or grammar skills. Eventually, Dolores, switching from her role as chair to the ESL lab coordinator, adopted Burlington English, a fully online English workbook practice site, to act as a temporary stopgap measure for students to continue practicing, but enrollment was still low overall. It wasn't until 2022, when the ESL lab began tentatively offering on-ground offerings, that enrollment began to pick up again.

Conclusion: Close the Gap with More Writing, More Rigor, More Support

The policy documents for A.B. 705 and 1705, as well as the general feelings during the ESL retreat, together paint a picture of the ideologies and values of the policymakers and faculty in redesigning the curriculum and overall structure of the ESL department. In answer to my second research question, the major changes that happened to the curriculum and structure of the program as a result of the bills reflected many conflicting ideologies between the department and the bills.

A.B. 705 in its requirement that ESL students be given a three-year period to complete transfer requirements changed the overall mission statement of what community colleges were supposed to accomplish. Before the bills, funding was tied to enrollment, and to expand enrollment, remedial education and lower-level courses which catered to "under-prepared" students were seen as invaluable courses in the college. The bills, in their effort to address a different problem of low transfer rates, changed the funding scheme to be one determined by transfer rates, specifically of those same "under-prepared" students: Latinx and African American specifically, but also Generation 1.5 within ESL. Much of the impetus for A.B. 705 was that Latinx and African American students were less likely to transfer or complete their degrees. Before, the problem was seen as one of those students being "under-prepared" due to an inherently racist K12 education that systematically deprived those students of opportunities to achieve college readiness by the time they graduated (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Yosso & Solórzano, 2005). Now, the bills defined remedial education as "barriers" which were not helping make up a gap in education, but rather somehow *preventing* those students from achieving in their transfer-level courses. The "gap" was then shifted, from one in preparation for college, to one in transferring to a four-year institution. In focusing on one gap, we have neglected the other.

Rather than focusing on enrollment numbers, community colleges are focusing on transfer and completion rates. Thus, rather than focusing on *keeping* students – in remedial education or in the college – for longer amounts of time, the focus is now on *pushing out* students quickly. Either system has harmful effects on students. The previous system of being allotted funding based on enrollment translated to colleges over-admitting students, whether they were prepared or not, until a certain deadline, and then pushing students to drop or withdraw

(Isserles, 2021). In the previous system, remedial courses were allowed to run unchecked, with no required pathways between lower-level courses and transfer-level courses, once again to boost enrollment numbers and keep students in college (Isserles, 2021; Mellow & Heelan, 2008). Now, transfer-level courses are allowed to run unchecked, with no required course support for students who may be unprepared other than corequisites which eat up precious units for financial aid or completing graduation requirements.

Students are thus more likely to transfer, certainly, but perhaps to their detriment once they do. According to a recent study completed by the Community College Research Center, only 48% of transfer students at four-year institutions earned their bachelor's degree within six years. Students who were African American, Latinx, male, older than 25, or low-income had the lowest rates, ranging from 13% - 9%. Comparatively to the rest of the United States, the 2015 cohort in California had a 32% transfer-out rate from community college, and of those students who successfully transferred, 53% of them completed a bachelor's degree. Though the 2015 cohort would have pre-dated A.B. 705, those students would have been affected by a similar policy change in the CUNY system in New York, which had a 37% transfer-out rate and a 48% bachelor's completion rate. Thus, a slightly higher transfer-out rate than California, but a similarly low bachelor's completion rate. The report noted that just helping students transfer out was not enough to help them succeed and get a bachelor's degree, and more needed to be done to address that. Interestingly, certain districts and states had policies that were effectively serving certain vulnerable populations, such as Latinx or African American students, depending on local contexts, which led the report to recommend more power in the hands of local schools: "The large institutional variation nationally and within states in community college transfer outcomes thus suggests that *local institutional practices and policies* are important factors in generating

stronger or weaker transfer outcomes" (Velasco, et al., 2024, p. 51). It is unlikely, then, that large-sweeping policy changes such as A.B. 705 and 1705, which take the power *away* from local contexts, would yield improvements in transfer rates for these vulnerable populations. The gap in college preparation, transfer rates, and bachelor's completion rates are most likely all inter-related, and pretending one doesn't exist, and prioritizing one over another certainly won't solve the larger issue of racial inequality in higher degree attainment.

For ESL as a field, the shift in focusing on enrollment to completion rates posed a unique problem. A.B. 705 redefined student success in ESL as transferring to a university, but ESL is not a major that students can study for college credit. The department's importance was simultaneously solidified by A.B. 705 in the sense that ESL was no longer considered "remedial" education and therefore provided a pathway to transfer-level writing, but also deemed superfluous in that students could bypass the sequence all together to enroll directly in transfer-level composition. Only two of the ESL courses – ESLW 340 and ESL 350 – could be transferred to a four-year university to fulfill the writing requirement, which was now the most important measure of a department's worth at the institution. Those two courses were writing-focused, required more work than the English counterparts, and lacked the corequisite support that the English department had.

In the ESL sequence leading up to those two courses were more rigorous six-unit integrated skills courses which also mostly evaluated students based on their writing skills, with little instruction in grammar or vocabulary. Simultaneously, the listening/speaking and grammar courses were now rendered optional in the sense that they neither directly led to a transfer-level pathway, nor fulfilled any transfer-level requirements. The lowest level was removed, and the placement test was replaced with a guided instrument with a writing component. In other words,

as a result of A.B. 705, students were more likely to bypass ESL altogether and place themselves directly in transfer-level composition. In these courses, students might be more likely to encounter grading practices that wouldn't help them develop their language skills, or possibly more ethnolinguistic bias from professors, or culturally biased prompts which required high levels of background knowledge, or all of the above. If they chose to stay in ESL, students were more likely to misplace themselves with the new instrument and removal of the lowest level or focus on developing only their writing and reading skills without taking listening, speaking, or grammar courses. Those courses were now more rigorous, and worth 6 units instead of 4, and had a higher impact on GPA. With the focus of data collection being on Latinx and African American students at the college, most English learners such as adult immigrant students or Generation 1.5 students were being erased from the dataset all together, and there was no way for faculty to prove whether their completion or transfer rates were higher, or lower, as a result of this bill.

The overhaul of the ESL lab, designed to serve as the ESL department's own corequisite course for any of the courses in their sequence, could have served as an effective additional support for students to access. Overshadowing all these plans was the Covid-19 pandemic, which shifted everything – the placement test, the new courses, and the ESL Lab – to emergency online instruction. With the pandemic, there was no way to know whether low enrollment, high dropout rates, and high pass rates had to do with the new shift to online instruction, or A.B. 705, or a combination of both. This new environment, in which students were expected to have higher completion and pass rates but also with higher rigor and higher standards, created a paradox in which faculty specifically felt trapped between their own ideologies and the ideology of A.B. 705. As Chapter 5 will describe, the on-ground effects of A.B. 705 and the pandemic together

created a sense of burnout, isolation, and frustration among faculty. Many times, their own ideologies about community college – that it should address the gap in preparation and provide a place for all students to study – conflicted with that of A.B. 705, which dictated that the primary gap to focus on was the one in completion and transfer rates for students.

Chapter 5: Faculty Perspectives about A.B. 705 and 1705

As described in Chapter 4, there were several large-scale changes that happened in the ESL department as a result of A.B. 705. Many if not all of those changes defined student success as meeting the outcomes of their courses and demonstrating academic, transfer-level composition capabilities. Removing both the placement test and the requirement that students take ESL to qualify for transfer-level composition rendered the entire ESL curricular sequence institutionally optional for students to take. The removal of remedial writing courses and the 20 level ESL courses also placed more burden on the existing support services of the college and also therefore placed the burden on the students to seek out additional support services in order to pass their now higher-unit courses. Overall, the ideologies in the curricular revision mirror the ideologies present in A.B. 705 and 1705: completion rates and transfer rates were the only definition of student success, and anything standing in the way of those rates was considered at best superfluous and at worst harmful.

In Chapter 4, I conducted an in-depth analysis of the language of A.B. 705 and 1705 and how those bills were interpreted and then implemented at the curricular level at NCCC. I used the vignette of the two-day ESL retreat to capture the on-the-ground attitudes of colleagues as these changes were being implemented. In this chapter, I will move away from examining the curricular documents and move instead towards the interviews that I completed with faculty members at the institution concerning their perceptions, experiences, and underlying ideologies governing their opinions of these changes. Again, in keeping with portraiture as a methodology for describing these participants and their interviews, I will highlight their positive intentions and features, casting no one as a villain, but still providing measured critiques of certain themes that may arise from their testimony (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). I will begin with the

structural changes made to the placement test which participants perceived to be a large root of the other problems which they identified. I will then detail attitudes and experiences about the larger curricular changes made to the department, followed by the changes made to the ESL Lab, and finally, the non-ESL changes made to English and math which participants also commented on. Throughout each of these themes, I will interweave how the pandemic loomed over everything, compounding many of the issues mentioned and complicating the participants' ability to separate the effects of the pandemic from the effects of the bills.

Guided Self Placement: You're the Experts (Sometimes)

By and large, the faculty were very upset with the mandate from A.B. 705 and 1705 that their placement test be removed or changed. One faculty member, Adriana, who had been teaching at the college since 2008, had a representative comment that showed the mingled puzzlement and frustration that the rest of faculty felt at this change:

> "The thing that makes me the craziest is the placement test. That seems so arbitrary. Why don't we get a placement test? That's just so illogical!"

Indeed, the faculty for the most part did not understand why their placement test had to be so completely changed, given that placing students into a language program was completely different from placing them into a composition course or a math course. For years leading up to A.B. 705, CCCCO had been working on creating a statistically valid and reliable placement test to help community colleges place their ESL students into different ESL tracks (Shaw, et al., 2018). This contributed to the puzzlement for many faculty during this time: all that time and money was spent on developing a placement test that was simply never used and suddenly discarded with the A.B. 705 mandates. To them, it felt like an arbitrary change that hadn't been thought through enough.

In early 2020, when the first set of changes were implemented because of A.B. 705, the intention was for the listening and speaking portions of the placement test to remain standalone and anchored with multiple measures. However, with the pandemic and subsequent A.B. 1705 mandates, this in-person assessment was removed in favor of an online guided self-placement which had three parts: 1) a background questionnaire, 2) a self-guided reading portion that showed sample reading and writing assignments at different levels for students to compare with their own skills, and 3) a writing assessment scored by faculty members. No listening, speaking, or grammar skills would be evaluated on this new guided self-placement test.

The implementation of a guided self-placement test coincided with the college closing the assessment office. As noted in Chapter 4, remedial education was removed from most colleges because its presence hindered the ultimate goal of A.B. 705, to push students through quickly. As such, there was no longer a need for an assessment office to place students into those non-existent levels. This meant that any in-house assessment that the ESL department at NCCC wanted to maintain would be their responsibility alone, with no assessment office to provide support. This shift in responsibility from an external assessment office to the ESL department had positive and negative effects. Arthur, a faculty member who had been at the college for over twenty years and the assessment writing coordinator for the past ten, enjoyed the additional control afforded to the ESL department with the in-house placement test. He described that while administering the placement test himself, he could provide students with a brief introduction to the department. He could recommend certain classes, give students a list of supplies or materials they needed, and orient them to college expectations. Most importantly, the placement test could act as a touchpoint for the students, and early connection to the ESL community:

> "Most of our student staff are ESL students in the ESL program now, so they can give counsel and advice to these new people coming in. It's created this continuity…It gives

> them someone in the ESL department to connect to directly…And we've had many students spend half an hour talking to a staff member, often in their own language, because they've got so many questions."

As mentioned in Chapters 4 and 6, students valued their ESL courses in part because of the community feel that they felt that those courses had. Being able to connect with students who spoke their language during the placement test was a bonus to create buy-in into their program and personalize their experience. In this way, placement was truly allowed to be "guided" so that students could understand what their options were, what the levels were like, and which courses they should take. Arthur also noted that having the in-house ESL assessment done completely through their department created a faster turnaround for students to get their scores, especially through the writing component, as he could directly email assessors writing samples to rate and get them back in a much shorter time period than waiting for the assessment office to process the samples before distributing them into faculty's mailboxes. Overall, the major consensus was that the removal of the assessment office allowed the ESL department to offer more guidance to their students and have a better idea of student levels before they entered the ESL sequence.

However, arranging these 1:1 meetings and completing assessment over Zoom of course was expensive for the college. Arthur noted that closing the assessment office, where there used to be two full-time classified staff members dedicated to assessing 30 or more students at a time across multiple departments, resulted in costing the college more money, because now, two tenured faculty members with release time plus an Instructional Assistant (IA) were assessing twelve students online, or 20-30 in person. The assessments took more time simply because they were being done online and were difficult to explain to students virtually. For instance, explaining the guided self-placement options, "This is easy for me to understand", "This is okay, it's my level" and "This is too hard for me to understand" created confusion for students who

didn't know what the words "too" or "easy" or "hard" meant. Arthur described several occasions in which students would pick "too easy" for everything, and then in their writing assessment, write only one sentence, or "No English." This test was costing more time and therefore money for him and the other IAs because of the amount of time expended explaining to students with almost no English what the test was and how to take it.

There is a consensus among researchers studying guided or directed self-placement that its implementation is most effective with the addition of informed guidance, from external assessment tools, counselors, or faculty (Ferris, et al., 2017; Ferris & Lombardi, 2020; Guida Messina, 2023; Saenkhum, 2016). This is in part because students are unaware of the expectations of individual courses, having never taken them before. For adult immigrant students who know even less about the American educational system all together and are L2 speakers, even for those students who have higher levels of English, informed guidance is especially crucial. Lilith, the other assessment coordinator who took over Arthur's duties during the pandemic, noted that there is a disconnect between student experiences or levels of English and their preparedness to enroll in higher levels of ESL coursework:

> "...To ask a student who's come to this country, you know, a year and a half ago or less from a war-torn country where maybe they had an elementary school education, and to ask them to make placements for themselves, and expect that they're all gonna come up with an appropriate placement, it just doesn't make sense to me."

In the system that Lilith and Arthur had set up during the pandemic, with the return to in-person instruction, the assessment process was indeed guided. Students were able to take the test with the help of multiple faculty and staff members, many of whom were students who could speak their language and provide insider knowledge about the course offerings in the ESL department. However, both Lilith and Arthur pointed out that the kinds of resources being spent on this new placement process were not sustainable for a college that had cut assessment measures partially

to save money. Additionally, because the college was part of a larger district, any other placement test given at any other college within the district could also be used to place students into NCCC's sequence. So, many students could bypass this guided self-placement for asynchronous online self-placement which included no writing component and no faculty or staff advisor to help guide students towards an appropriate level. As I will report in Chapter 6, students who had taken this new online test reported higher instances of misplacement, generally at higher levels. The faculty, then, were of the collective opinion that their assessment, which they had fought to maintain, was probably the most accurate for their college, and of the three parts of their assessment process, the writing portion was the most reliable and trustworthy way to place students. Indeed, given that the writing assessments were scored by ESL faculty members, they provided additional hands-on touchpoints for faculty to monitor and guide students into their proper levels.

Once again, the changes to the placement test mandated by the bills created an environment in which writing was the only skill being assessed, while reading, listening, speaking, and grammar skills were either marginally assessed or not at all. And, once again, the pandemic was a complicating factor in assessing students' writing abilities. Arthur pointed out that, rather than assessing for students' writing skills, many times the writing assessment was actually assessing students' typing skills:

> "Pre- pandemic they wrote by hand. We did not have to worry about students having their typing competency becoming a factor of their writing competency. So now there's some writing that's for sure skewed because some people can't type as fast as they can write, some people can type so well and so quickly that they can use the spell check really fast, and fix things that they wouldn't fix. So I'm worried we're getting some false results."

Arthur also noted that they had found three cases of plagiarism during the two and a half years that they had completed this online assessment which denoted a relative lack of security in the

online platform. In essence, the assessment instrument was only assessing students' 1) previous backgrounds with learning English in a formal educational background, 2) opinions or feelings about which levels they felt were their own, and 3) writing and typing skills when being asked to respond to a prompt. These three measures were being used to place students not only into the new six-unit integrated reading and writing courses, but also grammar and listening and speaking courses. Overall, it is unsurprising the faculty had doubts about this new placement test, when the previous one that they had been using for years had collected data about students' actual skills rather than their perceived skill level in everything except writing.

Part of the reason why the department was forced to cut their old placement test was because of what Arthur and Lilith dubbed the "anti-assessment attitudes" of the committees and the college. A.B. 1705 mandated that all college assessments be approved by the Board of Governors, which was a lengthy and difficult process to undergo, not only because the instruments had to be vetted for validity and reliability, but also because the assessments had to be low-budget and self-guided. Faculty felt frustrated and burned out because they were being forced to go to extreme lengths to keep the only part of their assessment that they felt truly assessed student skill level: the writing portion. The ESL faculty, and Lilith in particular, opted to go through the hoops to keep their writing assessment, but met barriers such as sudden deadlines, with little to no help or guidance from the Board of Governors or the Chancellor's Office (CCCCO). Despite her frustrations, Lilith also understood that NCCC was privileged in their ability to develop this placement test, given the amount of support she had been provided:

> "So we're super lucky because we've had really good support from our administration in release time, in funding, and in recognizing that assessment is a really important piece of the process. But other colleges, they have no one, you know it's ESL professors. They're not getting any release time, and they're expected to do everything. And so most of those colleges have just folded, and they're just like, "Okay, whatever we'll do some sort of guided self-placement or self-placement."

Though Lilith and many other faculty members described feeling supported from certain members of administration in the college in terms of being provided with release time, funding, and recognition that assessment was an important part of their department, this was not the case for other colleges even within the district who did not have these resources or support. To Lilith, who had a four-month turnaround between the release of guidelines and the due date for faculty to create their new instrument, everything felt rushed, slapdash, and with added stress that many faculty could not handle, given all the other responsibilities that they had. Even for those faculty who felt supported, usually the support was release time which allowed them to get paid to complete this extra work, but without any other knowledge to enable the work to be effective or get completed efficiently. For the most part, faculty and other ESL professionals felt constrained by lawmakers and district officials to replace their functional placement test with one that they felt was inadequate for their student population, and therefore powerless. The rigidity with which these laws were applied across the board, despite the clear exception clauses outlined in Chapter 4, created an environment in which many ESL faculty could not advocate using their professional knowledge that they had obtained with their graduate degrees, or above all, personal experience working with this population.

The faculty were able to make the best of a difficult situation by implementing a truly guided self-placement test for students who came to assess at NCCC. However, the larger district-wide changes to assessment, such as the need for approval to include a writing assessment, followed by the removals of listening, speaking, grammar, and the 20 level from the assessment, had effects on the placement process which rippled out into the ESL course sequence. The pandemic compounded all of these elements, providing additional complications in helping students understand the test, or skewing the results of the writing assessment, which

was the only part of the placement that assessed students' skill levels at all. All of these changes made faculty feel an overwhelming lack of support, not only from the Chancellor's office, but also from the district office, and even from their students and each other, as the isolation of the pandemic set in to further complicate all of the issues that arose from these changes made to placement.

Curricular Changes: Reading and Writing Can Reinforce Each Other

As noted in Chapter 4, there were several large-scale curricular changes that were made to the college as a result of A.B. 705. Overall, as with the changes made to the placement test, there were positive and negative effects of these curricular changes, which were all compounded by the global pandemic. Like with the changes made to the placement test, these positive and negative changes both had rippling effects in which all students in all courses were affected. The first of these changes began with the newly integrated reading and writing courses, which ended up influencing the listening, speaking, and grammar courses in ways that no one could have predicted.

The first big change that happened in the ESL sequence was the creation of six-unit integrated reading and writing courses which now replaced two formerly separate four-unit courses. Faculty for the most part felt that this change was pedagogically and structurally sound. Before, reading and writing had been treated separately, and the skills did not reinforce each other. For instance, in a writing class, the students largely would write about topics that had nothing to do with anything they had read other than what was in their textbook, and in a reading class, students would write isolated, short summaries or analyses without learning about writing. The new integrated skills courses allowed for professors to now interweave those skills more directly, even at the lowest level. A.B. 705, given its push for accelerated curriculum and an

emphasis on academic writing, created more possibilities for instructors to intentionally use reading to teach writing, and writing to teach reading. Veera, a professor who had been teaching for 20 years at the time of her interview, gave an example of how she integrated reading and writing even in the lowest level 37 course:

> "If they're reading a novel, I create essay topics around the novel...and I would show them how to pull ideas that relate to the main points of the body paragraph…I think that's good for the students, to learn how to do that early, because they have to learn how to analyze sources, and use the sources to support their ideas, and I think that helps them to be more critical readers…"

A.B. 705's premise that there were no longer any "unprepared" students enabled professors like Veera to hold students to higher standards and accelerate the curriculum, but in a way that was pedagogically sound. Thus, students could be introduced to academic reading and writing even at the lowest level and have extra preparation for the more challenging transfer-level writing courses. The integration of courses was also effective on a curricular level. Previously, with the separate reading and writing courses, students many times opted to take one without the other, and their levels would become staggered. Adriana, the professor who expressed such frustration at the elimination of the placement test and identified her wheelhouse as teaching reading, described the frustration in depth that she used to experience when teaching separate reading and writing courses:

> "We had students who would come in and didn't want to do the writing and would do the reading. They would shoot from reading 30, reading 40, reading 50, and they'd be up in reading 320 and doing writing 40. 320 level, you know, has texts and books with vocabulary and past perfect like they were missing all the inference, they were missing the message…You've got to understand the text to figure it out. They didn't have the skills or proficiency yet to succeed."

So pedagogically, all of the faculty understood that reading and writing reinforced each other, and that enabling students to take one without the other was damaging for their ability to really develop both skills simultaneously. With the new placement methodology, students would now

be placed at the same level for all skills, and so in theory there would no longer be students who could excel in certain skills without attending to others.

Integrating reading and writing and introducing students to source-driven writing was an important change that fulfilled another requirement of A.B. 705: to enable students to transition out of ESL and be successful in mainstream composition. Indeed, given that using reading to support writing was a main tenet of the transfer-level composition curricula in ESL and the English departments, it was clear that integration supported students to be successful in those courses. Veera and Adriana were also working on creating guided pathways for students to help them transition directly into different majors by awarding students certificates for completing certain ESL courses, which Veera mentioned was a direct result of A.B. 705:

> "We're trying to make sure our ESL students have pathways that lead them to a particular career or field of study that they want to go into. So we're hoping that once we have the certificate out that they could see "Oh, I just need to take this course, and I can get this certificate," And then hopefully, by taking that course, they will continue towards whatever field that they want to study."

The guided pathways thus served a twofold purpose: first, they served as a pathway to hopefully guide ESL students towards certain degrees, thus positioning the ESL department firmly as a pathway to other majors, and thus legitimizing it within the college in the new A.B. 705 regime. Second, these guided pathways also encouraged ESL students to take a certain number of courses within the ESL sequence, including listening, speaking, and grammar courses in addition to integrated skills courses. Thus, they were significant for the department because they legitimized all their courses both to other departments by linking ESL to specific majors, *and* to the students as a way for them to transition out of ESL into their major of choice.

As discussed in Chapter 3, with the pandemic, there was a significant drop in community college enrollment nationwide, and ESL was no exception (Burke, et al., 2022). The subsequent

shift back to on-ground instruction in 2022 was further complicated by the fact that many students were unwilling or not ready to return to fully in-person classes, partially due to the vaccine mandate and partially due to students having adjusted to fully remote instruction and being unwilling or unable to fully transition back in person yet. Thus, when most of these interviews were conducted, enrollment was one of the major factors dictating the modalities of how courses were being taught. Faculty on the whole expressed mixed feelings about online instruction: on the one hand, they enjoyed the ability to not have to commute anywhere (especially adjuncts who had been "freeway fliers" pre-pandemic), but on the other hand they all acknowledged the detriments to their ability to teach and assess student progress throughout their courses, which had already been complicated by the changes from A.B. 705.

The most major unforeseen change to impact the integrated skills courses as they had been redesigned was the impact, once again, on writing. As Arthur outlined in his critique of the writing assessment, because there was no longer an option for students to write in person, there was thus no way to mandate any timed writing, which had previously been a major tenet of the integrated skills courses. This was both a good and a bad thing, in the opinion of many faculty members. On a positive note, many faculty like Adriana did not feel that the previous timed writing exams accurately assessed students' ability to write in a meaningful way, precisely because it did not integrate any sort of reading ability whatsoever. She described the previous timed writing exams as being "painful" to read and grade, because students would be stuck in a room for two hours "trying to pull examples from space…and just making stuff up" with no relationship to what they may have been reading or vocabulary they had been learning in the course. Thus, the timed writing many times felt like an inaccurate representation of students' abilities, given that it had almost no relationship to what they had been learning about in the

course. With the inability to do timed writing in the pandemic, students could now use what they had read, as well as vocabulary and concepts from the course, to write and thus find more purpose and meaning in what they were writing, which was more closely related to how they would be expected to write in ENGWR 300. As such, the major positive impacts of A.B. 705 on the ESL curriculum were the integration of reading and writing, the early exposure of academic writing, the creation of guided pathways to other majors, and the removal of standalone timed writing exams.

What About Grammar, Listening, and Speaking?

Aside from integrating the reading and writing courses, there were many additional changes to the listening and speaking and grammar courses, which had also originally been 4 units but were now brought down to 3. The unit change complicated in-class teaching time (which was reduced), and students' enrollment decisions based on financial aid. In California community colleges, students who qualify for the Cal Grant are required to enroll in twelve units to receive 100% of that funding but may enroll in a minimum of 9 units to receive 75% of that funding or 6 units to receive 50% of that funding (Cal Grant Programs). Many faculty felt that this change in units had a detrimental impact not only on the courses themselves, but on the courses that students would elect to take under A.B. 705 with the new push towards transfer.

Under the previous system, reading, writing/grammar, upper-level grammar, and listening/speaking were 4 units each, providing students with an equal 12 units in which they could enroll in all the skills and qualify for financial aid. If they wanted to enroll in reading and writing only, they could take an additional 1 unit as a lab to practice their listening/speaking and qualify for 9 units and still earn 75% of their financial aid package. Under the new system, the new integrated skills courses were 6 units, with listening and speaking and grammar each being 3

units. Theoretically, the units added up the same: students could enroll in 12 units by taking all three courses (integrated skills, listening/speaking, and grammar), or 9 units by picking the integrated skills and either grammar or listening/speaking. Under this new system, however, students could also enroll in any other major courses, and were now on a strict timeline to finish their degree in three years or lose their financial aid. Thus, students largely opted to take a six-unit integrated skills course, and supplement those six units with either listening/speaking, grammar, or credit courses that were within their major.

The implications of removing grammar instruction from teaching writing were such that grammar now became an optional course for students to take. As detailed in Chapter 4, prior to A.B. 705 grammar was automatically included in lower-level writing courses, and then once students hit the intermediate levels, grammar was given its own course designation. Many faculty, including Arthur, who had been teaching writing and coordinating the writing assessment in the guided self-placement, noticed that the removal of grammar from the lower-level writing courses in particular was having an effect on the quality of student writing:

> "I'm getting students with certain grammar issues at level 47 like understanding how to do a singular possessive and basic past tense that I'm not really supposed to spend a lot of time teaching. But if they're not enrolled in grammar 41, they're not going to get it. So where are they going to get it? So you have the 6 unit course, and they also take the listening course. So there's their 9 units."

Arthur, like many other faculty, felt the conundrum: with the new integrated skills courses that were already six units and thus a heavy load to teach, he had little/no time to focus on grammar issues, and thus, could not address those problems unless he referred those students specifically to a grammar course. In fact, other teachers who hadn't taught the integrated skills courses before and were now piloting them over the pandemic noted that they felt that the course was strictly focused on one skill: writing. Anastasia, an adjunct who was also working full-time at an

adult charter school in the area, struggled with teaching ESL 55 (the mid-intermediate course) online because she was basically only working on writing, without any grammar:

> "It's more of a writing class. But then you don't get to explicitly work on any grammar, I feel like I really cut down on my grammar, whereas I love to integrate that into my writing classes. But there's not much time for grammar now anymore, which I think is important for their reading and their writing."

Not all faculty noted this emphasis on writing in the way they taught their courses. Generally, those faculty who had experience teaching reading, listening/speaking or grammar were more likely to describe the frustration of not being able to focus on these skills in their courses the way they used to. Other faculty who had previously specialized in teaching writing either didn't notice or didn't comment on this emphasis during their interview.

Grammar was not the only skill to fall by the wayside in the new course sequence. Listening/speaking also became another course which students could optionally avoid and still complete transfer-level requirements, so many times they cut it out of their schedules entirely. Sonya, a full-time faculty member who had been at the college for 22 years and who had designed many of the listening/speaking classes and identified that skill as her wheelhouse, repeatedly referred to the effects of A.B. 705 and the pandemic on her courses as a "disaster." Her account of the changes and how they impacted her role was to minimize listening/speaking even further in a system where it was not prioritized to begin with:

> "[With A.B. 705] we've squished it even more, so students get less of an opportunity to speak, less of an opportunity to work with the materials. I'm frustrated, because…they also don't understand [pronunciation's] importance to reading and writing…like Spanish speakers who don't pronounce the -ed. Well, if you don't really teach them to hear it, why would you? Why would you write it when you don't hear it?"

The irony which Sonya identified here is the strong connection between pronunciation, listening, speaking, reading, writing, and grammar. Apart from that connection, listening, speaking and

pronunciation are important skills for any academic classroom or setting, where students will be required to listen to lectures, take notes, and speak or present in class with peers or to the professor. Aside from the academic argument, many students did value listening and speaking as a skill for daily life, as will be discussed further in Chapter 6. Those who valued it ended up taking listening/speaking and making decisions to cut other things from their academic or personal lives. Anastasia described one such student, who, in her sixties, had no desire to get a degree, but rather wanted to take listening/speaking courses to help her navigate daily life in the United States:

> "I was always trying to draw in the practical use of language, like the everyday: doctor, store, things like that. Understanding native speakers. I'm very big on pronunciation…because it'll help you understand better…just making sure they know we pronounce it differently than it's spelled usually. And then there are other students who really wanted to…communicate with their peers or their kids, kids' teachers, and then others wanted to get their PhDs someday…I did get the sense that it was more of an intrinsic want to learn listening and speaking than it was academic."

What Anastasia described here broached a larger question about the purpose of community colleges. This new bill, A.B. 705, defined student success in strict terms: student completion and transfer rates. Thus, those courses which did not strictly lead to transfer themselves were no longer prioritized by students or counselors when students were picking their classes, and faculty noticed the effects of this shift in all their classes, including the integrated skills courses. The guided pathways, designed by Veera and Adriana, were one of the ESL department's attempted solutions to address this issue: students could now earn certificates in different majors by taking a certain number of integrated skills, listening/speaking, and grammar courses. The guided pathways were an attempt to thus legitimize the grammar and listening/speaking courses for students and the college as potential pathways that could lead to transfer. However, once again,

the pandemic complicated the success of listening/speaking and grammar courses, as well as the success of the guided pathways programs.

Level Gaps and Confusion

Integrating the reading and writing courses allowed those skills to reinforce each other and therefore better prepare students for transfer-level composition. Grammar and listening/speaking, though they were redesigned and given fewer units to comply with A.B. 705 and 1705, became relegated to the "optional" category, and students many times felt external pressures to pick and choose between them, despite their own potential desires to take both courses. The lack of grammar, listening, speaking, and pronunciation instruction in the integrated skills courses created large gaps of knowledge where they previously may not have existed, particularly with grammar. The prior integration of grammar and writing in the lower-level courses allowed for faculty to use writing to reinforce grammar, and vice versa. With the removal of the 20 level, students who normally would have had an additional semester to adjust from adult school were now thrust into a relatively rigorous academic setting. These changes created an environment in which students had much larger gaps in their abilities as they went through the levels, depending on which courses they opted to take. Thus, faculty were suddenly unaware of what the new "normal" should look like in their courses, not only because they were brand new, but also because grammar instruction had suddenly become an optional element.

These large gaps in abilities within levels began with the initial redesign of the integrated skills courses. Naturally, with piloting any new course, there will be frustrations and hiccups in the first few iterations. It is not surprising, therefore, that faculty were not united in their grading practices and expectations when they were tasked with redesigning courses that were once separate to now be integrated. What is surprising, or perhaps troubling, is the lack of time and

support provided to faculty as they were making these changes in their curriculum. With little time and major amounts of stress, faculty designed the integrated skills courses based on their previous skillset. Dolores, the chair of the department during the pandemic who had led the ESL retreat in January 2020, described this double bind of being given support in terms of training, but not actually knowing how to integrate, and thus making decisions based on her previous teaching experience:

> "We hadn't had experience with integrating reading and writing. And it was funny because I had experience with W320. So my emphasis was on the writing in that class. And then, for example, Adriana, when she came into 315, her baby is reading, so she had a lot more reading stuff…When I created 325 at first it just kind of felt like you're squishing together a reading and writing, an R320 and a W320 and I thought I was gonna die that semester. So I kind of informally changed it, because I couldn't survive, or the students, in such a heavy load."

Despite the support and training that Dolores had received, she still had to conduct a lot of trial and error in redesigning the one-level below-transfer ESL 325 course. She also noted that the individual execution of the course was up to the faculty member, and that the faculty's previous experience with what they had taught before trickled down into the course redesign. Many faculty echoed these feelings of frustration throughout the process of redesigning these courses – on the one hand, they understood that there were many pedagogical merits to integrating reading and writing, but on the other hand, as Dolores noted in her PowerPoint during the ESL retreat, for the most part faculty felt like they were laying down the tracks as they were riding the train.

Even with courses like 55, 315 and 325, which had been piloted and redesigned multiple times before they were implemented, there were many lower-level courses, like 37 and 47 which had not previously been piloted before the curriculum came out. This led to further muddling of levels, given that the lower levels, which led up into the higher levels, had been given fewer iterations and thus fewer faculty had even taught them or knew what they should expect at those

levels. At the beginning of January 2020 during the ESL retreat, faculty weren't worried about this, because they had planned to pilot these courses during the following semester fall 2020, iron out the problems, and distribute them to everyone else once they had been tested. One thing they didn't bank on, and in fact couldn't anticipate, was the global pandemic that shut down all in-person instruction in March 2020, thus complicating and continuing to muddle the pilot testing of these brand-new courses for the next few years.

The pandemic brought with it many challenges, perhaps the most damaging of all being the sudden shift to emergency remote instruction, for which nobody, especially the faculty, was ready. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3, faculty burnout and completion rates were at all-time highs, probably because faculty were burned out and more likely to pass students who were higher achievers, given that the lowest-achieving students were most likely to have dropped out (Bulman & Fairlie, 2022; Jenkins, et al., 2022; Rodriguez, et al., 2022; Schwartzman, 2020). The sudden shift to emergency remote instruction was not unique to the ESL department. What is significant to note here is that this shift, coupled with the changes in curriculum brought by A.B. 705, skewed the ability for faculty to gauge whether their students were meeting the SLOs for the integrated skills courses. Many faculty had been teaching at the institution for several years and had internalized what kinds of writing met the outcomes for the course, and what did not. The removal of timed writing, which made writing more meaningful and authentic and thus emulated transfer-level composition, also removed a significant metric that the department had been using for years to assess students' writing ability. Without the presence of timed writing, faculty instead assessed writing that students composed at home over several days, with the added help of many other factors, including family members or technology. Certain students who were technologically savvy gained an advantage by this change, while others who were

technologically illiterate were at a disadvantage. Many faculty thus felt blind to what they called their students' "true abilities" because they didn't know what kind of help their students were getting at home. Vanessa, an adjunct who had experience working both in the adult school as well as at NCCC for 19 years described her frustration:

> "I want to see what they're doing. I can't look over their shoulders. It's very, very frustrating. I don't know their real levels…I think I'm grading pretty much the same, but they're writing them at home, and so that's the real difference. I just don't know what kind of help they're getting…I think I'm grading an essay roughly the same."

Vanessa's desire to look over her students' shoulders was a remnant of the in-person timed writing exams where faculty could indeed watch students as they composed their essays. While describing her frustration, she noted that her approach to grading had not changed with the switch to online, or the removal of timed writing. Thus, much of her internal metrics and grading rubric had stayed the same but given that the nature of the writing task had changed, these metrics no longer reflected what students could produce. The timed writing had assessed students' abilities to 1) write in a five-paragraph essay structure, 2) use appropriate vocabulary and grammar, and 3) make a cogent argument all within two hours. With more time and more resources to check grammar or vocabulary use, it's unsurprising that students' scores on their writing increased, if they were evaluated with much the same metrics.

The aforementioned fear that students would struggle to pass their six-unit integrated skills courses due to the increase in workload did not come to pass. Now with the move to online instruction and removal of timed writing, it was *easier* for students to pass these six-unit courses. Faculty had not prepared to remove timed writing from the integrated skills courses, and had no time to readjust their expectations of what students could write in an online, at home, untimed environment. In the past, faculty had relied on group grading and norming to help them

internalize what their students should be able to produce in a two-hour timed writing exam. Without these touchpoints due to the pandemic, faculty began questioning the levels that they were seeing, and noting grade inflation across their courses, but had no other classes with which to compare their findings. Of course, this feeling of unease was made worse by the fact that almost all the faculty were piloting brand new integrated skills courses which they had never taught before, which had been redesigned and re-sequenced as a result of A.B. 705. Faculty were therefore unsure of what exactly was causing the grade inflation: was it the newly designed integrated skills curricula, or was it the move to online teaching? Adriana noted that much of the disconnect had to do with faculty having to interpret new, vague SLOs which had been written into the integrated skills courses:

> "The teachers are much more scattered right now. We're not leveled. I think we got people coming in teaching new courses part time, full time, doesn't matter, and we don't know what we're doing. We have these SLOs that are kind of vague. Vague is okay, because it gives us academic freedom to do what we need to do, but we're not sure where the benchmark is anymore, and the benchmark seems to be sliding."

With more open-ended SLOs that stressed the integration of reading and writing without any sort of grammar, vocabulary, or specific structural requirements, faculty had much more leeway about what constituted a passing paper at a given level. Some faculty like Vanessa cared about grammar and relied on it as an internal metric for grading, while others who were new or hadn't internalized the same expectations of writing at that level might assess completely differently. Thus, the curriculum redesign brought by A.B. 705 created multiple gaps in students' abilities, as grammar was no longer being taught alongside writing with the new curriculum redesign, but it was still being *assessed* for by some faculty while students were composing their essays at home rather than in person. Students who were tech savvy, enrolled in grammar courses, or getting outside help could make up this deficit, but other students could not. Thus, faculty felt that

students' "true grammar levels" were being obscured by many external factors which hadn't been factored into their new grading schema, and without group grading to norm, they didn't know how to address those large gaps in ability.

Complicating the already large gaps in levels was the removal of the 20 level from the ESL curriculum. Students who previously could be placed into the 20 level to work on basic English skills or as a transition between adult school and college-level expectations would now be given "recommendations" to take adult school but could still enroll at the 30 level in the college. This meant that lower-level students who probably would have failed in a fully in-person class were now passing in a fully online setting. The faculty reported one of two phenomena happening: either much higher failure rates in their 30 level courses, or, more alarming to them, much higher pass rates than they would have expected given this level change.

Dolores, the chair of the department at the time, described the philosophical quandary that this new problem suddenly presented: should faculty keep the high fail rates, and adjust their expectations to help students pass and move on to the next level, or do they hold the line and just deal with having a high fail rate in the lowest level? For Dolores, the answer was one that required a lot more work:

> "We need to spread the pain in 37. We need to redesign the curriculum to make sure that 37 is our bottom level and realign the SLOs. Don't make them write essays in 37…We don't have the 20s anymore. And some people think students have the right to fail. And yes, that's true, but that shouldn't be our goal, should it?"

Dolores's proposed solution was to, once again, redesign the lower levels with the removal of the 20 level in mind and to make up for the deficit and "spread the pain" so that students could succeed in the higher levels *and* in the lower levels. In essence, this would require the department to completely redesign and relevel their whole curriculum, once again, from top to bottom to ensure that all the SLOs led into each other.

On the other side of the "spread the pain" argument, other faculty saw this relevel design as lowering standards for the higher levels and compromising students' ability to perform well in the upper levels and beyond ESL, which was the whole goal of A.B. 705. Adriana, representing the opposite end of this philosophical quandary, noted that this same question in other departments isn't as challenging because they have fewer levels and fewer jumps to make between levels:

> "[Other departments are] not as stacked as we are. For one student to get to the next level, they have to meet certain criteria in order to succeed. I don't know. I've got students in my 315 and my 325 that I'm scared [of] why they're there."

Adriana noted that lowering standards in the lower levels might make the jumps between levels much higher. With the levels being misaligned and faculty not talking to each other as much or having as many opportunities to norm, Adriana had students in her upper levels that she felt were grossly unprepared for the work. She and many other faculty members worried that lowering standards at the lower levels would mean lowering standards at the upper levels, where students would suddenly be pushed out of the ESL nest and forced to take courses in mainstream English and overall be unprepared.

The level misalignment caused by a combination of the A.B. 705 mandates and the pandemic caused further gaps between student abilities, which carried through to the upper levels. However, the newly integrated skills courses and the pandemic were not the only two factors causing grade inflation. There were two additional external pressures encouraging faculty members to pass their students through no matter whether they learned the material: enrollment numbers and financial aid.

Financial Aid, Enrollment, and Grade Inflation

The faculty were all painfully aware of the external pressures, like financial aid, that drove the students to enroll or not enroll in classes in their department. As I discussed in Chapter 2, the four or six-year time limits, and the very real possibility for dismissal with the failure of a higher-unit course, were very real dangers for students. Joanna, the chair of the department after Dolores, had redesigned the transfer-level composition course curriculum and described financial aid as being potentially the only indicator that the vast majority of our students were disproportionately impacted, given that, as noted in Chapters 2 and 4, their immigration and refugee status was being obscured by the data collection process. This imbued financial aid with a certain kind of power in the department but ironically also contributed to a large part of the reason why students needed to show high completion rates. On the one hand, low-income status and financial aid represented a disproportionately impacted group for statistical analysis to provide the department with funding and resources to better help those populations. On the other hand, under A.B. 705 and 1705, the presence of financial aid was also what limited students to the three-year timeline and encouraged the integration of courses to help students achieve that timeline. Thus, financial aid was a significant factor that contributed not only to student enrollment, as I will discuss further in Chapter 6, but also course sequencing and pass rates.

The former Dean, who had been at the college for 26 years as a faculty member and administrator and was a strong advocate for ESL throughout the changes brought by A.B. 705 and 1705, noted that the initial decision to have separate four-unit classes rather than an integrated one was to be able to provide ESL students with the opportunity to get financial aid:

> "...ESL used to have four-unit classes…so that ESL students could enroll in [the college], get a full load, get financial aid to be able to continue so that they could continue on to community college."

The reduction of units in the ESL department, she noted, was potentially harmful for two reasons. First, it would be more tempting for students to leave ESL earlier or stack their units to incorporate more mainstream courses that they might not be ready for more quickly, thus causing them to have to leave the college or drop out or take alternative classes elsewhere. Second, it would also have students completing essentially the same amount of work for fewer units, and thus being required to take more classes with more responsibilities to be eligible for financial aid. When students could previously take two four-unit courses for eight units, they could opt to take one more course and thus have twelve units. Now, students would have one integrated skills course (essentially a similar workload as the two standalone courses) for six units and need to take two more courses for an additional six units to qualify for 100% of their financial aid. This decision alone could lead students to higher failure rates, as they were now essentially taking four courses for the same number of units that would have been three.

Of course, because faculty had originally designed the course units with financial aid in mind, it was on their mind now with this new transition into the six-unit integrated skills courses. Part of Dolores's desire to redesign the levels to avoid a 50% failure rate at the lowest level was precisely because of the hit that students would feel on their financial aid, and partly the effect it would have on the department to have that many students failing:

> "But now, in 37 we can't [have high fail rates] anymore, because it's a high impact on the students, and on the department. It's a six-unit course, now part of a six-class semester sequence. So we have to make it work better."

Part of Dolores's dilemma here is both the pressure to pass students because of the financial aid implications, as well as the pressure to pass students exerted by the college on each department because of A.B. 705. Because student success was measured by transfer or completion rates, failing students was something to avoid as much as possible, not only to get more students to

complete the six-course sequence in a timely way, but also because of the disproportionate impact that failing a six-unit course would have on a student's financial aid. Lilith, who was currently teaching the 37 level, noted that the assessment process and removal of the 20 level was also contributing to this dilemma. To avoid those high failure rates, she was encouraging students to drop or enroll in adult school rather than go through the pain of sixteen weeks only to fail:

> "Well first I had 27 students…that I felt were very well prepared, or at least prepared, and then many that had adult school placements or 20 level placement. So from the beginning I was concerned like, "how are they going to do?"...I had 10 students drop in the week before the drop date. I've never in my entire teaching career had that number of students drop, because I was really upfront with them all, and just said. "I don't think it's going to be possible for you to pass this class. So right now you need to go meet with counselors and figure out, what's your best option? Is it better for you to stay in the class and earn that D or F Or is it better for you to drop?" And they all were very different in whether or not they were first semester students, so it's their first crack at financial aid."

This dilemma that students were facing about whether to take the D or F was contingent on financial aid at the college, but also on dismissal rates. Failing a six-unit course was drastic, especially for students in their second semester or third semester, because it would in most cases automatically place a student's GPA at 2.0 or below, given that six units was usually half or two thirds of the units that a student would enroll in. As noted in Chapter 2, a GPA of 2.0 or lower would automatically place a student on academic probation, with a potential loss of California College Promise Grant eligibility. Two consecutive semesters of a GPA below 2.0 could result in a dismissal from the college, meaning that a student would have to reapply for financial aid and admission to the college but would no longer be eligible for the same amount that they had previously received.

However, this academic probationary period only went into effect after a student had attempted 12 semester units, meaning that a brand-new student who had enrolled at the college

and was only enrolled in nine units could theoretically fail a six-unit course and retake it the following semester to try to replace the grade, thus avoiding academic probation or any effect on their financial aid. It was a tricky system to navigate, and very individualized based on the student's financial aid package and enrollment. Late withdrawals and drops also impacted a student's financial aid status, and many times a student could lose funding if they were enrolled in a six-unit course which they withdrew from to avoid a failing grade.

Thus, many faculty felt pressured to pass students, especially in six-unit courses, because they knew that the effects could be detrimental to students' home situation if they failed. Though all faculty felt these pressures, they did not all react the same way to them. As noted above, faculty had qualms about potentially not serving the students by passing them up until they could no longer pass in the higher courses that mattered. Other faculty, however, saw this pressure to pass as almost a freeing sensation, in which they could actually focus more on the learning process rather than the grades. Sebastian, the new ESL Lab coordinator who was assuming his new role right when I began conducting interviews, had a very pragmatic viewpoint that still focused on pedagogy:

> "I tell my students the first week I don't care about grades. In a certain way I feel so blessed that I'm in this discipline, to me it's completely no stakes. It's a win, win, win. Because it's credit they get units towards financial aid that they might need to support themselves, their friends, their family, whatever. That, but the courses, aside from 340 and 350 don't transfer, so I don't need to worry about giving a grade that I'm like "ahhhh that was like a borderline" but it doesn't matter."

Sebastian's observations connect back to the larger institutional changes that had happened as a result of A.B. 705: because the majority of ESL courses are non-transferable, but still credit courses, they were largely being ignored by the college – in fact, no data was being collected on their pass/fail rates primarily because they were non-transferable. The pressure to pass, for

Sebastian, was only significant once students got to the ESLW 340 and ESL 350 courses, both of which were only four units, and both of which were transferable. Otherwise, this assumption that everyone would pass functioned for Sebastian like something akin to labor-based contract grading: he could focus on encouraging students' critical thinking, and whether they did the work, rather than focusing on borderline students who may or may not succeed in the upper levels. For him, giving passing grades to borderline students was a way to encourage actual skill development and critical thinking that could serve students in the upper levels more than showing proficiency with a particular grammatical concept.

Very few faculty agreed with Sebastian's philosophy, however. Rather than see this pressure to pass as something freeing, many of them saw it as something that kept contributing to level misalignment. Some faculty felt that passing students for financial aid actually punished students who *did* care about learning more than grades and wanted to repeat a level. Nicky, an adjunct whose son was enrolled at the college, was intimately familiar with how financial aid and failure or dismissal rates were constantly on the mind of all faculty, students, and counselors working at the institution. From a pedagogical perspective, she described the harm that pushing students to move forward and penalizing repeating courses could have both on their learning trajectory as well as their financial aid:

> "I have students most semesters that really feel like they're not ready to move on, but they either have to get a D or drop, so they're gonna have some kind of repercussion if they decide they want to repeat. And I feel like that shouldn't be a punishment, because they know, "Hey, I still feel like I need more time in this level," and they know if they pass they gotta move on, and if they want to repeat, it's gonna hurt them."

For Nicky, as well as many other faculty, pushing students forward who wanted to slow down and ensure they learned the concepts before moving on felt antithetical to learning. If a student self-identified that they wanted to slow down and learn a concept by retaking a course, especially

if they had no intention of transferring to a four-year institution, many faculty felt that they should have the right to make that decision without external pressures from the college telling them to focus on completion rates.

Thus, financial aid was a central force pressuring faculty to pass students through, not only due to the new six-unit integrated skills courses, but also due to the three-year timeline to which students were now relegated under this new system. Faculty felt the double bind of wanting to maintain their high standards to prepare students to successfully transfer out of their program, while simultaneously feeling immense empathy to pass students so that they could have their financial aid and not be put on academic probation or dismissed from the school. As if these forces were not enough to put pressure on faculty to pass students (as discussed in Chapter 3), record low enrollment rates were yet another factor pushing faculty to keep students in their courses by any means necessary. Sonya, the listening and speaking professor who was perhaps the most disgruntled about A.B. 705 out of any of the faculty who I interviewed, succinctly summarized how all these elements came together to form a perfect storm:

> "The 20 level was sort of a way to say [to failing students], "you haven't learned any vocabulary or any grammar, and you really need to stay in 20 until you've exhibited that." And now it's happening at the 37 where people come in, and there's still people who just are not getting the language. And now especially with the pandemic, the disaster is people are home with their six kids, and we have a very different population…of people…who wouldn't be able to go to school, but it also changes things incredibly, because they're not learning at the rate that people who are dedicated students would learn. Another part of the disaster to me is that we're being encouraged to help students be successful. So the message I get is "pass them." And at the same time there's an integrity to the program…But we're encouraged because our enrollment is so low to keep the bodies in the seat, and so we can't even show that they're not successful."

Sonya's frustration takes pieces of almost everything the other faculty had described. First, she described how the removal of the 20s, the integrated skills courses, and the pandemic all contributed to level misalignment within their program. Then, she went on to note that given the

enrollment constraints, and under the new climate of A.B. 705 in which student success was measured through completion rates, she was being pressured to pass students, so that the level misalignment and potential gaps in their program were being hidden. Thus, these elements all formed for her a perfect "disaster" that continued to get worse and worse, now that everyone was about to transition back on ground. Enrollment would continue to be a dictating factor in deciding which classes were online and which classes were in person, and which classes were even offered, thus potentially contributing to further misalignment with students exhibiting higher pass rates in online vs. in person courses. Faculty were beginning to feel the effects of this disaster, despite their own outlooks on all these different elements, and this led to large cases of isolation and burnout, caused partially by the pandemic, and partially by A.B. 705.

Isolation and Burnout

Most faculty were incredibly angry but also exhausted with the changes brought by A.B. 705. While they weren't angry about the bill itself, most of them were angry about how it had been enacted at the college – with very little preparation, and with very little support from the district or other larger entities. Faculty felt like they were laying down tracks while riding a train in recreating their entire curriculum and placement process and also felt a strong tension between empathy for their students and desire to practice good pedagogy to maintain level integrity. On top of all these tensions that faculty were dealing with, they felt utterly alone and isolated, without in-person touchpoints that they could use to begin fixing some of these issues. Sebastian, despite not feeling pressure to "hold the line" and instead opting towards empathy for students, expressed these feelings of exhaustion and isolation in his department:

> "But, particularly for the disciplines that are being blown to smithereens by A.B. 705…we're getting hurt by enrollment numbers. I strongly believe the people who are going to figure out how to [implement A.B. 705] and still make effective instruction are

> the faculty and not the admins. And the only way that the faculty are going to figure out how to do that is to talk to each other."

Sebastian's attitude here was clear: A.B. 705 was like a bomb for English, math, and ESL, blowing the departments "to smithereens," and to add insult to injury, now they were dealing with an enrollment crisis. His opinion, like the opinion of many other faculty members, was that if they had been in-person and had each other as support, they could have come up with solutions for their level misalignment or newly piloted courses or enrollment problems much more easily. As noted in Chapter 4, while faculty were frustrated with the way that these changes were implemented, they were also optimistic during their ESL Retreat in January 2020 that they could make it work, and that there was real pedagogical merit to integrating reading and writing to prepare their students for transfer-level writing. In fact, during her interview, Dolores noted that the main reason why she designed the ESL Retreat and got funding so that faculty were paid to attend was so that she could create support and buy-in for these changes that were coming down the pipeline. In January 2020, faculty felt frustrated, but they also felt optimistic because of the dean Marie and the chair Dolores's leadership. When the pandemic hit, everyone was left to their own devices, and while Dolores tried to provide a unifying presence through her Zoom faculty drop-in hours, few people attended and those who did attend didn't always get the help they needed.

Without timed writing, group grading, or any sort of baseline with which to compare student work, faculty felt like they were essentially teaching alone in their own world without the support of each other to talk to. Faculty thus felt not only a lack of support from the lawmakers or larger entities at play, but also felt cut off from the previous support that they would have relied on with teaching: each other. Previously, I noted that faculty were worried about level

misalignment becoming more of an issue at the upper levels, and that passing unprepared students through would have harsher consequences on students in the higher levels. During these interviews, many faculty like Adriana who taught at those higher levels described those fears coming to pass, and having to make decisions about whether to pass or fail multiple students who were unprepared to meet the more challenging SLOs. Cathy was a full-time faculty member who had taught in the program since 2005 and was made full time the year A.B. 705 went into effect in 2019. She had piloted some of the upper-level curricula and noted the toll that this disconnect took on her and many other faculty members:

> "I don't know what the other teachers are doing. I know what they should be doing, but I don't know what's actually happening, so I'm trying to gather all those pieces and teach the students and get each student back up to where they're supposed to be, which is really impossible for one person to do. There's no more collaboration with the teachers because we're not there, there's no more hallway conversations, and that was huge."

Again, the feeling of isolation and burnout due to the pandemic was common among many people in and out of academia in general during the pandemic. Cathy's concern, though, was that the newly written curriculum, which allowed for so much leeway and interpretation among faculty, was leading to students passing and being unprepared to face the more challenging SLOs in the higher levels. Even students who did well one level below might fail at the next level because of the larger jumps in difficulty, due to the removal of the lowest level and the subsequent meshing of reading and writing into one course. Cathy, who took her job seriously and ensured that her pre-transfer level courses were rigorous enough to prepare students for ENGWR 300 or ESLW 340, felt the herculean effort of needing to hold the line and lift students up to the higher levels to where they needed to be for when they transferred out of ESL. Most faculty described this feeling of powerlessness and frustration at feeling the misalignment of the levels, especially now with the return to in-person learning, where students could no longer hide

behind the computer screens. The added pressures of low enrollment and financial aid pushing them to pass students through only exacerbated these feelings of frustration and thus isolation and faculty burn out. To make matters worse, the feelings of isolation were not only intradepartmental, but interdepartmental as well, as Veera described the frustration of not being able to create more guided pathways programs because of the pandemic:

> "We were trying to do one where it's a multi-disciplinary, last semester, but it didn't go so well, because…there were a few faculty members who it didn't matter how many emails we sent, they didn't respond, and we know we have to get their input and they have to agree to allow us to include their courses."

Veera's demeanor during this interview indicated that she did not feel personally slighted at the lack of response, but rather understood that no one was really communicating much during the pandemic. Faculty overall were not communicating with each other even within the department, let alone with faculty outside of it. Thus, the ESL department's plans to lean on English and math and learn from their journeys implementing A.B. 705 wouldn't be fulfilled, and the guided pathways program, a savvy curricular move to incentivize ESL transfer-rates as well as legitimize the department outside of the college, had also come to a grinding halt because of the pandemic.

Aside from feeling exhausted and powerless, most faculty were burned out and angry. They were angry that they had to make changes to a department that they felt had been functioning pretty well before A.B. 705 was implemented, but the two things they were most angry about were the placement test and the removal of the 20s, specifically because these two changes were not explicitly outlawed by the bill. In fact, these changes were made by the district office, and specific individuals not in any way affiliated with the department or even the college who did not see the purpose of having the lower level because they felt the adult school could

pick up the slack for the loss of the 20s. As noted in Chapter 4, the lower levels were seen as hindrances to potentially getting those high completion rates in the three-year timeline to get the college more funding. The irony is that the removal of the 20s, designed to streamline students to pass through their courses more quickly, may contribute to higher failure rates and a pushout of lower-level students. Arthur, normally a very mild-mannered and cheerful person, expressed the feelings of anger that he felt with the decision to remove the 20s:

> "We had created twenties to make those separate, to help those 20 students progress more without an initial failure, and to keep the 30 levels more cohesive, so that those students could be taught without having to waste time on people who just don't understand what's going on. This is I'm sure a problem with every lowest level of any system. But our system wasn't broken, and we were forced to fix it, and I think we broke it. That makes me mad."

Because Arthur was an assessment coordinator, this change ended up affecting him both in the classroom as well as during assessment. Other faculty who had administrator roles or interacted with other staff outside of the college were similarly angry, and again, it wasn't due to the bill itself, but rather the enactment and subsequent hypocrisy that accompanied its enactment. Sebastian as the new ESL center coordinator was intimately familiar with the administration's goals for equity and inclusion, and was frustrated with the fact that many administrators and researchers were deeming the removal of remedial education and the subsequent high pass rates as a step towards equity and inclusion, when really he saw the reality which was that those pass rates were not genuine, but in fact pressured and created by the administration and pandemic:

> "The only reason anybody cares about [completion rates] is money, right? It used to be enrollment figures, that was how you're going to get your funding, and now it's pass through rates and all that stuff. I'm really sick of talking out of our mouth and being like "we're not lowering standards," while we're lowering standards in order to make sure we pass them through."

What Sebastian was referring to here was the funding scheme that community colleges were now a part of as a result of A.B. 705. As noted in Chapter 2, community colleges were now getting most of their funding from completion and transfer rates rather than enrollment numbers (although of course enrollment was implicated because it directly impacted completion and transfer rates). In Sebastian's interview, as with many other interviews, faculty made the connection that they were being pressured to pass students through especially in transferable courses to "cook the books" and gain more funding from the state. These efforts were like ones that Isserles (2021) had pointed out when enrollment numbers were the primary ways that community colleges were gaining funding.

However, there were some students who enrolled in the "entry level" courses and still failed, despite efforts on the college's part to pass students through. Higher push out rates were due to the inflation of course credits across English, math, and ESL. In English, the 300 course that was once three units was changed to five with the inclusion of a lab. In ESL, the integrated skills courses were four units and changed to six. Transfer-level Math 300 was now linked to another course to make a three-unit course now six units. If a student were enrolled in Math 300 and ESL 325 and they failed one or both, they would automatically be placed on academic probation in their first year, because those two courses now counted as twelve units. This would then speed up the process to have them placed on academic probation, and then dismissed the following semester, just because of two "entry level" courses.

Sebastian's frustration at the college talking out of both sides of its mouth was well-founded. Indeed, under this new system, whether it was purposeful or not, in the name of "equity" students who were now unprepared for college were being pushed out at a much faster rate, and thus being forced to reapply for admission and financial aid. Community college, rather

than serving a wide range of students and acting as a place to help promote equity and inclusion of all students, was now quickly dividing students based on those who could achieve in this accelerated learning process and those who could not, and denying those students who could not achieve the option to even slow down or take remedial courses. Students were then being funneled en masse not to the remedial courses in which they could have worked with professors over time to develop their skills, but instead to additional support services that were now being flooded with underprepared students. The ESL lab, of course, was one of those support services designed to pick up the pieces in this new system.

ESL Lab and Support Services: Picking Up the Pieces

The ESL Lab was the major additional support service that was used to help students succeed in their classes. The lab was designed so that students could enroll for half a unit up to 1.5 units (20-60 hours over the semester) and work on whatever skills they wanted to independently, and many students under the old curricular sequence used the additional one unit so that they could qualify for financial aid by taking two classes plus a lab and thus getting nine units. Faculty were worried that the curricular unit adjustment would impact student enrollment in the Lab given that now students could easily get nine units with an integrated skills course and a grammar or listening/speaking course, but that did not seem to be the case when the lab was transitioned back on ground. In fall 2021 during the height of the pandemic, enrollment was estimated to be in the 80s, and in fall 2022, week 16 enrollment was 181 students total, which were both significant drops from the pre-pandemic average of about 400 students. However, once the lab transitioned back on ground, enrollments spiked again, with fall 2023 week 16 enrollment being 355 and spring 2024 Week 16 enrollment going all the way up to 438, which was about where it was pre-pandemic. Thus, the pandemic was a significant factor impacting

enrollment in the ESL Lab, which makes sense, because it impacted enrollment across all courses as well.

The Lab functioned like many other support services, which meant that people who worked in the lab were susceptible to feelings of burnout and isolation just like other faculty, but more keenly felt the immediate effects of A.B. 705 due to working with specific students who were more likely to be failing or who needed additional help due to the revised curriculum. Dolores, who was briefly the ESL Lab coordinator after her time being chair, noted that the ESL Lab was where students went when they could not get the help they needed from their instructors:

> "A student who is really doing poorly in 37. Where else are they going to go? They don't want to go to adult school because they get financial aid and because it's more rigorous at [the college], right? So the lab is where they go, at least attempting to get some support. And we have some stuff, but I mean it's really hard because the lab is basically independent learning, with some support from staff. When you're at zero English, it's hard to do independent learning."

Thus, in the wake of A.B. 705, the ESL Lab acted as a sort of "catch all" where students who were struggling with anything – academic or otherwise – went to get the support they needed. In Chapter 6 I further describe how ESL students knew that the lab was a place of safety for them to go when they were confused, upset, or just had general questions.

During the transition caused by A.B. 705, there were three ESL Lab coordinators: Lauren, who developed the system that was in place up to the pandemic and was the coordinator until 2021, Dolores, who had previously been chair of the department during the A.B. 705 transition and took over the Lab during the pandemic, and Sebastian, who was the Lab coordinator from 2022-2024 when data for this study were being collected. However, all three

coordinators shared similar feelings of burnout and frustration linked to A.B. 705 and the pandemic, but for different reasons.

Lauren took over the ESL Lab in the 1990s after adjuncting at the college for five years, and her primary goal when she inherited it was to change it from a one-unit corequisite course into a standalone entity in which students could enroll to practice different skills. Under her system, students would come into the lab, be given photocopied packets of particular skills that they wanted to practice or that a professor had advised that they practice (e.g. subject-verb agreement, reading for inferences, writing topic sentences, etc.), work independently or with a student tutor, instructional assistant (IA) or faculty member, and then get feedback on their work when they finished that packet. Students could also opt to participate in mixed level speaking sessions which were run every hour for about thirty minutes about a variety of topics. Students earned credit by spending 20 hours per semester for each half a unit in which they were enrolled in the lab completing their own independent work or speaking sessions, but not for homework help. When A.B. 705 was introduced, Lauren was given the herculean task to design and restructure two separate sets of lab courses for each level, one strand addressing reading, writing and grammar and the other strand supporting speaking and listening (more details were provided about this in Chapter 4). This was partly to address the repeatability issue, that students would no longer be able to repeat any course and still show satisfactory progress to maintain financial aid, but also to satisfy requirements for A.B. 705 that showed that these courses were support courses designed specifically for the new six-unit integrated skills courses. Lauren similarly noted that the emphasis was once again being placed on writing, and that she was under pressure to develop support specifically for the writing element:

> "Instead of just being satisfied that we were addressing their individual needs, we had to do this little agenda…that was going to help them get through the composition

> course…I've always been of two minds with [a writing] emphasis for ESL students because of the fact that not all the students were by default on transfer…I'm kind of spinning here because I think there were just so many different levels, and the time pressure and the timing of everything was so overwhelming."

Lauren defined the changes made by A.B. 705 as an "agenda" and in other parts of the interview, she characterized this frantic rush to change the curriculum as going through the motions to show administrators that she was making the changes to help students "succeed in" (or complete) their composition courses. The day-to-day operations of the lab, though, did not change drastically as a result of this curricular overhaul. When I pressed Lauren to give me more details about what she had had to change, she felt like she was "spinning" when trying to articulate the specifics of what she had written and directed me to the curricular documents themselves to see what had changed. During her interview, she defined this experience, with the subsequent move to online, as being the impetus for her retirement, because she felt so burned out by all the sudden massive curricular changes that she had had to make, mostly online. Ironically, Lauren was the only faculty member that I spoke with who had been following A.B. 705 for many years prior to 2017 and had been actively going to trainings to prepare herself for the changes the bill would bring, and yet she still felt overwhelmed and burned out due to the way that it was enacted.

With Lauren's retirement, Dolores found herself transitioning from the role of chair into the role of ESL lab coordinator. Despite having been a lab coordinator at another college in the district, she still found moving the ESL Lab online during the pandemic to be an immense challenge due to the mostly paper packets which made up the bulk of what the lab had to offer students. Thus, she decided to adopt Burlington English, an online, independent, adult English learner platform to create learning modules. The department also tried to create their own materials, but felt similarly overwhelmed with the task of just keeping up during the pandemic:

> "[Burlington English] wasn't for the integrated courses, and honestly at the beginning, and even now we just couldn't address the integrated course support. It was just too much to do. And so just now, we're trying to create…e-learning materials for reading, grammar and writing. So again I started that when I was in the lab last year but again it was so overwhelming."

The dream of supporting the new challenging six-unit integrated skills courses, which was the reason for Lauren to revamp the ESL Lab curriculum in the first place, was unable to be fulfilled due to the pandemic. Though many faculty attempted to create their own materials for the lab to support their integrated skills courses, it was too overwhelming for them to learn the technology needed to create those materials on top of adjusting to online teaching themselves. Thus, the lab functioned essentially as it had before the pandemic, unconnected to the courses in which students were enrolled, but providing a bit of extra individualized practice for them just the same.

When Sebastian took over the ESL Center, he had big plans to get the integrated skills support courses up and running, and wanted to address the higher-level composition courses, which were the transfer-levels that A.B. 705 was concerned with. He envisioned the ESL Lab as the "gem" of the ESL department, and enthusiastically described loving his job and feeling excited for his role. However, he was realistic about the other problems he needed to contend with:

> "I love it, but the truth of the matter is…expectations are too high, relative to what the bureaucratic systems will allow us to accomplish in a short amount of time. [I] haven't been on campus for two years…there's three pieces of paper printed to the date of March 2020. It's like "get in there and make this a both on-ground and online lab, oh and get enrollment back up" because at the peak the Center had over 400 students enrolled."

Sebastian was thus tasked with running both a virtual *and* online lab (in other words, two labs), getting enrollment back up, and developing the higher-level integrated skills support courses. It was an impossible task, and though Sebastian was able to establish on-ground and virtual

services and increase enrollment exponentially, he was never in a position to develop the integrated skills support courses during the time of the study. He was, however, able to hire an additional instructional assistant (IA), Sergey, who had been teaching the developmental English courses at the college in Writing Across Curriculum (WAC) and Reading Across Disciplines (RAD) for 10 years and had been a student at the college himself. Sergey ended up being an invaluable asset to the Lab for his ability to individually tutor students in the integrated skills and transfer-level composition courses.

Sergey had strong feelings about A.B. 705 because he used to teach in the remedial reading and writing programs, WAC and RAD, and taught the remedial writing courses which were cut from the college. He described the additional labor that all instructors now had to contend with, dealing with what he deemed "the gap" between the lowest-level student and the highest-level student who were now all grouped in the ENGWR 300 course. For our ESL students though, this gap was magnified by a lack of institutional knowledge of how the American education system works. For our English learner students, whether they be Generation 1.5 or new immigrants, there were additional challenges that they needed to face, and a lack of confidence that losing access to remedial courses would eventually harm them:

> "When A.B. 705 came out and my students that were enrolled in 50 were offered to go to 300, 1% 2% of them left. I asked a lot of them "why'd you stay?" and they said, "I need it. I'm in the right place. I feel like I can succeed in this class. I don't think I'd be able to succeed in 300." because one of the big skills you learn in 50 is how to do a research essay, and how to maximize your reading time…I mean you may show up to 300 and be assigned a 500 page book on the first day. Now if your language is not great, the level of intimidation is so high. They're already thwarted a bit in terms of their likelihood of success. As opposed to here's a couple of 2 to 3 page articles, let's work on these first and then build up a little bit and then read a short book at the end of 50…I always felt like 300 was just making a lot of assumptions about skill level that weren't necessarily true. There was still a lot of expectation of skill level in the classroom that didn't quite match up with the "you can have no skills whatsoever and you can take this class" to "now I'm in the class and I'm expected to have all these skills."

Sergey noted that with no more remedial courses to give students more time to practice and attain these skills, instead they would be now enrolled in a transfer-level course with a "sink or swim" mentality and presented with a curriculum that could be extremely rigorous and make many assumptions about a student's skill level prior to enrollment, depending on the instructor. Payne (2021) in his dissertation closely examined first year composition courses' revised curriculum and compared it with the syllabi and rubrics that instructors were using to teach at a community college in the wake of A.B. 705. His research corroborated Sergey's evidence, noting that there were wide variations in the cultural and rhetorical knowledge that instructors expected students to come in with in their FYC courses, and that very many instructors did not change their teaching materials at all in response to the new SLOs for the course, but in fact recycled materials that they were using at other institutions – two- and four-year -- which had vastly different student populations. So, despite the revised SLOs for ENGWR 300 and the removal of any prerequisites for the course, it was likely that many instructors were recycling the curriculum they would have used before when students had access to developmental English courses.

To aid with this gap and these unchanged expectations, there were now corequisite courses for ENGWR 300 which all students were required to enroll in for support, thus weighting the course at five units instead of three. This unit change ended up creating *less* grading for the English faculty, because they could now get two additional credit hours for the same group of students, thus grading potentially 50 fewer essays because of needing to take on fewer courses to have a full course load. In theory, this unit change could have worked well in the faculty's favor as well as the students' favor, because faculty could have had more time to meet with students and give them individualized attention rather than being bogged down with grading additional essays. But of course, the pandemic further complicated how effective the

corequisite courses were for students. The 80-minute corequisite labs taught by the instructor and dedicated to in-person writing time in computer labs turned into asynchronous Zoom meetings quickly, as Sergey described:

> "The students that I worked with who were in those classes, most of them were in asynchronous class. They said most of the time…their peer mentor time would be their lab time. So they weren't technically writing per se…And the professor can't just roam around and just see how people are doing and say, "Hey Sally, what are you stuck on?" That's not going to happen in Zoom. Which is exactly what the purpose of the lab was supposed to be."

According to Sergey, the corequisite courses were, by and large, asynchronous Zoom rooms led by peer mentors rather than faculty, offering little or no guidance for students who may have been floundering in those courses. For ESL students, as Sergey pointed out, this was especially harmful, because they lacked the institutional knowledge or additional resources to know how to ask for help in those corequisite courses, or in their main ENGWR 300 course. To top it all off, English faculty were under the same external pressures that ESL faculty were. Low enrollment and high units meant that faculty were pressured to pass students through to show high completion rates and to not disproportionately impact students' financial aid status. This push to pass all students, Sergey speculated, was an additional underlying reason why faculty chose to adopt contract grading in the English department.

So, where did ESL students go when they encountered these institutional barriers? Mostly, they went to the ESL center, or the tutoring center. Sebastian and Sergey personally met with many multilingual students – some in ESL classes, and some not – who were taking ENGWR 300, ESL 325 or ESLW 340 and coached them through their essays. Especially coming out of the pandemic, support services were being inundated with student who were ill-prepared for their transfer-level courses partly due to the misalignment caused by the pandemic and the newly integrated curriculum, and partly because students could now enroll directly in transfer-

level English whenever they chose. This was not happening only at this college, but at other colleges in the area. Frances, who had been an adjunct at the college for three years, had recently gotten a job as an IA in a writing center at a neighboring college in a different district, and because of her ESL experience, was mostly working with ESL students. She described the burnout that she and many other students felt as a result of A.B. 705 and the pandemic:

> "[Students] are struggling, and they come to the writing center to get help. But there's only so much that we can do for them, because they are in a class that is way over their head, and they're hoping to make it up with academic help. And so some of that load that the other lower courses were taking, teaching those skills that those students needed, that educational load is now placed on academic support, and we get overwhelmed…We even had a student yesterday that was bawling, and it's a lot of stress on these students, and it makes them feel like they're inadequate or they're stupid because they're not at the same level as other people that are in that class because they haven't gotten the skills they need…The instructors don't know how to help these students, and even if the people in academic support know how to help these students, there's so many of them, and with such diverse needs, it really it puts a lot of strain in all areas."

Frances and Sergey similarly described the feeling of being overwhelmed with the amount of additional teaching and guidance that support services were now expected to provide, especially given that students now had no other options other than tutoring to get help with these skills. Before, students could choose to enroll in developmental writing, or WAC or RAD courses to build those skills at their own pace and go to the tutoring center when they needed to. Now, with the corequisite courses largely operating like asynchronous courses without additional instructor guidance, or with peer mentors who didn't know how to help ESL students, support services and specifically the ESL center became the final safety net before students failed their six-unit courses, lost their financial aid, and got dismissed from the college all together.

Conclusion: What is a Community College?

I want to take a moment to recap the details that I have so far outlined above and use this final section as a place to define what a community college is for faculty members. I will do this

by first describing what community college is not (i.e., adult school), followed by what faculty believe community college is, and ending on how community college has been defined by A.B. 705.

A.B. 705 and the pandemic worked together to create a situation in which faculty were overworked, burned out, and isolated for several reasons. Faculty were overworked because of the last-minute implementation and lack of support provided with the implementation of guided self-placement, large-scale curricular changes, and an overhaul of the ESL lab. They were then resentful of these changes, as the unexpected removal of the 20s along with the pandemic and a lack of communication between them created a large level misalignment in which faculty felt clueless as to where everyone else was, and measures that they would have used to gauge their teaching effectiveness, like group grading and timed writing, were no longer possible due to the pandemic. The ESL lab and support services were frantically trying to pick up the pieces of this mess, by providing as much support as possible in a completely virtual environment while also trying to bolster enrollment and implement on ground services. And, finally, even if they wanted to, faculty could not fail their students en masse to show that students weren't achieving their SLOs not only because of financial aid or enrollment concerns, but because of the pressure to have high completion rates to get funding for the college. And even if they had failed their students, the college wouldn't have counted those failures into their non-completion rates, because the courses were largely non-transferable. One faculty member in particular had experience working at an adult school and contrasted her experiences working there with working at the college. This contrast is significant to unpack, because it not only contributes to the overarching definition of what a community college is, but also to the larger assumptions about adult ESL which drove policy decisions like A.B. 705 and 1705.

Vanessa, the instructor who wanted to look over her students' shoulders while they wrote, also worked at an adult school. Though she wasn't an administrator, she was unofficially given extra tasks and therefore privy to certain meetings, especially because she had also taught at a community college. In her interview, she described someone from the county Office of Education (OE) meeting with the faculty and administrators at the college sometime between 2014 and 2016 and telling them what OE's vision of an adult school is, namely, that it feeds directly into community college. Vanessa, with her extensive experience working at both institutions, immediately saw the flaws in this definition, as she described it to me in the interview:

> "They kept saying the top year [of adult school] would be where they would have community college, and everything below that would be at the adult school. They'd go, "it goes up to the community college," and I kept saying, "No, it doesn't, because the adult school education is very different from the community college education." You don't teach academic writing the same way. You're just really teaching communication and workforce skills. It's very practical. It's much less academic focused. Nobody is talking about topic sentences, and how to write an essay or anything like that. You would have to revamp the whole adult school curriculum, if it were going to lead into English 300."

Adult school as a concept came up frequently in other interviews with faculty members, but most of them described it the same way that Vanessa did: as a completely different institution, with completely different curricular goals from community college. Corroborating Vanessa's point, on a fact sheet about English as a Second Language Adult Education programs put out by California Adult Education Programs (CAEP), a California Department of Education program which funds both adult education and community colleges, the organization defined their primary mission as, "expanding ESL and citizenship offerings, such as vocational ESL programs, integrated ESL programs, online citizenship courses and holistic programs aimed at immigrant integration" (AEBG). CAEP was also a primary funding stream for community

college ESL, perhaps leading to some of the assumptions which Vanessa described in her interview. Regardless, this definition of adult school as being primarily vocational, and serving an assimilationist purpose to help immigrants adjust to their new lives, offered a sharp contrast with how faculty and students envisioned the role of community college: as being an academic and rigorous institution. This was partly motivated by the existence of financial aid, which students could only be eligible for in community college and not adult school. However, this was also motivated by the ability for students to get an A.A. and transfer to a four-year institution.

A.B. 705's definition of a community college was narrowed down as being a place where students could get an A.A. and transfer to a four-year institution. Though this was of course an important aspect of what community college has always offered, there have always been many non-academic services, such as vocational programs or ESL programs that did not necessarily lead to transfer. The emphasis on transfer was also what de-legitimized the ESL department in the eyes of the college. Because ESL was not a major that students could use to get an A.A. or transfer to a university, and because there were so many courses that were non-transferable in the ESL sequence, this department did not technically fulfill the new definition of a community college, which was now driven by transferability. As such, many faculty reported feeling devalued and brushed aside by the college. Sonya, already feeling devalued for her work in listening/speaking within ESL, described further how counselors at the college had advised students against taking ESL at all, because they had felt it would be a "waste of their time":

> "I had a student tell me that the counselor told them L310 would be a waste of their time. Things like that, the counselors don't understand. What I think they meant by "waste of time" is "It's not what you need to graduate." And I think A.B. 705 feeds right into that. There's no time. There's no time to do these peripheral things."

Every single faculty member I spoke with, and many students I interviewed, reported being told the same thing by counselors: ESL was deemed a "waste of time." In this new paradigm for

success, of course it was. A.B. 705 and existing financial aid packages only gave students three years to complete, and six years max to get a Pell Grant. Why would students waste their precious time taking non-transferable courses, which potentially weighted heavily on their GPA and could jeopardize their financial aid eligibility? Why would students waste their time with these developmental courses when they could just take transfer-level English and math? Because the very definition of a community college was now driven by the passage of time itself (three years to complete), the time it takes for someone to learn a language, or a challenging concept, was rendered obsolete. Instead, ESL was relegated to a non-academic, non-transferable, and therefore non-essential category.

Despite the college's staunch position that its purpose was to provide academic rigor and help students transfer to a four-year institution, the majority of faculty did not feel that this was the purpose of community college. Though they didn't all agree on one definition of a community college, they all agreed on what it wasn't. Sonya's interview here represented the stark contrast of how all faculty felt that, whether or not community college was an academic institution, it should be a place for self-discovery, and rather than defining what success should look like, success should be individualized for each student.

> "The counselor told [my student] she didn't need grammar courses, and I think [that is] selling our students short. Like "you don't need this, I can guess what you need in life, and you're maybe not going to get very far," and we're supposed to encourage them. The world's wide open, right? You can do whatever you want. You decide with language whether you go to a university, or whether you get a job at McDonald's, I don't care, it's about you and what you want."

Sonya and many other faculty felt that leading ESL students down these transfer paths was selling them short and taking away valuable opportunities for them to slow down, learn the language, and thus actually succeed at their own pace and by their own definition. Isserles (2021)

similarly remarked that time for self-discovery for community college students is usually seen as a privilege, and something that most of them don't have. While many four-year universities make this one of their key selling points for attracting students, community colleges are usually relegated to a "get in, get out" mentality where students don't have time as a luxury to learn and figure out who they are or what they want. A.B. 705 feeds into this paradigm – it tells students they only have three years to learn everything that they need to succeed at a four-year institution and tells them that what they should aim for is to transfer to a four-year institution and complete their coursework as fast as possible.

The larger definition of student success as completion and transfer rates caused a lot of frustration for faculty when thinking about A.B. 705. Especially given the student population of the ESL department, many of whom may not have had interest in transfer or may have seen it as a long-term goal rather than an immediate one, faculty felt frustrated by this new definition of student success in how it related to their students. Did this new paradigm mean that students who learned English, got a great job because of it, and eventually transferred to a university or even completed an MA or PhD several years down the line were not considered "successful" because the college couldn't take credit for their learning? Did this paradigm also mean that students who were enrolled at the college and chose to go at their own pace and take longer than three years to transfer were no longer deemed "successful"? Other faculty pushed back and felt that this expectation of transfer was a good thing. Sebastian, the ESL lab coordinator who framed pressures to pass students as a freedom of being able to give high grades to focus on higher order skills like critical thinking, similarly welcomed the pressure of higher expectations on students:

> "If there's a 65-year-old person who wants to learn English to be able to speak to their grandchildren, I don't need to stress them about MLA format. But I…have seen in our discipline infantilization and reductive thinking about our students' skills. So I think it's

> awesome to have high expectations as long as we provide high support for them in that regard."

Sonya and Sebastian both hinted at a similar pattern of outsiders and even insiders underestimating ESL students' abilities. But again, with high expectations should come high support, not only in the form of support services, but also in the form of extra time and resources for students to be able to learn and complete their trajectories in a way that adequately prepared them for the challenges they would face.

I am in awe of the resilience of these faculty members and their dedication to their craft. They implemented the mandates from A.B. 705 and 1705 dutifully, making them work in their favor. They created a guided self-placement that was truly guided and provided additional touchpoints for students. They fought to keep their writing assessment even when the odds were stacked against them and no other college had opted to do so. They piloted and redesigned their integrated skills courses so that reading and writing reinforced each other, even at the lower levels, to better prepare their students for transfer-level English. They created guided pathways to give their students access to popular majors, and worked tirelessly to try to improve and reflect on their teaching practices even during a pandemic when everyone was burned out. They even got their ESL lab enrollment up to where it was pre-pandemic in less than two years, with both an on-ground and online component, and with additional IAs to support students in their writing. Against all odds, these faculty made A.B. 705 work to their advantage in whatever ways they could, and despite their struggles and frustration, students reported learning from them even during the pandemic, as will be detailed in Chapter 6.

Part of why faculty worked so tirelessly to maintain the integrity of their program and provide exceptional education to their students was because many of them were driven by an intrinsic understanding of what a community college was supposed to be. This vision, largely at

odds with the vision taken up by legislators, was what sustained them throughout this process. A.B. 705 redefined student success at the college in terms of completion and transfer within a three-year timeline for ESL students, but the faculty defined a community college as a place where students could take the time for self-discovery. Given that most of their students were adult immigrants, it was important for them to learn about the American educational system and what kinds of options they had for careers now that they were living in the United States. Faculty understood that, despite their feelings of burnout, frustration, and anger at the larger system, that they were still the front lines who could control how these changes were implemented, and how students could benefit from them. As will be discussed in Chapter 6, students did indeed feel the efforts that faculty put into their craft and internalized the larger message that faculty wanted to send of community college being a place of self-discovery, autonomy, and choice.

Chapter 6: Student Perspectives about A.B. 705 and 1705

As detailed in Chapter 5, faculty's perceptions and experiences following the enactment of A.B. 705 at this local community college were colored by the relatively rapid enactment of the bill during a global pandemic which exacerbated existing problems that would have arisen from the bill regardless. Though many faculty felt that the integration of skills and the revision of curriculum was not necessarily a bad thing, they had many qualms about other changes. The removal of the placement test, the removal of the 20 level, and the newly weighted six-unit integrated skills courses were seen to create larger level misalignment and confusion among faculty already disconnected due to the pandemic. Faculty reported feeling burnt out, isolated, and powerless regarding the implementations of these bills because of the heavier lift they felt they were doing both in implementing these changes rapidly without support and in now providing support services to students who they felt were floundering as a result of the accelerated curriculum. To make matters worse, the floundering wouldn't be collected in the data, because of a combination of record-high pass rates and a lack of data about ESL student pass rates *and* the non-transferable courses.

Regarding their ideologies and values about community college ESL, most faculty conceptualized community college as an academic institution that should offer students multiple pathways and options to help them achieve whatever goals they had. This included transferring to a four-year institution but also included completing an A.A. degree, getting a certificate, or even just improving their English for daily life. Faculty mostly characterized A.B. 705 as a bill that took away their agency, putting them in difficult positions in which they felt they were "talking out both sides of their mouths" and being forced to simultaneously "hold the line" and insert rigor into their courses while also boosting completion and pass rates. They felt many

times like they were being told both that their existing pedagogical and curricular practices were wrong and needed to be revised, and that they were the experts and needed to figure out how to fix their "broken" system.

In a stark contrast to faculty perceptions and experiences, students were highly in favor of A.B. 705 and the changes that they had experienced because of the bill. While most students acknowledged that the bill had some shortcomings regarding placement specifically, few of them felt personally that the bill had negatively affected their lives, and in fact mostly felt the opposite: that the bill had *enabled* the success that they had achieved. This was due largely to the fact that they perceived A.B. 705 as offering them a choice, rather than mandating a strict timeline, and one that students could make depending on their educational goals, which they felt increased their autonomy and agency significantly. This was due in part to the fact that students picked up on the attitudes of faculty in the ESL department, as discussed in Chapter 5, and treated ESL as a place where they could practice self-discovery in a new country with a new life.

However, most students did *not* agree with the reigning rhetoric of A.B. 705 that remedial and lower-level ESL classes or long ESL sequences were barriers to their education. Even students who resented being forced to take ESL acknowledged that without it, they would not have succeeded, and more times than not, even opted to take extra ESL classes that didn't go towards their major or transfer requirements. Most students described external barriers to their education as being the culprits for their slow trajectories, or even a desire to slow down so that they could make sure they left ESL with a strong foundation of English before going into mainstream English courses.

Thus, in terms of their ideologies and values, students highly valued ESL as a significant and indispensable factor in their educational journeys. This was for several reasons: 1) they all

regarded the mastery of English as being the only factor that would help them through their educational and career goals later in life, 2) they felt they could learn from ESL professors and had positive experiences with the program, and 3) they felt ESL courses were an important transition used to introduce them to the American higher education system. Even students who skipped the ESL sequence or left it early still relied on the use of the ESL Lab or other professors to continue their trajectory. In terms of their purposes for attending community college, there was a statistically significant difference between students enrolled in the lower levels (37 and 47) and the upper levels (55, 315, 325, 340, and 350). The main goals in attending community college for the students enrolled in the lower levels were to learn English and maybe get a job, while the students enrolled in the higher levels characterized community college as an academic institution where students should attend so they could transfer to a four-year university. This again contrasted with much of the rhetoric of A.B. 705, which assumed that the majority of ESL students attended community college to transfer to a four-year institution.

In this chapter, I will attempt to follow a similar structure to that of Chapter 5 by addressing my research questions to more effectively compare and contrast student and faculty experiences. I will begin by describing students' reasons for enrolling in ESL, perceptions and experiences with the guided self-placement test, curricular changes, and support services following the enactment of A.B. 705 and the pandemic. I will then detail what they felt were their biggest barriers for learning or completing the program in the three-year timeframe, and I will conclude with their overarching opinions and conceptualizations of A.B. 705.

Goals for Enrolling in Community College ESL

Students' goals for attending community college and enrolling in ESL were not as straightforward or unambiguous as previous research has claimed (Hayward, 2020; Park, 2019;

Rodriguez, et al., 2019). To begin to answer this question, it is important to begin with the results of the survey that was distributed in fall 2022, spring 2023, and fall 2023. This survey was designed to understand ESL students' goals for taking community college ESL at all levels, encompassing both the lower and higher levels. Because almost all the interview participants were enrolled in or had taken a transfer-level writing course, the survey was an important metric for understanding the experiences of students who were enrolled in the lower levels. The survey participants (n = 120) indicated from a list which ESL courses they were enrolled in at the time of the survey. I then divided these participants into "lower level" ESL students (n = 82) from the two lowest-level courses, 30 and 40, and the "upper level" ESL students (n = 38) from the five higher-level courses, 50, 310, 320, 340, and 350, to understand differences between these two groups. This division was made based on the course descriptions, as the 50-level courses were classified as "Intermediate-Mid" and marked a transition out of the "lower levels" for students and faculty at the college. Participants were then asked to indicate from a list of possible reasons why they were taking ESL courses at the college and were asked to choose all reasons that applied to them. These reasons for taking ESL courses were organized and filtered into three general categories: 1) for a job, 2) to transfer to a four-year university, and 3) for personal or other reasons (e.g. for daily life and survival, to get an A.A. or certificate, for fun, etc.). Table 9 below summarizes students' reasons for taking ESL courses at the college, divided by level.

Table 9

Survey Participants' Goals Divided by Upper and Lower Levels

Student Level	Want a Job	Want to Transfer	Want a Job AND Want to Transfer	Other Personal Reasons
Lower Level (n = 82)	44 (54%)	17 (21%)	11 (13%)	79 (96%)
Upper Level (n = 38)	12 (32%)	16 (42%)	6 (16%)	38 (100%)
Total (n = 120)	56 (47%)	33 (28%)	17 (14%)	117 (98%)

When taking "want a job AND want to transfer" into account, two thirds of lower-level students (67%) indicated that one of their primary reasons for attending ESL courses was to get a job, with only 34% choosing transfer among their list of goals. In contrast, 58% of upper-level students named transfer as one of their reasons for attending ESL, with 47% choosing a job as their only reason for taking ESL. Interestingly, 100% of upper-level students and 96% of lower-level students also indicated personal reasons for enrolling in community college ESL courses along with transfer or job-related reasons. These findings suggest that students may have multiple reasons for taking ESL courses and that seeking a job and transferring to a four-year university may be among those reasons, but not the only ones.

To further investigate the difference in stated goals for taking ESL between levels and whether there was a relationship between their level and their desire to transfer, I performed a Chi-square test of independence. In the survey, after indicating their primary reasons for enrolling in ESL, students were asked whether they wanted to transfer to a four-year university, and could choose 1) yes, 2) no, or 3) maybe/I'm not sure. Table 10 below shows the data used

for the Chi-square test of independence. The relationship between student level and desire to transfer was statistically significant at the .001 level, X^2 (2, n = 120) = 15.52, p = .00042.

Table 10

Survey Participants' Desire to Transfer Divided by Upper and Lower Levels

Student Level	Yes Transfer	No Transfer	Maybe Transfer
Lower Level (n = 82)	23 (28%)	15 (18%)	44 (54%)
Upper Level (n = 38)	25 (66%)	4 (10%)	9 (24%)
Total (n = 120)	48 (40%)	19 (16%)	53 (44%)

Table 10 shows that there is a statistically significant relationship between student level and the desire to transfer, with upper-level students being more likely to want to transfer and lower-level students either being unsure or having no desire to transfer. To ensure that the "maybe transfer" option was not skewing the data, another Chi-square test of independence was performed based on the "yes" and "no" answers between the levels, with the removal of the "maybe" column. The difference between levels was still statistically significant, though at the .05 level, X^2 (1, n = 67) = 5.34, p = .0209. Both Chi-square tests of independence suggest that there is a statistically significant relationship between student levels and their desire to transfer.

Finally, participants were asked to explain why they chose either "yes," "no," or "maybe" in response to the question about transfer. These justifications were then coded and sorted into different categories. Table 11 reports on the reasons for why students indicated "yes" "maybe" or "no" in response to the transfer question.

Table 11

Survey Participants' Reasons for Transfer Decision

Transfer Decision	Degree	Future	Job	Not needed	English	Money	Age or Disability	Kids	Unsure
Yes (n = 40)	16	7	17	-	-	-	-	-	-
No (n = 11)	-	-	-	6	2	1	2	-	-
Maybe (n = 38)	5	-	3	-	5	2	-	5	18

The "degree" category indicated that students either had a desire to get a B.A., A.A., or M.A., or were unsure of their major or already had a degree from their country. The "future" category was for students who noted they wanted to transfer to improve their future. The "job" category was for students who either wanted to transfer and get a good job, or who may or may not transfer depending on whether they were able to get a good job with an A.A. Many students simply wrote "not needed" on the survey to indicate that they didn't feel that their career or trajectory required an advanced degree. "English" was noted as a barrier for students who wanted to improve their English to see if they could manage mainstream classes or a four-year university. "Money" was noted for students who either didn't want to spend the money on a degree, or wanted to wait until they had more money to apply. "Age or disability" was for students who indicated age or a physical ailment that kept them from transferring. "Kids" was a category for students who weren't sure if or when they could transfer, due to their young children at home. Finally, the "unsure" category was for students who simply put that they weren't sure about whether they wanted to transfer, or whether it was feasible, or what transferring to an institution even meant.

Altogether, the findings from the survey add much nuance to previous research about ESL students' reasons for enrolling in community college or ESL courses as well as their potential transfer rates. Previous research has noted that lower-level ESL students may be less likely to transfer to a four-year institution (Park, 2019; Rodriguez, et al., 2019), and this survey could potentially support this finding, but with a significant caveat: lower-level students may not *want* to transfer to a four-year institution, and this may be why they are not transferring. Previous research has been predicated on the assumption that lower-level students cannot or do not transfer simply because of the length of time to complete a degree or the number of courses in a sequence. However, not a single student in this survey indicated that time to degree or ESL courses were contributing to their desire to transfer. Rather, most students were either 1) confident about their reasons for wanting to transfer, or 2) unsure about whether they wanted to transfer due to other external factors that had nothing to do with time to degree.

Given that this survey was distributed in 2022 and 2023 after A.B. 705 was fully enacted, it could provide evidence that the bill effectively shortened the ESL sequence enough so that students no longer felt that time to a degree was a major barrier for transferring to a four-year university. Thus, it could mean that lower-level students who were unsure about their desire to transfer could take their time, work through the lower-level classes to build up their foundational English skills, and then make the decision to transfer when other external factors in their lives had been resolved. However, this survey also indicates that it is unlikely that lower-level students prior to the enactment of A.B. 705 viewed lower-level ESL courses as their primary barrier to completion. Other external driving factors such as work, family commitments, English level, or money were mentioned by students as motivating factors not only to enroll in ESL courses, but also to transfer or not transfer, based on their individual situations. Similarly, part-time

enrollment influenced by the above external factors, coupled with taking the time to consider one's options and whether transfer is the best fit for one's circumstances, can also extend the time to transfer past three years, or to never happen.

To gain more insight into students' reasons and goals for enrolling in community college ESL, I conducted interviews with twenty-three (n = 23) students at the college who identified as language learners and had taken at least one ESL course or an ESL Lab section. The majority of participants had been placed in the upper levels, but all students had taken upper-level ESL courses and were either currently enrolled, had graduated, or had dropped out for various reasons. All participants were adult immigrants except for one, who came here when he was in high school and thus would be considered Generation 1.5. Most interview participants (65%) indicated that they wanted to transfer, although not all of them were certain about whether it would be directly after graduating, or whether it would be further in the future. Table 12 below details their desire to transfer based on their original placement.

Table 12

Interview Participants' Desire to Transfer by Placement

Original Placement	Yes Transfer	No Transfer	Maybe Transfer
Lower Level Placement (n = 4)	2	-	2
Upper Level Placement (n = 19)	13	3	3
Total (n = 23)	15	3	5

Interview participants, like the survey participants, also noted other reasons for taking ESL courses which weren't related to transfer or to getting a job. One of the most common goals

which students mentioned alongside transferring or getting a good job was building foundational English skills to prepare themselves for any imagined future academic or career goal. Many students expressed surprise at their low English levels upon immigrating to the U.S. and felt that ESL had been invaluable for preparing them for transfer-level coursework. For instance, Basira, who had been a teacher in her home country of Afghanistan, was eager to get her A.A. degree in Early Childhood Education to get back in the classroom. She had spent nine months in adult school upon arriving in the United States, and enrolled in community college so that she could get her degree and thought maybe someday she'd get her B.A. when her kids were older. In her interview, she stressed that she was taking her time at the college and had only taken grammar and listening and speaking classes because she felt she was unprepared for the more challenging six-unit integrated skills courses. For her, the experience at the college was one that she felt could prepare her not only to eventually transfer, but also for her immediate success and her future career:

> "Whenever I'm going to get a job, I have to learn English first…Maybe it's easy for the people who is like, let's search and copy from Google, and they wanted to just pass the class. But I don't want to do that. I wanted to be honest with myself, and I wanted to learn and understand really good, and I don't want to cheat with myself. That would be really damage my career, if I don't know English, and I pass the class that doesn't make any sense to me. I have to learn. That's my goal."

Basira, like many other students, saw English as a foundational skill that could help in her immediate courses, but also in her career and for whatever other imagined future she might experience. Not all students wanted to go at the slow pace that Basira was, and in fact, many of them appreciated the acceleration that A.B. 705 provided. Nora, a younger woman from Afghanistan, was eager to continue her computer science education in the United States which she had begun in her home country. Her English level was very high, and she was placed at the 340 transfer-level writing ESL course. Initially, she had thought that this course would be a

waste of time and complained constantly during class about being "forced" to take ESL, even though it was optional for her to take it. Later in the interview though, she noted that because her education had been interrupted in Afghanistan due to the Taliban's resurgence, she saw the value in taking her ESL course when she saw the sudden improvement in her writing abilities after only one semester:

> "Before coming here, in Afghanistan, I wanted to try, like, apply for some universities. And they were asking for essays…That was where the most difficult part for me. But then, after this class, we did a lot of writing, and now I feel comfortable. Some days ago I wanted to apply for scholarships. They were asking for essays, and that was the time that I realized that my writing is very good now. Like, I'm feeling comfortable."

Even students like Nora who originally resented being forced to take ESL courses in retrospect saw the value of taking them and saw improvements when they left the sequence and were able to enroll in mainstream courses. Though it wasn't her original goal to improve her English, because she had thought it was good enough, after taking ESL she realized that improving her foundational English and learning about the writing style used in the U.S. would facilitate her reaching her other goal of getting a master's degree in computer science.

ESL students had multifaceted goals for attending the college, and though transfer may have been a common goal among them, not a single one of them named that as their sole goal, without wanting to improve their foundational English, get a job, and more fully integrate into the United States. Many saw English, transfer, and a career as being interrelated, and prioritized learning English *above* the desire to transfer in their hierarchy of goals. This caused many students to slow down their trajectories, either by enrolling in optional grammar or listening/speaking courses or taking classes part-time so that they could go at their own pace through the curriculum. Thus, the question of an ESL student's primary goals for attending the college was much more complicated than simply whether they wanted to transfer or not.

Student Thoughts and Experience: ESL Courses are Valuable

All of the students who participated in the interview felt that their experiences in ESL were valuable, even if they had originally resented being forced to take those classes. One of the major reasons why students highly valued their ESL classes was because they felt overall that their experiences prepared them for mainstream classes, in *all* skill levels: reading, writing, speaking, listening and grammar. In particular, they noted that despite having received an education in their country, and maybe even being fluent in English, they had no idea how to write in an American style of writing. Kondwani, a mechanical engineering major from Nigeria who was interested in working on cars and maybe eventually transferring to a university, noted the rough transition he experienced when he first placed at the mid-intermediate 55 level:

> "Because we were colonized by Europeans…back home English was like a first language. So I use the mentality of the way we speak English over there to write the text and also follow the English 55 when I enroll the class. But as times goes on at the middle of the class, I keep understanding that everything is different. So English ESL 55 was like to brush me up to understand the way the system of English education here works."

Students commented that, overall, most of their aim in taking ESL, even if they were in it for just one semester, was to learn about the American educational system and expectations for reading and writing specifically. Specifically, conducting research was a skill that they all struggled with, and especially at the upper levels, highly valued learning. Many students in fact told cautionary tales to each other during class about enrolling in mainstream courses such as history or communication without taking ESL first because they had experiences with failing those courses due to not knowing how to conduct research. Nolene, who had experienced a fifteen-year gap in her education between her time in Uganda and her first class at the college, shared such a story. She was encouraged by her counselor to begin enrolling in general education courses while she enrolled in ESL, since her placement was relatively high, at the low-intermediate 315 level.

Though she was relatively fluent in English upon starting at the college, she had no frame of reference for how to conduct research here and wasn't even sure how to ask for help. In her history class, she described passing the class, but failing the final research paper:

> "The history professor was telling [ESL students] to go inquire, but like I wasn't free, it was my first time. I'm like, how will I start? How will I ask for help? But ESL really helped me. I was taught how to write research like how to search for information in the library, and in other resources. It has really helped me how to speak. I can understand what someone is saying. I have learned how to write, to read... I am taking business law, and we have a legal research paper. With the knowledge I got from [ESL 340] and from 315, it is due in May, but I'm through with my introduction. Since it is a 10 page paper, I decided to start early."

Her history professor urged her to come and seek help, both with him as well as with other support services, but without the foundational skills she needed from her ESL courses or additional free time, she didn't even know how to ask for help, or what kinds of resources to access. She described in this interview how much ESL helped her not only learn how to conduct research, but how to access other support services at the college, improve her listening and speaking skills to understand her professors, and manage and plan her time around writing academic papers. Despite her high English ability, she needed ESL as a place to teach her not only about how to write in an academic way, but also to introduce her to student expectations so that when she transferred to a four-year institution, she'd be ready to take on an even more challenging workload.

Students also felt that ESL courses were valuable for them because they believed that ESL faculty were professionals who were trained in how to help them with their specific needs. On the whole, students reported having positive, helpful, and healing experiences in their ESL classes *because* of the faculty and their pedagogical expertise. As discussed in Chapter 5, faculty in the ESL department on the whole urged students to use their courses as places for self-discovery and to access the ESL Lab as a place to gain additional support about any other

questions they might have. This is not to say that students had worse experiences in mainstream courses, or that all students loved all of their ESL professors. It was a general trend, however, that ESL students felt more understood by their ESL professors and felt that they could learn more in an ESL course than they could in a mainstream course. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the contract grading methodology that many professors in the English department had adopted helped students pass their English classes, but many times, students did not think that they learned much in those courses. Students appreciated the microscopic lens that their ESL professors took, explaining writing in minute detail for an international audience (Atkinson & Ramanathan, 1995; Silva & Leki, 2004). Students also appreciated the community feel that came with ESL, as they could bond more easily with each other rather than the American-influenced students in mainstream classes.

In fact, this sentiment largely drove their enrollment practices when they were given the option to switch from ESL to mainstream courses. Students who stayed in the ESL track largely did so because they felt they could learn more about writing and continue to improve their language skills and had positive experiences in the program. Kondwani, who had been shocked to learn that his Nigerian English did not translate into the college's academic expectations, ended up failing his ESLW 340 transfer-level course when he was working three jobs during the pandemic and sleeping less than three hours per night. He was given the option by his counselor to switch to the mainstream English course and potentially get an "easier A," but elected to stay in ESL because he felt he could learn more there, despite having failed that course once:

> "I prefer ESL classes, because the way the professors, the teachers, help us on the class, I like it. But I thought about, in English class, I don't think that the teachers or the professor, the way they will break everything down is not the same way. You know a professor on ESL class would break it down for us. So that was why I decide to take ESL classes."

Students who made the switch to mainstream English in ENGWR 300 did so mainly for two reasons: it fit better with their schedule, or the ESL course equivalent 340 was full and only offered online. There were two students who started in ESL and switched to mainstream for other reasons: Najla, who had failed a course with me due to not submitting her work, and Fawzia, who had felt restless in ESL and wanted to try taking mainstream courses to transfer more quickly. They both appreciated having the ability to transition out of ESL when they felt ready to, but they also both felt that they had learned a lot from the courses that they had previously taken. Fawzia was still working as a student tutor in the ESL Lab, even after having successfully transferred to a local university, and spent a considerable amount of time in the lab hanging out with friends or tutoring lower-level students. Najla, despite having an extremely positive experience in her mainstream English courses and feeling overall that the transition out of ESL was successful, still attributed her success to the two ESL classes she had taken. During our interview, in a moment that few professors experience, Najla explained that the reason she failed my course was a combination of hyper-focusing on her mainstream communications course, my lenient late work policy which allowed students until the end of the semester to submit their work, and her own struggle with motivation. This combination of reasons created a situation in which she prioritized her mainstream classes over mine, putting off her homework until the end of the semester, when she was stuck in a depression that prevented her from finishing. Najla admitted that she wished she had completed my course, because she knew that it would have helped her even more in her ENGWR 300 course, specifically in terms of the research:

> "I don't remember the exact essay. But when I was in 300, I was writing, working on the second paper, and it reminded me of my 325 class. I was like, "Oh, if I've done that in my 325 class, I would not struggling it right now." [ESL] did prepare me for this classes."

Students valued ESL so much that many times during the interview they regretted having finished the sequence, because they wanted to continue improving their English. Even students who had graduated or gotten a job told me they had plans to enroll in grammar or listening/speaking courses to continue improving those skills. This desire to keep practicing and learning English was surprisingly common – many students in fact elected to complete the interview with me because they wanted my advice on whether they should continue taking ESL courses, even after they had finished the sequence. And when counselors advised students against taking ESL, many students ignored that advice. Farrah, a business administration major from Afghanistan, noted that her primary goal in attending the college was to transfer so that she could get her bachelor's degree. She described the first time she met with a counselor, when she had been placed at the mid-intermediate 55 level, and how the counselor tried to encourage her to enroll directly into her transfer-level courses:

> "[The counselor] said that "I know that you can do your major classes, just start your major." But because I have my son beside me, and I don't want a lot of pressure put on me, and I want to start it like easier. And at first you just got familiar with how the things are going in the US, and universities here, and because of that, I started from that like easier paths at ESL."

In her reasoning, Farrah, noted that ESL was an "easier" path because she could not only familiarize herself with the university and expectations here, but also so that she could go slowly and put less pressure on herself because she had a young son to take care of. Students thus valued ESL as a track where they could go at their own pace, learn about the American educational system, and build up their skills in preparation for more challenging mainstream courses down the road. Most students had internal rather than external measures of English fluency success, and despite counselors telling them it was a waste of time, or finishing the

required ESL courses for their major, craved further practice and support in learning the language.

The Role of Support Services: Navigating Academic and Non-Academic Barriers

One of the major changes from A.B. 705 was to remove lower-level remedial coursework from the English, math, and ESL sequences and instead provide more robust support services to students. As faculty noted in Chapter 5, the sudden changes to the ESL Lab curriculum, coupled with the switch to emergency remote instruction, created a stressful and chaotic environment for the support services staff. Instructional assistants (IAs) such as Sergey and Frances both mentioned that, outside of the ESL Lab, students were relying increasingly on the Writing Across Curriculum (WAC) and Reading across Disciplines (RAD) offices, both of which housed peer tutors, supportive curricula, and instructional assistants, to make up the deficits that many students were struggling with in their mainstream English courses. As a result of the pandemic, however, neither the ESL Lab nor the WAC and RAD offices were functioning in the one-on-one, peer-to-peer way that they were originally intended with the implementation of the bill. In fact, Sergey had speculated that most students in the added ENGWR 94 Lab section, the corequisite course for ENGWR 300, were sitting in an asynchronous Zoom room writing to themselves, or otherwise meeting with peer tutors or WAC IAs rather than their professor.

As mentioned in Chapter 5, the faculty felt that the ESL lab was a "gem" for the students, and the students seemed to share this perspective. The ESL Lab was seen as an important touchpoint in the program, not just for academic reasons, but for non-academic reasons as well. During the three semesters that I spent time leading speaking sessions and observing the ESL lab, I noted that students came in for almost any need that they had. If a student wanted to know which professor they should take a class with, or which classes to enroll

in, or what major they should choose, or what university to choose, or what transfer even meant, they came to the ESL lab. I also noted several times when students who were not enrolled in the Lab or ESL classes at all would come in for support. In particular, Sergey the IA and Cathy, an ESL faculty member who specialized in teaching higher-level writing, both consistently helped students who were enrolled in ENGWR 300 or other English courses and just wanted grammar or writing support. I even witnessed students going to the lab to look for another student who spoke their own language to help them act as a translator, or navigate the college, or figure out how to use the LMS, or apply for a driver's license, or apply for a job. Many students, like Fawzia, who had transitioned into mainstream courses early and had already transferred to a local four-year university, still spent time in the lab and worked as IAs or tutors because they enjoyed the community feel that the lab offered.

Cristiana, the only student I interviewed who never took any ESL classes but went straight into mainstream English, attended the ESL lab on a weekly basis to practice her speaking skills, get help with her writing, and attend TOEFL tutoring with me. She already had her nursing degree from Brazil, and ended up dropping out of the college after one semester of taking ENGWR 300 because she had successfully passed the TOEFL and was studying for the NCLEX so that she could get her nursing license in the U.S. Cristiana was extremely fluent in English, and had been living in the U.S. for eight years but still struggled with writing in the American style of writing. At first, she was not passing her essays because she had never been taught what a thesis statement was, or how to write academically in English. Her first step to learning these concepts was to attend the ESL Lab and do private tutoring with Sebastian in academic writing. However, this was not the only support service she attended: she also made active use of going to her professor's office hours multiple times a week, seeking tutoring in the

Learning Resource Center (LRC), and attending WAC and RAD tutoring. She spent at least as many hours a week attending support services as she did attending her one in-person ENGWR 300 course, if not more. In her interview, she described the process and the number of resources she accessed just to compose one essay:

> "I was not understanding…the format of this essay because was a little different. I went a couple of times in like [office hours]. And then [the professor] was explaining, I gave to her, and then she corrected. I think the counter argument was not enough. So I went back like with my essay because I was not have the argument thing the right way. So after she corrected and did all the details that I need to do, I went to that WAC program as well, and they help me especially with the grammar. And then I went back and gave to her. By talking with professors and being on their office almost every day, talking and asking…I learned a lot like even talking with you, being in the ESL center…and RAD, I did with [my professor] as well."

Cristiana had been working part-time but quit her job so that she could focus on her English course and on the TOEFL. She loved her English professor because she had shown endless patience meeting with Cristiana for several hours a week to help her pass the course. However, what's telling about this example is the fact that not all students have the time, energy, resources, or desire to seek that much support to pass their classes. Cristiana was an unusually motivated student, who had no other commitments and was singularly focused on this one class. Professors also can't be expected to put that many hours a week into supporting all their students to help make up the deficit in their knowledge, even with fewer students with the new five-unit courses. As touched on in Chapter 4, despite her professor's immense amounts of patience and her skillful ability to teach principles of writing, Cristiana still had to meet with the ESL lab and WAC tutors to get help with her grammar. Her professor, thus, was unable to help her with grammar, either due to being unfamiliar with teaching grammar, or having limited time to give to her student. After all of that time spent, Cristiana ended up dropping out a semester later because she didn't want to transfer and instead wanted to use her existing degree. In our interview, she noted that

she was happy she had taken the ENGWR 300 course but acknowledged that taking ESL probably would have required less of a time commitment from her to pass the course.

Other students who didn't use the ESL Lab and were taking their ENGWR 300 courses asynchronously online did not have nearly the same positive experiences that Cristiana did. Jingyi, a student from China who was very motivated to transfer to a four-year university, had been taking online ESL courses during the pandemic and preferred in-person instruction to help her learn. She had wanted to enroll in my ESLW 340 course since she had enjoyed my ESL 325 course, but her counselor had told her (incorrectly) that she could only enroll in ENGWR 300. During her interview, she described being completely frustrated with the asynchronous course because she never understood what her assignments were, and when she tried to access her asynchronous lab, found it impossible to navigate the system so that it fit within her schedule:

> "The professor said if we have some problem for essay, we can make appointments, then the English 94 teachers can help us to check. I was planning to make another appointment for tomorrow, but I didn't, because I saw the one person only can get a one time for each week. I think we should get more time, just the 1 hour, it doesn't work, because Sunday is my due for essay, if I get next week, it doesn't help me too much."

Jingyi described here several issues that plagued her: first, because her professor was not the same person who would be in the corequisite support course, she couldn't ask for clarification about the assignment. She didn't feel confident in her ability to email her professor to ask for clarification, because she had already done so several times and felt dissatisfied with the responses. Second, because the lab limited students to one hour a week, and she had already used her hour that week for another assignment, she couldn't make another appointment to get help with her essay. Because she worked full time at her family's restaurant, she didn't have time to access the in-person support services. Thus, the corequisite course which was designed to be a space for her to get extra help with her writing ended up being an additional frustration for her to

navigate. Cristiana and Jingyi's examples were both extremes, but together they paint an accurate picture: support services were still highly hit or miss at the college, and a student's experience in their mainstream English course was still more likely to be dependent on the quality of help their professor could provide, rather than the presence of these new corequisite courses.

Outside of academic help, the ESL Lab was a place for students to get help navigating the college's bureaucratic processes. Just like before A.B. 705, many students enrolled in one unit in the lab to qualify for financial aid. Financial aid questions in particular were a major reason that students came into the lab, because Sebastian, the ESL lab coordinator, had previously worked in the financial aid office and thus knew and could explain FAFSA and the DREAM Act, and sometimes would walk students through the process of filling out their application, or have another student help translate the application for them. Most of these students came to the lab after financial aid had turned them away or had met with them but the students hadn't understood what they were supposed to do. In fact, navigating financial aid was one of the major barriers that students consistently complained about in their interviews, and many times was the reason they either did or did not enroll in the college, thus slowing down their trajectory.

Aside from financial aid questions, many ESL students had larger questions about navigating the higher education system in general. For instance, many students didn't understand what a major was, or what it meant to choose one, and how that choice related to a future career. One day in late January 2023, I spent several hours in the lab personally with two young women from Mexico answering questions about the differences between an A.A., B.A., and M.A., and how those degrees translated into different careers. One of the women, Luz Marina, had previously been a dentist in Mexico and was planning to become a dental hygienist here. The

other one, Yesenia, was younger and had still not totally decided on a career track. Though she had interest in becoming an occupational therapist, she wasn't sure which majors would help her get to that career. I asked whether she had met with a counselor, and she said that she had, but that the counselor had just kept telling her to choose a major, and so she had chosen social science. During this conversation, she mentioned that she was trying to enroll in a nutritional science course because her counselor had recommended it as a general education requirement. She then asked a series of related questions, such as how to get a permission code to enroll in a course, what general education requirements even were, and whether she could take other courses to fulfill her requirements.

This is just one example of a very typical interaction that happened regularly in the ESL Lab. Many students even just doing their homework or participating in a speaking session would pepper in all kinds of questions related to navigating the college and higher education in general. Few students understood what "transfer" meant or what kinds of degrees they needed for specific jobs. When asked about where they intended to transfer, many said the local university because it was nearby, while others shrugged and said they would figure that out once they finished their A.A. or certificate. A shocking number of students thought that a bachelor's degree would be free like it was in their countries, and hardly any of them knew what student loans were, or how the financial aid process differed for a university.

Observing students in the ESL Lab corroborated many of the findings from the interview data. When asked about the biggest barriers that they faced at the college, almost all students said something related to a lack of institutional knowledge which caused them to either lose their funding, enroll in the wrong courses, or fail a course. Though students were unaware of this, the mandates from A.B. 705 exacerbated these issues. For instance, the students' unhelpful meetings

with counselors were mostly fueled by the fact that counselors at the college had caseloads of over 150 students to see, with generally between 30-40 appointments per day. A.B. 705 mandated that to increase transfer, students should meet with their counselors more often to confirm that they were on track to finish their major requirements within the shortened timeline. Counselors were told to help students finish quickly, and many times advised against ESL or gave incorrect information because there were so many curricular changes that the counselors couldn't keep up. A counselor meeting with a student like Yesenia wouldn't be able to explain what the different kinds of degrees are, what a major is, what a general education requirement is, how to get a permission code, and which courses to enroll in for the following semester in fifteen minutes.

Students thus valued ESL and the ESL Lab as places not only to improve their foundational English, but also to improve their institutional knowledge to help them navigate the college *and* learn how to navigate other institutions once they graduated. If not a lack of institutional knowledge, other students cited external factors, such as having children or working full time (or both) as preventing them from finishing in three years or enrolling in courses full time. Yasir, a student from Afghanistan who had been enrolled in both my ESL 325 and ESLW 340 courses, was highly motivated to finish his A.A. in computer science quickly and transfer to the local four-year university. He and his wife had just had a baby, and he was planning on transferring eventually, but could not give me a specific timeframe because he was uncertain about when he'd have enough time to study.

> "So my goal is to complete my major, my education. I know it's a little bit hard for me to work and control having family plus studying. It's a little bit hard, but I'm trying all my best to complete my major, which is computer science. For right now, I need to complete A.A. and then I have plan for B.A."

Despite these commitments, during the interview, Yasir still asked me whether I thought he should take ESL courses, because he felt his English still was not good enough to complete his transfer level courses. He said that the major skill he wanted to keep working on was speaking, and so he would consider taking a listening/speaking or grammar course or enrolling in a unit of the ESL lab even though he had finished the sequence. Like many other students, Yasir saw the ESL lab as a place where he could continue working on the number one barrier that he felt would harm his trajectory: his English skills. Though he and many other students cited external barriers which slowed down their trajectory or forced them to enroll part-time, the number one barrier that they were all concerned about was having English skills that wouldn't allow them to be successful once they left the program.

The idea that a lack of English skills could be a barrier for students contradicted A.B. 705, which was written with the assumption that *all* students are ready for transfer-level courses, regardless of background. As noted in Chapter 4, valuing non-transferable ESL courses which helped students with their English was like valuing remedial education for "underprepared students" which was an idea that theoretically no longer existed. A.B. 705 made allowances that students with lower-level English skills might need ESL to help them navigate their coursework, but didn't consider that students with higher-level English, like Kondwani or Nora might *still* need a semester or two of ESL to help them with their English. Sunita, an Indian student who had two master's degrees from her country, was married to an American who worked for the state. Though her English was very fluent, she enrolled in ESL classes not only to explore a new possible major, but also to provide her with foundational knowledge about the institution to help her determine whether she wanted to transfer and get an advanced degree in the U.S. or not. Her ultimate goal was to improve her English enough so that she could also get a job for the state,

and fully integrate herself into American life. She worked part-time, and though she frequently attended the lab to get additional help with her writing, had to stop attending when her schedule changed. Despite having completed ESL 325 and being eligible to enroll in transfer-level composition, she decided against it and ended up enrolling in the only ESL courses that fit with her schedule: the lowest-level listening/speaking course, and a grammar course two levels below hers. She felt that any English practice would be beneficial, because her biggest barrier to success was her English.

> "My goal for [community college] is not just to get the job…I say like the most barrier for my career and my life is English, because I can communicate…but the thing is whenever you want to express your feelings, your thoughts, your fear, that's the problem…I can learn, I can improve my base. That's the goal for now."

Sunita consistently referred to English as her "base" because it was the thing that she used to navigate her daily life in the U.S. Most students in their interviews noted that their biggest barrier to achieve whatever goal they had, outside of external factors or institutional navigation, was their English. It was the language they used to take other classes, to pick up their kids from school, and to work or interview for jobs. The ESL Lab was an additional touchpoint for students to work on their English on their own terms, by practicing conversation skills, or working through Burlington English in the presence of student tutors or faculty to answer any questions that they had. It was also a place where they could do their homework and ask for clarification on certain topics that they were struggling with in class. Though it didn't act as the corequisite support courses that the faculty were hoping for in the transition from four to six-unit courses after A.B. 705, the ESL lab was still a significant resource that students at all levels took advantage of to help them navigate institutional and academic barriers.

Changes from A.B. 705: Integrated Skills, Online Instruction, and Placement

Two of the major concerns faculty voiced about the implementation of A.B. 705 were that 1) the new integrated skills courses would be too much work or too challenging for students, especially for the lower levels, and 2) that the removal of the placement test coupled with emergency online instruction had caused several department-wide gaps within and between levels. Students, in contrast, did not find these issues to be prevalent. According to the survey, as Table 13 shows, most students who were enrolled in integrated skills courses (82%) described their experience as being either "not too difficult, not too easy" or "difficult, but manageable" both of which implied that they felt they were prepared and up for the challenge.

Table 13

Survey Participants' Perceptions of Integrated Skills by Level

Student Level	Too Easy	Too Difficult	Manageable
Upper (n = 29)	1	3	25
Lower (n = 44)	6	3	35
Total (n = 73)	7	6	60

A Chi-square test of independence found no statistically significant relationship between the level at which students were enrolled and their perception of the difficulty of the course: X^2 (2, n = 73) = 2.25, p = .324. Similarly, a student's enrollment in an ESL Lab section also had no statistically significant relationship with how they perceived the difficulty of their integrated skills courses: X^2 (2, n = 71) = 1.06, p = .59.

Interview findings corroborated these statistics, noting that students overall felt that there was an increase in workload, but that it was manageable and to be expected for an integrated skills course. In particular, students who had been present for the change in curriculum and went from separate reading and writing courses to newly integrated ones on the whole felt that the change was a vast improvement. Rahim, a student who had originally been placed at two separate levels (40 and 50) with the pre-A.B. 705 placement test in 2020, was now working as a tutor in the ESL center. He was enrolled in the most advanced ESL writing course, ESL 350, and wanted to transfer and eventually get a PhD in linguistics, honoring the memory of his father, who had been killed by the Taliban in Afghanistan when he was just a child. He noted that since the change in curriculum, he felt like his workload was lighter, because the reading and writing reinforced each other more clearly and it was easier to learn them both. He also noted that the change in units was beneficial for him, as this enabled him to enroll in multiple courses and more easily balance the workload:

> "In the reading [only] classes, still we have summarizing and there will be homework to write an essay or paraphrasing this topic. And so for writing [only] as well. When they combine it, it saves our time, and they change the hours from one hour to two hours. If we have one reading and writing, one listening or grammar, it's perfect."

Rahim was an extremely motivated student who described himself as someone who loved teaching and learning and volunteered for this interview because he felt passionate about being a student at the college. He felt strongly that the new integrated skills courses were better from a pedagogical perspective, as well as from a time management and workload management standpoint. Both of these together enabled him to focus more on learning English so he could have more availability to take another grammar or speaking course.

Though faculty themselves may have been feeling burnt out at the increase in workload that came with redesigning their courses and assigning more homework, students mostly did not

share this sentiment. One place where faculty and students did agree was in terms of the complicating factors of the pandemic and its effects on learning. According to the survey, interviews, and written samples, most students (61%) preferred in person classes over online teaching in all of their subjects (including outside of ESL) because they felt they could learn more in an in-person setting. Students gave a variety of reasons for this, including the ease with which they could make friends, practice their English, and ask the professor questions, all of which have been supported by other studies (Means, et al., 2014; Stewart, et al., 2022).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the high pass rates mentioned in Chapters 2 and 5, it appears that the majority of students found the integrated skills courses to be manageable even in an online environment. In the survey, students were asked to rank the difficulty of learning each individual skill level online, from "more difficult" to "about the same" to "less difficult". As Table 14 shows, the only skill which stood out to be more difficult than the others was speaking, with 56% of students indicating that they felt it was more difficult to take online than in person. The other skills – reading, writing, listening, and grammar – were all similarly ranked as having higher "about the same" rankings.

Table 14

Survey Participant Difficulty Rankings by Skill Level

Difficulty	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Listening	Grammar
More Difficult Online	32	38	58	37	43
Less Difficult Online	16	21	15	18	13
About the Same	54	44	30	45	46
Total	102	103	103	100	102

Interview and written data also supported the fact that the effectiveness of online instruction was dependent on which skill level and course students were enrolled in. Interestingly, there was a statistically significant difference between levels in terms of whether students indicated that they preferred in person courses or online courses, as Table 15 below shows. In fact, when disaggregated by upper or lower level, findings from the survey showed that lower-level students were much more likely to want in-person courses, whereas upper level students were more likely to want *online* courses. A Chi-square test of independence demonstrated that the relationship between level and preference for modality was statistically significant at the .01 level, X^2 (2, n = 95) = 42.31, p = 6.5E-10.

Table 15

Survey Participants' Preference for Course Modality by Level

Student Level	Online	In Person	Both
Upper (n = 33)	20	6	7
Lower (n = 62)	4	52	6
Total (n = 95)	24	58	13

Students' justifications for wanting in-person or online courses were not always tied to their learning preferences, however. In other words, many students noted in the survey as well as in their interviews or written work that their preference for online courses usually was one of convenience and ability rather than a belief that they could learn more online. Students also generally voiced the opinion that English proficiency should be considered with online course enrollment. Thus, many students described taking online integrated skills courses not only

because they felt reading and writing were able to be learned in an online environment, but also because they felt that their English was good enough that they could handle that heavier workload online. Alyona from Belarus was enrolled in ARC so that she could get her A.A. in accounting. She already had a job and had been working as an accountant virtually for a Russian company for many years but wanted an A.A. so she could get a better job at an American company. With her online work experience and schedule, she found it easy to take all of her advanced ESL courses online and balance her work with school. She felt that her reading skills had improved tremendously from her online courses, but that her major remaining weaknesses were speaking and writing.

> "I have some relatives who only but begin their college, and they have a very low English level. And I advise to them that if you have low level, you should go to campus. Because when you have a higher level, you can study online Zoom. But when you have low level, Zoom, it's totally not enough…Maybe I know grammar, but my speaking English and my writing English is not good."

Alyona's experience demonstrates how students can prefer online courses for certain subjects, but also understand that depending on a student's level or goals for learning, this may not be the right fit for everyone. Thus, even students who took all online courses, felt that they learned from them, and claimed to prefer online courses, also acknowledged their shortcomings when compared to in-person courses. In particular, students felt that once they reached a certain level they could switch to online courses, but up to that point they wanted to improve their foundational English enough so that they felt they could handle the increased workload that they knew would be expected from them at the higher levels. However, even students who spoke English at higher levels still had rough adjustments to learning online, or using the learning management system, Canvas, to complete their assignments. Many of them noted that this was something lacking in their larger institutional knowledge that took them at least one semester to

learn, and sometimes resulted in their getting a lower grade in a class because it took several weeks for them to learn the system. Taking longer to learn how to do their homework properly also resulted in their not being able to learn as much during the semester. Thus, students were also aware of the gaps in their abilities and their learning from taking online vs. in-person courses which the faculty had mentioned in Chapter 5.

Those students who had been around pre-A.B. 705 and made the switch to the integrated courses mostly felt that the new curricula were easier to manage, even in an online environment, but not because of the removal of timed writing or the additional help they could get from other people or technology online. Rather, students similarly appreciated the pedagogical reasoning of linking reading and writing together and noted that it was easier to learn simply because of the more intentional teaching they were now experiencing. However, while appreciative of the integrated and accelerated curriculum in some ways, students also expressed a desire to slow down at the lower levels and learn the basics before they pushed themselves into the upper levels of the program, addressing the main concern that faculty voiced in Chapter 5 about high pass rates in the lower levels leading to large gaps in ability at the higher levels.

The value that students placed on ESL as a resource to help them strengthen their foundational skills so that they could be successful outside of the college contributed to students' opinions about the new guided self-placement exam as well. Because most students wanted to focus on building their foundational English and used their own internal measurements of success rather than their progression through the ESL sequence, they had mixed feelings about the placement test. The interview participants who had been placed pre-A.B. 705 all reported that they felt their placement had been accurate in retrospect, even if they had resented it at the time. Students who were newer and had been placed using the new guided self-placement still reported

that they felt it was effective in their experience, but only at the higher level. Once again, they voiced strongly that they didn't think a guided self-placement test would work at the lower level, because newcomers with low English levels would be unfamiliar with the demands of an American academic institution and would not have the background knowledge to be able to place themselves accurately. Other research has supported this point, that students who are under-prepared linguistically or in terms of their writing skills are less likely to place themselves accurately because they've never been exposed to the expectations of college (Aull, 2021; Kanno, 2021). A few students even reported having relatives who were currently enrolled in lower-level ESL courses that were too difficult for them and were feeling discouraged from continuing in the program.

All in all, students characterized the placement test as a double-edged sword: one that was effective for higher level students and provided them with some autonomy but could potentially negatively impact lower-level students' trajectories if they placed themselves incorrectly. Ilya, a transfer-focused student from Russia who had been placed at the mid-intermediate level, described his primary reason for attending the college as improving his English so that he could transfer to a university. He felt the placement test had been very accurate for him, but expressed deep concern for students whose English or motivations for attending the college did not match his own:

> "I think [guided self placement] is pretty supportive, because people can decide which level they want, they need, and place in the right position. But at the same time, if student doesn't have pretty strong thoughts which level he should take, he can make mistakes, so I think it's something like a trap for some people."

Ilya's use of the word "trap" in describing an inaccurate placement for a lower-level student referenced the longer-term consequences that he felt an inaccurate placement could lead to. For

someone like Ilya, who stated that his goal was to think in English so that he could succeed once he transferred to the four-year university of his choice, a low-level placement could mean stagnation in his English level, making him feel "trapped" and stopped in his English-learning trajectory. Once again, students were most likely to characterize a lack of English knowledge or insufficient preparation in English as being their primary barrier to success.

A final effect of the guided self-placement test and A.B. 705 was the requirement that students' GPAs, high school course history, and diplomas be considered in the placement process. Generation 1.5 students who had graduated from a U.S. high school were generally discouraged from taking ESL and would instead be placed directly into transfer-level English. Only one interview participant, Farid, had moved to the U.S. from Iraq when he was fifteen and had graduated from high school here. In his literacy narrative, he described the struggles he faced knowing almost no English and trying to get through reading and writing assignments in high school while dealing with his ADHD and incessant bullying. He enrolled at the college in 2019, pre-A.B. 705 when high school graduation did not preclude a student from taking an ESL test. Though his speaking ability was fluent and he prided himself on sounding near-native, Farid's writing was still judged to be too simplistic and have too many grammatical mistakes to be passable. Despite having graduated from high school, Farid was placed at the lowest ESL level, 30, and worked his way up slowly through the years. In his writing assignments and during class he complained about being forced to take ESL, but when given the opportunity to switch to mainstream writing courses with the enactment of A.B. 705, refused. His number one reason was because he didn't feel prepared for mainstream courses:

> "The first reason [I stayed in ESL] is I didn't want to do like a big jump and then jump right away to regular English and then potentially get not a good grade…I kind of understand the structure of essays a little bit more…I now understand the structure of grammar, I understand the structure of how essays are done, how to add resources to my

> essays and all of those other things. I feel like my mindset is different. Like I see things differently."

Farid's stated fears about not wanting to make too big of a jump are supported trends in the literature as well. Studies have found that Generation 1.5 students are more likely to perform better in challenging transfer-level ESL courses, as they are in fact still language learners and need specialized feedback and grammar instruction (Bitchener & Knoch, 2008; Ferris, et al., 2013; Foin & Lange, 2007; Rodriguez, et al., 2022). Farid was my student in ESL 325 and ESLW 340, and then began working in the ESL lab as a tutor to help other students with their speaking ability. He had switched his major multiple times, and still frequently struggled with meeting the deadlines of his courses and completing his work. His current goal was to get an English proficiency certificate so that he could get a job and maybe think about getting an A.A. or B.A. later down the road. By the time he was in my advanced ESL courses, his writing ability was high enough that he could have switched to mainstream English, but he stayed in ESL because he felt he could learn more from those professors, in that community, and with those resources.

Though Farid was the only Generation 1.5 student I interviewed, he was not the only Generation 1.5 student who was enrolled in my classes, or who wrote about his decision to enroll in ESL. Other students who had completed high school in the United States similarly complained, as Farid, that they felt unprepared to take transfer-level English courses because their high school English Language Development (ELD) classes had not prepared them for college. Another student, Hasan, described in his literacy narrative that upon immigrating to the United States from Iran when he was 17 years old, he spoke no English, and was placed in ELD where he used his translator to complete all of his assignments. In his narrative, he noted that the only thing he really learned how to do was how to have conversations with people, mostly

through watching movies and talking with his classmates, but he still struggled with writing. The writing he did submit was largely informal, using mostly conversational English to communicate, with many grammatical and spelling errors.

Hasan was enrolled in my pre-transfer level ESL 325 course twice, in spring 2023 and fall 2023, and failed in spring due to a lack of time management skills because he also worked full time at a car dealership. In spring 2023, he also failed his nine-unit transfer-level math course and was placed on academic probation. In fall 2023 for the ESL 325 course, we met multiple times one-on-one, in Zoom meetings as well as during and after class, just so that he could earn a 77.5% on the final draft of his paper. In fall 2023, he was finally able to pass my ESL 325 course, but failed math again. He was dismissed from the college, and I'm unaware of whether he decided to re-enroll, but he wouldn't have been eligible for financial aid a second time.

Hasan is an example of a Generation 1.5 student who graduated from high school in the United States who struggled immensely with the demands of a six-unit and a nine-unit course. Despite only being enrolled in two courses, his math course required two lab sections, while the ESL 325 course required a minimum of twelve hours of homework per week, according to the curriculum requirements. Though he was eventually able to pass my course, the original double failure of both classes brought his GPA down low enough that even with passing my six-unit course, he was unable to raise his GPA enough to stay. In his final essay, he was one of the only students who argued *against* the bill. He noted that taking away remedial courses as a choice was what made his trajectory so much more challenging and difficult for him. Below is his writing, which I have not altered except to clarify which class he was talking about, to also illustrate the

kinds of errors he frequently made. He began by discussing his experience with failing his math course, and his subsequent frustration with a counselor:

> "Well for no reason I failed [my math] class, so that wouldn't be a good grade in my college scores. so I talked to my counselor and I told them I need a lower level. Also, my English is not very good, but they suggested that I take that class again with the support units, which would be 6 units the class by itself and 3 extra units for math support would be 9 units together. I accepted that idea and retook the class, well when I went through it, I felt the same way as the last semester and the counselor was unhelpful, and I failed again, so I felt I just needed help but I couldn't reach out to pass them or at least achieve better grades, well that was so awful. But AB 705 law says they took the remedial classes, and they added the support units, that can help the students to do better, but I would say no, because If I was able to go for lower level of class not only I wouldn't have failed, also, I could've learned more and be better for next level of math class, also, I graduated from here but I've had only 2 years of education in High School in the US, and I've had only one integrated math 120 in high school, well that was the easiest math in the high school."

In contrast, Hasan described that taking ESL 325 and not taking ENGWR 300 was a better decision for him, because he was able to finally learn after one year of taking courses at the college and feeling like it was too difficult:

> "Well after almost 1 year being in college I found my level, and started the ESL 325, oh my god that was the one I was looking for, because I literally I felt that the students and I are in the same path, so this class though me how to read and write or even though how we can practice to write an essay, everything was going well until I felt I'm getting better and now it's the time to going for English regular 300…I had the chance to save at least 1 year of my time, besides to start from zero for who graduate it from high school here, and now I could've be better and being in the right situation of the ESL classes level with better grades."

Hasan in his paper pointed out that starting with ESL saved him time, and with retaking the course and managing his time better, he was able to pass and complete the work to move on to ENGWR 300, when he finally felt ready. One of the biggest reasons why he kept failing his math classes was because of his English level – he was still using a translator just to be able to understand the language of most of the math problems he was answering. In contrast, he was happy to take ESL, because he felt he could go step by step and learn from that course, rather

than try to put himself in transfer-level mainstream English. Though his predicament seemed extreme at the time, he was not the only Generation 1.5 student who struggled with writing in the same way. Most of the students who elected to take ESL and were enrolled in my classes noted that their nine-unit math classes were extremely challenging to pass, especially because their high school math classes had not prepared them for what they were facing. ESL was rarely the biggest problem – although transfer-level ESL was certainly a challenge – and most Generation 1.5 students were able to pass either the first or second time. Rather, the math course, and the push from counselors to take stacked course loads with corequisite courses, were what caused the most problems for students who would have preferred to go more slowly and learn the material more carefully.

Students mostly felt positive about the changes that were enacted because of A.B. 705. They were in support of an integrated reading and writing course because they could not only go through the sequence more quickly, but they could also learn reading and writing together, and the skills could reinforce each other. Though the presence of emergency remote instruction was unavoidable and came with its own challenges, particularly with the listening/speaking courses and for lower-level students, students mitigated those effects by slowing down the pace with which they took classes, or seeking help from support services.

However, the two students who were generation 1.5 and had gone through the U.S. high school system did *not* feel prepared for transfer-level courses and chose to place themselves in ESL to try to give themselves more time to improve. Kanno (2021) similarly argued that most students in sheltered or separated English-learning programs in American high schools were unprepared for post-secondary education *or* careers, mostly because those programs were not rigorous enough to prepare students for college. Other researchers like Uretsky, et al. (2021)

similarly noted that without a system in place for secondary and post-secondary institutions to work together, so that high schools *could* effectively prepare students for college, removing remedial education from under-prepared students would not translate to higher student success. Though it's difficult to generalize with only two students' experiences, it's clear that these two students enjoyed the fact that they could opt to take ESL so that they could learn at their own pace.

The only change from A.B. 705 that all students did not feel was helpful was the implementation of guided self-placement, which they all felt could have negative consequences for starting lower students at too high of a level and thus harming their trajectory. In all, because students identified one of their main goals for enrolling in the college as improving their English to either transfer or get a job, one of their biggest fears and perceived barriers was that their English wouldn't improve enough for them to be able to tackle those challenges on their own. Students were happy with the changes that A.B. 705 brought because they saw them as symbolizing a lot more than just an accelerated curriculum, but rather as an introduction of student autonomy into a system where they largely felt powerless to make their own choices.

A.B. 705 as Student Autonomy

In my own ESL 325 and ESLW 340 courses, I assigned students many articles written about A.B. 705 by other researchers and scholars which provided justifications and explanations for its implementation. Students then wrote persuasive research papers arguing whether A.B. 705 was helpful or harmful for ESL students. Some participants, like Yasir or Farid, took both of those courses with me and thus wrote those papers twice, but using different articles to support their ideas. Thus, for this section I will rely on the interviews and written essays of those

participants who knew what A.B. 705 was prior to the interview (n = 17), and shared their opinions about it either in writing or in the interview.

By and large, students were very positive about A.B. 705 in their essays. This was partly because the majority of articles that students read and used for their research papers were largely in favor of the bill, but even during class discussions before reading these articles students felt strongly that the bill would help them. Most of them argued that it was helpful for ESL students because it allowed them to get out of college faster so that they could transfer and thus get a bachelor's degree more quickly out of the sequence. For instance, Amina, a student from Afghanistan who had taken adult school before enrolling in community college so she could transfer to a university, characterized A.B. 705 in her essay as allowing her to take advanced courses:

> "For example, I started the college from ESL 315. That is what I think that I deserved, because I had had the basic skills…If I placed in the lower levels, I had to study again what I had studied in high school in my home country and adult school in the U.S. Therefore, I think AB 705 let the students to be in the right levels and be transferred faster."

Here, Amina was happy that AB 705 "let" her surpass the lower levels and gave her the choice to enroll at a higher level so that she could move more quickly towards her goal. She also characterized herself as someone who "deserved" the higher placement, because she had taken adult school and had been studying English for a long time. Yet, in her interview, Amina elaborated on how this autonomy *also* allowed her to take additional, non-required ESL courses:

> "I like really AB 705, and it helped me a lot, because I sometimes think that if I was placed in the lower classes now I might not able to get the non-ESL classes. Because I have kids, I have family issues, and it would make me...I'm under the time to get the non ESL classes. And one thing that also helped me, that right now I'm also taking the ESL classes, even though I'm not required to get them. But the AB 705 has allowed me to take it."

In her interview, she cited her external barriers, such as family and kids, which she felt would have made finishing her degree without A.B. 705 much more difficult. She credited her high placement, and her ability to choose to enroll in higher level classes, as enabling her to take non-ESL classes more quickly. However, she also noted that because she was able to get to her major courses, she could actually have more time to spend taking ESL classes for fun. She noted in her literacy narrative as well as her interview that learning English for fun was a major goal of hers for enrolling in the college alongside her desire to get a bachelor's in business.

Students valued A.B. 705 as a bill that they felt enabled them to go at their own pace. This was quite the opposite of how the bill was designed, or how faculty felt, given that they were forced to shorten their sequence to the prescribed six-levels to enable students to graduate in three years. However, students also felt that inherent in A.B. 705 was a definition of which kinds of students were eligible or belonged at community college: upper-level students, who were academically minded. Thus, many students believed that lower-level students needed to go to adult school before enrolling in college so that they could build up their skills before learning academic English. For instance, Samad was a student from Afghanistan who completed one semester of ESL with me and then had to drop out to take care of his son. He was working as a realtor and wanted to eventually get an A.A. and maybe transfer but didn't know when that would happen. Though a bright student, he struggled in his first and only semester at the college with adjusting to the deadlines, homework, and student expectations at the college, and almost failed my course. Yet, he still felt very strongly that community college was a place for students with higher English levels to attend:

> "Colleges are like academic places, they are not adult schools. In the past the colleges were like adult schools, people were coming to the colleges, learning English from the scratch. When someone goes to the college, it's kind of academic place after the high school. That's why it's the job of the adult schools, English language institutions, to teach

> basics. So once someone is prepared for the college they have to like, come directly and enroll at the college and get the necessary or advanced or intermediate English classes, not the basic ones, not the elementary classes."

Though not all students felt as strongly as Samad, the majority of students (including ones who had previously attended adult school) felt that community college was an academic institution meant only for students who had a certain caliber of English. This was in direct contrast to faculty members, who felt immense frustration at the removal of the lower 20 level and felt that community college should be a place that served the community, rather than only as an academic institution. Given that many students wanted to slow down and take their time to build up their foundational English at the college and felt English was the most important thing they needed to improve, this attitude was shocking. My initial interpretation of Samad's thought process was that he (and many other students) felt that lower-level students were not academically minded, or did not deserve to attend community college. That somehow, because their English was not high enough, community college should not have to cater to them, and that they weren't good enough to try to achieve a higher education.

However, upon interviewing Amina, I realized that this attitude had more to do with students' experiences attending adult school, learning English, and their overall perceptions of community college than a judgment of lower-level students. Amina, who felt that A.B. 705 provided her with more choices to take ESL and non-ESL courses on her own terms, explained that after six months of adult school upon arriving in the United States, she had improved certain skills, but not others:

> "When I came to the United States, I felt the necessity to learn English to speak with the people, communicate fluently with people, understand them, and they could understand me. So I started at adult school, but I really love to get academic qualifications. So I started in community college. For grammar, I learned a lot in adult school. But for writing, some reading, it wasn't helpful for me at all."

Amina had always intended on getting her academic qualifications, and so first enrolled in adult school to build up her basic skills, such as speaking and grammar. However, she hadn't improved in her reading or writing skills, and so decided to enroll in community college when she felt she had improved her skills enough. She had always envisioned getting an advanced degree eventually but saw adult school as a place where she could prepare herself for the more rigorous academic expectations that the college required, especially in two specific skills that she wanted to improve: reading and writing.

Some faculty were worried that reading and especially writing were now being over-privileged as skills in the newly revised curriculum, and from the student interviews, it seems that that was the case. Most interviewees felt that the main skills that they were still struggling with were listening, speaking, and grammar, but that they had mostly mastered writing and reading. However, few students dismissed listening, speaking or grammar as being unnecessary, and in fact, many times would return to the ESL sequence just to take those courses. Quang, a student from Vietnam whose primary goal in attending the college was to get a job and eventually take the TOEFL, acknowledged that his main goals had been reading writing, but now that he'd finished the program, his new goal was speaking and pronunciation:

> "Actually, I want to improve like the speaking class to improve my pronunciation, because some words I didn't pronounce well. But right now I work for full time job, so I don't have too much time to attend them. But my priority was writing and reading because it really help for daily help for me in working. I had to do like paperwork and reading the paper and report to the manager every week. So I had to writing a lot."

In fact, after taking my ESLW 340 course, Quang thanked me for teaching him how to write academically, because during the interview for his new full-time job, he had been required to compose a professional email which he was able to do after emailing back and forth with me. In asking most students if they felt prepared for their mainstream English courses or careers, almost

all of them said they felt more confident in their writing skills, and less confident in either their speaking, grammar, or reading skills. Reading and writing then may have been over-privileged in the new revised curricula, but students certainly were not discounting the other skills as they went about their daily lives living in the U.S.

The pandemic may have also played a role in students' feelings about their speaking skills. As previously reported, students felt that the most difficult skill to learn online was speaking, and this was something that many of the faculty also said was the most difficult skill to teach online. Therefore, it's unclear whether students' relative discomfort with their listening and speaking skills after leaving the program had more to do with its lack of emphasis in the curricular sequence due to A.B. 705, or with the fact that it was very challenging to effectively learn how to speak or practice English in a fully remote classroom.

There were a few students in particular who wrote vehemently against A.B. 705, and those were mostly students who had either failed a course themselves, or wanted to slow down their own learning trajectory but didn't feel they could due to the bureaucratic limits in place. Those students did *not* characterize A.B. 705 as a choice, but rather as a *lack* of one. Hasan, the Generation 1.5 student who had failed his math course twice and was subsequently dismissed from the college, was extremely frustrated with the bill:

> "When I started in community college, I only could have taken algebra 333 as my first math class, since there were no classes lower than that provided, I felt I'm not understanding the math problems, but people think to just starting with a transferable math class and not having a choice to decide for their education level would be a good thing, well in my opinion I would say no, because imagine you going to a class and you can't understand what they want from you, and you fail the class and just losing score/GPA and makes you having a bad grade history to have a less chance to drop your other classes."

His biggest frustration was that as a language learner still struggling to learn the language, he had no options to go lower than transfer-level math. His English was not good enough, but his

counselor told him to enroll, and he felt that he didn't have a choice. At just twenty years old, he didn't have the maturity or confidence to ignore the counselor's advice, despite having a mother who had gone through the ESL sequence herself a few years before. Thus, for students who were burned by A.B. 705, who would have considered themselves "under-prepared" for a college transfer-level math course and who didn't know how to ignore a counselor's advice, A.B. 705 was not a choice, but rather a lack of one.

Conclusion: A.B. 705 Helps Adult Immigrants

The findings from this chapter call into question many of the stated underlying reasons for implementing A.B. 705. The biggest assumption to be challenged in existing literature is the belief that all community college ESL students want to transfer, and that the reason that lower-level students were less likely to transfer was because of the long course sequencing (Hayward, 2020; Park, 2019; Rodriguez, et al., 2019). The results from the survey, student interviews, and student writing samples indicate that while students encountered many other external barriers to transferring in three years or less, lower-level ESL courses was not one of them. In fact, according to the survey results, lower-level students were less likely to want to transfer and were more likely to write "maybe" as the answer to that question with the simple explanation that they weren't quite sure whether transferring to a four-year university was something they wanted to do. Though some might argue that the implementation of A.B. 705 may have removed long course sequencing as a barrier to completion and that was why students did not list it in their reasoning, this still would not explain the large number of students who selected "maybe" as their answer regarding whether they wanted to transfer. Students still mentioned many other barriers that, even after the implementation of A.B. 705, prevented them from finishing their degree in the three-year timeframe. In fact, only one of the students who participated in the

interview was actually able to complete her degree in the three-year timeframe, and she attributed her success to the fact that she didn't have kids or a job.

Furthermore, the findings from this chapter imply that students not only valued their ESL courses but saw English as their primary barrier that could prevent them from succeeding once they transferred to a four-year institution. Students were more likely to enroll in extra non-required ESL courses than they were to skip out of the sequence altogether, and even those students who did leave the sequence acknowledged the role that their ESL courses or the lab had played in their success in their mainstream English courses. Taking both findings into account, it seems more than likely that there are other explanations for low completion rates among lower-level ESL students. For instance, it's possible that lower-level students who wanted to improve their English before they decided about transferring to a four-year institution might take their time while deciding on a major and learning about how to navigate the institution of higher learning. It's also possible that ESL students with children, or a job, or both, might enroll part-time in courses and take their time to build up their foundation of English, and may get their A.A. and a job rather than transferring to a four-year institution. Some students may have taken five or six years to transfer, dropping out and coming back to the college multiple times due to external circumstances which had nothing to do with ESL or their ability but more to do with their health, their family, their jobs, or personal traumatic events that may have happened to them.

These students are resilient, optimistic, and driven to achieve their goals. In a bill that has defined success in terms of a three-year limit to transfer to a four-year institution, students see possibilities and agency where faculty see narrow limits. This is not to disregard either experience or opinion – as a faculty member myself, I am inclined to see A.B. 705 as a limiting

and narrow-minded bill and was shocked to see students define it in terms of choice and autonomy to learn at the pace that they wanted. Perhaps the most interesting finding is that students have seen a choice where they were told there wasn't one by the college. Rather than seeing A.B. 705 as a bill that limited their possibilities to three years or defined success as transfer to a university, they defined success in their own way and saw the bill as enabling them to speed up and slow down the processes that they wanted to. Rather than see prescriptive lists of courses that they had to take for majors to get out as fast as they could, students saw opportunities to learn and explore and improve their English in the ways that they wanted. ESL was there for them in many different ways – as their integrated skills courses, as supplemental grammar or listening/speaking courses, or as a lab supplement to practice their conversational English or keep practicing their grammar. In this way, students *did* use the bill as a mode of self-discovery, which was what the faculty had intended all along.

Though the pandemic played a role in student experiences, this was unavoidable and not necessarily related to the implementation of A.B. 705, except in the fact that its implementation coincided with the pandemic, complicating an already difficult transition. Though students had strong opinions about online education, this once again did not stop them from making the most of the situation and trying to learn despite a global pandemic. Students' goals for enrolling in community college ESL were multifaceted, and so they maneuvered and prioritized certain courses and skills and personalized their learning trajectories for themselves, even through a pandemic. Despite stakeholders at the college telling students that ESL was a waste of time, and that they should enroll directly into their mainstream and major courses, students made that decision for themselves, and judged ESL to be invaluable not only for improving their English,

but for allowing them to adjust to the formal education system that they would need to navigate if they did end up transferring.

Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusion

Discussion

Throughout this study, I set out to answer my five research questions which I posed in Chapter 3, which I will now summarize in this discussion and conclusion. I will discuss the implications of these findings, both for faculty and community college educators as well as policymakers.

The first research question was *What are ESL students' stated reasons and goals for attending community college and enrolling in ESL?* Unsurprisingly, students stated multiple reasons for enrolling in community college, as well as ESL, but there were significant patterns to note in their answers. There was a statistically significant relationship between a student's level – being either upper or lower – and their desire to transfer, with lower-level students being more likely to indicate "maybe" with upper-level students more likely to indicate "yes." When asked to explain their reasoning, students who chose "maybe" were most likely to note that they just weren't sure of whether they wanted a four-year degree, whereas students who chose "yes" or "no" had considered their options and were making the decision based on their career trajectories, or their other personal commitments. Time to degree was not something that students mentioned as a barrier, but during their interviews and in their writing, students consistently noted that they felt that their English level was a barrier in their personal, professional, and academic lives. Most students elected to take ESL because they wanted to improve their English, as they saw a clear relationship between their English ability and whatever other stated goals they had noted were significant for them to achieve at the college.

The second research question was, *What are the perceptions and experiences of students, faculty, staff, and administrators in a community college ESL program following the enactment*

of AB 705? While faculty and staff on the whole had more negative opinions of the bill and its implementation due to the lack of institutional support they felt in making those changes on a short timeline, students felt more positively that the new courses faculty had designed were well-implemented. In terms of the placement test, faculty liked that their in-house assessment that they had fought to keep was more guided than the completely online one being used in the rest of the district. However, both faculty and students had general distrust of a guided self-placement test, especially for lower-level students, because of the lack of institutional knowledge and English that they had. Both faculty and students felt the integrated skills courses were more pedagogically sound and allowed more effective teaching of reading and writing skills, but with the increase in units, faculty felt pressured to pass students because of enrollment and financial aid. Furthermore, the reduction of units in the listening/speaking and grammar courses translated to a devaluing of those skills in the curriculum, and both students and faculty acknowledged that they felt the gap in abilities that had resulted from this reduction of units.

The removal of the lowest level of ESL, the 20 level, was something the students and faculty fundamentally disagreed about. Faculty felt that this removal was harmful and created situations in which the new lowest-level course, the 30 level, was now serving students with a wide range of skills, with a much more rigorous curriculum than originally intended. Students mostly felt that this removal was fine and noted that adult schools would make up for this deficit. However, without a placement test to prevent students from taking the 30 level, faculty had no recourse to prevent students from enrolling, and so much of the responsibility and additional labor fell to them to hold the line at the lower level. Additionally, many students felt that they could make up for any deficit caused by the removal of the 20 level by enrolling in the ESL lab. The ESL lab was seen by both students and faculty as an important touchstone and place for

students to go to get additional help, but many times felt that they couldn't make up the deficit if it was too big. Faculty and support staff thus felt more burnt out at having to provide additional support, and students felt more frustrated at having the onus put on them to access those services themselves.

In answer to the second sub-question, *What are participants' perceptions of how the pandemic has impacted their experiences?*, it's clear that all participants – students and faculty – felt that the pandemic exacerbated issues that A.B. 705 had already introduced. The sudden need to move non-piloted integrated skills courses online meant that timed writing, once a major metric to demonstrate student learning, was removed from the courses. Faculty's inner metrics for how to assess student writing were skewed, and with a new curriculum and set of standards, coupled with feelings of burnout, isolation, and pressure to pass students, completion rates went up when they were expected to go down due to the rigorous curriculum and abrupt shift to emergency remote instruction. Students noted in their survey that the integrated skills courses were more convenient to take online, but when given the chance, in-person classes created more opportunities for learning, especially for lower-level students. Listening/speaking and grammar courses, which had already been de-emphasized in the new curriculum, were experiencing lower enrollment because students noted that speaking was one of the most difficult skills to learn online. Corequisite courses, like ENGWR 94 or the ESL Lab, which were supposed to help students adjust to these new elevated expectations, were moved online and provided additional barriers for students to get the help they so desperately needed. Large gaps within and between student levels that might have existed because of the new implementation of unpiloted curricula were widened due to the nature of emergency online instruction.

These perceptions and experiences that faculty and students shared were closely connected to their ideologies and values. In answer to *What are the ideologies and values of various participants at this California community college concerning higher education and ESL?*, it's clear that while the college and bills themselves did not necessarily value ESL, the students and faculty did. Students valued ESL as a department where they could work with language-teaching professionals who could effectively help them with their greatest perceived barrier to success: their English. Furthermore, students felt ESL courses helped them adjust to American college expectations, even for those students who came to the U.S. fluent in English. While students did not necessarily dislike the mainstream English courses, and many of them had positive things to say about their professors, they acknowledged overall that ESL was an important steppingstone for them to eventually be successful in those other courses, and without it they struggled more. Both students and faculty defined community college in terms of what it was not: adult school. While faculty saw community college as an academic program where students could transfer or get an A.A. if desired, they resented the three-year timeline and narrow definition of success that the bills provided. Instead, faculty wanted students to have the space to discover themselves, and take their time to learn the concepts, especially if that's what they wanted.

Students in contrast overall felt that A.B. 705 provided them with more autonomy, and defined community college as a place for academically minded students with advanced English to complete a degree and transfer to a university. The acceleration represented to students an ability to get certain requirements out of the way early so that they could study what they wanted. However, this was only true for students who were older, better prepared to succeed, or who were comfortable ignoring the advice of counselors. Generation 1.5 students, and younger

students who had gone through the American high school system, described feeling frustrated at the lack of power they had to take lower-level classes, and resented the fact that their high school education had not prepared them for transfer-level English and math. They largely felt that A.B. 705 was restrictive and made them waste time taking large-unit classes and failing them multiple times rather than starting lower and succeeding the first time.

Overall, many of the enactments on the ground, as well as the ideologies that students and faculty expressed, were tied closely to the larger ideologies that were manifested in the policy and curricular documents. To address my final question, *How are those ideologies and values manifested in policy and curricular documents?*, the policy documents worked to restrict the power of placement testing and thus the power of colleges to make decisions about whether students were prepared for transfer-level coursework or not. Instead, the documents relied upon high school GPAs, transcripts, and course history of students to be able to place themselves into transfer-level coursework, with high support if needed. Thus, the policies removed a previous issue that community colleges had been attempting to fight, which was the issue of students being unprepared for college-level work out of high school, and instead focused on trying to address the issue of low completion and transfer rates into four-year universities. In doing so, the policies made assumptions about the abilities of all students who could enroll in community college: that they were all suddenly prepared for transfer-level work, and with enough support services, could fast-track their way to a four-year degree.

ESL was an afterthought in the creation of the bills, and it was an afterthought in the implementation of the bill. No data collection procedures were mandated for ESL students, and there was no accountability measure put in place to determine whether ESL students were benefiting or not from this sudden change in curriculum and placement practices. The policy

documents largely reflected a "one language, one nation" (Piller, 2015) ideology that assumed linguistic homogeneity of all the students enrolled at community college, when the opposite has historically been true (Matsuda, 2006; Mellow & Heelan, 2008). In redesigning the curricular documents, ESL faculty, though they attempted to fight this assumption, also were pressured to insert "academic rigor" into their coursework to prove that it could qualify as transfer-level. Thus, the new curriculum was made more rigorous, with more focus on academic writing, and with vaguer student learning outcomes to provide faculty with more leeway in how to interpret whether students met those outcomes. Listening/speaking and grammar, essential skills for students to learn to be successful in their course work, were reduced in units and made to fill in additional educational gaps that the integrated skills courses could not. The ESL lab was also made to act as a corequisite course and pick up the pieces based on what students could achieve, but this did not come to pass due to the pandemic.

All together, these findings raise many questions in terms of how effective this policy actually was in accomplishing its stated goal: to increase student success in terms of completion and transfer rates. First, it's clear from the student data that their reasons for not completing or transferring within a three-year timeline had little to do with the lower-level ESL courses that they were taking, and more to do with personal barriers, such as work, kids, family, or desire to complete or transfer. Though students of course didn't want to languish in community college for several years, almost none of them – even the highest-achieving students who placed high in the sequence – would be able to complete their degree in three years. Students also elected to slow down their trajectories to continue working on their English, taking "optional" listening/speaking and grammar courses once they had finished their integrated skills courses because they were dissatisfied with their own English levels.

Second, it's also clear that students *felt* unprepared for their transfer-level coursework, even if the bill claimed that they weren't. This lack of preparation took many forms: lack of institutional knowledge, lack of English knowledge, or lack of understanding of the American education system overall. Many students weren't prepared to put in the amount of time necessary to take twelve units, while other students weren't prepared for the amount of coursework that was now expected of them in the new six-unit integrated skills courses. Even students who were prepared at a lower level once they went to the next or left the ESL sequence felt unprepared for the sudden increase in homework or expectations. For this reason, students valued having the time to take their ESL courses, get college credit for them and keep their financial aid, and go at their own pace so that they could succeed once they left the sequence.

Third, for Generation 1.5 students, it's clear that encouraging them to skip ESL is a gross oversimplification of the skills and desires of that population as a whole. I do not doubt that there were certain Generation 1.5 students who went directly into transfer-level composition and performed well, maybe even learning more in that course than they would have in an ESL course. But to argue that *all* students with a U.S. high school diploma, despite their previous grades or language level, are prepared for transfer-level coursework, is honestly irresponsible. Many researchers argue that giving students the ability to take and fail and retake a course that is too difficult for them will help them learn that material (Lowe & Hetts, 2023), and while this may be true for some, it isn't true for all. Many students, like Hasan or Farid, fear failure more than they fear wasting their time, and failing courses that they are told are "entry level" and therefore should be passable by anybody can have severe effects on their self-esteem. Aside from that, failing a course can have detrimental consequences for their financial aid and possibly their ability to ever get an A.A. I think if given the option, most students would rather take a little

extra time to get an A.A. and have it paid for than lose the opportunity to ever get an A.A. because they lost their financial aid eligibility.

Maybe completion rates and transfer rates were high originally due to skewed results from the pandemic, (Bulman & Fairlie, 2022; Rodriguez, et al., 2022), but completion and success rates once students transfer to university are still quite low (Community College Research Center; Velasco, et al., 2024). This calls into question the effectiveness of a bill that essentially leads to nowhere. Professor John Almy, one of the first and most outspoken faculty against A.B. 705, titled his opinion editorial "The Fast Lane to Nowhere" and predicted this precise problem: once students complete, will they suddenly be prepared for university? Or, is the true impetus of this bill perhaps one to sort out those who can achieve at an accelerated rate from those who can't? By raising entry-level course units so that failing one course might have a higher impact on a student's GPA, it wouldn't be far-fetched to argue that A.B. 705 does the opposite of provide "equity" and "inclusion" but rather sorts those who can succeed from those who can't very early in the enrollment process.

It's clear that the proponents of A.B. 705 and 1705 were trying to solve a problem that they felt needed to be solved. However, the way in which they went about it, by overhauling the curriculum and trying to unify California community colleges so that they are more streamlined and in-line with one another, is part of a long history of ineffective reform changes in public schools. Tyack & Cuban (1995) in their book, *Tinkering Towards Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform* noted that much of the decision-making surrounding education has come from a business and budgetary perspective rather than one rooted in pedagogy or effective teaching. Primarily, the authors noted that this business-mindset generally comes with demands for accountability in the form of data collection, but without consistent or effective follow-through

when enacted on the ground. Furthermore, the authors noted that schools have a history of wanting to revolutionize the performance of low-achieving students by contracting them out to business corporations, to create more "efficiency" and "accountability." There are also tendencies to make teaching into a business, and create more top-down programs, with clear instruction manuals to further streamline the education process. Though we aren't using private corporations to contract out the lowest-performing students, we *are* using external tutoring, corequisite courses, and other professionals within the system to help them, but putting the onus on students to seek that help. A.B. 705 has certainly created certain top-down pedagogical rules, with clear instruction manuals about how to collect data and teach students, and which students to teach.

A.B. 705 and 1705 were just the first steps towards a much larger reform that has taken California community colleges by storm. The reform is called Vision 2030, and according to the Chancellor's Office (CCCCO), it is, "a collaborative action plan that provides focus, equity, and direction to our community colleges. It guides field practice, removes barriers, fosters policy reform, and supports college implementation. And it responds to technological and environmental changes facing our community while holistically addressing the needs of colleges and students" (CCCCO, Vision 2030). The specific outcomes of the program are of course to improve completion rates, but also to help with bachelor's attainment, student support, and community college access to "underserved Californians." The project is once again well-meaning, and just like A.B. 705 and 1705, has a lot of potential to revolutionize education for community college students. But again, the question comes with the *implementation* of this program. Will CCCCO provide substantial training, resources, time, and money to help community colleges implement these changes? Or will community colleges, desperate for

funding and with inadequate support, continue using data collection procedures which maintain "accountability" but hide large data patterns from the public eye? In addition to demanding accountability from educators, we need more accountability from the larger governing bodies approving these policies and mandating these changes in the community college system to ensure they are enacted responsibly and equitably.

Conclusion

Examining how large-scale policies are enacted on the ground shows an inside look into how the "soup is made" so to speak. Many policies are written to serve specific populations and create certain outcomes, usually towards fostering equity and inclusion. However, how they are interpreted and implemented by multiple stakeholders (districts, administrators, faculty, and support staff) is out of the control of the policymakers. ESL students who were adult immigrants, had higher levels of English, few personal commitments, and the ability to access multiple support services, benefitted from A.B. 705. However, it's likely that those students would have completed their degree before the implementation of the bill, anyway, and were not necessarily the target population that the bill was trying to help. Faculty, on the other hand, felt burnt out, isolated, and frustrated by the changes wrought by the bill. Being "on the front lines," as many educators characterize it, depicts teachers as being soldiers who are the first to feel the brunt of a battle and many times will suffer the highest casualties. In the case of this bill and its implementation, the faculty at NCCC were indeed the ones to feel the largest force of A.B. 705 and 1705 but did the best they could and bore those changes with grace to try to provide the best possible education for their students.

The implications for this research affect policymakers and educators. It's clear that providing funding based on student "achievement" or other metrics like "completion rates" with

programs like No Child Left Behind in fact has the opposite effect of providing equity and inclusion (Darling-Hammond, 2012; Guisbond et al., 2013). Instead, researchers like Tyack & Cuban (1995) note that effective reforms tend to come from *within* rather than outside. In particular, better outcomes come from reflective practitioners and stakeholders within the colleges. Because community colleges are situated within specific communities, and serve populations as widely varied as universities, creating large-sweeping, uniform changes will likely serve only a small portion of those students at best. Instead, more effective policies would give individual colleges more freedom to enact changes that best serve their populations and provide more funding that isn't conditional on certain outcomes. Even providing materials and guidance in a more individualized manner with more staff members on the ground to help with implementation would better serve the faculty, administrators, and students.

For administrators and educators, especially in ESL, it's clear that feeling the support of other faculty, administrators and staff members had a significant impact on faculty members' abilities to do their jobs effectively. Instituting practices like group grading or providing stipends for adjuncts to attend more faculty meetings like the ESL Retreat in January 2020, can create a more unified and cohesive department. All colleges are different and serve a wide variety of populations with differing needs, but providing and leaning on as many resources as possible to weather these changes made a huge difference for faculty at NCCC. More prepared and supported faculty were able to teach more effectively and aid their students more because their own needs were taken care of first. If policies like A.B. 705 and 1705 are going to ask faculty to shoulder more of a burden and put extra work in to help all students complete their coursework, then it's important to provide faculty with the support they need so that they can afford to provide extra services. As the saying goes, you can't pour from an empty cup, you must fill your

own cup first. To that I say, can't faculty *and* students have full cups? Policymakers need to ensure that faculty's cups are full – to the brim! – before asking us to pour additional water into our students' cups.

It's clear that students do value going one step at a time and being provided with more space to work on their individual skills. At NCCC, students highly valued their ESL courses not only because they were credit and therefore could be used for financial aid, but also because they led directly into a transfer pathway. This, along with the inclusion of integrated skills courses, was an effective change brought by A.B. 705. Instituting more support services like the ESL Lab where students can enroll in additional units to practice particular skills or connect with other students or faculty can provide invaluable experiences. Additionally, it's important to provide more in-person courses for certain skills like listening/speaking and for students with lower levels of English before they get to the higher levels. Finally, even for students who seem fluent in English, even taking one ESL course can make the difference between a passing and failing grade when students get to mainstream English, just to help them adjust to the expectations of the American educational system. Giving students more *options* to make choices about where they want to be – either ESL or mainstream English – without *mandating* that students take certain courses, will probably result in higher completion rates and happier students and faculty.

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Appendix A: ESL Student Survey

Q1 Thank you for taking this survey! This survey is a group of questions about your thoughts and experiences as an ESL Student at NCCC. This survey should not take longer than 10 minutes to complete. If you have questions about this research project, please contact Sabina Simon at **********.

Q2 Which ESL Courses are you currently taking? Please select all.

- ☐ ESLG 31 Grammar (1)
- ☐ ESLL 31 Listening and Speaking (2)
- ☐ ESL 37 (3)
- ☐ ESLG 41 Grammar (4)
- ☐ ESLL 41 Listening and Speaking (5)
- ☐ ESL 47 (6)
- ☐ ESLG 51 Grammar (7)
- ☐ ESLL 51 Listening and Speaking (8)
- ☐ ESL 55 (9)
- ☐ ESLG 310 Grammar (10)
- ☐ ESLL 310 Listening and Speaking (11)
- ☐ ESL 315 (12)
- ☐ ESLG 320 (13)
- ☐ ESLL 320 Listening and Speaking (14)
- ☐ ESL 325 (15)
- ☐ ESLR 340 Reading (16)
- ☐ ESLW 340 Writing (17)
- ☐ ESL 350 (18)

Q3 Are you currently enrolled in an ESL Lab class?

- ○ Yes (1)
- ○ No (2)

Q19 What is your major?

_____

Q4 Which country are you from?

_____

Q5 How long have you been living in the United States?

- Less than one year (1)
- 1-2 years (2)
- 2-5 years (3)
- 5-10 years (4)
- More than 10 years (5)

Q6 How many semesters have you taken English classes at NCCC or another Community College?

- This is my first semester (1)
- 2 semesters (2)
- 3 semesters (3)
- 4 semesters (4)
- 5 semesters (5)
- 6 semesters (6)
- 7 semesters (7)
- More than 7 semesters (8)

Q7 Why are you taking English classes here? Please select all reasons that apply.

- ☐ I need to get a job (1)
- ☐ I have a job and want to get a better job (2)
- ☐ I have a good job but need better English for my work (3)
- ☐ I have children and need to speak English for their school and other needs (4)
- ☐ I enjoy learning English and am taking classes for fun (5)
- ☐ I want to transfer to a four-year university and need academic English (6)
- ☐ I want to get an Intermediate Proficiency ESL certificate (7)
- ☐ I want to get an Advanced Proficiency ESL certificate (8)
- ☐ I want to complete the Pathway to Business Technology Certificate (9)
- ☐ I want to complete the Pathway to Computer Info Science Certificate (10)
- ☐ I want to complete the Pathway to Culinary Arts Certificate (11)
- ☐ I want to complete the Pathway to Early Childhood Education Certificate (12)
- ☐ I want to get an Associate in Arts (A.A) degree (13)
- ☐ Other reason: (14) _____

Q8 Do you want to transfer to a four-year university?

- Yes (1)
- Maybe (2)
- No (3)
- I'm not sure (4)

Display This Question:

If Do you want to transfer to a four-year university, like Sacramento State or UC Davis? = Yes

Q9 Why do you want to transfer to a four-year university? Please explain in 1-2 sentences.

_____

Display This Question:

If Do you want to transfer to a four-year university, like Sacramento State or UC Davis? = No

Q14 Why don't you want to transfer to a four-year university? Please explain in 1-2 sentences.

_____

Display This Question:

If Do you want to transfer to a four-year university, like Sacramento State or UC Davis? = Maybe

Or Do you want to transfer to a four-year university, like Sacramento State or UC Davis? = I'm not sure

Q13 Why did you choose "maybe" or "I'm not sure" to transfer to a four-year university? Please explain in 1-2 sentences.

_____

Display This Question:

If Which ESL Courses are you currently taking? Please select all. = ESL 37

Or Which ESL Courses are you currently taking? Please select all. = ESL 47

Or Which ESL Courses are you currently taking? Please select all. = ESL 55

Or Which ESL Courses are you currently taking? Please select all. = ESL 315

Or Which ESL Courses are you currently taking? Please select all. = ESL 325

Or Which ESL Courses are you currently taking? Please select all. = ESLW 340 Writing

Or Which ESL Courses are you currently taking? Please select all. = ESL 350

Q10
This question is for the Integrated Skills ESL Classes. ESL 37, 47, 55, 315, 325, W340, or 350.

For you, how difficult is the Integrated Skills class that you are currently enrolled in?

- Too difficult (1)
- Difficult, but I can do it (2)
- Not difficult, but not easy (3)
- A little easy (4)
- Too easy (5)

Display This Question:

If This question is for the Integrated Skills ESL Classes. ESL 37, 47, 55, 315, 325, W340, or 350. F... = Too difficult

Or This question is for the Integrated Skills ESL Classes. ESL 37, 47, 55, 315, 325, W340, or 350. F... = Difficult, but I can do it

Q11 Why is this class difficult for you? Please explain in 1-2 sentences.

_____

Display This Question:

If This question is for the Integrated Skills ESL Classes. ESL 37, 47, 55, 315, 325, W340, or 350. F... = A little easy

Or This question is for the Integrated Skills ESL Classes. ESL 37, 47, 55, 315, 325, W340, or 350. F... = Too easy

Q12 Why is this class easy for you? Please explain in 1-2 sentences.

_____

Q15 Do you think you can learn English from online ESL classes?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)
- Sometimes (3)

Q16 Please choose whether the following types of learning are more difficult or less difficult in a fully online class.

	More Difficult Online (1)	About the Same (2)	Less Difficult Online (3)
Managing your time to complete homework (1)	○	○	○
Making friends with other classmates (2)	○	○	○
Improving your reading skills (3)	○	○	○
Improving your writing skills (4)	○	○	○
Improving your speaking skills (5)	○	○	○
Improving your listening skills (6)	○	○	○
Improving your grammar skills (7)	○	○	○
Understanding the teacher's directions (8)	○	○	○
Using Canvas or other websites to do homework (9)	○	○	○
Keeping up with deadlines (10)	○	○	○

Q18 Which of the following skills do you feel you can still learn effectively online? Please choose all that apply.

- ☐ Speaking (1)
- ☐ Listening (2)
- ☐ Grammar (3)
- ☐ Reading (4)
- ☐ Writing (5)
- ☐ Pronunciation (6)
- ☐ None of these are true for me (7)

Q21 Do you prefer to take online classes or in person classes to learn English? Please explain in 1-2 sentences.

Q20 Thank you for your time! The survey is over. Do you want to complete an interview with a researcher later in the semester? If yes, provide your email address below. If no, do not write anything.

Appendix B: Faculty Interview Protocol

Hello, and thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. This interview is designed to get at your thoughts and experiences around AB 705/1705 and how it has impacted your role here at American River college. I'm hoping this interview will not take longer than about 30 minutes to complete. You will be recorded on Zoom, but your personal identifying information will be kept confidential.

1. What is your role at ARC? How has your role changed from when you started here until now?
2. What courses have you taught at ARC? Which of those are transfer-level courses?
3. How has AB 705 affected your current or past roles at ARC? Can be positive or negative things.
    1. More work as a teacher?
4. What kind of professional development did you receive in preparation for AB 705? Did you feel it was sufficient?
5. How has the pandemic affected your current or past roles at ARC, or AB 705/1705?
    1. Pre-pandemic vs. Post pandemic (enrollment and success vs. post pandemic)
6. What are some suggestions that you have for ARC to address some of the issues you've raised in regards to the Pandemic or AB 705/1705?
7. How would you define the mission of community colleges?
8. Dean: enrollment pre-pandemic vs. during pandemic; professional development (how valuable did they see professional development before AB 705 – how valuable was it to prep for it? Get it, or figure it out after the fact?)

Appendix C: Student Interview Protocol

Hello, and thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. This interview is designed to understand how your thoughts and experiences have been influenced by some of the policy decisions made in the past few years. This interview should take about 30 minutes, and will be recorded on Zoom, but your personal information will be kept confidential.

1. Where are you from originally, and how long have you been in the United States?
2. What are your goals for attending American River College?
3. What are your goals for enrolling in ESL classes here at American River College?
4. What level of ESL integrated skills or writing are you currently taking? Why are you taking that level?
5. Have you ever heard of Assembly Bill 705, or 1705? If so, what do you know about it?
6. Are you interested in transferring to a four-year institution? What steps have you taken to transfer, if you are?
    1. Are you able to get the classes that you need, or the information that you need in these classes?
7. What are your personal goals in reading and writing?
8. What do you feel are your current course's goals for reading or writing?
    1. For example, what kinds of writing are you doing in your current courses? Do you feel that these assignments are helpful for your goals?
    2. Do you feel that you get support to succeed in your transfer-level or ESL classes?
9. How has the pandemic influenced your goals or English learning path?
10. What are some suggestions that you have for ARC to address some of the issues you've identified in this interview?

Appendix D: List of Collected Student Writing

Table D.1 below outlines the different student writing that was collected in the ESL 325 fall 2022, spring 2023, and fall 2023 semesters and the ESLW 340 spring 2023 and fall 2023 semesters. Throughout ESL 325, students completed two major writing assignments. The first assignment was a literacy narrative describing students' past, present and future reading and writing skills and English learning experience, which I used to understand what their previous experiences were with reading and writing, as well as how they characterized themselves as English learners. I collected the final draft of this assignment.

Table D.1

Student Writing Collected from my ESL 325 and ESLW 340 courses fall 2022, spring 2023, and fall 2023

Course	Writing Collected
ESL 325	- Final Draft of Literacy Narrative - Timed Writing reflection on purposes for attending community college - Persuasive Essay Brainstorming - Timed Writing First Draft of Persuasive Essay - Final Draft of Persuasive Research Paper
ESLW 340	- Final Draft of Synthesis Essay - Final Draft of Research Paper - Annotated Bibliography - Final Reflection Paper

The second major assignment was a persuasive research paper which required students to reflect on their purposes for taking community college ESL and take a stance arguing whether AB 705 was helpful or harmful for community college ESL students. Students were assigned three articles with opposing opinions about AB 705 to read over the course of three weeks: Almy (2017), Burke, et al. (2022), and Shaw, et al. (2018). Following the discussion of these articles,

students wrote their persuasive essay with an in-class brainstorm, followed by in-class timed writing for the first draft of their essay using their own personal experience to support their claims. They revised this essay to include three additional sources, one of which was a scholarly journal article that they found by themselves. I collected the initial timed writing, in-class brainstorming, first draft, and final draft of the persuasive research paper.

In ESLW 340, I collected the four final projects that students produced at the end of 16 weeks. During weeks five, six, and seven, I assigned three articles for students to read about AB 705: Rodriguez, et al. (2019), Hartman, et al. (2019), and Park (2019). In the synthesis essay, students picked two of the assigned articles and responded to the question: what are the effects of AB 705 on community college ESL students? The students then expanded on this synthesis paper into a ten page research paper, in which they conducted their own research to find two more scholarly articles that talked about AB 705. They built this paper off of what they wrote for their synthesis essay. In addition to this research paper, students also wrote an Annotated Bibliography of ten sources about AB 705, and so they found five additional sources about this topic. Finally, at the end of the semester, students wrote a reflection paper in which they detailed what they learned in the course, as well as their overall feelings about AB 705 in light of their experiences and their future goals at the college.

Appendix E: ESL Department Curricular Changes Pre- and Post A.B. 705

Table E.1

ESL Department Reading and Writing 320 Changes Pre- and Post A.B. 705

Time Period	Course Description and SLOs
Pre A.B 705	**Reading 320** This course, intended for non-native speakers of English, focuses on refining academic reading skills with an emphasis on speed, vocabulary development, and analytical comprehension. It also includes practice in research and synthesizing skills and extensive writing based on critical analysis of readings at the Advanced-Low level. ❖ examine long, complex reading passages. ❖ appraise and critique reading passages for bias. ❖ make inferences. ❖ recognize a wide variety of academic and idiomatic vocabulary. ❖ adapt reading speed and style to material. ❖ outline, paraphrase, and summarize passages from a range of texts. ❖ apply basic research steps. ❖ synthesize research materials. **Writing 320** This advanced-low course for non-native speakers of English develops analytical and logical skills in the production of focused, developed and organized essays on a variety of topics. The course emphasizes the development of ideas in body paragraphs and the analysis and use of readings as a basis for ideas in argumentative essays. Sentence variety and the mechanics of English in the context of the essay are also covered in the course. Written final drafts totaling at least 6,000 words are required. ❖ evaluate a variety of reading selections by critically analyzing, critiquing, and responding to readings both in-class and out of class. ❖ compose clear, well-developed, and soundly structured essays on academic topics. ❖ develop effective persuasive essays under time constraints. ❖ synthesize information by summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting readings to integrate outside sources into writing.

- demonstrate near-mastery of English writing style, grammar, vocabulary, and mechanics by revising, editing, and proofreading writing effectively.
- - analyze sentence, paragraph, and essay structure and apply these concepts to writing.

Post A.B. 705

ESL 325

This advanced-low integrated-skills course for non-native speakers of English builds on academic reading and writing skills, while also introducing basic research steps. Emphasis is placed on developing critical reading and writing skills to evaluate a variety of college-level texts and use them to inform and support students' own compositions. Instruction targets the needs of multilingual writers by addressing specific linguistic and cultural content to promote academic success. The goal of this course is to prepare students for transfer-level composition.

- analyze complex, college-length texts for context, audience, purpose, structure, and genre.
- apply and adapt appropriate reading strategies in order to critique complex, college-length texts for reliability and credibility.
- utilize the writing process to produce clear, well-developed, and soundly structured compositions on a range of culturally relevant topics.
- effectively recognize and implement the conventions of persuasive reading and writing.
- develop and apply basic research steps and MLA formatting to effectively incorporate outside sources in their own writing through outlining, quoting, paraphrasing, and/or summarizing new texts.
- understand and use corrective feedback to revise and edit their own writing for clarity of ideas, unity and coherence, accuracy in grammar, punctuation, and mechanics.

Table E.2

ESL Department Listening and Speaking 320 Changes Pre- and Post A.B. 705

Time period	Course Description and SLOs
Pre-A.B. 705	**ESLL 320 (4 units)** This course provides intensive practice in listening and active participation strategies for U.S. college courses. Activities include listening to extended lectures from various subject areas, refining note-taking skills, participating in in-depth discussions, and giving oral presentations. Practice of pronunciation skills is also covered. ❖ demonstrate English oral communication skills in most contexts with some repetition ❖ choose appropriate intonation to convey intended meaning ❖ compose and present dialogues and reports with appropriate eye contact, voice level, and lexical choice ❖ identify central meaning in conceptually and linguistically complex discourse such as lectures, speeches, or reports ❖ compile accurate notes while listening to lectures and presentations ❖ formulate and use a variety of interactive strategies effectively such as clarification, polite interruption, and agreement/disagreement strategies ❖ analyze elements of understandability in listening situations ❖ assess online resources for listening comprehension practice
Post A.B. 705	**ESLL 320 (3 units), unchanged** This course provides intensive practice in listening and active participation strategies for U.S. college courses. Activities include listening to extended lectures from various subject areas, refining note-taking skills, participating in in-depth discussions, and giving oral presentations. Practice of pronunciation skills is also covered. ❖ demonstrate competency in English oral communication skills, including giving presentations and communicating effectively. ❖ compose and present dialogues and reports with appropriate pronunciation, grammar, organization, and lexical choice. ❖ compile accurate notes while listening to lectures and presentations. ❖ formulate and use a variety of interactive strategies effectively, such as clarification, polite interruption, and agreement/disagreement strategies. ❖ - recognize and use a wide variety of academic and idiomatic vocabulary.

Table E.3

ESL Department Grammar 320 Changes Pre- and Post A.B. 705

Time period	Course Description and SLOs
Pre-A.B. 705	**ESLG 320 (4 units)** This course focuses on the forms and meanings of the main grammar patterns and sentence structures of English. You'll practice reading, writing, and oral techniques that will help you develop advanced understanding of grammatical constructions at the clause and sentence level. ❖ demonstrate mastery of verb tenses and modal auxiliary uses ❖ combine sentences, with emphasis on the ability to recognize, contrast, and analyze subordination and coordination ❖ evaluate and apply sentence-writing skills in larger context ❖ write and edit to achieve clarity and correctness ❖ employ passive voice; noun, adjective, and adverb clauses; and clause reduction ❖ - recognize and generate sentences using conditional and subjunctive constructions
Post A.B. 705	**ESLG 320 (3 units)** This course focuses on practice in the forms and meanings of major structures used in English conversation and writing with an emphasis on clause structure at the advanced level. Oral practice reinforces the structures studied. Assignments emphasize sentence structure in the context of longer written work. ❖ demonstrate skill in using targeted, level-appropriate grammar when speaking, listening, and writing. ❖ demonstrate both written and oral competency of verb tenses and modal auxiliary uses. ❖ combine sentences, with emphasis on the ability to recognize, contrast, and analyze subordination and coordination. ❖ recognize and generate sentences using conditional and subjunctive constructions ❖ demonstrate mastery of passive voice and its uses. ❖ integrate noun clauses and adjectives clauses into everyday conversation and written usage. ❖ employ adverb clauses when conversing and writing. ❖ construct adverb and adjective phrases from clauses.

Appendix F: Changes Made to Transfer-Level Writing Courses

Table F.1

Revised SLOs of Transfer-Level Writing Courses, Post-A.B. 705

ENGWR 300	ESL W340
❖ compose college-level writing for multiple and diverse audiences using a variety of rhetorical strategies and sources (including the student's own community knowledge or lived experience). ❖ identify, develop, and utilize their own processes in order to generate authentic writing. ❖ demonstrate an understanding of research tools and practices, as well as information literacy to identify bias, context, and explicit and implicit purpose. ❖ analyze and synthesize complex oral and written sources from multiple perspectives and traditions to build comprehension, think critically, and share learning. ❖ effectively employ a variety of paragraph and sentence structures, citation methods, stylistic conventions, and diction--each reflective of the writer's voice, rhetorical purpose, and audience.	❖ analyze and synthesize complex readings that represent a diversity of perspectives. ❖ compose organized and unified argumentative, interpretive, and analytical essays in response to collegiate-level readings. ❖ identify and employ genre-specific style and rhetorical choices across a variety of assignments, such as pathos in literacy narrative or logos in an analytical research paper. ❖ assess the credibility of online and print sources and integrate them in writing through effective paraphrase and quotation using MLA citation formatting standards. ❖ integrate research from multiple academic databases and assess bias in source material for a fully documented analytical research paper in MLA format. ❖ - revise and edit writing for clarity of ideas and accuracy in grammar, punctuation, mechanics, and appropriate diction for the collegiate level.

Appendix G: Changes between the 20 level and 30 level

Table G.1

SLOs of 20 and 30 level, By Skill

Skill	20 Level	30 Level
Reading	❖ read simple words, sentences, and readings. ❖ respond correctly to basic comprehension questions. ❖ respond to and use basic vocabulary. ❖ identify and use appropriate word forms (nouns, verbs, and adjectives). ❖ identify the use of sentence word order, pronouns, and verb forms in the readings. ❖ write short responses to readings using learned expressions and format.	**ESL 37 (Integrated Skills)** ❖ demonstrate an understanding of the basic features of the ARC Learning Management System. ❖ demonstrate comprehension of terminology necessary for completion of course tasks. ❖ identify the features of an American English dictionary. ❖ recognize and use novice-high vocabulary. ❖ spell common words accurately. ❖ use reading strategies (skimming and scanning) to identify general ideas and locate specific information in novice-high readings. ❖ identify nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, articles and prepositions, along with subjects and verbs in sentences.
Writing	❖ write simple sentences with correct capitalization and punctuation. ❖ use simple present and present progressive tenses of common verbs. ❖ write questions in correct word order. ❖ write sentences based on everyday topics and picture prompts in paragraph form. ❖ spell common words correctly. ❖ use clear handwriting placed correctly on the paper.	❖ write multiple paragraphs of 5-10 sentences each with topic sentences, basic control of English syntax, punctuation, capitalization, and correct formatting, including indentation. ❖ connect topics and vocabulary from reading into writing. ❖ recognize and understand the simple present, present progressive, simple past of basic regular and irregular verbs in reading and use these constructions in writing. ❖ produce simple and compound sentences.

Listening and Speaking	❖ express ideas and understand others during basic discussions about everyday topics with pronunciation comprehensible to a sensitive listener. ❖ communicate by understanding and using the simple present and present progressive tenses. ❖ demonstrate emergent understanding of word order and pronoun use. ❖ use language to help with miscommunication. ❖ use and demonstrate understanding of question forms in simple present and present progressive tenses. ❖ pronounce a limited number of common words in a way that is comprehensible to a sensitive listener. ❖ communicate by understanding and using basic vocabulary. ❖ discriminate between most American English consonant and vowel sounds. ❖ recognize syllables and word stress.	❖ demonstrate practical conversation skills in giving and receiving information, asking for repetition and clarification. ❖ implement and demonstrate increased vocabulary on topics introduced. ❖ implement and demonstrate pronounced grammar appropriate for this level, including simple and progressive verbs forms in both statement and question form, past tense statements and questions, as well as modals in the present tense. ❖ be able to communicate on familiar topics, i.e. family, health, school, and travel. ❖ demonstrate the ability to take simple notes. ❖ begin work to recognize syllables, stress (including number stress, i.e. thirteen vs. thirty), and IPA pronunciation. ❖ recognize and understand the rules for stress in nouns, verbs, and words with suffixes. ❖ understand the rules for pronunciation of the final /s/ and /ed/ endings. ❖ recognize reductions in English, including "have to, want to, and going to." ❖ demonstrate knowledge in basic college competencies, including syllabus, office hours, and support services. ❖ deliver short oral presentations. ❖ demonstrate the ability to critically analyze and discuss ideas from listening activities. ❖ demonstrate knowledge of the rules of vowel pronunciation based on spelling.