

*PATHWAYS & OUTCOMES:  
Tracking ESL Student  
Performance*

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**A Longitudinal Study of  
Adult ESL Service at  
City College of San Francisco**

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by  
**Steven Spurling  
Sharon Seymour  
Forrest P. Chisman**

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**January 7, 2008**



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**Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy**

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**1221 Avenue of the Americas - 46th Floor  
New York, N.Y. 20020  
<http://www.caalusa.org>**



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## **FOREWORD**

**Pathways & Outcomes: Tracking ESL Student Performance** is a longitudinal study of English-as-a-Second-Language services at City College of San Francisco. The report completes a trilogy of CAAL studies on adult ESL service in community colleges. It is designed primarily to help those who plan and design community college ESL programs to assess and develop effective services. It will also be useful to groups that offer adult ESL services in other institutional settings, and to policymakers and funding agencies.

Along with other publications in the series (Passing the Torch: Strategies for Innovation in Community College ESL, and Torchlights in ESL: Five Community College Profiles, **Pathways and Outcomes** is available at no charge from the website of the Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy ([www.caalusa.org](http://www.caalusa.org)). It can be purchased in bound form directly from CAAL ([bheitner@caalusa.org](mailto:bheitner@caalusa.org)).

Passing the Torch (February 2007) was the result of a major two-year study of five community college ESL programs, all nominated by a national panel for their excellence: Bunker Hill Community College (MA), City College of San Francisco (CA), College of Lake County (IL), Seminole Community College (FL), and Yakima Valley Community College (WA). Drs. Forrest P. Chisman (study director, CAAL vice president) and JoAnn Crandall (research director, University of Maryland Baltimore Campus) worked with a team of co-researchers from the five colleges studied. Passing the Torch focuses on non-credit ESL services from the standpoint of learning gains, retaining students, and bringing about transitions to postsecondary education. Among the strategies examined are high intensity instruction, learning outside the classroom, and the use of “learner-centered thematic” curricula.

Torchlights in ESL (June 2007) was written by the principal co-researchers from the five colleges at the center of the main study, under the direction of Dr. Chisman. The publication provides a deeper look at some aspects of service at the five study colleges.

**Pathways and Outcomes** was made possible by CAAL discretionary funds; a considerable amount of CAAL pro bono staff time and resources; and staff time, data, and computer resources generously provided by the City College of San Francisco (CCSF). Dr. Chisman was responsible for overall project direction. He developed its initial design, supervised and participated in the research and analysis, and drafted large parts of the final report. The other two members of the team are staff members of the City College of San Francisco (both research participants in Passing the Torch and Torchlights in ESL): Steven Spurling (Institutional Research Officer, Office of Research, Planning and Grants) and Sharon Seymour (former Chair, ESL Department). Dr. Spurling conducted the data analysis and had primary responsibility for interpretation of that analysis. He also played a large role in designing the study and crafting this report. Dr. Seymour contributed to the study’s design and interpretation of its findings and produced the first draft of this report and portions of the final draft. Her special insights into the



College's ESL program helped shape findings about student performance and features of the program that may have influenced it.

CAAL extends deepest appreciation to CCSF for its extraordinary assistance in making the College's staff and other resources available. **Pathways and Outcomes** would not have been possible without that help. CAAL is especially indebted to the research team for its remarkable dedication. These three authors, with their unique and extensive expertise, collaborated on virtually every aspect of the research, analysis, and report preparation. Credit for the report truly belongs to them.

Gail Spangenberg  
President, CAAL

## AUTHORS' EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### A. THE STUDY

This report presents the findings of a longitudinal study of English as a Second Language (ESL) students at the City College of San Francisco (CCSF) conducted during the summer of 2007. The study used College records to track all students who first enrolled in CCSF's credit and non-credit ESL programs in 1998, 1999, and 2000 for seven years each. In total, 38,095 non-credit and 6,666 credit ESL students comprised the "cohort" that was examined. The study's primary focus was on the persistence, learning gains, and transition to credit studies, and the success in credit courses of non-credit ESL students. It also examined various features of CCSF's ESL program that affected these variables.<sup>1</sup>

Although, strictly speaking, the findings of this study apply only to CCSF, the authors believe they have implications for the adult education ESL field as a whole – both because CCSF's ESL program has many features in common with a great many other programs and because the College's program is regarded by many ESL professionals as "exemplary" in the way it applies the principles of English language learning. In many respects, it is both a typical case and a best case of adult education ESL in the United States.

### B. OVERALL FINDINGS

Overall, the findings of this study tell a "glass half full/glass half empty" story. Non-credit students who take full advantage of the opportunities CCSF offers are outstandingly successful, both in ESL courses and in subsequent academic studies. ESL works for them as a means to meet their personal needs for greater English proficiency in everyday life and as a means of improving the skills of our national workforce through postsecondary education. But, by either measure, ESL does not work as well as it should for most students who enroll in non-credit courses, because most of these students do not persist for enough terms or attend enough hours of instruction to make significant learning gains or to cross crucial thresholds.

The gap between potential and realized outcomes is very large. Fortunately, CCSF has adopted at least some measures that can close that gap, and a careful scrutiny of both its students and its program suggest others. If some students can succeed, many others can as

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<sup>1</sup> At CCSF, as at most community colleges, "non-credit" ESL is the equivalent of what might elsewhere be called "adult education" ESL. Courses are offered without charge and they cover the range of English language proficiency from what the U.S. Department of Education defines as the "ESL Literacy" to the "Low Advanced" levels. "Credit" ESL is a sequence of courses for which students must pay tuition. Credit courses are primarily designed to help students prepare for academic studies, although they are often used by students in other ways. In some cases, they help students gain a higher level of general English proficiency than do non-credit courses, but in all cases they focus on different applications of English language skills.

well. The challenge for CCSF and other ESL programs is to understand the potential for success, identify the factors that lead to it, and enrich programs with components that increase it.

## **C. MAJOR FINDINGS**

The primary purpose of this report is to present and explain the data generated by the 2007 CCSF study. Many different narratives might be constructed from the data, and the authors hope that readers will delve into it and construct their own.

Because CCSF is a postsecondary institution, the following summary begins with the success of non-credit ESL students as measured by the standards most postsecondary institutions use to gauge success: achievement in academic programs. It then proceeds to examine the components of that success.

### **1. Academic Achievement**

Only about eight percent of the students who enrolled in CCSF's non-credit ESL program from 1998-2000 made the transition to academic (credit) studies in seven years. But here is what those "transition students" achieved:

- Seventy-five percent enrolled in credit ESL, and 85% enrolled in other academic courses, usually at the same time they were studying credit ESL. In fact, they enrolled in far more credit courses than in credit ESL courses, but credit ESL seems to have been the pathway to success in academic studies for most students.
- In terms of grade point averages, percentage of courses passed, and other measures of academic success, students who made transitions from non-credit ESL equaled or surpassed both other credit ESL students and other credit students at the College.
- Twenty-five percent of transition students obtained Associate Degrees or Certificates from the College. This was three times the rate of students for whom English was their native language. In fact, credit ESL students, taken as a whole, attained nearly one-third of the certificates and half the degrees awarded to students who first enrolled in CSSF from 1998-2000.
- Transition students transferred to other two-year and four-year institutions at 70% the rate of other CCSF students during the period studied, but this may understate transfer rates, because some transition students may transfer in subsequent years.
- In short, students who began in non-credit ESL and made the transition to credit were among the College's best academic students.

## 2. Who Made Transitions?

Impressive as this record of success in academic studies may be, it was still the case that only eight percent of non-credit students crossed the threshold to credit studies. Who were they?

- Most of the students who made transitions began at fairly low levels of non-credit ESL and “worked their way up” to gain the levels of English proficiency they needed to meet the College’s standards for credit studies, and most began at fairly low levels in credit ESL after they had made transitions. They were students determined to achieve, and they did.
- This means they were *not* primarily students who first enrolled in non-credit ESL at a high level of English proficiency. Only a small percentage of students who began at high levels made transitions.
- Almost all transition students had attained the Intermediate level of non-credit English language proficiency or higher. About 30-40% of students who attained the High Intermediate Level and 20-25% who attained the Low Intermediate level made transitions to credit – compared to eight percent of all non-credit ESL students.
- These students had not only attained a high level of “life skills English,” but a large portion of them moved on to success in academic studies.
- One reason that so few non-credit students made the transition to academic studies was that only 19% of all non-credit students who began at low levels of proficiency attained the Intermediate level of or above.

## 3. Who Advanced?

CCSF’s non-credit ESL Program offers 10 Levels of courses – from ESL Literacy to Low Advanced.<sup>2</sup> Advancing levels was used by this study as a measure of learning gain, because students can only advance a level if they have mastered the skills of the level in which they are enrolled.

Sixty-seven percent of CCSF’s non-credit ESL students first enrolled at the lowest levels of English language proficiency (the Literacy and Low Beginning Levels). Which of these students were most likely to comprise the 19% who advanced to the Intermediate Level?

- Of all CCSF’s non-credit ESL students, only 44% advanced even one level during the seven-year period.

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<sup>2</sup> CCSF’s ESL levels are aligned with the California Model Standards for ESL. In this summary, the six-level designation of proficiency commonly used in ESL programs is used: ESL Literacy, Low Beginning, High Beginning, Low Intermediate, High Intermediate, and Low Advanced.

- Not surprisingly, the students most likely to advance were those who enrolled for the most terms and attended the most hours of instruction. The correlation between persistence, hours attended, and level advancement is consistent and strong.
- On average, it took students who advanced a level about 100 hours to do so. This does not mean that all students who attended for 100 hours advanced – some students took more or less time to advance, and some attended for large numbers of hours and did not advance at all.
- Students who began at the lowest levels (the Literacy and Beginning levels) were more likely to advance levels and to advance more levels than students who began at higher levels, although it took them more terms and hours of attendance to do so.
- Of the College’s two major ethnic groups, Asians were more likely to advance levels than Hispanics, although it took them more terms and hours to advance in the lower levels.
- Very young students (16-19) were more likely to advance levels than other students were, and they were more likely to make transitions to credit studies. Aside from this age group, age made no difference in level advancement.
- Thirty percent of non-credit students “stopped out” (stopped taking classes for a year or more and subsequently re-enrolled). These students (stop-outs) advanced at the same rate as other students who began at the same first level, although they attended slightly more terms than did comparable students, but they made the transition to credit at lower rates – at least during the time period during which they were studied. Because of their long absences from the program (often two years or longer), more stop-outs may make transitions at some point subsequent to the time period studied.

#### **4. Who Did Not Advance?**

- Fifty-six percent of students who enrolled in CCSF’s non-credit ESL program from 1998-2000 did not advance even one level (showed no learning gain, as measured by level advancement).
- Half of these students who did not advance attended 50 hours or less of instruction over the seven-year time period studied. An additional 30% attended less than 150 hours of instruction. In addition to the students examined by this study, 13% of students who enrolled in the College’s non-credit ESL program attended eight or fewer hours.

- Thirty-eight percent of non-credit ESL students enrolled for only one term, and hence did not advance levels. Sixty-eight percent enrolled for three or fewer terms.
- Of students who did advance, 65% advanced no more than two levels.
- Although the 67% of students who began at the Literacy or Low Beginning Level advanced more terms than other students, 51% of these students did not advance even one level, 18% advanced one level, and 12% advanced two levels. As a result, 81% of these students did not advance beyond the beginning level. In part, this was because 61% of students who began at the lowest levels enrolled for three or fewer terms.
- In short, more than half of CCSF's non-credit ESL students did not advance at all, and most of those who did so advanced only one or two of CCSF's 10 ESL levels. Students who advanced were those who enrolled for a large number of terms and hours. Most students did not persist or attend for long enough to advance very far.

## **5. What Increases Advancement and Transitions?**

This study examined several measures CCSF has in place to increase student advancement and transitions. All of them are effective. They would probably be more effective if adopted on a larger scale.

- The College has a non-credit matriculation process with three primary components – placement (using a formal placement test), orientation, and a counseling interview. In 1998-2000, these services were not available to most non-credit ESL students (particularly those who began at the lowest levels), but their availability has subsequently increased. The study found that students who received the full range of matriculation services attended somewhat more hours and terms than those who did not. Importantly, it found that most categories of students who received all three services were about 50% more likely to make transitions to credit than those who did not.
- The College also offers three “Program Enhancements” that are optional for non-credit ESL students: (a) “Focus” ESL courses that allow students to improve their abilities in a single ESL skill at the same time they are attending general ESL courses; (b) Accelerated courses that combine two levels of ESL into one course; and (c) a policy that allows non-credit ESL students to enroll in other non-credit courses at the same time they are taking ESL.

The study found that 49% of non-credit students took advantage of one or more of these Enhancement options. Most students selected Focus courses and enrollment in other non-credit courses, and 25% of students who selected Enhancements selected both. Only two percent of students selected Accelerated courses, perhaps because of the limited availability of these courses. The study showed that students who selected any of these options were more likely than other students to enroll in more terms, attend more hours, advance more levels, and make transitions, and these outcomes were greatest for students

who enrolled in Accelerated courses. Eighty-one percent of students who made transitions selected one or more enhancements. The enhancements had a cumulative effect: although only 12% of students enrolled in Focus and other non-credit courses, they accounted for 34% of students who made transitions to credit.

## **6. What Might Be Done?**

Because most of CCSF's non-credit ESL students (and most adult education ESL students nationwide) begin at quite low levels of English proficiency, they must be "willing and able" to devote a substantial amount of time (terms of enrollment and hours in class) to improve their English very much and/or to advance to success in postsecondary education. That is, they must have the personal motivation and goals to climb the ladder of ESL and they must be able to work around the responsibilities of adult life to do so. This study showed that some of CCSF's ESL students are willing and able in this sense, but most do not advance very far (or at all) in non-credit ESL. CCSF has adopted some measures to help students expand their goals and accelerate their progress, and these measures should be reinforced by the College and also examined by other programs. Although the study was an exercise in observational research, it provides the basis for informed speculation about what other measures might be adopted.

***Calibrate instructional units.*** Many ESL programs offer only 3-6 hours of instruction per week and do not operate during the summer. At that rate, it would take even students with good attendance records several years to advance very far, and many may not be prepared to make this commitment. CCSF offers 175 hours of instruction per term, usually promotes students only at the end of each term, and does not promote them on the basis of studies during its short summer term. Thus, at most, students can advance two levels per year. Many students can probably advance more quickly, and may become discouraged. Programs should consider offering 4-5 terms of ESL per year, each providing about 100 hours of instruction and promoting students as soon as they have mastered the skills of each level in which they are enrolled. This would make it possible for students to advanced from quite low to quite high levels in a year or slightly more.

***Managed enrollment.*** Like most ESL programs, CCSF has an "open-entry/open-exit" policy. Students can enroll in programs and drop out at any time. More ESL programs should consider a "managed enrollment" policy in which students can enter only at the beginning of each instructional unit and can be dropped for non-attendance. Programs that have adopted managed enrollment for all or some of their students believe that it encourages learners to make a stronger commitment to persistence and attendance. It also accelerates the instructional process, because teachers do not have to repeat instruction for students who enter classes at mid-term, and those students do not have to struggle to catch up with the rest of the class.

***Fast-track programs.*** The success of CCSF's curricular enhancements suggests that many students are prepared to devote extra time to ESL if they believe it can lead to the achievement of some near-term goal, beyond simply learning more English. As a result, programs should consider implementing high intensity "fast track" programs to help

students achieve goals such as transition to postsecondary education and enrollment in vocational programs. For example, programs should consider a “pathways to college” track that would combine short-term multi-level courses meeting for a large number of hours per week with pre-collegiate orientation, and incorporate college-level English into the non-credit curriculum. “Fast tracks” of this sort could challenge and motivate students to move on to academic or vocational studies in a year or less.

***Enhanced student services.*** The low retention rate of students who first enroll in CCSF’s non-credit program – and especially of those who enroll at very low levels – cries out for solutions that extend beyond changes in the instructional program. It calls for something this study could not accomplish – an in-depth examination of why a majority of students take the trouble to enroll in ESL, but quickly drop out.

The effectiveness of CCSF’s fairly modest matriculation services underlines the importance of enhanced guidance, counseling, and supportive services to help students understand the nature of ESL classes and the responsibilities they must assume. Above all, enhanced student services should help students understand that they can succeed in ESL and that there are benefits to success, encourage them to establish ambitious personal goals, trouble-shoot their academic difficulties, and help them overcome barriers to attendance that are created by personal problems such as work schedules and child care responsibilities. Programs should reach out to students in providing these services, rather than waiting for students to come to them. And services that encourage and support success should be provided throughout the period in which students are enrolled, not just at the time of their first matriculation.

***Target success.*** The findings of this study indicates that CCSF and other ESL programs can identify at least some categories of students who are most likely to succeed in non-credit courses. Among these are the youngest students (those in the 16-19 age group), those who express interest in using ESL to obtain further education (such as academic studies or vocational training), stop-outs, and those who have advanced to the threshold of the Intermediate levels. Programs may wish to consider recruiting more younger and intermediate-level students as well as targeting curricular and student enhancements on students most likely to take advantage of them.

***A culture of success.*** These and other measures are premised on the belief that many ESL students can achieve much more than they do now, and that it is a primary goal of ESL programs to help each student advance as far as possible up the ladder of English language learning. The authors believe that too often programs are so overwhelmed with the enormous demands of program maintenance that they find it hard to focus on how well they are achieving these larger goals and what they can do to achieve them better. Unless program managers, teachers, and students are joined in an enterprise that expects a high level of achievement, and unless they reinforce each other in the belief that this is both possible and necessary, the prospects of improvement are diminished. ESL programs, like any other enterprise, are most successful if they make the time and devote the energy to creating and reinforcing high expectations for everyone involved.



## **7. The Value of Longitudinal Research**

The primary goal of this study was to use longitudinal research to improve understanding of the success of non-credit ESL students and the components that make for success. A secondary goal was to demonstrate by example the feasibility and value of longitudinal research at the program level. Most programs do not track the progress of their students for more than one year at a time. Because it takes most ESL students several years to make substantial progress, this severely limits the ability of individual programs, and of the ESL field as a whole, to understand what they accomplish and why, as well as to flag problems and build on strengths.

Virtually none of the information in this report could have been generated without longitudinal research. The authors believe it is information every program should have and should continue to generate as part of its program planning and improvement processes. It is also information that programs can use to generate funding, both for their existing efforts and for the program enhancements they need.

Programs may be reluctant to undertake longitudinal research because they believe it is not feasible or would be overly expensive. The authors of this report found that substantial longitudinal research can be carried out in a few months at a fairly modest cost, if members of the host institution's institutional research staff are centrally involved in the task. By far the most difficult aspect of the project was selecting the right template for organizing and explaining their work. The authors hope that the methods they adopted will serve as at least an initial template for other programs to consider. More importantly, they hope this study will encourage other programs to adopt longitudinal research as part of on-going efforts at continuous improvement aimed at providing students with the services they need and deserve.

Of course, longitudinal research at the program level can only be as good as the information about students that programs gather. For example, this study would have been strengthened if information about the prior educational backgrounds, family circumstances, employment, and geographic mobility of students had been available. Overall, the authors believe that the more programs know about their students, the better they can help them. Thus, if longitudinal research accomplishes nothing else, it highlights what programs should know and the importance of knowing it.

## INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings of a longitudinal study of English as a Second Language (ESL) students at the City College of San Francisco (CCSF) conducted during the summer of 2007. The study used College student records to track all students who first enrolled in CCSF's credit and non-credit ESL programs in 1998, 1999, and 2000 for seven years each. It examined the enrollment trends of these and other CCSF students, but its primary focus was on the persistence, learning gains, transition to credit studies, and success in credit courses of non-credit students. It also examined various features of CCSF's ESL program that affect these variables.<sup>1</sup>

This report is not a research monograph in the usual sense of the term. Its primary purpose is to publish and explain data generated by the longitudinal study, although it also summarizes the findings of that data and briefly discusses their significance for program design and other aspects of ESL practice. This fairly modest purpose was adopted because the authors believe that reasonable people can differ about the larger implications of findings based on only one program. But the authors also believe (for reasons stated below) that the ESL field can benefit greatly from a detailed understanding of those findings and how they were generated. As a result, this report, in some respects, is a resource document that different readers will wish to use in different ways.

### **A. PURPOSES OF THE STUDY**

The major goal of the CCSF study was to use longitudinal research techniques to improve the ESL field's understanding of some major student outcomes and program variables. A second, but related, goal was to demonstrate the value and feasibility of conducting longitudinal research at the program level and to provide an example of how it can be conducted in a cost-effective way. Understanding the importance of both goals requires understanding the distinctive contributions that longitudinal research can make to the ESL field.

#### **1. Value of Longitudinal Research**

Longitudinal research follows the progress of individual students for multiple years. In contrast, most research findings about student outcomes and program designs in the ESL field (and in many other fields of education) are based on annual reports that provide information about the progress of students for only a single year. This is largely due to

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<sup>1</sup> At CCSF, as at most community colleges, "Non-Credit" ESL is the equivalent of what might elsewhere be called "adult education" ESL. Courses are offered without charge and they cover the range of English language proficiency from what the U.S. Department of Education defines as the "ESL Literacy" to the "Low Advanced" levels. "Credit" ESL is a sequence of courses for which students must pay tuition. Credit courses are primarily designed to help students prepare for academic studies, although they are often used by students in other ways. In some cases they help students to gain a higher level of general English proficiency than do non-credit courses, but in all cases they focus on different applications of English language skills.

the fact that, for administrative purposes, individual programs, as well as state and federal educational agencies that provide them with funding, organize most of their work by annual cycles (such as academic or fiscal years). As a result, it is natural for them to collect progress reports once a year, or in some cases at the end of each semester or some shorter period of time.

Although annual reports contain valuable information about ESL and other programs, they necessarily provide an incomplete picture of both student progress and the program structures intended to bring it about. ESL students (like most other students) are often enrolled for multiple years, and a major goal of ESL programs is to help them progress as far as they can in improving their English proficiency while they are enrolled. By themselves, annual reports cannot determine if or how programs achieve this goal. For example, they do not reveal the number of years during which students attended classes, how far they progressed during that time, or what personal variables (such as their initial level of English proficiency or hours of study) or program variables (such as the length of terms and classes or special interventions to assist students) affected their progress.

These limitations of annual data are particularly problematic in the ESL field because students often progress at different rates depending on personal factors, such as their level of English proficiency when they enter a program. As a result, a student may make limited progress in one year, but advance rapidly in the next. Also, many ESL students attend classes on an intermittent basis. In some cases they “stop-out” for years at a time before re-enrolling. The success of programs in helping them improve their English proficiency can only be determined by summing the results of their incremental enrollments over many years. Finally, annual reports segment information about student progress in ways that may be misleading. For example, a student who falls just short of completing a program benchmark and completes it in the next year may be reported as having made the same progress as a student who makes much less progress and drops out of the program after the end of the year.

## **2. Barriers and Methods**

In short, the only way to gain a thorough understanding of what ESL programs achieve and how they achieve it is to follow the progress of students for multiple years through longitudinal research. Regrettably, this type of research is rarely conducted. In part, this is because it is not required. Annual reporting has become an accepted routine. But the shortage of longitudinal research is due primarily to the fact that it requires a special effort to conduct.

There are a number of methods for tracking students over multiple years. Many of these involve interviewing and assessing students at periodic intervals both during the time

they are enrolled in ESL programs and for some years thereafter. Studies of this sort are highly valuable, but they are very expensive and take many years to carry out.<sup>2</sup>

A simpler and more expeditious approach is to match student records from different years and interpret the findings in terms of multiple variables. That is the approach adopted by this study. Although it is limited by the types of information student record systems collect and cannot shed light on the experiences of students after they leave the program, it can provide a wealth of information about student performance that would otherwise be unavailable.

But even this approach requires substantial effort. In some cases, technical difficulties must be overcome. For example, the relevant information may be in different data bases, the program may have changed its student record system, or student identifiers may have changed over time. Some programs find it difficult to determine how many non-credit students eventually make the transition to credit studies, because the same student identifiers are not used for both programs. With some ingenuity on the part of researchers, however, these problems can often be overcome. But local programs, state education authorities, and the federal government all have limited budgets for analyzing student outcomes, and they rarely chose to invest their resources in longitudinal studies.

The result is that understanding about many aspects of ESL service is incomplete, and some of the available data about it may be misleading. Programs and policymakers must rely too heavily on personal experience or inference, rather than on objective data, to understand ESL service. Many people in the ESL field realize that there are important gaps in knowledge about student outcomes that result from a shortage of longitudinal research, but efforts to fill those gaps are rare.

### **3. The Value of This Study**

The primary goal of this study was to extend understanding of what ESL programs accomplish and how they accomplish it by conducting in-depth longitudinal research on a single ESL program: the program at CCSF. Of course, all programs are different, and there are limits to how much an analysis of any one program can add to an understanding of ESL service as a whole. However, by examining the performance of students enrolled in this one program over seven years, this study was able to ask and answer a large number of questions about ESL that have rarely been answered by objective data from any program. As a result, its findings are at the very least suggestive of patterns and trends that other programs, policymakers, and researchers should examine.

This is especially true because CCSF's ESL program is very large and well regarded. It enrolled 3,981 credit and 25,361 non-credit students in 2006, and it was identified as one of the nation's outstanding community college ESL programs by a CAAL survey of ESL

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<sup>2</sup> A particularly important example of this type of longitudinal research is the Longitudinal Study of Adult Literacy, directed by Professor Stephen Reder of Portland State University, now nearing completion. Although the Portland State study does not primarily focus on ESL students, its methods are exemplary for longitudinal analysis of any aspect of adult education.

leaders conducted in 2005 (see below). CCSF was also a recipient of the 2004 Met-Life Foundation exemplary college award in recognition of the outstanding service provided by the College, and especially its ESL Department, in helping underserved youth and adults meet their educational and career goals. As a result, findings about the program may have a special significance because they show the student outcomes of a program that has implemented what many people in the ESL field consider best practices, and because they show the results of providing ESL service on a large scale.

This study also had a second goal: to show that longitudinal research on ESL programs can be conducted in a cost-effective way, and to exemplify one way in which programs can conduct it. Carrying out this study was, in some respects, a matter of learning by doing. Although it took several months to complete, the expense was not great, and the time and expense of replicating it would be even smaller. Any longitudinal research at the program level must be adapted to the special features of each program. But the authors hope that other programs will see the value of longitudinal research, as exemplified by this-study, and be encouraged to undertake longitudinal analyses of their own. They also hope that the approach adopted here will serve as an initial template for other efforts. The authors believe that longitudinal research of this kind can and should be used as an on-going program management tool. They hope the findings of this study will interest other programs in adopting it for those purposes.

## **B. STUDY BACKGROUND**

The initial purpose of this study was to make public a large body of longitudinal research on CCSF's ESL program conducted in 2006 as part of CAAL's Project on ESL in Community Colleges, which focused primarily on non-credit ESL.<sup>3</sup> That project began with a survey that asked more than 100 leaders of the ESL field to identify those colleges in different parts of the country that provide "exemplary" ESL instruction. Five of the colleges nominated participated in the project. Each of the five colleges contributed information about a great many aspects of its ESL programs including data about the effectiveness of those programs in producing various student outcomes – such as persistence, learning gains, and transition to credit studies. The principal CAAL researchers for that project (Forrest Chisman and JoAnn Crandall) asked each of the colleges to track student outcomes on a multi-year basis. All of the participating colleges did this in some fashion, but limitations on resources as well as aspects of their program structures presented most of them from conducting very extensive longitudinal research.

CCSF was one of the colleges that participated in CAAL's ESL Project. Because College leaders at CCSF took a special interest in the project, they made a significant in-kind contribution of staff time to analyze the performance of all students enrolled in credit and non-credit ESL from 1998-2005 in terms of a large number of variables. The result was a unique and extensive body of data (eventually reduced to 70 tables) that led to a great

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<sup>3</sup> Details about the nature of this study as well as its findings can be found in: Forrest P. Chisman and JoAnn Crandall, *Passing The Torch: Strategies for Innovation in Community College ESL* (New York: Council for the Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2007).

many valuable findings – some of them unexpected. In fact, the data and findings generated by this research were far more than could be used by the CAAL project, although some of the findings were published in both the final report of that project and in a separately-published profile on CCSF’s ESL program.<sup>4</sup>

CAAL and the CCSF researchers who were involved in the 2006 analysis believed that it would be valuable to publish all of the longitudinal research findings that analysis had generated, and to extend the analysis to variables that had not been examined. Because those findings existed only in the form of data tables, this would have entailed organizing and interpreting the tables, as well as conducting limited additional analysis to examine other variables of interest.

In the spring of 2007, CAAL committed to publish the 2006 data in this way. It quickly became apparent, however, that the research plan should be modified. A main reason was that the 2006 analysis had tracked the progress of all students enrolled in credit and non-credit programs over a six-year time period. This meant that some of the students studied were enrolled for the full six years and others were enrolled for as little as one year. As a result, the educational experiences of students included in the 2006 study differed, and it seemed likely that many of the students had not been enrolled long enough for their performance to be evaluated by a longitudinal study.

For these reasons, the research team decided to track the progress of students first enrolled in ESL at CCSF in 1998, 1999, and 2000 for seven years each. The year 1998 was selected as the starting date because student records starting in that year were most readily available, and the length of the analysis was extended to seven years, because of the availability of data for 2006. Three years of students were studied to diminish the possibilities that unknown factors in any one program year would bias the findings.

This decision meant that the study would have to conduct a completely new analysis of the variables investigated in the 2006 effort plus additional variables not previously examined. This report contains the findings of that analysis.

## **1. Methodology**

***Organization of the study.*** The research team began by developing an initial outline of the major student outcomes that should be examined. These were enrollment patterns, persistence, learning gains, transitions to credit studies, and success of non-credit students in credit courses. The outline also identified the variables affecting each outcome that should be analyzed (such as the level of English proficiency of students when they were first enrolled and the number of hours they attended classes). The outcomes were organized as chapters in the report that would be produced, and the variables affecting them were organized as a set of data tables that would help to explain each outcome.

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<sup>4</sup> See Sharon Seymour, “City College of San Francisco” in *Torchlights in ESL: Five Community College Profiles* (New York: Council for the Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2007).

The initial outline relied heavily on the 2006 study in selecting the variables that should be analyzed. That study had shown that a number of factors were closely related to each of the major outcomes. These variables were selected for the 2007 study and augmented with additional variables that the 2006 study suggested might also show important relationships. Some of these additional variables were incorporated into the chapters on major student outcomes. Other additional variables were organized into separate chapters (such as the effects of “stopping out” and various aspects of the CCSF program designed to increase learning gains).

Finally, the research team defined the characteristics of the cohort of students who were first enrolled in CCSF’s ESL program in 1998, 1999, and 2000 that would be tracked for seven years.

Both the initial outline and the definition of the cohort changed in large ways and small as findings emerged during the course of the study. Changes were also made to the research team’s initial plans based on experience about how the analysis could most effectively be conducted and presented. In most respects, however, the 2007 study followed the plan established by the initial outline.

**Data analysis.** Based on that outline, Steven Spurling of CCSF augmented the software code written for the 2006 CAAL study. This was an extensive program written in SAS, which was based on similar code used to construct CCSF’s Decision Support System (DSS). Since DSS extracts started in 1998, it was fairly easy to use that as a starting point to elaborate and illuminate the enrollment patterns and success of non-credit ESL students. It was only necessary to link the DSS extracts to academic history files in order to determine who was new to ESL non-credit in the 1998-2000 time period.

When it came time to analyze the relationship between variables, SAS was used both for the descriptive and analytical interpretation. SAS multiple-variable cross tabulations were exported to EXCEL where they were turned into pivot tables. The pivots were investigated for important relationships. Where these were found, they were copied to Word files for display in the report. In addition to the descriptive analysis, SAS data analysis procedures were used to investigate multiple variables and their interactions. These procedures were the “catmod” procedure to investigate dichotomous variables and the “glm” procedure (general linear model) to examine continuous variables. The main advantage of using these procedures over simple descriptive ones is that the researcher can investigate multiple relationships simultaneously. Although the output from these procedures is cited only a few times in this report, the procedures directed further investigations using descriptive methods. The findings from these investigations are contained in the following chapters.

Nearly all research findings discussed in this report are statistically significant, if only because of the large numbers of students underlying each variable. More importantly, there is practical significance to each finding that should be given serious consideration by ESL practitioners. Each finding indicates relationships that have consequences for understanding how ESL programs function and how they might be improved. Although

the meaning of the numbers must be inferred, and the issue of causality is always difficult in observational research, the relationships that are presented are significant in this practical sense.

***Limitations.*** Any longitudinal analysis based on student record data is inherently limited by the data that student records contain. Variables that might be important for explaining student outcomes cannot be examined unless information about them is contained in student records. Fortunately, CCSF's student record system contains a large amount of information about the College's ESL students. But the College does not collect information about certain key variables. For example, as will be noted in subsequent chapters, it does not collect information about the prior education of its non-credit students.

More importantly, student record data at CCSF and elsewhere does not contain information about the geographical mobility of students – whether or not they left the College's service area within the timeframe covered by the study. As a result, it is impossible to be sure if certain outcomes (such as how long students persist in programs) are due to student characteristics (such as motivation or personal goals), aspects of the program's design, or simply the fact that students moved to a different area. As Chapter 4 will discuss, there are reasons to believe that the effect of geographical mobility on the findings of this study are fairly small. However, there is no way to be certain, and this limitation must be acknowledged at the outset.

It is important to bear in mind, however, that all social science research is limited by the data it can collect. It is never possible to obtain information on all of the variables that might affect human behavior. The most that any research can do is analyze the relationships between a limited number of variables and base its findings on the results. Thus, this study is no more flawed by the fact that it cannot assess all of the variables that might be of importance in understanding the performance of ESL students than are any other studies of education or other subjects examined by social science.

Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge the absence of information about key variables that might shed more light on the study, if only to encourage other researchers (and those who might benefit from research) to gather that information. With regard to research on ESL student outcomes, the authors believe that colleges should gather data on the prior education of their non-credit students, because this would help them to better understand both the needs and performance of these students, whether through longitudinal analysis or other means.

They also believe, for the same reasons, that colleges should contact at least a sample of students who have stopped attending classes for several terms to determine their location and other reasons for their absence. There are a number of low-cost methods for doing this, such as contacting students at their last known address, accessing Unemployment Insurance records, or distributing postcards to a sample of all students at the end of each term and paying those who return them at regular intervals a nominal amount. None of these or other methods would produce completely accurate information about student



absences, but they would shed some light on the subject and be a useful addition to analyses based on existing student record data.

## **2. Presentation of the Research**

A large part of this report consists of statistical tables, together with explanations of how to read them and interpretations of the information they contain. In many research monographs, tables or charts are used to illustrate or reinforce findings. In contrast, the statistical tables presented here are the building blocks of this report. This is because they contain the data generated by analyses of student records on which the findings of this report are based, and the discussions of them show how the authors generated those findings.

Presenting the results of data analysis in this way places readers in the middle of the research process. It allows them to scrutinize both the results of data analysis and how it was used. Many research reports either relegate the results of data analysis to an appendix or present the relationship of that analysis to student outcomes (or other dependent variables) in terms of regression coefficients. In contrast, tables that show the relationship between analyses of student records and student outcomes are at the heart of this report. The authors chose to construct the report around an explanation of the tables that constitute its building blocks for several reasons.

First, the findings of any research depend on the variables that are analyzed. There are far more variables that might effect student outcomes in the ESL field than this or any other study could investigate. As a result, the authors wished to make the variables they selected and the ways in which they analyzed them as transparent as possible.

Second, the strength of the relationships between the variables analyzed and student outcomes differs, and some of the differences depend on how the primary data (student records) are analyzed. The findings of this report express the conclusions of the authors about how strong and significant different relationships are. But these are matters on which reasonable people can differ. As a result, the authors chose to present the data on which their findings were based so that readers could form their own opinions.

Third, this study generated far more information about the factors affecting student outcomes than could be explored in this report. Many of the tables contain data that could be interpreted to lead to further findings or suggest directions for additional research. The authors wished to present this data as a way of encouraging readers to explore relationships they did not discuss and to pursue further investigations.

Finally, as discussed above, a primary purpose of this study was to demonstrate at least one way in which longitudinal research on ESL programs can be conducted. To achieve this goal, it was necessary to explain the various steps in the research process and the reasoning behind them in more detail than might otherwise be required.

This way of presenting research findings makes the reader a partner in the research process. It invites readers to follow the reasoning that led the authors from data to findings step by step, and to understand the basis for their conclusions as well as the limits of their findings.

The authors are aware that this may be an invitation that many readers will not wish to accept. We have tried to make the material included in the statistical tables and the explanations of them as lucid as possible, but there were limits to how much this portion of the report could be simplified. The large number of tables and the large number of variables they analyze require a narrative that some readers may find challenging. For those readers who do not wish to accept this challenge, this report summarizes the findings and their implications in several ways, as indicated below.

## **C. ORGANIZATION: HOW TO USE THIS REPORT**

### **1. Chapters**

This report contains 10 chapters. Chapter 1 (“Context”) describes the nature and dimensions of CCSF’s ESL program and its relationship to other programs at the College. It provides background information that is essential to understanding the analysis that follows. Chapter 2 explains total enrollment trends at the College from 1998-2006 over the last seven years as well as enrollment trends in credit and non-credit ESL. It highlights the effects of changes in ESL enrollment on enrollment at the College as a whole. Chapter 3 defines the cohort of students first enrolled in ESL in 1998, 1999, and 2000 that form the basis for the analyses in all subsequent chapters. It explains why the cohort was defined in this way as well as possible limitations that the definition places on the study’s findings.

Chapters 4-7 contain the major findings of the study. Each of these chapters shows the relationship between selected variables and the student outcomes with which the study is primarily concerned. Chapter 4 examines the persistence rates (the number of terms enrolled in ESL) of members of the cohort and analyzes factors that are associated with persistence. Chapter 5 examines the learning gains of members of the cohort (defined as numbers of levels of ESL completed) and analyzes factors associated with differences in learning gains. Chapter 6 shows the rates at which members of the cohort made the transition to credit studies and the factors associated with different transition rates. Chapter 7 shows the success in credit studies of non-credit students who made the transition to credit courses.

Chapters 8-10 analyze a number of factors not examined in Chapter 4-7 that are related to the student outcomes discussed in those chapters. Chapter 8 shows the relationship between “stopping out” (long breaks in attending ESL classes) and persistence, learning gains, and transitions. Chapter 9 shows the relationship between matriculation services provided by CCSF and these student outcomes. Finally, Chapter 10 examines the relationship between three program enhancements CCSF has adopted to improve students performance and major student outcomes. The three enhancements are ESL Focus

Classes that allow non-credit students to study only one of the core ESL skills at a time, accelerated courses that combine the study of two levels of ESL in one semester, and CCSF's policy of allowing ESL students to enroll in non-credit courses outside ESL.

## **2. Organization of the Chapters**

All the chapters in this report (except Chapters 1 and 3) are organized so that they can be read independently of each other and so that readers with different levels of interest can explore the subjects they discuss in various levels of detail. Each chapter begins with a "Background" section that explains aspects of CCSF's ESL program that the reader must understand to follow the analysis in the chapter. Next, each chapter contains a "Major Findings" section for the chapter and some of the implications of the findings in a concise form. This is followed by an "Analysis" section that presents and explains the data on which the major findings are based and also contains some secondary findings. Each chapter also contains a "Discussion" section," which discusses some of the major implications of the analysis for understanding the outcomes of CCSF's ESL program and for its program design.

## **3. How to Use This Report**

The authors do not believe that most readers will wish to read this report from cover to cover. As stated above, the report is, in many respects, a resource document. The sequence of chapters and their organization are intended to help readers with differing interests use the report in different ways. For example, readers who are primarily interested in the report's overall findings can read only the Executive Summary or the "Major Findings" of chapters that are of interest to them. Readers who have a special interest in the topics covered by one or more chapters can read as many sections of those chapters as they wish. Readers with a special interest in implications of the report for program design can read only the "Discussion" sections of any of the chapters.

We hope that readers will select the portions of the report that are of greatest interest to them and not be discouraged by either the report's length or the complexity of some of the analyses that may not meet their needs. We also hope that everyone with an interest in gaining a deeper understanding of ESL service and of means by which both that service and research on it might be improved will be rewarded by some aspects of the report.

In short, this report is organized to facilitate "browsing" by the reader, both among and within chapters. This means that it inevitably contains a certain amount of redundancy. The authors have attempted to keep this to a minimum, while still constructing chapters and sections of chapters that can be read independently of each other.

Finally, there is one way in which this report should *not* be used. It should not be used to assess the overall quality of CCSF's ESL program. The authors believe that few if any other ESL programs have been subjected to such in-depth scrutiny. As a result, there is no way to know how CCSF's program would compare to other efforts if they were. Data from CCSF were used to investigate aspects of ESL service that have seldom been

examined. But a fair evaluation of the College's program would require more than data on outcomes. It would also include an assessment of the College's financing, the state and federal policies under which it operates, the characteristics of the community it serves, and many other factors.

**CHAPTER 1**

**OVERVIEW OF ESL PROGRAMS  
AT CITY COLLEGE OF SAN FRANCISCO**

**A. THE COLLEGE AND ITS STUDENTS**

**1. CCSF Services**

The City College of San Francisco (CCSF) is located in San Francisco – California’s fourth largest city, with a population of nearly 800,000. San Francisco is a diverse city with substantial Asian/Pacific Islander and Hispanic/Latino communities. It is also a graying city with a median age approaching 45. According to a CCSF poll in June 2005, over one third of the residents of San Francisco have taken classes at CCSF and 72% have friends and family who took classes through the College.<sup>5</sup>

CCSF offers both credit and non- credit programs. In most California communities, adult education (including ESL) is provided by the K-12 system but in a few communities, including San Francisco, it is provided by community colleges. In 2005-2006, CCSF served a total of 91,423 students. Of these, 47,002 were credit and 44,421 were non-credit. The ESL Department is the largest department at the College. In 2005-2006, it served a total of 30,265 students – 33% of the total CCSF enrollment. The non-credit (adult education) ESL program is the largest non-credit program at the College. In 2005-2006, there were 25,959 non-credit ESL students – 58% of all non-credit students. The credit ESL program is the eighth largest credit program at the College. In 2005-2006, 4,306 credit ESL students were enrolled – 9.2% of all credit students.<sup>6</sup>

**2. ESL Student Profile**

The College’s ESL program serves a wide variety of ethnicities but the most prominent are Asian and Hispanic. In the 2005-2006 academic year, 58.2% of non-credit ESL students who reported their ethnicity were Asian/Pacific Islander and 36.4 percent were Hispanic/Latino, with 13.3 percent unknown. In the credit program, 69.7% of students who reported their ethnicity were Asian/Pacific Islander, and 17.0% were Hispanic, with 1.2% unknown. Non-credit students were an older population than credit students. Nearly 60% of the non-credit students who reported their age (5.3% were unknown) were age 35 or older. Twenty-seven percent of those reporting were age 50 or older. In the credit program, nearly 75% were under 34 years old.

The majority of ESL students in 2005-2006 were women, in both credit and non-credit programs. In non-credit, 59.1% of the students who reported their gender (16.4% unknown) were women, whereas 62% of the credit students were women (2% unknown).

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<sup>5</sup> CCSF 2006 Accreditation Self Study (October 2005).

<sup>6</sup> Data taken from the CCSF Decision Support System in May 2007.

The majority of students in both credit and non-credit programs attended day classes only, but evening and weekend classes were also popular. In non-credit, 55.3% attended day classes only, 23% attended evening only, 5.1% attended weekend only, and the rest attended a combination of day/evening/weekend. In credit, 64% attended day only and 22.9% evening only, and the rest attended a combination of day/evening/weekend.

CCSF does not systematically collect information on the prior educational backgrounds of its non-credit students. As a result, the educational background of 71.9% of non-credit ESL students is unknown. However, based on the College's research, it appears that non-credit ESL students were less educated than were credit ESL students. Of those whose educational background was determined, 21% had not graduated from high school, 15.3% had a high school equivalency, 9% graduated from high school in the United States, and 4.4% have an Associate or higher degree. In credit ESL, of the 74% reporting, 13.2% had not graduated from high school, 57.1% had a high school equivalent, 25.6% had graduated from a U.S. high school, and 4% had an Associate or higher degree.<sup>7</sup>

## **B. THE ESL DEPARTMENT**

### **1. ESL is a Mission of CCSF**

ESL is a separate academic Department at CCSF, headed by a Department Chair. In recent years, it employed about 240 instructors, about half of whom were employed full time. It had a total annual budget of about \$15 million.

The Department Provides English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction to meet City College of San Francisco's mission statement:

“CCSF provides educational programs and services to meet the diverse needs of the community:

- Preparation for transfer to baccalaureate institutions
- Achievement of associate degrees of arts and sciences
- Acquisition of career skills needed for success in the workplace
- Lifelong learning life skills, and cultural enrichment
- Active engagement in the civic and social fabric of the community, citizenship preparation, and English as a Second Language
- Completion of requirements for the Adult High School Diploma and GED
- Promotion of economic development and job growth”<sup>8</sup>

### **2. Location of Classes**

CCSF offers classes at 12 major sites (ten campuses and two other sites) and at more than 100 other rented sites in different neighborhoods of San Francisco. Non-credit ESL classes are offered at eight of the campuses (Alemany, Chinatown/North Beach, Evans,

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<sup>7</sup> Data taken from the CCSF Decision Support System, May 2007.

<sup>8</sup> CCSF 2005-2006 Catalog.

Downtown, John Adams, Mission, Ocean, and Southeast) and at off-site locations connected to those campuses. Credit ESL classes are offered at three campuses: Ocean, Downtown and Mission. The largest non-credit ESL programs are at the Chinatown/ North Beach and Mission Campuses, which serve the Asian and Hispanic populations respectively.

### **3. ESL Programs Offered**

The following programs are offered:

- *Non-Credit ESL* - The non-credit ESL program offers 10 levels of instruction, (from literacy to low advanced, using California Adult ESL Model Standards level designations.<sup>9</sup>) The curriculum focuses on life skills. (See “Non-Credit ESL Program Characteristics” below for details on the types of courses offered.) In fall 2006, the non-credit program offered 522 sections of 76 different ESL courses.
- *Credit ESL* - The credit ESL program offers seven levels of English for Academic Purpose courses (High Beginning to Superior, using California Pathways level designations.<sup>10</sup>) and, as of fall 2006, English for Health Professionals courses. (See “Credit ESL Program Characteristics” below for details on the types of courses offered.) In fall 2006, the credit ESL program offered 144 sections of 19 different courses.
- *Institute for International Students* - This intensive program is designed to serve students on a foreign student visa who are preparing to enter a U.S. college. It served 238 students in the 2004-2005 academic year. The program is administered separately from the ESL Department, but it is closely related. Instructors for both the Institute and the Department are hired from the same pool. Many foreign students who enroll in the Institute subsequently enroll in the College and take credit ESL courses.

## **C. NON-CREDIT ESL PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS**

### **1. Purpose**

Non-credit ESL courses are designed to give students proficiency in English to find employment, continue their education, and to function successfully in the culture and society of the United States. Survival skills are stressed. In the general ESL courses, emphasis is on fluency and communication in all four language skills – reading, writing, speaking, and listening (comprehension of spoken English). Course descriptions for the

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<sup>9</sup> California State Department of Education, “English-as-a-Second language Model Standards for Adult Education,” 1992. Available at: <http://www.otan.us/webfarm/emailproject/standard.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office, “California Pathways: The Second Language Student in Public High Schools, Colleges and Universities”. Available at: <http://www.catesol.org/pathways.pdf>.

Low Beginning Level 1 and High Intermediate Level 8 classes give a picture of the range of skills taught.

In Level 1, students develop language skills and a general understanding of the content in simple written and spoken English. They practice language for daily survival, learn how to participate in common social exchanges, and learn to copy and print simple sentences. In Level 8, students develop the skills to understand essential points of discussions or speeches in special fields of interest and to communicate about a variety of topics using appropriate syntax. They read authentic material on a variety of topics and write brief compositions about previously discussed topics.

## **2. Courses Offered**

Non-credit ESL courses are offered free, and they are “open-entry/open exit”. This means that students can begin attending any time during the term if there is space available in a class and they can stop attending at any time without penalty.

Most of the non-credit ESL courses are a semester in length (about 18 weeks) and meet for 10 hours a week (180-hour courses). In addition, courses of five-hours a week (for about 18 weeks) are offered (90 hours/semester). Some courses of 2.5-hour a week (45 hours/semester) are also offered, mostly on weekends. Instructors follow course outlines approved by the state Community College Chancellor’s Office. As noted, because the program is open entry, students can enter at any time during the semester if space is available. On average, non-credit ESL students attend 110 hours per semester.

CCSF offers the following type of non-credit ESL courses:

- a) *General ESL courses*: These courses have integrated listening/speaking/reading/writing curricula. A few are intensive courses that offer two levels of curriculum in one course (for example Intermediate Low 5/6 Intensive). These courses are designed for students who wish to move more quickly through the program. General ESL courses are designated “ESLN” courses at CCSF.
- b) *Focus ESL courses*: These include courses that focus on a single skill (such as listening or writing), computer assisted language courses, and courses that focus on a specific topic, such as Current Events. Focus courses are designated “ESLF” courses.
- c) *VESL courses*: These include general job preparation courses (such as Social Communication and Career Exploration) and courses that prepare students for specific vocations – such as Communication Skills for Janitorial Workers and Communication Skills for Health Workers. VESL courses are designated “ESLV” courses.
- d) *Literacy courses*: Literacy courses in English are offered for students who are pre-literate, non-literate, or semi-literate in their native language and have few or no



English skills. These are designated as the lowest level ESLN course. A Spanish language literacy course (which provides development of literacy skills in Spanish and is designed for students with less than five years of schooling in their native country) is offered at the Mission Campus. This is classified as an ESLF course.

- e) *Citizenship courses*: These courses provide preparation for the U.S. citizenship test. These are designated “ESLC” courses.
- f) *Bridge courses*: These include courses in introduction to computers and keyboarding and are designed to prepare students to enter business courses at the College. These are designated “ESLB” courses.

Most non-credit ESL courses are leveled courses. This means they provide instruction at different levels to students with different levels of English proficiency. However, some courses are multi-level. These take various forms. They may include up to four levels of classes (for example ESLN 1-4 or ESLN 5-8), or be an ESLF (Focus) class in which many levels of students can enroll (for example, “English Through Song Lyrics,” in which anyone at Level 3 or above can enroll).

### **3. Features of ESLF**

Because this report focuses on a study of a cohort of students enrolled in ESLN and/or ESLF courses at CCSF, it is important to understand how the ESLF courses are similar to and differ from the ESLN courses as well as the rationale for offering these courses.

***Curriculum.*** The curriculum in the majority of ESLF courses focuses on *one* of the four skills that are taught in the ESLN courses (reading, writing, speaking, or listening), whereas the curriculum in ESLN courses focuses on all four language skills.

An underlying assumption about second language learners is that they may have uneven language skills. For example, a student may demonstrate advanced speaking skills but only intermediate writing skills. Thus, CCSF offers focus courses in each separate skill for Beginning and Intermediate Level students (there are no single skill focus courses for Advanced Level 9) to give students the opportunity to take courses in the skill(s) in which they are weakest or wish to improve. In addition, ESLF courses in pronunciation and conversation are offered and a few in specific topics such as Current Events.

***Length.*** The ESL Department determined that focus classes do not need to be as long as general ESLN courses. So, whereas most ESLN courses are 10 hour a week courses, most ESLF courses are for 5 hours a week, although a few 2.5 hour a week ESLF courses are offered, primarily on weekends.

***Scheduling.*** ESLF courses are offered to meet student needs for classes at different times of the day, and the times at which they are offered make it convenient for students to take both ESLF and ESLN. For example, campuses typically offer daytime ESLN classes that meet for two hours per day starting at 8 am, 10 am, 1 pm and 3 pm. They

offer ESLF courses that meet for one hour per day at 12 pm. Therefore, these courses are bracketed by ESLN courses in terms of scheduling.

**Two-level classes.** Most ESLF courses are two-level – for example, Beginning Low 1 and 2 Speaking, or Beginning High 3 and 4 Listening. For purposes of this study, these two-level courses are coded as one level, using the lower of the two levels. For example, ESLF Beginning Low 1 and 2 Listening are coded as a Level 1 ESLF course. Any ESLF course that was more than two levels is considered a multi-level course, and in this study it is coded as a “no level” class.

**Enrollment.** Many students enroll in both ESLN and ESLF courses and most often they enroll in them concurrently. Of the ESLF courses included in this study, the most commonly offered are Listening and Speaking courses at the Beginning Levels. For example, in Fall 1998, 11 sections of Beginning Low Listening and 3 sections of Beginning Low Speaking were offered. One section of Beginning Low Reading and two sections of Beginning Low Writing were offered. At the Intermediate Levels, the distribution of ESLF leveled courses was more even.

#### 4. Enrollment in Non-Credit ESL

In Fall 2006, 76 different ESL non-credit courses were offered, although some were different lengths of the same course (for example a 180-hour version and a 90-hour version of Level 1). Twenty-three general non-credit ESL courses, 5 literacy courses, 18 vocational ESL courses, 24 focus courses, 3 citizenship courses, and 3 bridge courses were offered.

Duplicated enrollment figures for non-credit ESL courses for fall 2006 were:

- |                   |        |  |
|-------------------|--------|--|
| • ESL Bridge      | 1,036  | (24% Beginning Level, 76% Intermediate Level)      |
| • ESL Citizenship | 2,243  | (93.3% Beginning, 6.7% Intermediate)               |
| • ESL Focus       | 5,285  | (72% Beginning, 28% Intermediate)                  |
| • ESL General     | 20,706 | (66.7% Beginning, 32.3% Intermediate, 1% Advanced) |
| • ESL Literacy    | 2,595  | (100% Beginning)                                   |
| • Vocational      | 1,438  | (64% Beginning, 36% Intermediate) <sup>11</sup>    |

#### 5. Admissions

Anyone 18 years of age or older can enroll in free non-credit classes at CCSF, with the exception of those on F1/F2 and B1/B2 visas.<sup>12</sup> Most students enrolling in ESL classes take an ESL placement test as part of the matriculation process. Students are pre-screened by Admission and Enrollment staff and/or Placement Testing staff. They are exempted from the placement test if they are determined to be at the Literacy Level and not able to

<sup>11</sup> Decision Support System, CCSF Office of Research Planning and Grants.

<sup>12</sup> F1 visas are short-term foreign student visas, and F2 visas are for the dependants of F1 visa holders. B1 visas are business visas, and B2 visas are for tourists.

complete the test. They are also exempted if they are determined to be at the lowest Beginning Level and can be placed directly in Level 1.

Students who take the ESL placement test may also receive orientation and counseling. The number who do so varies from campus to campus based on the availability of these matriculation services. At locations where only one or very few non-credit ESL classes are offered, none of these services may be available and the teacher enrolls the student directly into the class. (Further information about these matriculation services is provided in Chapter 9.)

The College, individual campuses, and the ESL Department advertise the availability of ESL classes, but the majority of students learn about them through word of mouth.

## **6. Placement**

The College uses locally developed tests in reading and listening to determine the level of non-credit ESL at which students are initially placed. These tests undergo a rigorous validation process at CCSF and are approved by the state Community College Chancellor’s Office. CCSF does not have correlations between its ESL placement tests and nationally developed tests. However, CASAS and TABE test scores that are correlated with the levels CCSF offers provide a frame of reference:

<u>CASAS Levels</u>	<u>CCSF Levels</u>	<u>CASAS Reading</u>	<u>TABE Reading</u>
Literacy	CCSF ESL Literacy	150-180	
Low Beginning	CCSF ESL 1, 2	181-190	
High Beginning	CCSF ESL 3, 4	191-200	
Low Intermediate	CCSF ESL 5, 6	201-210	
High Intermediate	CCSF ESL 7, 8	211-220	461-517 (4-5.9 grade)
Low Advanced	CCSF ESL 9	221-235	518-566 (6-8.9 grade)

## **7. Advancement**

Instructors are responsible for making decisions about when students have satisfactorily achieved objectives of a course (as specified in the course outline) and are ready to be advanced to the next level. Instructors evaluate student performance in class on a daily basis. In addition, department-wide tests in Listening and Reading are administered at the end of each semester to students enrolled in Levels 2, 4, and 6. Listening and Reading tests are augmented by an oral interview and writing sample to determine whether Level 4 students are ready to move from Beginning to Intermediate courses. All these department-wide tests are designed to assess whether students have mastered the content of courses at each level, as specified in the course outlines (which are based on the state ESL Model Standards).

Although most of College’s funding for non-credit ESL comes from the State of California, the College also receives federal funding under the provisions of Title II of the Workforce Investment Act. To meet the reporting requirements of Title II, the ESL

Department administers CASAS tests to students in all ESLN classes that meet 10 hours per week. Instructors do not use the results of these tests when making promotion decisions, because CCSF's ESL curriculum is aligned with the state Model ESL Standards, not the CASAS tests.

## **D. CREDIT ESL PROGRAM CHARACTERISTICS**

### **1. Purpose**

Credit ESL courses at CCSF are designed to help students develop academic language skills and strategies and prepare them to be successful in academic college coursework. Course outlines must meet state requirements for credit courses and are approved by the state Community College Chancellor's Office. In credit ESL, language skills instruction is integrated with academic tasks and content.

The lowest level core reading/writing/grammar course provides an introduction to pre-college reading materials and practice in writing simple academic paragraphs and reports, as well as High Beginning Level vocabulary and grammar study. The highest-level reading/writing/grammar course focuses on advanced academic reading skills with an emphasis on critical reading of expository prose and practice in various forms of composition and research necessary for college work. It pays special attention to the development of grammatical accuracy and a college writing style.

### **2. Courses Offered**

Unlike non-credit ESL courses, credit courses are neither free nor "open-entry/open exit." Students pay tuition and fees on a unit cost (credit hour) basis – although this is refundable in certain circumstances. Students usually can enter only at the beginning of each term, and they can be dismissed due to no-attendance. Those who are dismissed ("dropped") usually forfeit their tuition and fees. Classes are graded, but there is no penalty for failing, except that a student must take the course again (and incur more cost) if they wish to continue in the credit ESL sequence.

All credit ESL courses are semester length (about 18 weeks), but they meet for differing numbers of hours. Nineteen credit ESL courses are offered, twelve of which are non-degree applicable and seven of which are degree applicable. CCSF offers the following types of credit ESL courses:

- *Integrated reading/writing/grammar:* These courses are designated ESL 110 (Low Beginning) through ESL 170 (Superior). All credit ESL students are required to take these reading/writing/grammar courses, beginning at the level in which they are initially placed by the Department's matriculation process (see below). ESL 110-170 courses meet between three and six hours per week plus lab time, depending on the course. (See chart below.) ESL 82, a three-hour-per-week course roughly equivalent to ESL 160, has been phased out, but it was offered during the time frame of this study.

- *Listening/Speaking:* Depending on placement test results, students may also be required to take three-hour-per-week listening/speaking courses. These are designated ESL 112 (High Beginning) through ESL 142 (High Intermediate).
- *Elective courses:* Elective courses are offered in pronunciation, accent improvement, advanced speaking and pronunciation, advanced listening and reading, intermediate and advanced editing, and grammar review.

Most credit ESL courses are offered at the Ocean Campus, where most CCSF credit programs are located. A few are offered at two other campuses. In fall 2006, 144 sections of 19 credit ESL courses were offered. Duplicated enrollment figures for credit ESL courses for fall 2006 were:

<u>Required R/W/G courses</u>	<u>Units</u>	<u>Hours/Week</u>	<u>Enrollment</u>
ESL 110	6	6	71
ESL 120	6	6	232
ESL 130	6	6	377
ESL 140	6	6	478
ESL 150	5	5 lecture/1 lab	482
ESL 160	4	4 lecture/1 lab	158
ESL 82	3	3	217
ESL 170	3	3	41
Total			2,056

<u>Required Listening/Speaking courses</u>			
ESL 112	2	3	62
ESL 122	2	3	158
ESL 132	2	3	215
ESL 142	2	3	160
Total			595

<u>Elective courses</u>			
ESL 20	6	6	32
English for Health Professionals			
ESL 49	2	3 lecture/1 lab	81
Pronunciation			
ESL 66	3	3	16
Advanced Listening and Reading			
ESL 75	2	3	99
Intermediate Editing/Grammar			
ESL 79	3	3	221
Advanced Speaking and Pronunciation			
ESL 85	2	3	63
Advanced Editing/Grammar			
Total			512

### **3. Admissions**

Anyone 18 years or older may enroll in CCSF credit courses and does not need to have a high school diploma or GED. Students who enroll in credit courses for the first time and those who have dropped out and wish to be readmitted are required to participate in the credit matriculation process. This includes submitting an application, taking a placement test, receiving an orientation, meeting with a counselor and registering for classes. Students may be excused from the assessment, orientation, or counseling components under certain conditions.

### **4. Placement in Credit ESL**

Students who wish to enroll in credit ESL courses must take credit ESL placement tests. These tests are primarily administered at the Ocean Campus, where the majority of credit courses are offered.

The ESL Department uses locally-developed placement tests. Students take multiple choice grammar and listening tests and provide a 30-minute writing sample. These tests undergo a rigorous validation process at CCSF and are approved by the state Community College Chancellor's Office. ESL instructors read the writing samples and, based on their evaluation of the writing, confirm that the student should be placed in the level indicated by the multiple choice test scores, or adjust the placement up or down one level (or in rare cases two levels). In some cases, they may also recommend that the student be placed in an English Department course that requires a higher level of English proficiency than is taught in the highest level ESL course. If this evaluation process determines that a student's English proficiency is below the standard required for the lowest level credit ESL course, the student is referred to non-credit ESL courses.

### **5. Advancement**

In credit ESL, as in non-credit, instructors are responsible for making decisions on whether a student passes or fails a course. Their decisions are based on whether the student achieves the objectives of a course as specified in the course outline. Teachers evaluate student performance by course assignments, quizzes, tests, compositions, and other means. For ESL 110-170, they also use the results of locally-developed tests in reading, grammar, and writing, administered at the end of the semester. Course outlines recommend that these final tests should be 25% of the grade a student receives for each credit course. The final tests were first used in Fall 2002.

### **6. ESL Courses Meeting Graduation Requirements**

The highest-level credit ESL composition course, ESL 170, presently meets the College's graduation requirement for written composition. The graduation requirement will change to English 1A in Fall 2009.

ESL students seeking an AA or AS degree or certificate from CCSF, if they are not interested in transferring to a four-year college, take ESL 170 (or ESL 82) to meet the College's graduation requirement for Associate degrees. ESL students who wish to transfer to a four-year college in the University of California system must complete freshman composition, English 1A, before transferring.

Most credit ESL students complete English 1-A by taking a sequence of courses in the English Department. In most cases, they must successfully complete ESL 160, the prerequisite for English 93, and then complete English 93, English 96, and finally English 1A. But students may also take the English Placement test at any time to place higher in this course sequence.

## 7. Articulation

***Non-Credit to Credit.*** A major focus of this report is the transition of non-credit ESL student to credit studies. As a result, it is important to understand the relationship between non-credit and credit courses at CCSF.

There is no formal articulation between non-credit and credit courses at the College. Students who wish to enroll in non-credit courses complete the non-credit matriculation process, which for ESL students usually includes taking the non-credit ESL placement test. Students who wish to enroll in credit courses complete the credit matriculation process, which for ESL students includes taking the credit ESL placement test.

However, CCSF has various systems to facilitate the transition from non-credit to credit ESL. Counselors at the major campuses where a large number of non-credit students are enrolled offer one-hour Steps to Credit Workshops several times a semester. Attendance at these Workshops ranges from very few to over 20 per workshop. The workshops explain what credit courses are, the reasons for taking those courses (to obtain a degree/certificate, a job, transfer, or self-improvement), the credit vocational training programs CCSF offers, how to enroll in credit courses, and information on financial aid/scholarships. Counselors are available to assist students in understanding and completing the approximately one-month credit matriculation process: completing the application, taking the placement test, attending orientation, making an appointment with a counselor, and registering for classes.

Students who wish to pursue a degree or certificate can take either the credit ESL or the English Department placement test. Non-native speakers who identify themselves as English dominant (mostly those who have lived in the United States for a long time) are more likely to choose to take the English placement test and enroll in courses offered by the English Department. Counselors and staff of the admissions and enrollment offices try to direct students to the program that seems most appropriate for them.

Most non-credit ESL students who make the transition to credit courses enroll in credit ESL, but students are not required to complete the credit ESL sequence before enrolling in other academic or vocational courses at the College. In fact, most credit ESL students take other academic/vocational courses concurrently with credit ESL (See Chapter 10.)

Aside from credit ESL, the credit programs with the highest enrollment of students who at one time took non-credit ESL are: Physical Education, English, Business, Math, Learning Assistance, Social Science, Child Development and Family Studies, Computer Networking and InfoTech, Health Science, Behavioral Sciences, and Biological Sciences.<sup>13</sup>

***Transition from non-credit ESL to other non-credit courses.*** It is important to understand the relationship between non-credit ESL and other non-credit courses at CCSF, because (see chapter 10 of this report) enrollment in other non-credit courses increases the chances that non-credit ESL students will transfer to credit.

There is no formal articulation between non-credit ESL and other non-credit programs. Non-credit ESL students do not need to complete the ESL sequence of courses before enrolling in other non-credit courses at the College, although many courses have an ESL advisory of at least ESL Level 5 (Intermediate Low).

Over 25% of students who start in non-credit ESL also take other non-credit courses at CCSF. The most popular other non-credit courses for non-credit ESL students are offered by the Business Department. College research shows that 14.9% of students who start in non-credit ESL also take non-credit business courses. About 6.5% of non-credit ESL students take courses through the Transitional Studies Department, either to get a GED or high school diploma, or to continue to develop their language skills.

The Business Department offers a wide variety of non-credit courses that provide training in use of computers (microcomputer labs, spreadsheets, internet, etc), such as courses in word processing, office technology, and small business. The Department also offers non-credit certificates in such areas as office technology and small business. As a result, ESL students can obtain a substantial amount of vocational education in business without enrolling in credit programs or in the College's vocational ESL courses (ESLV).

The Transitional Studies Department offers 21 non-credit courses for students who have not had a chance to complete or advance their education, generally due to lack of a high school diploma. The Department offers three course levels of adult basic education – ABE Basic, ABE Intermediate, and GED/High School Diploma. Transitional Studies also offers some vocational courses to prepare students for employment, entry into job training programs, or further college study. Some courses offered through the Transitional Studies Department have a CASAS or TABE test score or ESL level advisory. In 2004-2005 3,317 students took courses in this Department; 30% of them were from non-credit ESL.

Some non-credit ESL students take non-credit courses in more than one non-credit area. College records indicate that 6.4% take Business plus courses in another non-credit area,

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<sup>13</sup> Steven Spurling, "Summer 98-Fall 05 Research Report," CCSF Office of Research Planning and Grants, Spring 2006.



and 4.2% take courses in Transitional Studies plus another non-credit area. Non-credit ESL students are probably more likely to learn about and take courses through other non-credit departments when these courses are offered at the same campus where they are studying non-credit ESL.

## CHAPTER 2

### ENROLLMENT

#### A. BACKGROUND

This chapter describes the enrollment trends of all students enrolled at CCSF and all ESL students enrolled at the College over a nine-year period from 1998 to 2006. (Chapter 3 will describe the characteristics of a sub-set of the College's ESL students on which the longitudinal analysis in subsequent chapters is based.)

To understand the enrollment trends described in this and other chapters, it is essential to understand the distinction between ESL students that this report designates as "new" and those it designates as "continuing." This distinction is necessarily abbreviated in footnotes to the tables in this chapter. In abbreviated form, "new" ESL students are any students who enrolled in credit or non-credit ESL for the first time during the year indicated. "Continuing" ESL students are students who were enrolled in ESL during the year indicated within the same division (credit or non-credit), *and* who had been enrolled in ESL in some previous year in that same division. Students who move from one division to the other (e.g., from non-credit to credit ESL) are considered new students in the division to which they moved, even though they are continuing at the College. Other students enrolled at CCSF (those not enrolled in ESL) are designated as "new" and "continuing" using a similar classification system.

These short definitions do not include all aspects that bear on how new and continuing students were calculated as they affect the enrollment numbers in this report, which may be of interest to some readers. Thus, a more complete explanation of this distinction can be found in the "Definition" section at the end of this chapter.

#### B. MAJOR FINDINGS

- ESL is the single largest department at CCSF and is a major source of the College's total enrollment. From 1998-2006, 34% of all enrollments, 58% of all non-credit enrollments, and 10% of all credit enrollments at CCSF were in ESL.
- Total College enrollment was about the same in 2006 as it had been in 1998. Total ESL enrollment declined by 12% from 1998-2006. Both total College and ESL enrollment peaked in 2001-2002 before declining.
- Total *non-credit* enrollment for both the College as a whole and for ESL declined from 1998-2006, but the percent of decline was smaller for the College as a whole (7%) than for ESL (9%). Total *credit* enrollment for the College as whole increased by 7% from 1998-2006, but it declined by 26% for ESL.
- The College as a whole and its ESL program have been more successful retaining continuing students than enrolling new students. The decline in new enrollments

accounts for the decrease in non-credit enrollment for both ESL and the College as a whole from 1998-2006. The decrease in new non-credit ESL enrollment accounts for 79% of the decrease in total ESL enrollment and 74% of the decrease in non-credit enrollment at the College as a whole. A large portion of this decrease in new non-credit enrollment was due to a decrease in the number of new students enrolled in the largest ESL program, General Life Skills (designated ESLN).

- From 1998-2006, the vast majority of non-credit ESL students (78%) were enrolled in ESLN. The smallest numbers of students were enrolled in Vocational ESL (ESLV) and ESL Bridge courses (ESLB). Enrollment in Vocational ESL increased the most over the nine years (by 170%). Enrollment in Citizenship courses (ESLC) decreased the most (by 36%).
- From 1998-2006, a majority of *credit* ESL students first enrolled in the three highest credit levels. Except for credit Level 2 (ESL120), all credit levels experienced declines in enrollment, and the three highest levels experienced the sharpest declines in both percentage and numerical terms. In *non-credit*, the vast majority of students first enrolled in the Literacy Level and in the four Beginning Level courses (Levels 1-4) of ESLN and ESLF. Enrollment in some non-credit levels increased, and enrollment in other levels declined. Declines in Beginning Levels 1-3 accounted for 74% of the fall in non-credit enrollment.
- By far the largest ethnic group of students enrolled in both credit and non-credit ESL from 1998-2006 was Asian (51% of total ESL enrollment). The next largest was Hispanic (29%). In credit, declines in enrollment occurred in both these ethnic populations over the 9-year period, while non-credit enrollment by both these ethnic populations was about the same in 2006 as it had been in 1998. There were major declines in enrollment in both credit and non-credit by students from other ethnic groups (e.g., White, Black, Filipino) that made smaller contributions to total enrollment.
- Considerable differences existed between ages of students in credit and non-credit. In credit, over half of students were under 30, and the largest age group was the 20-24 group. In non-credit, over half of students were over 30, and the largest age group was the 50+ group. These age differences did not change substantially over the 9-year time period.
- Although most of the findings in this chapter and the responses required to address particular issues they raise (see “Discussion”) are specific to CCSF, they have important implications for other ESL programs:
  - *All programs should examine the percent of their students at different proficiency levels to ensure that they are providing appropriate services. The available evidence suggests that in most adult education ESL programs, as at CCSF, a majority of students are enrolled at the lowest levels of English proficiency. Programs should monitor the progress of low-level students with*

*special care, because these students will have to advance multiple levels to attain the English skills needed to meet the challenges and benefit from the opportunities of American life.*

- *Likewise, all programs should examine multi-year enrollment trends, and in particular the ratio of continuing to new students. This ratio gives a partial indication of problems in persistence that should be addressed. All programs should also examine enrollment trends in different types of ESL services to determine whether some of these should be expanded or improved. In particular, they should examine the demand and need for vocational ESL: (VESL) programs.*
- *Finally, all programs should gather comprehensive demographic information (including information of prior education levels) about their adult education ESL students. And they should adopt procedures to estimate how many students leave their service area and what the characteristics of those students are. Programs should use demographic profiles of their student body and demographic trends to determine whether they are reaching all sectors of the population in need of ESL service with appropriate types of instruction. And they should determine the extent and nature of the unmet need for ESL in their areas.*

## **C. ANALYSIS**

### **1. Total College Enrollment Trends**

Table 2.1 below presents annual enrollment at CCSF for all credit and non-credit students from 1998-2006. Between 1998-2006, the largest total enrollments at CCSF were in 2001 and 2002 (103,701 students and 104,220 students, respectively). But total enrollment in 2006 was about the same (91,783) as it had been in 1998 (92,110). Total enrollment declined by 12% (12,279 students) from 2002 (the year of highest enrollment) to 2006.

Total enrollment was about the same in 2006 as in 1998, but there were significant changes in the composition of that enrollment. Between 1998 and 2006, credit enrollment increased by 7%, while non-credit enrollment declined by 7%. Because the number of students enrolled in credit and non-credit was about the same, these percentage changes led to almost no net change in total enrollment.

The decline in non-credit enrollment was entirely due to a decline in the number of new students. Although non-credit enrollment of continuing students (students who had previously been enrolled) remained the same in 2006 as it had been in 1998, enrollment of new students decreased by 19%. Because there were fewer new than continuing students in each year, this differential in the percentage of new and continuing students accounts for the 7% decline in non-credit enrollment. That decline would have been greater if continuing student enrollment had decreased.

The effect on total enrollment of the rates of change in new and continuing student enrollment was also apparent in the credit division. From 1998-2006, new student enrollment in credit remained about the same, but continuing student enrollment increased by 11% – leading to the net increase of 7% in credit enrollment. This increase in total enrollment would have been smaller if continuing student enrollment had not increased by as much as it did.

Taken together, these findings lead to the conclusion that the College appears to have been more successful in retaining students who were already enrolled (an increase in credit and no change in non-credit) than in attracting new students (no change in credit and a decrease in Non-Credit) from 1998-2006. This effect is most apparent in the Non-Credit division where the number of new students declined.

**Table 2.1 Annual Enrollment at CCSF, 1998-2006**

Academic Year	Credit		Credit Total	Non-Credit		Non-Credit Total	Grand Total
	New	Continuing		New	Continuing		
1998	15989	28406	44395	17628	30087	47715	92110
1999	16507	28928	45435	17989	30971	48960	94395
2000	17214	30036	47250	17854	31973	49827	97077
2001	19282	31867	51149	18473	34079	52552	103701
2002	18983	33536	52519	17034	34667	51701	104220
2003	15309	32340	47649	15818	32440	48258	95907
2004	15336	31908	47244	14527	31287	45814	93058
2005	15256	31746	47002	14520	29901	44421	91423
2006	16035	31559	47594	14229	30118	44347	91941
Grand Total	149911	280326	430237	148072	285523	433595	863832
% Change from 1998	0%	11%	7%	-19%	0%	-7%	0%

- Enrollment figures include all students who have a minimum of eight hours enrollment at the college in non-credit or enrolled in any credit course.
- The “Total” category includes both continuing and new students who were enrolled in any classes during the summer, spring, or fall of the year.
- The “New” category includes any student who enrolled in any class at CCSF for the first time during the summer, spring, or fall of the year.
- The “Continuing” category includes all students who had been enrolled in any class at CCSF prior to the year indicated.

## 2. Total ESL Enrollment Trends

Table 2.2 presents annual ESL enrollment for 1998-2006. ESL is the largest single Department at CCSF. Comparing this table to Table 2.1, it is apparent that ESL makes a large contribution to College enrollment, particularly in the Non-Credit Division. In total, 34% of all enrollments at CCSF, 58% of all non-credit enrollments, and 10% of all credit enrollments from 1998-2006 were in ESL. The highest ESL enrollment was in 2001 (5,140 credit and 31,039 non-credit students, respectively.) The 2006 ESL enrollment (29,342) was the lowest in the nine-year period.

The trends in ESL enrollment were somewhat different from those for enrollment in the College as a whole. Total ESL enrollment declined 12% (3,920 students) from 1998-2006, whereas total college enrollment was about the same in 2006 as it had been in 1998. There were declines in enrollment in both credit and non-credit ESL, whereas credit enrollment increased for the College as a whole and non-credit declined.

In percentage terms, credit ESL enrollment fell more than non-credit enrollment from 1998 to 2006. There was a 26% decrease in ESL credit enrollment, compared to 9% in non-credit. In contrast, credit enrollment increased by 7% at the College as a whole, and non-credit enrollment decreased by only 7%. In numerical terms, the decline in non-credit ESL enrollment was almost twice as large as the decline in credit – 2,515 in non-credit compared to 1,405 in credit. Hence, in numerical terms, the decline in non-credit enrollment accounted for 64% of the decline in overall enrollment in ESL and 68% of the decrease in non-credit enrollment at the College as a whole.

Furthermore, this decline in non-credit ESL enrollment was almost entirely due to a decline in new non-credit students. This is demonstrated by the fact that, although enrollment of *continuing* non-credit students decreased by a tiny number (10 students) from 1998-2006, enrollment of *new* non-credit students decreased 23% (2,505 students). This differential of 2,505 students (plus the decrease of 10 continuing students) accounts for the decline in non-credit ESL enrollment.

In contrast, the percent of *both* new and continuing credit ESL students decreased by 26% from 1998-2006, and the decrease in new credit students (607 students) was slightly smaller than the decrease in continuing students (798). But, these changes in credit enrollment had little effect on the relative number of *all ESL* students who were new and continuing in 2006 compared to 1998. This is because the decrease in the number of new credit students was only slightly smaller than the decrease in the number of continuing students. It is also because both numbers were much smaller than the decrease of 2,505 continuing non-credit students from 1998-2006.

Combining credit and non-credit enrollment, new students decreased by 3,113, whereas continuing students decreased by 808 between 1998-2006. Decreases in new student enrollment accounted for 79.4% of the decrease in total ESL enrollment during this time period. These decreases also accounted for 74% of the decrease in non-credit enrollment for the College as a whole.

These trends lead to the conclusion that, like the College as a whole, CCSF’s ESL program was more successful in retaining existing students than in enrolling new ones. And like the College as a whole, this decline in the proportion of new students was primarily due to a large decline in new non-credit enrollment. This means that the decline in new ESL non-credit enrollment had a major effect on both total enrollment in ESL and at the College as a whole.

**Table 2.2 Annual ESL Enrollment, 1998-2006**

Academic Year	Credit		Credit Total	Non-Credit		Non-Credit Total	Grand Total
	New	Continuing		New	Continuing		
1998	2317	3069	5386	10745	17131	27876	33262
1999	2193	2982	5175	11067	17391	28458	33633
2000	2143	2800	4943	11282	17955	29237	34180
2001	2318	2822	5140	11593	19446	31039	36179
2002	2176	2940	5116	10334	19796	30130	35246
2003	1859	2829	4688	9592	18448	28040	32728
2004	1831	2757	4588	9202	17668	26870	31458
2005	1705	2538	4243	9116	17090	26206	30449
2006	1710	2271	3981	8240	17121	25361	29342
Grand Total	18252	25008	43260	91171	162046	253217	296477
% Change from 1998	-26%	-26%	-26%	-23%	0%	-9%	-12%

- Enrollment figures include all students who have a minimum of eight hours enrollment at the College in non-credit or who took any credit course.
- The “All” category includes both continuing and new students who were enrolled in any classes during the summer, spring, or fall of the year.
- The “New” category includes any student who enrolled in any ESL class at CCSF for the first time during the summer, spring, or fall of the year. The “Continuing” category includes students who enrolled in any ESL class at CCSF prior to the year indicated.

### **3. ESL Contribution to College Enrollment**

Because ESL is a major source of students for the College (34% of all enrollment from 1998-2006),<sup>14</sup> it is a matter of some concern when ESL enrollment declines. Table 2.3

<sup>14</sup> In fact, the total contribution of ESL to College enrollment was undoubtedly greater, because some ESL students enroll in classes outside ESL either during the period of time in which they are taking ESL classes or subsequently. See Chapters 7 and 10.

presents CCSF enrollment compared to ESL enrollment for each year from 1998-2006. Credit ESL enrollment dropped from 12% of the total College enrollment in 1998 to 8% of the total in 2006. Non-credit ESL enrollment was 58% of total Non-Credit enrollment from 1998-2006 but dropped to 57% in 2006. As a result, non-credit ESL enrollment was a fairly constant percentage of total non-credit College enrollment, whereas credit ESL enrollment declined as a percentage of total credit enrollment.

**Table 2.3 Annual CCSF Enrollment Compared to ESL Enrollment, 1998-2006**

Academic Year	Credit			Non-Credit		
	All College	All ESL		All College	All ESL	
	Number	Number	% of All College	Number	Number	% of All College
1998	44395	5386	12%	47715	27876	58%
1999	45435	5175	11%	48960	28458	58%
2000	47250	4943	10%	49827	29237	59%
2001	51149	5140	10%	52552	31039	59%
2002	52519	5116	10%	51701	30130	58%
2003	47649	4688	10%	48258	28040	58%
2004	47244	4588	10%	45814	26870	59%
2005	47002	4243	9%	44421	26206	59%
2006	47594	3981	8%	44347	25361	57%
% Change from 1998	7%	-26%		-7%	-9%	

-Enrollment figures include all students who have a minimum of eight hours enrollment at the College in non-credit in a year or enrolled in any credit course.

#### **4. Enrollment Trends by Type of Non-Credit ESL Courses**

Non-credit ESL offers five different types of courses: ESLN (General Life-skills), ESLF (Focus ESL), ESLV (Vocational ESL), ESLC (Citizenship ESL), and ESLB (ESL Bridge). Students sometimes enroll in more than one type of ESL course, which results in duplicated enrollment figures.

Table 2.4 describes duplicated enrollment figures for all ESL students from 1998-2006. As the Table shows, the vast majority of the non-credit ESL enrollment was in ESLN (General Life-skills). ESLN accounted for 78% of all ESL duplicated enrollment from 1998-2006. The second largest enrollment was in ESLF (Focus) classes (22% of total duplicated enrollment). ESLC (Citizenship) enrollment was the third largest (6% of total



enrollment). ESLV had the smallest enrollment over the 9-year period (4.6% of total duplicated enrollment).

Enrollment in ESLN, ESLC, and ESLB decreased from 1998-2006. ESLC enrollment declined the most – by 36% from 2,525 students to 1,623 students. ESLV (Vocational ESL) showed the greatest increase in the nine-year period – from 683 to 1,844 students (170%). ESLF also showed an increase during this period – from 5,423 to 6,996 students (9%).

The decline in new student enrollment was dramatic for all types of classes except ESLV. In numerical terms, the decline in ESLN enrollment was by far the greatest – 3,309 students, and ESLN had the second largest decline in percentage of new enrollment (29%), exceeded only by ESLC.<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, the large size of enrollment in ESLN (78% of all duplicated ESL enrollment during the 9-year period) and its large percentage decline in new student enrollment suggest that a decline in new ESLN students was the primary reason for the decline in new ESL students and its consequences mentioned above.

In contrast, the enrollment of continuing ESL students increased in all non-credit courses, except ESLC. This is consistent with the finding that the decline in non-credit ESL enrollment is almost entirely due to a decline in new student enrollment.

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<sup>15</sup> Note that the decline in new ESLN duplicated enrollments in Table 2.4 is greater than the total decline in all new ESL enrollments in Table 2.2. This is because “new enrollments” in Table 2.4 are new to the classes indicated, whereas they are new to *any* ESL class in Table 2.2. Hence, in Table 2.4, some students were new to ESLN, but not new to ESL, because they took another ESL class prior to enrolling in ESLN. The same logic applies to the numbers of new and continuing students in all the classes displayed in Table 2.4.

**Table 2.4 Non-Credit ESL Enrollment by Subject, 1998-2006**

Academic Year	ESLN Enrollment			ESLF Enrollment			ESLV Enrollment		
	New	Continuing	Grand Total	New	Continuing	Grand Total	New	Continuing	Grand Total
1998	11516	14156	25672	3945	2478	6423	295	388	683
1999	11754	14382	26136	4101	2473	6574	338	534	872
2000	11822	14996	26818	4157	2650	6807	389	837	1226
2001	11876	16334	28210	4930	3125	8055	479	1285	1764
2002	10414	16926	27340	4585	3672	8257	398	1268	1666
2003	9438	15760	25198	4329	3887	8216	469	1272	1741
2004	9037	15216	24253	3760	3847	7607	539	1214	1753
2005	8995	15000	23995	3807	3583	7390	613	1394	2007
2006	8207	15008	23215	3327	3669	6996	418	1426	1844
Total	93059	137778	230837	36941	29384	66325	3938	9618	13556
% Change from 1998	-29%	6%	-10%	-16%	48%	9%	42%	268%	170%

  

Academic Year	ESLC Enrollment			ESLB Enrollment		
	New	Continuing	Grand Total	New	Continuing	Grand Total
1998	1353	1172	2525	1187	349	1536
1999	1255	1182	2437	1238	316	1554
2000	1238	1003	2241	1565	452	2017
2001	1196	1123	2319	1235	541	1776
2002	1069	1187	2256	1058	511	1569
2003	853	1075	1928	1001	410	1411
2004	894	949	1843	917	429	1346
2005	926	708	1634	910	454	1364
2006	824	799	1623	933	419	1352
Total	9608	9198	18806	10044	3881	13925
% Change from 1998	-39%	-32%	-36%	-21%	20%	-12%

-ESLN=general ESL, ESL V=Vocational ESL, ESLC=Citizenship ESL, ESLF=Focus ESL, ESL B=Bridge ESL  
 -Enrollment figures include all students who have a minimum of eight hours enrollment at the College in non-credit or enrollment in any credit course.  
 -Duplicated enrollment counts student enrollment in all types of classes. So, for example, a student who is enrolled in two types of classes, such as ESLN and ESLF, is counted twice.

## 5. ESL Enrollment Trends by Level

The level of English language proficiency of CCSF's ESL students is obviously an important variable in describing enrollment in the College's ESL program. In non-credit ESL, level of proficiency can most easily be described by looking only at ESLN and ESLF students – who comprised the vast majority of all Non-Credit ESL enrollments.<sup>16</sup>

Table 2.5 describes the level at which all credit and Non-Credit ESL students were enrolled during each academic year from 1998-2006. More specifically, it shows the ESL level of each student in the first term during which they were enrolled in ESL during each year.<sup>17</sup> The top portion of the Table shows the numbers of *non-credit* students to whom a level could be assigned (most ESLN and ESLF students).<sup>18</sup> The bottom portion of Table 2.5 describes the first level of all *credit* ESL students who were enrolled in the courses indicated. These credit courses (the core Reading/Writing/Grammar courses) were all single level and comprise the vast majority of credit ESL enrollment. Students not enrolled in any of these core-leveled courses but enrolled in other credit ESL courses are represented in the “No Level” row. These students are excluded in the calculations below. In both tables, levels are listed in ascending order of English language proficiency.

***Non-credit.*** Table 2.5 shows that, over the 9-year period, 84% of all non-credit ESL students in single-level courses (those to whom a level could be assigned), were first enrolled during each year at the Literacy Level (represented as Level “0” in this and subsequent tables) and Beginning Levels (represented as Levels 1-4). Sixty percent were enrolled at the three lowest levels (Literacy and the Low Beginning Levels 1-2).<sup>19</sup> The level in which largest number of students enrolled during all nine years was Level 1.

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<sup>16</sup> This is because most (but not all) ESLN courses are “single level” courses – Literacy Level and Levels 1-9. Most ESLF courses are two-level courses. They are offered at the following levels: Beginning Low (CCCSF Level 1 and 2) Beginning High (CCSF Level 3 and 4) Intermediate Low (CCSF Level 5 and 6) or Intermediate High (CCSF Level 7 and 8.) That is, most classes in ESLN and ESLF enroll (and provide instruction to) students who are at the same level of proficiency. In contrast, most ESLV, ESLC, and ESLB are “multi-level” courses. Classes in these courses enroll (and provide instruction to) students who are at different levels of proficiency, for example, combining Beginning Low and Beginning High together. As a result data is not readily available on the proficiency levels of students in these programs.

<sup>17</sup> This distinction is important, because many students were enrolled in more than one ESL level during any given academic year.

<sup>18</sup> These are listed as levels 0-9 with ‘0’ being the Literacy Level. For purposes of this study, ESLF courses that were two CCSF levels were coded as the first of the two levels. So, for example, ESLF Beginning Low courses (CCSF Levels 1 and 2) were coded as Level 1. Those to whom a level could not be assigned (students in ESL courses other than ESLN and ESLF, and the limited number of students in those courses enrolled in multi-level classes) are listed as “No Level.”

<sup>19</sup> These percentages are slightly lower if the “No Level” students are included in the calculations. That is, if the percentage of students enrolled in Levels 0-4 are calculated as a percentage of all students to whom a level could be assigned plus all “No Level” students, the percentage is 72%, and if the percentage of students enrolled in Levels 0-2 is calculated in the same way, the percentage is 52.5%.

Enrollment in Level 1 ranged from a high of 9,585 students (36% of students to whom a level could be assigned) in 2001 to a low of 6,861 (31% of students to whom a level could be assigned) in 2006.<sup>20</sup> The level in which the smallest number of students enrolled was the highest non-credit level, Level 9. (Note that no figures for ESL 9 are available before 2001, because that was the first year in which the course was offered.)

Overall, there appears to be no systematic pattern of increase or decrease in enrollment among non-credit levels in percentage terms. The percent of students enrolled in both Literacy and Level 8 increased significantly (by 20% and 31%, respectively), while the percentage of students enrolled in Level 3 and 6 significantly declined (by 21% and 31%, respectively).

It is important to note that while the number of students enrolled at the Literacy Level increased by 20% over the nine years, the percentage of students enrolled in almost all of the other Beginning Level courses declined. Together with Literacy, these were the levels in which the overwhelming majority of non-credit ESL students enrolled. Level 1 enrollment declined by 13%, Level 2 by 16%, and Level 3 by 21%, whereas Level 4 increased by 4%.

In numerical terms, the declines in each of Levels 1-3 were larger than for any other levels of non-credit ESL. They totalled a decline of 2,436 in non-credit ESL enrollment. In total, the decline in all other levels was only 846. Thus, the declines in Levels 1-3 accounted for 74% of the decline in levels that lost enrollment from 1998-2006.

Although the declines in Levels 1-3 were augmented by declines in other levels and offset by increases in some levels, these numerical declines in Beginning level courses were largely responsible for the decline in total non-credit ESL enrollment discussed above.

**Credit.** Table 2.5 shows that credit enrollment had a different pattern. In all years, a majority of enrollment was in the higher-level credit ESL classes – ESL 140, ESL 150, and ESL 160/82. In 1998, 68% (2,878) of all credit students enrolled in the classes listed in Table 2.5 were enrolled in these advanced classes, and in 2006, 64% (2,149) of credit students enrolled in the classes listed enrolled at these levels. In total, from 1998-2006, 67% of credit students first enrolled in higher-level courses each year.<sup>21</sup> The relative number of students in these three advanced classes varied over the three years, but the difference in enrollment between them was at most a few hundred students, and often less. In all years, the number in the highest-level class (ESL 160/82) was lower than the number in the other two higher-level classes (ESL 140 and 150).

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<sup>20</sup> These percentages change to 31% and 27%, respectively if the “No Level” students are included in the calculations.

<sup>21</sup> If these calculations include “No Level” students, the percentages become 53% and 54%, respectively.

**Table 2.5 ESL Enrollment by First Level with Year from 1998-2006**

**Non-Credit**

First ESL Level	Academic Year										Percent Change from 1998
	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	Total	
0	2501	2602	2987	3065	2786	2751	2722	2855	3007	25276	20%
1	8047	8393	8885	9585	9171	7970	7537	7519	6961	74068	-13%
2	3633	3684	3475	3653	3619	3379	3378	3349	3047	31217	-16%
3	3710	3630	3654	3803	3663	3481	3311	3140	2946	31338	-21%
4	2183	2044	2058	2300	2312	2224	2250	2066	2260	19697	4%
5	1708	1614	1511	1605	1515	1512	1786	1735	1478	14464	-13%
6	1130	1240	1107	1105	1015	1075	917	899	781	9269	-31%
7	893	839	849	838	849	1013	883	747	818	7729	-8%
8	198	241	264	291	397	217	151	144	260	2163	31%
9				191	162	92	110	102	122	779	
No Level	3873	4171	4447	4603	4641	4326	3825	3650	3681	37217	-5%
Grand Total	27876	28458	29237	31039	30130	28040	26870	26206	25361	253217	-9%

**Credit**

First ESL Level	Academic Year										Percent Change from 1998
	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	Total	
0 (ESL22)	56	47	67	100							
1 (ESL110)	166	165	142	139	289	216	176	161	159	1613	-4%
2 (ESL120)	394	410	346	372	476	507	449	429	436	3810	11%
3 (ESL130)	762	723	762	810	907	796	756	653	600	6769	-21%
4 (ESL140)	859	862	888	960	1010	963	952	868	761	8123	-11%
5 (ESL150)	1099	1030	947	1038	975	874	864	837	750	8414	-32%
6 (ESL82/160)	920	889	779	719	816	730	798	737	638	7026	-31%
No Level	1130	1058	1012	1002	643	602	593	558	637	7235	-44%
Grand Total	5386	5175	4943	5140	5116	4688	4588	4243	3981	43260	-26%

-The "No Level" students in credit ESL were those enrolled in credit courses other than the core Reading/Writing/Grammar courses, designated as Level 0-6.

-The "No Level" students in non-credit were those enrolled in non-credit programs to which a level could not be assigned (ESLV, ESLB, and ESLC) plus those enrolled in multi-level ESLN or ESLF courses, and a small number whose final level of enrollment was below their first level of enrollment.

-ESL 22 was offered in 1998-2000, but was discontinued in Fall 02.

## 6. Ethnicity and Age of ESL Students

***Ethnicity.*** Table 2.6 describes the ethnicity of all students enrolled in CCSF's ESL program for the nine-year period, 1998-2006. Asians comprised the largest ethnic group in both credit (67% of all credit enrollment) and Non-Credit (48% of all non-credit enrollment). Hispanics comprised the second largest group (16% of total credit enrollment, and 32% of total non-credit enrollment).

The percentage of students from each of these ethnic groups was fairly close to these overall percentages in each of the 9 years examined and did not vary greatly from year to year. The percentage of Asian enrolled in non-credit ESL increased steadily from 46% in 1998 to 50% in 2006, and the percentage enrolled in credit ESL increased from 64% in 1998 to 69% in 2006 – with a brief dip from 68% in 2002 to 67% in 2003 and 2004.

The percentage of Hispanics enrolled in non-credit ESL increased from 28% in 1998 to the 33%-34% range in 2000-2003, declining to 31% in 2004, and reaching 32% in 2005-2006. The percentage enrolled in credit ESL rose from 15% in 1998 and 1999 to the 16%-17% range from 2000-2006.

In terms of numbers of students, from 1998-2006 the number of Asian *decreased* 1% in non-credit ESL and 20% in credit ESL. The number of Hispanics *increased* 1% in non-credit ESL and *decreased* 18% in credit ESL. Overall, the ratio of Asians to Hispanics changed very little over this time period.

However, the rates of increase and decrease in the enrollment of Asians and Hispanics differ from the rates of change in the total ESL population in Table 2.2 – where non-credit enrollment decreased 9% and credit enrollment decreased 26%. This difference cannot be accounted for by changes in the numbers of members of these ethnic groups enrolled in ESL. That is because those numbers were almost the same for non-credit enrollments in 2006 as they had been in 1998, and for credit ESL, they declined at a lower rate than did total ESL enrollment. Nor can they be explained by changes in the percentage of members of each of these ethnic groups enrolled in credit and non-credit ESL, because those percentages increased over the 9-year period.

*Instead, the differences are primarily due to major decreases in the number of members of other ethnic groups enrolled in ESL (such as a 65% fall in non-credit enrollment by White/Non-Hispanics). These decreases in other ethnic groups changed the ethnic composition of CCSF's ESL population. They accounted for a large part of the decrease in non-credit enrollment, and a significant part of the decrease in credit enrollment. In short, CCSF's ESL enrollment was much more dominated by Asians and Hispanics in 2006 than it had been in 1998.*

**Table 2.6 ESL Enrollment by Ethnicity, 1998-2006**

<b>Non-Credit</b>											
Ethnicity	Academic Year										Percent Change from 1998
	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	Total	
African American/Non Hispanic	140	119	138	138	133	143	120	99	72	1102	-49%
American Indian/Alaskan Native	15	13	18	25	28	23	17	17	11	167	-27%
Asian/Pacific Islander	12831	13305	13688	15139	14645	13667	13504	13168	12703	122650	-1%
Filipino	111	119	119	128	133	123	115	86	86	1020	-23%
Hispanic/Latino	7933	8361	9528	10319	10281	9215	8355	8300	7994	80286	1%
Other Non White	119	131	120	96	84	81	94	88	92	905	-23%
Unknown/No Response	4266	4194	3695	3632	3532	3693	3666	3494	3537	33709	-17%
White Non Hispanic	2461	2216	1931	1562	1294	1095	999	954	866	13378	-65%
Grand Total	27876	28458	29237	31039	30130	28040	26870	26206	25361	253217	-9%

<b>Credit</b>											
Ethnicity	Academic Year										Percent Change from 1998
	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	Total	
African American/Non Hispanic	59	42	34	35	34	34	36	39	33	346	-44%
American Indian/Alaskan Native		3	3			1			1	8	
Asian/Pacific Islander	3427	3324	3261	3482	3466	3145	3066	2935	2743	28849	-20%
Filipino	256	239	215	175	232	234	208	167	126	1852	-51%
Hispanic/Latino	803	778	836	861	814	785	809	707	658	7051	-18%
Other Non White	24	29	33	36	60	61	72	59	57	431	138%
Unknown/No Response	298	326	189	104	76	69	71	49	66	1248	-78%
White Non Hispanic	519	434	372	447	434	359	326	287	297	3475	-43%
Grand Total	5386	5175	4943	5140	5116	4688	4588	4243	3981	43260	-26%

**Age.** Table 2.7 displays the age of CCSF’s ESL students. Non-credit students tended to be older than credit students. Sixty-seven percent of non-credit ESL students were 30 years old or older compared to only 37% of credit ESL students.<sup>22</sup> The 50 or older age group in non-credit was the largest (25% of the total), while the 20-24 age group was the largest in credit (34% of the total).

The 16-19 year old age group comprised only 4% of non-credit enrollment, but comprised 11% of credit enrollment. *These young people are of particular interest, because many of them might otherwise have been in high school. It is encouraging that their personal goals lead to a higher percentage of them going to credit ESL than to non-credit, because credit ESL is intended to be a preparation for academic courses in college. It is also encouraging that so many of them had a high enough level of English proficiency to enroll in credit courses.* Unfortunately, this study could not determine whether their total enrollment or their education levels were proportionate to the percentage of this age group in the immigrant population of San Francisco.

**Table 2.7 ESL Enrollment by Age, 1998-2006**

Age	Non-Credit Academic Year									Total	% Change From 1998
	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006		
16 - 19	1066	1051	1244	1156	1121	1050	1047	1116	1064	9915	0%
20 - 24	3310	3582	3821	3987	3856	3509	3425	3506	3426	32422	4%
25 - 29	3491	3467	3534	3673	3671	3226	3031	3064	3000	30157	-14%
30 - 34	3392	3412	3487	3729	3639	3260	3083	2868	2765	29635	-18%
35 - 39	3059	3146	3263	3534	3267	2833	2705	2619	2505	26931	-18%
40 - 49	4930	5157	5287	5940	5880	5570	5224	4868	4755	47611	-4%
50+	7421	7222	7028	7315	7178	6966	6894	6799	6917	63740	-7%
Unkwn/NoResp	1207	1421	1573	1705	1518	1626	1461	1366	929	12806	-23%
Grand Total	27876	28458	29237	31039	30130	28040	26870	26206	25361	253217	-9%

-Table 2.7 cont'd on next page-

<sup>22</sup> This calculation and the others in this paragraph are based on the “Grand Total” of enrollments in Table 2.7, and hence it includes 12,806 non-credit students whose age is unknown. If the calculations included only non-credit students for whose age is known, the percentages would increase slightly. For example, the percentage of non-credit students 30 years of age or older would be 70%. But because the ages of only 13 credit students are unknown, the percentages given for these students would not change.



Table 2.7 cont'd

Credit

Age	Academic Year										% Change From 1998
	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	Total	
16 - 19	644	579	548	568	543	446	449	397	395	4569	-39%
20 - 24	1895	1769	1769	1788	1699	1533	1551	1508	1427	14939	-25%
25 - 29	1011	979	892	935	999	878	775	726	679	7874	-33%
30 - 34	674	682	643	736	742	685	633	558	474	5827	-30%
35 - 39	496	485	450	464	464	475	439	400	363	4036	-27%
40 - 49	491	472	470	471	488	479	503	448	401	4223	-18%
50+	170	207	169	176	181	190	238	206	242	1779	42%
Unknown /No Response	5	2	2	2		2				13	
Grand Total	5386	5175	4943	5140	5116	4688	4588	4243	3981	43260	-26%

**D. DISCUSSION**

**1. Serving Students With Very Limited English Proficiency**

The overwhelming majority of CCSF's non-credit ESL students were in enrolled at the very lowest levels during each of the nine years examined by this study. It appears that CCSF is not unique in this respect. Hard evidence on this point is fragmentary, but the evidence available from surveys of other programs and from ESL professionals indicates that most other adult education non-credit ESL programs across the country have a very high percentage of low-level students.<sup>23</sup> These students have very limited English

<sup>23</sup> Regrettably, this study was unable to find any comprehensive data on the relative number of ESL students enrolled at different levels nationwide. In the course of its 2005-2006 investigation of ESL in community colleges, CAAL reviewed the enrollment patterns of more than a dozen colleges and found that the lowest level students (students at the Literacy and Beginning levels) comprised by far the largest proportion of enrollments in all of their ESL programs. In addition, CAAL consulted several leading authorities on ESL who have knowledge of many more ESL programs. All of these authorities agreed that students at the very lowest levels of English proficiency dominate adult education ESL enrollment. Finally, CAAL obtained data on ESL enrollment for all 50 states gathered by the Department of Education's National Reporting System for adult education (NRS) for Program year 2005-2006. This data shows that 48% of ESL students reported by states to the NRS in that year were at the ESL Beginning or ESL Beginning Literacy levels. Regrettably, some (perhaps most) programs do not test all of their students using NRS approved tests, and hence do not report the levels of all their students to the NRS. *It appears that lower level students are least likely to be tested.* As a result, NRS reports probably understate the percentage of students at low levels. Nevertheless, NRS estimates reinforce the observations of CAAL and various authorities on ESL. (NRS data received via communication from Mike Dean of the Office of Vocational and Adult Education to Forrest Chisman on July 17, 2007).

proficiency, and, thus, have a long way to go to reach a proficiency level that will make a significant difference in their lives. They will need a much higher level of proficiency to move beyond entry-level jobs, get a college degree, function more successfully in an English speaking environment, and become effective citizens.

*Retaining Beginning level students and moving them to higher levels of proficiency is, therefore, one of the major challenges that ESL programs across the country face.* Future chapters in this report will provide further evidence of this challenge.

## **2. ESL Plays a Significant Role at the College**

ESL plays a prominent role at CCSF as evidenced by the fact that 68% of the College's non-credit enrollment and 10% of its credit enrollment from 1998-2006 were ESL students. CCSF also relies on ESL students to contribute to the enrollment in other non-credit and credit programs/classes at the College. As ESL students increase their language proficiency, some enroll in the wealth of vocational and academic courses/programs offered by the College to further their education and skills. Chapters 6 and 7 will describe some of the ways in which ESL students move beyond ESL. CCSF has risen to the challenge of serving the large limited English speaking population in San Francisco, and the College as a whole has benefited from the ESL enrollment. Other colleges may also find similar benefits from serving ESL students.

In the past, CCSF's ESL program, taken as a whole, was considered a profit center for the College because it brought in more funding than was needed to cover the costs of running the program. CCSF was willing to add courses to meet the high demand that had existed in previous years. But the declining enrollment in the last five years has caused some concern. Because CCSF funding largely depends on income from the state based on student enrollment and from student fees in credit courses, declining enrollment means fewer dollars to pay for rising costs.

## **3. Declining ESL Enrollment**

There has been a rise and fall pattern in ESL enrollment at CCSF over the years, but overall credit ESL enrollment has declined 26% from 1998, and non-credit enrollment has declined 7%. The percentage declines from the years of highest ESL enrollment (2001-2002) are even greater. The primary sources of decline have been enrollment of new students at the lowest levels of the College's largest non-credit programs – ESLN and ESLF. On the whole, the College has been more successful in retaining ESL students than in attracting new students to ESL. The positive side of this finding is that the College has retained a fairly large percent of ESL students, at least for short periods of time. Chapter 4 of this report will show that long-term persistence is a problem.

At least some of the decline in both new and continuing ESL enrollment at CCSF probably can be attributed to a decline in immigration to San Francisco<sup>24</sup> combined with a movement of immigrants out of the city.<sup>25</sup> This out-migration may be due to the increased cost of living in the city as well as the desire of immigrants to find higher-paying jobs and re-unite with their families elsewhere.

It is important to note that demand for ESL is variable from year to year and from location to location. Other areas of the country are facing increased ESL enrollment as immigrants leave San Francisco and as the initial destinations of new immigrants change. Policy makers need to be prepared for continued changes in the demand for ESL. In particular, they need to be prepared to augment resources when the demand is high, as CCSF has done, and they need to be prepared for the consequences of reduced enrollment when that happens.

It is also important to remember that a decline in ESL enrollments does not mean a decline in the need for ESL service. According to the 2000 census, 16 million people in the United States between the ages of 16 and 65 “had difficulty with English, and they comprise 12-15% of our workforce.”<sup>26</sup> For a variety of reasons, adult education programs serve only a fraction of those who need ESL instruction. According to the U.S. Department of Education, only 1.1 million limited English proficient adults are served nationwide by federal/state funded ESL programs.<sup>27</sup> The number of new immigrants with limited English each year may well exceed the number served.<sup>28</sup> Declining enrollments provide CCSF with the opportunity to review how to better reach and serve the unmet need. Improved recruitment efforts, more partnerships with other organizations, better marketing, and new and improved programs are some of the options CCSF and other institutions faced with declining enrollments can consider.

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<sup>24</sup> According to the City College of San Francisco 2006 Accreditation Self Study, legal immigration to San Francisco declined from 13,198 in 1993 to 7,551 in 2003. See also data on declining rates of San Franciscans who report speaking English less than very well at <http://www.census.gov/acs/www/Products/Profies/Chg/2003/AS/Tabular/385/38500US736273602/htm>

<sup>25</sup> See: Jeffrey S. Passel and William Zimmerman, “Are Immigrants Leaving California? Settlement Patterns of Immigrants in the Late 1990’s,” (Washington D.C.: Urban Institute, 2000.)

<sup>26</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, “America Speaks: A Demographic Profile of Foreign-Language Speakers in the United States: 2000.” Available at: [www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hh-fam/AmSpk/htm](http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hh-fam/AmSpk/htm). U.S. Census Bureau, “Language Use and English-Speaking Ability:2000.” Available at: [www.census.gov/prod2003/pubs/c2kbr-29.pdf](http://www.census.gov/prod2003/pubs/c2kbr-29.pdf).

<sup>27</sup> See: U.S. Department of Education, “Adult and Family Literacy Act Report to Congress, Program Year 2003-2004.” Available at: [www.ed.gov/about/reports/annual/ovae/2004ae/fla.pdf](http://www.ed.gov/about/reports/annual/ovae/2004ae/fla.pdf). Any program can determine the unmet need for service in its area by comparing its present level of service with Census reports on the number of people with limited English in its area, such as the report for San Francisco mentioned in Note 11 above.

<sup>28</sup> See: Jeffrey Passell, “Background Briefing Prepared for Task Force on Immigration and America’s Future” 2005. Available at: [pewhispanic.org/files/reports/46.pdf](http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/46.pdf).

#### **4. Decline in Citizenship Enrollment**

Enrollment in CCSF's ESLC Citizenship programs has declined more than enrollment in its other ESL programs over the past nine years. In part, this may be due to a decline in immigration into the San Francisco area. In addition, agencies other than the College may be offering more citizenship classes. Also, the costs for applying for citizenship have risen. The cost of taking the American citizenship test is now almost \$700. However, the need for citizenship classes could change dramatically if proposed changes in federal immigration laws are passed and obtaining citizenship becomes a higher priority for immigrants. ESL programs need to be prepared for a potentially large increase in demand for these classes.

#### **5. Increase in Vocational ESL (ESLV)**

ESLV enrollment at CCSF has increased at a faster rate than enrollment in any of CCSF's other ESL programs over the past nine years. CCSF has made an effort to increase ESLV offerings to better meet student needs, and the increase in enrollment has been a result of this increase in offerings. The most successful non-credit ESLV offerings in spring 2006 were Communication Skills for the Workplace, ESLV for Culinary Workers, and ESLV for Janitorial Workers (all offered for non-credit Level 5 students – Intermediate Low – and above), and ESLV and Career Exploration (offered for non-credit Level 3 and 4 – Beginning High – students).

The success of these ESLV programs in attracting students is probably due to the fact that many of CCSF's ESL students are employed and are interested in learning English that will help them in the workplace. Increased enrollment can also be attributed in part to collaborations the College has developed with other agencies to provide courses for special groups of students. One of these is the ESLV Intensive Program, offered in collaboration with the Department of Human Services, which started in spring 2001.<sup>29</sup> Another collaborative program is the displaced garment workers program, which started in fall 2005. This program is partially funded by the Department of Labor and offered in collaboration with several community partners.

Other colleges may wish to consider increasing offerings in ESLV. Based on CCSF's experience, they should examine the demand for particular offerings to determine what types of ESLV classes are likely to be successful in their service areas, in terms of student interest, the availability of the types of employment for which the courses prepare students, and the potential for students who enter these types of employment to achieve substantial earning gains and take the first steps up "career ladders." In several cases CCSF has offered new ESLV classes to meet expressed student desire/need, but had to cancel the class because enrollment was insufficient.

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<sup>29</sup> For a description of this program, see: Sharon Seymour, "VESL Immersion Program (VIP) at City College of San Francisco" in Forrest P. Chisman and JoAnn Crandall, Passing the Torch: Strategies for Innovation in Community College ESL (New York: Council for the Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2007) pp. 148-153. Available at: [www.caalusa.org](http://www.caalusa.org).

## **6. Changing Demographics**

This study shows that there have been some changes in the ethnicity of CCSF's ESL students since 1998, but not in their age. During all of the 9 years studied, the College's ESL students were predominantly Asian (especially Chinese), and the second largest ethnic group was Hispanic. The ratio of Asian to Hispanic enrollment has remained essentially the same from 1998-2006. The number of both groups enrolled in non-credit ESL has remained about the same over the 9-year period, and the number of both groups enrolled in credit ESL has declined at about the same rate.

The major demographic changes in CCSF's ESL population have been dramatic decreases in the enrollment by members of all other ethnic groups – such as African American, Filipino, and White Non-Hispanic. This study cannot explain the reason for these decreases. In part, they may be due to demographic changes in the immigrant population of the San Francisco area. Whatever their cause, they challenge the College to investigate unmet needs in all ethnic groups and to examine whether it can serve them better by out-reach efforts or curricular changes. For example, the increasing percentage of Hispanic immigrants in the San Francisco area may indicate the need for more Spanish language literacy classes.

## **7. Focus on the Source of Enrollment Declines**

Because of the importance of declines in ESL enrollment to CCSF, the College needs to focus attention on what it can do to reverse the major sources of those declines. The major sources are a decline in new non-credit students, particularly at the lowest levels of the College's largest non-credit programs (ESLN and ESLF). Efforts to recruit and retain more students in ESLN and ESLF should have a high priority. But the College must also increase efforts to recruit and retain students in non-credit ESL courses that have smaller enrollments, but suffered large percentage declines in new students (all except ESLV).

And priority must also be given to credit ESL – in which the number of both new and continuing students declined. Also, the College should focus on declines in enrollment by members of ethnic groups other than Asians and Hispanics. Finally, it should realize that the majority of ESL non-credit students are over 30 years of age and make an effort to reach more young people. Chapter 4 of this report focuses on a key element in addressing enrollment declines – increasing the persistence of ESLN and ESLF students. Increasing persistence would, effectively, convert more “new” students to “continuing” students. Other chapters will augment this discussion of persistence.

## **8. Definitions of “New” and “Continuing” ESL Students**

As defined for purposes of this study, new students are any students who were enrolled in credit or non-credit ESL for the first time in the year (or years) and/or class (or classes) designated. Some of these new students (about 10%-15% depending on the years examined) were previously enrolled at CSSF in courses other than ESL. Continuing students are those who were enrolled in credit or non-credit ESL at some time prior to the

year (or years) designated and who were enrolled in ESL during the year (or years) and/or class (or classes) designated.

Unless otherwise noted, the number of new and continuing credit and non-credit students was calculated separately. This means that some students who are reported as new to credit ESL, were previously enrolled in non-credit ESL, and a small number of students reported as new to non-credit ESL were previously enrolled in credit ESL.

Finally, all non-credit ESL students included in this report were enrolled in a course or courses at the College for eight hours or more in the academic year indicated. The data used to generate this report does not indicate whether they were enrolled in an ESL course for all of the eight hours, but, undoubtedly, the vast majority were. Credit ESL students included in this report were students who enrolled in a credit ESL course and had not “dropped” (notified the college that they would no longer be attending) from the course or been dropped by the teacher (been removed from the enrollment list) by the time of the College's first census of non-credit enrollment (usually 2-3 weeks into the term).

In describing the total enrollment of the College (of which ESL students are a sub-set), this report uses the same definitions of new and continuing students that it uses to describe ESL students. New students are students who had not been enrolled in any class at CCSF prior to the year specified, and continuing students are students who had been enrolled in at least one class prior to the year specified. This means that some students who were new to ESL are counted as continuing students in calculating total College enrollment, because they had previously been enrolled in classes that were not ESL classes.

Students who comprised the cohort of ESL students that will be discussed in subsequent chapters of this report differed from other ESL students described in this chapter in only one respect. In calculating the number of new non-credit students for the cohort, only non-credit students who were enrolled for eight hours or more in an ESLF or ESLN class were included, whereas in calculating the number of new non-credit students in the other tables in this chapter, only students who enrolled in a non-credit ESL class and were enrolled in *any* non-credit class for eight hours or more were included. The difference in numbers is undoubtedly small, but should be noted.

## CHAPTER 3

### COHORT DESCRIPTION

#### A. COHORT DEFINITION

This section describes the characteristics of a cohort of ESL students that will form the basis for the longitudinal analysis of CCSF's ESL program in subsequent chapters. The cohort consists of all students who first enrolled in any credit ESL course and in the non-credit ESLN (General ESL) and ESLF (ESL Focus) courses in the years 1998, 1999, and 2000. Students enrolled in other non-credit ESL courses are not included because (as explained in Chapter 1) it is not possible to assign levels of English proficiency to students in those courses. Thus, it is only possible to analyze most of the major variables with which this study is concerned (such as learning gains and transitions to credit programs) for students enrolled in ESLN and ESLF. Moreover, as Chapter 1 shows, ESLN and ESLF students comprise the vast majority of CCSF's non-credit ESL students.

Subsequent chapters will analyze the progress of students who first enrolled in each of the three years that comprise the cohort over the course of seven years. That is, the progress of students who first enrolled in 1998 will be analyzed through 2004, those first enrolled in 1999 through 2005, and those first enrolled in 2000 through 2006. The analysis will primarily focus on non-credit ESL students.

In total, there were 44,761 students in the cohort studied, with 85% (38,095) enrolled in non-credit and 15% (6666) enrolled in credit. These students are a subset of the students described in Table 1.5 of Chapter 1.

Tables 3.1 and 3.2 describe the characteristics of non-credit and credit students in the cohort. These students are a sub-set of the ESL students enrolled from 1998-2006 described in Table 2.5 of Chapter 2. Accordingly, the same coding system that was used in Table 2.5 was applied to them.

For example, those students not enrolled in any of the College's core-leveled credit courses, or who enrolled in non-credit courses that included more than two levels of proficiency, are represented in the "No Associated Level" row. In subsequent chapters, these students are eliminated from the analysis where indicated. Likewise, students enrolled in ESLN courses that covered two levels of proficiency were coded at the lower of the two levels.<sup>30</sup> Because all ESLF courses are two-level courses, all enrollments in these courses are coded at the lower of the two levels. Chapter 10 will discuss the effect of including ESLN and other two-level students in the cohort.

There are only two important differences between the students in the cohort and those described for the years 1998-2000 in Table 2.5. First, the earlier table describes *all*

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<sup>30</sup> See Chapter 1 for a description of these courses and for a description of the "core" leveled credit courses.

students enrolled in ESLN and ESLF in the years indicated. In contrast, the cohort includes only *new* students – those who first enrolled in 1998-2000. Second, Table 2.5 includes ESL students who were enrolled for eight hours or more in *any* non-credit course at CCSF as long as the students were also enrolled in ESL. In contrast, the cohort includes students who were enrolled for eight hours or more in ESLN and ESLF classes only. As a result, it excludes slightly more ESL students than Table 1.5 does.

By using this version of the eight-hour standard, the cohort excludes 13% of students who first enrolled in Non-Credit ESLN and ESLF from 1998-2000. That is, 13% of all students who enrolled in ESLN and ESLF from 1998-2000 did not attend ESL classes for more than eight hours in their seven years of academic history, and hence are not included in the cohort.

## **B. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COHORT**

Tables 3.1 and 3.2 show that the largest ethnic group in the non-credit portion of the cohort was Hispanic (39% of non-credit students). Asians were the second largest (35% of non-credit students). In credit, Asians were by far the largest ethnic group – comprising 58% of the credit portion of the cohort. In credit, the Hispanic population comprised 16% of students in the cohort.

These percentages differ from those in Table 2.6 of Chapter 2, where Asians were about 48% of the non-credit population and 67% of the credit population, while Hispanics were 16% of the credit population and 32% of the non-credit population. The difference is due to the fact that Table 2.6 includes *all* students enrolled in the various years indicated, whereas Tables 3.1 and 3.2 (the cohort) include only *new* students. It appears that from 1998-2000, Hispanics made up a larger percentage of new students than Asians, but Asians made up a far larger percentage of continuing students. Because of these percentage differences and because (as Chapter 2 explains) there were more continuing students than new enrollments in all years, Asians made up a larger percentage of total enrollment but a smaller percentage of the cohort (which consists entirely of new students).

Tables 3.1 and 3.2 show that non-credit students in the cohort were older than the credit students. More than half (52%) of the non-credit students were 30 years of age or older at the time of their first enrollment in ESL, while almost one third (32%) of the credit students fell into that age group. Moreover, students in the cohort tended to be slightly younger than those in the ESL population as a whole, as described in Table 2.7 of Chapter 1. This age difference would be expected in a subset of new students drawn from a population made up of new and continuing students, because continuing students advance in age the longer they continue.

Finally, Tables 3.1 and 3.2 show that, similar to the total population of ESL students described in Table 2.5 of Chapter 2, the percentage of non-credit ESL students in the cohort who first enrolled at the lowest non-credit levels was greater than the percentage who enrolled at higher levels. Approximately two thirds (67%) of the non-credit ESL



students in the cohort first enrolled in the Literacy Level and Levels 1-2, compared to 60% of the total ESL population, as represented in Table 2.5. In contrast, a smaller percentage of credit students in the cohort than in the total ESL population first enrolled at the highest levels of credit ESL. Less than half (42%) of the credit ESL students in the cohort first enrolled in the higher level credit ESL classes, compared to 67% who first enrolled in these levels in the total ESL population, as represented by Table 2.5. These differences are due to the fact that the level of first enrollment for the population as whole is calculated in a different way in Table 2.5 than it is for the members of the cohort in Tables 3.1 and 3.2 (See note below.)<sup>31</sup>

### C. INCLUDING ESLF

This study included students enrolled in ESLF courses as part of the cohort studied because ESLF is an integral part of CCSF's general non-credit ESL program (ESLN). All ESLN courses teach the four core ESL skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening in English), although the emphasis on these skills differs at different levels of instruction. However, as noted in Chapter 1, it is widely recognized that second language learners often do not have the same level of ability in all of the core skills when they enter ESL programs, and they also develop ability in the core skills at different rates.

ESLF is CCSF's answer to this problem. Most ESLF programs allow students to focus on a single skill they have not mastered as well as the other core ESL skills and, thereby, to bring their overall abilities in English up to the standard being taught in the level of ESL in which they are enrolled.

As a result, eliminating ESLF from this study would mean eliminating an important part of CCSF's non-credit ESL program. This could be accomplished only by eliminating from the cohort either students who took ESLF, or by eliminating the ESLF courses students took. But *eliminating students* who took ESLF would result in eliminating a large percentage of the College's non-credit ESL students. Table 3.3 shows that 33% of students new to ESLN in 1998-2000 also took ESLF courses at some time over the next seven years during which they were tracked. Likewise, *eliminating the ESLF courses* these students took would be eliminating one of the major ways in which ESLN students improve their English. Students who enroll in ESLF courses at any given level probably devote more hours to studying English at that level than other students do. If ESLF

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<sup>31</sup> These differences are due to the fact that the levels of first enrollment given in Table 2.5 and in Tables 3.1 and 3.2 are measured in different ways. The levels of first enrollment in *Table 2.5* include the levels of first enrollment *each year of both new and continuing students from 1998-2006*. In contrast, the levels of first enrollment for members of the cohort in *Tables 3.1 and 3.2* include the levels of first enrollment of *only new students in 1998-2000*. The first level of non-credit students is similar in both tables, because (as subsequent chapters will show) most non-credit students do not advance very many levels. Hence, their level of first enrollment during their first year (when they are new students) is similar to their level of first enrollment in subsequent years (when they are continuing students). In contrast, more credit students advance multiple levels. Hence, their level of first enrollment during their first year in the credit program (when they are new students) tends to be lower than their level of first enrollment in each subsequent year (when they are continuing students).

courses were eliminated from this study, those hours would be either excluded from the study or unexplained.

In short, ESLF courses must be included in any study that seeks to explain how and why students progress (or fail to progress) in CCSF's non-credit ESLN program. In this study, enrollment in ESLF courses is regarded the same as enrollment in ESLN courses. That is, if a student is enrolled in an ESLF course during a particular term they are counted as enrolled in non-credit ESL in the same way that they would be counted if they were enrolled in an ESLN course.

This way of incorporating ESLF courses into the study may seem to pose difficulties. This is because, as explained in the Chapter 1, ESLF courses meet for only five hours per week during a term, whereas ESLN courses meet for 10 hours per week, and because ESLF courses focus only on a single English language skill, rather than on all four core skills. It may appear that by considering them as the same as ESLN courses, the study may be counting students who enrolled in different kinds of non-credit ESL courses as if they were enrolled in the same kind of course.

But these difficulties are more apparent than real, for two reasons. First, students who enrolled in ESLF were, in fact, enrolled in the same kind of course as other students in the cohort. That course was ESLN. As Table 3.3 shows, all except a very small number of ESLF students also take ESLN. What the table does not show is that they usually take ESLF during the same term, or at least in the same year, and at the same level of proficiency as the ESLN courses in which they are enrolled. Thus, the practical effect of students taking ESLF courses is usually nothing more or less than to add more hours to the time they devote to a particular ESL level at the same time they are taking ESLN courses at that level.

Second, as will become apparent, this study is not primarily concerned with how many courses non-credit students take. It is primarily concerned with how many levels they complete (or fail to complete), how many terms and hours it takes them to complete those levels, and the consequences of (as well as reasons for) these level advances. As a result, any courses (whether ESLN or ESLF) that lead to an advance in levels (or lack thereof) are of equal importance for purposes of this study.

ESLF courses, considered separately from ESLN courses, are only of interest for this study because they are one of several curricular options in CCSF's ESL program that helps students advance levels. The effectiveness of ESLF in this regard will be considered together with other curricular options that help increase level advancement in Chapter 10.

**Table 3.1 Description of Non-Credit Cohort Students**

**New Students to Non-Credit (1998, 1999, 2000)**

Ethnicity	Percent			Number			
	1998	1999	2000	1998	1999	2000	Total
African American/Non Hispanic	1%	0%	0%	73	56	62	191
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0%	0%	0%	7	5	13	25
Asian/Pacific Islander	36%	35%	35%	4429	4475	4458	13362
Filipino	0%	0%	1%	55	64	65	184
Hispanic/Latino	34%	36%	41%	4186	4607	5237	14030
Other Non White	1%	1%	1%	73	79	65	217
Unknown/No Response	24%	22%	18%	2919	2793	2286	7998
White Non Hispanic	5%	6%	5%	648	735	705	2088
<b>Gender</b>							
Female	42%	38%	40%	5204	4884	5095	15183
Male	37%	37%	39%	4531	4752	4964	14247
No Response	21%	25%	22%	2655	3178	2832	8665
<b>Age</b>							
16 - 19	7%	7%	8%	815	846	1002	2663
20 - 24	16%	17%	17%	2004	2212	2228	6444
25 - 29	16%	15%	15%	1923	1926	1924	5773
30 - 34	13%	13%	12%	1569	1655	1583	4807
35 - 39	10%	10%	10%	1287	1274	1310	3871
40 - 49	15%	15%	15%	1855	1873	1888	5616
50+	16%	15%	14%	1979	1863	1794	5636
Unknown/No Response	8%	9%	9%	958	1165	1162	3285
<b>First Level</b>							
0	14%	13%	14%	1676	1700	1804	5180
1	44%	43%	45%	5391	5567	5753	16711
2	11%	11%	9%	1348	1353	1149	3850
3	10%	10%	9%	1240	1220	1171	3631
4	4%	4%	4%	505	510	502	1517
5	3%	4%	3%	431	482	450	1363
6	3%	3%	2%	315	373	321	1009
7	3%	3%	3%	364	327	369	1060
8	1%	1%	1%	99	97	114	310
9	0%	0%	0%	2	8	20	30
No Associated Level	8%	9%	10%	1019	1177	1238	3434
<b>Total Number</b>				12390	12814	12891	38095

-“No Associated Level” means that students did not enroll in an ESLN or ESLF course to which a level could be assigned.

**Table 3.2 Description of Credit Cohort Students****New ESL Students In Credit (1998, 1999, 2000)**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Percent</b>			<b>Number</b>			<b>Total</b>
	1998	1999	2000	1998	1999	2000	
African American/Non Hispanic	1%	1%	1%	23	15	18	56
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0%	0%	0%		3	2	5
Asian/Pacific Islander	55%	58%	63%	1288	1266	1341	3895
Filipino	6%	6%	5%	144	127	103	374
Hispanic/Latino	15%	15%	17%	359	336	372	1067
Other Non White	1%	1%	1%	16	21	21	58
Unknown/No Response	9%	9%	3%	221	195	69	485
White Non Hispanic	12%	10%	10%	279	230	217	726
<b>Gender</b>							
Female	58%	60%	58%	1349	1314	1233	3896
Male	41%	38%	39%	961	838	836	2635
No Response	1%	2%	3%	20	41	74	135
<b>Age</b>							
16 - 19	19%	20%	20%	443	431	423	1297
20 - 24	31%	30%	33%	732	647	700	2079
25 - 29	17%	18%	17%	388	403	372	1163
30 - 34	13%	11%	13%	299	250	268	817
35 - 39	8%	9%	7%	197	190	155	542
40 - 49	8%	8%	8%	196	180	176	552
50+	3%	4%	2%	71	90	47	208
Unknown/No Response	0%	0%	0%	4	2	2	8
<b>First Level And Course Number</b>							
0 (ESL22)	2%	2%	3%	50	42	64	156
1 (ESL110)	6%	6%	5%	137	130	105	372
2 (ESL120)	12%	12%	12%	273	272	261	806
3 (ESL130)	19%	20%	23%	437	437	499	1373
4 (ESL140)	17%	18%	22%	402	401	463	1266
5 (ESL150)	21%	20%	18%	480	438	382	1300
6 (ESL 82/160)	9%	9%	6%	221	198	138	557
No Associated Level	14%	13%	11%	330	275	231	836
<b>Total Number</b>				2330	2193	2143	6666

-Level 1 in credit ESL is not same skills level as Level 1 in Non-Credit ESL. See the discussion of the relationship between credit and non-credit levels in Chapter 1.

-ESL 22 was a Beginning Mid Level course in credit that was discontinued in 2003.

-"No Associated Level" means that students did not enroll in the credit courses ESL 22 or ESL 110-82/160 during the first year of enrollment.

**Table 3.3 Non-Credit Cohort Students Enrolled in ESLN and ESLF Compared to Those Enrolled in ESLN Only**

First ESLNF Level	ESLN + ESLF		ESLN Only		Total
	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	
0	34%	1748	66%	3432	5180
1	35%	5739	65%	10785	16524
2	27%	1022	73%	2828	3850
3	49%	1678	51%	1778	3456
4	20%	301	80%	1216	1517
5	56%	718	44%	563	1281
6	25%	250	75%	759	1009
7	58%	580	42%	413	993
8	12%	36	88%	274	310
9	30%	9	70%	21	30
(blank)	7%	208	93%	2854	3062
Grand Total	33%	12289	67%	24923	37212

- 883 students (2% of the non-credit portion of the cohort) enrolled only in ESLF. For convenience, they are included in the cohort in future tables, but their small number and percentage undoubtedly makes no significant difference in the findings of this study. They are, however, excluded from Table 3.3 and other tables, where noted.

- It will be noted that the number (and hence percent) of students who took ESLF is lower at Levels 2, 4, and 6 than at 1, 3, 5, and 7. This is probably due to the opportunities students had to enroll in multi-level courses. For example, students who began at Level 1 might have enrolled in a Level 1-2 ESLF course either when they first enrolled, or after they advanced to Level 2. Students who began at Level 2 could only have enrolled in that course at the time of their first enrollment. Hence students who began at odd numbers of levels had twice the chance of enrolling in a multi-level course (if they advanced a level) as students did who began at even number levels. This clustering of ESLF enrollments has no effect on the analysis in this study because, as noted, the study does not count the number of courses students take at different levels, but only the number of levels and hours they take.

## CHAPTER 4

### PERSISTENCE OF ESL STUDENTS

#### A. BACKGROUND

This chapter describes persistence in ESL courses of students first enrolled in credit or non-credit ESL at CCSF from 1998-2000 – the cohort examined by this study. In this report, the term “persistence” is used to describe the total number of terms students enrolled in ESL courses, whether that enrollment was continuous or episodic – that is, whether students enrolled in ESL courses during each consecutive term or had breaks in enrollment. Chapter 8 will examine the relative numbers of students who enrolled continuously and episodically, as well as the difference these enrollment patterns made in their performance. The primary focus of this chapter is on the persistence of non-credit members of the cohort.

As Chapter 3 explains, members of the cohort were tracked for seven years from the year of their first enrollment in ESL. As a result, students in the cohort could have enrolled at most for 21 terms – 3 terms a year (the fall and spring terms and the short summer session) for seven years. For purposes of this report, persistence in non-credit ESL is defined as the total number of terms students enrolled in ESLN and/or ESLF courses over the seven years, because ESLN and ESLF are the subject codes that define the non-credit portion of the cohort. Persistence of credit ESL students is defined as the number of terms students enrolled in any credit ESL courses offered by CCSF.

There are two reasons to examine persistence. First, virtually all learners require a considerable amount of time to significantly improve their ability in a second language. Therefore, it is important to study how many terms students are enrolled. Subsequent chapters will show that persistence is closely related to learning gains and to transitions from non-credit ESL to credit studies. Many ESL professionals may feel they have a sense of the persistence rates of their students, but their beliefs are often based on anecdotal or incomplete evidence. The only accurate way to determine persistence rates is to conduct a longitudinal analysis of the kind this study employs.

The second reason to study persistence is that the number of students enrolled is one of the major factors that determines the amount of funding most college receive. Students who persist for longer periods of time make a greater contribution to a college’s total enrollment than do students who persist for shorter periods of time, because they increase the numbers enrolled in each term, year, or other period of time used to calculate funding. As a result, the longer students persist, the greater the contribution they make to college revenues. So persistence is very important from two perspectives, that of students and their need to attain their educational objectives and that of colleges and their need for income.

## B. MAJOR FINDINGS

- Most members of the cohort did not enroll for very many terms. Thirty-eight percent of non-credit ESL students and 30% of credit ESL students enrolled for only one term. Sixty-eight percent of non-credit students and 63% of credit students enrolled for three or fewer terms, and smaller percentages enrolled for each additional number of terms over the seven-year period studied.
- Students who first enrolled at lower levels of non-credit ESL were more likely to enroll for multiple terms than were students who began at higher levels. This pattern is most pronounced for students who began at Literacy and Beginning Low levels of non-credit ESL. Students who began at these levels comprised 68% of the non-credit cohort. This pattern was not found in credit ESL students.
- Despite their higher persistence rates, many students who first enrolled at the Literacy and Beginning Low levels of non-credit ESL did not persist for a very large number of terms. Sixty-one percent of these students (42% of the total cohort) persisted for three or fewer terms.
- Asians persisted for more terms than Hispanics in non-credit ESL.
- With the exception of the 16-19 year olds, the older non-credit ESL students were at the time they first enrolled the higher their persistence rates. Students who were 16-19 years old had persistence rates somewhat higher than those who were 20-34 years old. Students who were 40 years of age or older had the highest persistence rates.
- Nearly 13% of non-credit ESL students had fewer than eight total hours of attendance. Students who first enrolled at the Literacy Level and at Level 6 were least likely to have fewer than eight hours of attendance. The percentages of those with fewer than eight hours of attendance were about the same for those who first enrolled at all other levels. Asians were less likely than Hispanics to enroll for fewer than eight hours, and students who were 50 years of age or older were less likely than those in other age groups to do so.
- Low persistence rates are a cause for concern in adult education programs of all kinds, because students who do not persist have limited learning gains. CCSF is taking some steps to improve persistence. This chapter primarily discusses measures the College has adopted to improve orientation to ESL courses and the issues posed by an open-entry enrollment system. Chapter 5 will discuss the need for increased guidance and counseling as well as possible changes in CCSF's program design that might improve both persistence and learning gains. Chapters 9-10 will discuss innovative features of CCSF's program that might be expanded to address the issues posed by low persistence rates. Because many other programs face the same issues, this report's analysis of them and its discussion of measures CCSF has adopted (or

might adopt) to deal with them should help other programs consider strategies for improving persistence rates.

## C. ANALYSIS

### 1. ESL Persistence Rates

Table 4.1 describes the persistence rates in ESL for the cohort of credit and non-credit ESL students examined by this study. The Table shows the total number of terms for which students enrolled over the seven year time period during which they were studied. That is, the Table shows the percentage and number of students who enrolled for *no more than* the numbers of terms indicated. Students in non-credit with fewer than eight total hours of attendance are excluded, because the California Community College Chancellor's Office excludes these students in its reporting system. In credit, all students who received a grade, including those who received a withdrawal (W) or an incomplete (I), are included in the data.

As might be expected, Table 4.1 shows that the percent and number of students enrolled for a large number of terms are substantially *less* than the percent and number who enrolled for fewer terms. In fact, it shows that a smaller percent and number of students enrolled for each incremental number of terms. For example, 19% (7,132) of non-credit students enrolled for only two terms, 11% (4,243) enrolled for only three terms, 8% (2,972) enrolled for only four terms, and so forth.

More importantly, Table 4.1 shows that most students did not enroll for very many terms. Thirty-eight percent of non-credit students (14,606) and 30% of credit students (1,985) enrolled for only one term during the seven-year period during which they were studied. It is important to note that students had to enroll for at least one term to be counted as ESL students and members of the cohort.

Conversely, 62% of all non-credit ESL students (23,489) and 70% of credit ESL students (4,681) enrolled for more than one term. But most of these students did not enroll for very many additional terms. Only 32% of non-credit ESL students (12,114) and 37% of credit ESL students (2,454) enrolled for more than three terms during the seven-year period.<sup>32</sup> This means that, in total, 68% (25,981) of non-credit and 63% (4,212) of credit students enrolled for three or fewer terms. Moreover, Table 4.1 shows that only 13% of credit students and 8% of non-credit students enrolled for as long as four terms, and the percentage enrolled fell to 2% of both credit and non-credit students enrolled for eight or nine terms, and a very small number and percentage who enrolled for more terms.

Thus, although about two-thirds of students enrolled for more than one term, most credit and non-credit students in the cohort did not enroll for very many of the 21 terms available to them over the seven years studied.

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<sup>32</sup>Because the percentage portion of the table is rounded to the nearest whole number, calculations of percentages for those persisting for more than 3 terms were performed using the number, not percent figures.



It is important to note that a significant number of students (5,500) who were new to non-credit ESL in 1998, 1999 and 2000 had fewer than eight hours of attendance. If these students had been included in the cohort, they would have comprised 12.6% of the total cohort. Including these students in the cohort would have increased the number and percentage of students who enrolled for only one term, and decreased the percentage of students who enrolled for additional numbers of terms. See Table 4.6 for a description of students with fewer than 8 hours of attendance.

**Table 4.1 Persistence of the ESL Cohort of Students at CCSF**

Terms Persisted	Percent		Number	
	Credit	Non-Credit	Credit	Non-Credit
1	30%	38%	1985	14606
2	18%	19%	1189	7132
3	16%	11%	1038	4243
4	13%	8%	854	2972
5	8%	5%	563	1974
6	6%	4%	403	1477
7	4%	3%	250	1201
8	2%	2%	151	931
9	2%	2%	101	788
10	1%	2%	67	664
11	0%	1%	31	502
12	0%	1%	12	369
13	0%	1%	13	336
14	0%	1%	5	268
15	0%	1%	4	215
16-21	0%	1%	0	417
Grand Total	100%	100%	6666	38095

-Terms persisted is within all ESL in credit and within ESLN and ESLF in Non-Credit.

-8 hour limitation applies.

-Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

## **2. Persistence by First Non-Credit ESL Level**

Table 4.2 describes the persistence rates for *non-credit* ESL students in the cohort studied by the first ESL level in which they enrolled. Overall, the Table shows that students who first enrolled at lower levels were more likely to persist for multiple terms than were students who began at higher levels. This greater persistence is particularly pronounced at the Literacy Level (Level 0) and Low Beginning levels (Levels 1 and 2). As Chapter 2 indicates, 68% of non-credit ESL students first enrolled at these three levels. For example, 78% (4,055) of students who began at the Literacy Level, 66% (11,065) of those who began at Level 1 and 64% (2,466) of those who began at Level 2 persisted for

more than one term, while only 55% (755) of students who began at Level 5 and 51% (518) of those who began at Level 6 persisted for more than one term.

Likewise, the Table shows that 64% (3,330) of students who began at the Literacy Level, 47% (7,906) of those who began at Level 1, and 45% (1,718) who began at Level 2 persisted for three or more terms, compared to 34% (466) who began at Level 5 and 29% (294) who began at Level 6.<sup>33</sup>

However, most students who began at lower levels did not enroll for very many terms in total – despite their higher persistence rates. For example, 47% (2,384) of students who began at the Literacy Level, 64% (10,735) of those who began at Level 1, and 67% (2588) who began at Level 2 persisted for three or fewer terms. Collectively, 15,707 students who began at the Literacy Level or the Low Beginning Levels 1 and 2 persisted for three or fewer terms. They comprised 61% of students who began at these levels and 41% of the cohort.

A larger percentage of students who began at higher levels did not enroll for very many terms. For example, 80% (1087) of students who began at Level 5 and 84% (844) who began at Level 6 persisted for three or fewer terms. But *because students who began at the Literacy or Low Beginning levels had to advance more levels to attain fairly high levels of English proficiency, the fact that a significant percentage of them did not persist for very many terms is notable*. The implications of this finding are elaborated in the “Discussion” section of this chapter.

Some ESLN and ESLF classes are multi-level<sup>34</sup>. Regrettably for purposes of this study, student levels are only known for those who are in leveled classes. As a result, students whose first enrollment was in a multi-level class are listed in the NA column in Table 4.2 and in subsequent tables in this report where students are grouped by levels. In subsequent analyses of level advancement, students who enrolled in multi-level classes were not counted as advancing a level because it is impossible to determine the number of levels they advanced.

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<sup>33</sup> Because the percentage portion of the table is rounded to the nearest whole number, calculations of percentages for those persisting for more than 3 terms are done using the number, not percent figures.

<sup>34</sup> See the non-credit course description section in Chapter 1 for a description of the types of multi-level classes at CCSF.

**Table 4.2 Persistence of Non-Credit ESL Students by First Level  
Percent and Number**

		First ESL Non-Credit Level										
		Percent										
Terms Persisted	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	NA	Total
1	22%	34%	36%	38%	46%	45%	49%	49%	56%	3%	75%	38%
2	14%	19%	19%	21%	21%	21%	22%	25%	21%	17%	16%	19%
3	10%	12%	12%	13%	12%	14%	13%	13%	11%	47%	5%	11%
4	10%	9%	9%	9%	6%	8%	6%	5%	5%	10%	2%	8%
5	7%	6%	5%	5%	4%	4%	4%	3%	3%	3%	1%	5%
6	6%	4%	4%	4%	3%	3%	2%	1%	2%	3%	0%	4%
7	5%	4%	4%	3%	2%	2%	1%	1%	2%	3%	0%	3%
8	5%	3%	2%	2%	2%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	2%
9	4%	2%	2%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	0%	0%	2%
10	4%	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	3%	0%	2%
11	3%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	7%	0%	1%
12	2%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%
13	2%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%
14	2%	1%	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%
15	2%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%
16-21	3%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	3%	0%	1%
		Number										
Terms Persisted	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	NA	Total
1	1125	5646	1384	1384	701	608	491	521	174	1	2571	14606
2	725	3159	748	760	324	289	224	267	65	5	566	7132
3	534	1930	456	472	179	190	129	138	34	14	167	4243
4	500	1430	334	316	98	104	61	54	14	3	58	2972
5	364	1019	190	175	58	56	45	33	8	1	25	1974
6	309	740	162	135	39	37	22	11	5	1	16	1477
7	265	618	140	97	25	23	9	10	5	1	8	1201
8	237	478	96	68	23	10	6	9	1		3	931
9	218	393	73	54	19	15	5	6	2		3	788
10	203	331	47	51	12	10	5	2		1	2	664
11	148	245	54	30	11	5	1	3		2	3	502
12	122	165	44	23	6	3	1	1	1		3	369
13	122	152	32	19	5	3	1				2	336
14	88	123	27	11	9	5	2	1	1		1	268
15	78	95	24	9	3		3	1			2	215
16-21	142	187	39	27	5	5	4	3		1	4	417
Total	5180	16711	3850	3631	1517	1363	1009	1060	310	30	3434	38095

-Percents are rounded to the nearest whole number.

### 3. Persistence by First Credit ESL Level

Table 4.3 shows the persistence of *credit* ESL students in the cohort by the first credit level of ESL in which they enrolled. This Table shows that, unlike non-credit students, credit students who began at lower levels were *not* significantly more likely to persist than students who began at higher levels. In fact, the persistence rates of credit students were about the same, regardless of their first level of enrollment, with the exception of those who first enrolled in Levels 5 and 6.

For example, the Table shows that 83% of students who began at the Intermediate credit levels, (ESL 120, 130, and 130 – represented as Levels 2, 3, and 4 in the table), 84% of those who began at of Level 5 (ESL 150), and 81% who began at Level 0 (ESL 22) enrolled for more than one term. In contrast, 77% (286) of students who began at Level 1 (ESL 110) enrolled for more than one term. The highest credit ESL level was an Advanced High class, ESL 160, formerly numbered ESL 82 (shown in the Table as Level 6). Twenty-nine percent (164) of Level 6 students were enrolled for more than one term, although there were no more levels in this sequence for them to take. Most of these students were probably taking other elective ESL courses or repeating Level 6.

About the same percentage of credit ESL students who began at Levels 0-4 enrolled for three or more terms.<sup>35</sup> Sixty-seven percent of those who began at Level 0 (105), 66% of those who began at Level 1 (245), 69% of those who began at Level 2 (558), 72% of those who began at Level 3 (983), and 70% of those who began at Level 4 (892) enrolled for three or more terms. In contrast, 50% of students who began at Level 5 (649) and 4% of those who began at Level 6 (32) enrolled for three or more terms.<sup>36</sup>

The differences between students who began at Levels 5 and 6 and those who began at other levels probably are not very revealing about persistence. This is because those differences were probably due in large part to the fact that there was only one more level in the credit sequence examined by this study that students beginning at Level 5 could take, and no more levels that students beginning at Level 6 could take – regardless of how many terms they enrolled.

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<sup>35</sup> Percentages for students enrolled for three or more terms were calculated using the number rather than the percent figures in Table 4.3.

<sup>36</sup> Some of the Level 4, 5, and 6 students who enrolled for three or more terms probably were taking other elective ESL courses, and others probably were repeating a level of ESL.

**Table 4.3 Persistence of Credit ESL Students  
by First Level Percent and Number**

		First Credit Level							
		Percent							
Terms Persisted	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	NA	Total
1	19%	23%	17%	17%	17%	16%	71%	82%	30%
2	14%	11%	14%	11%	12%	34%	24%	15%	18%
3	18%	8%	13%	12%	25%	26%	4%	3%	16%
4	10%	10%	10%	16%	24%	15%	1%	1%	13%
5	11%	8%	11%	16%	11%	6%	0%	0%	8%
6	6%	9%	11%	13%	5%	2%	0%	0%	6%
7	6%	10%	9%	6%	3%	1%	0%	0%	4%
8	4%	7%	6%	3%	2%	0%	0%	0%	2%
9	4%	6%	4%	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%
10	2%	5%	3%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%
11	3%	2%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
12	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
13-15	2%	2%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
		Number							
Terms Persisted	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	NA	Total
1	29	86	137	233	220	205	393	682	1985
2	22	41	111	157	154	446	136	122	1189
3	28	31	104	164	320	343	22	26	1038
4	16	36	82	218	301	191	4	6	854
5	17	28	87	222	135	74			563
6	9	32	87	177	68	29	1		403
7	10	37	76	83	33	10	1		250
8	6	26	48	48	21	2			151
9	6	21	33	37	4				101
10	3	17	22	20	5				67
11	5	7	9	9	1				31
12	2	3	3	3	1				12
13	2	4	5	2					13
14	1	1	1		2				5
15		2	1		1				4
Total	156	372	806	1373	1266	1300	557	836	6666

-Percents are rounded to the nearest whole number.

#### 4. Demographics of Persistence

Tables 4.4 and 4.5 present persistence rates by ethnicity and age, respectively. Only persistence rates for non-credit ESL students are presented.

***Ethnicity.*** Table 4.4 describes the persistence rates of Non-Credit ESL students by ethnic group. Of the two ethnic groups with the largest enrollment, Asian/Pacific Islanders persisted at the highest rate and Hispanic/Latinos persisted at a lower rate.

Seventy-three percent of Asian/Pacific Islanders (9,808) enrolled for more than one term, compared to 60% of Hispanic/Latino students (8,428). Fifty-seven percent (7,647) of Asian/Pacific Islanders enrolled for three terms or longer compared to only 40% (5,550) of Hispanic/Latinos.<sup>37</sup>

***Age.*** Table 4.5 shows persistence by age. Overall, students at the age extremes –16-19 years old and 35 years old or older – had slightly higher persistence rates than did students in other age groups. Between 64% and 70% of these students enrolled for more than one term, compared to between 58% and 61% of students in the three other age groups. The largest percentages of students who enrolled for more than one term were in the 40-49 and 50+ age groups, 70%.

The percentage of students in the 16-19 year old age group and in the age groups 35-39, 40-49, and 50+ who enrolled for three or more terms ranged between 43% and 53%. The percentage in the age groups 20-24, 25-29, and 30-34 who enrolled for three or more terms ranged between 38% and 42%. The largest percentages of students persisting for three or more terms were in the 40-49 and 50+ groups, 53%.

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<sup>37</sup> Percentages of students enrolled for three or more terms were calculated using the number rather than percent figures in Tables 4.4 and 4.5.

**Table 4.4 Persistence in Non-Credit ESL by Ethnic Group**

Terms Persisted	Ethnicity								
	Percent								
	African American Non Hispanic	American Indian Alaskan Native	Asian Pacific Islander	Filipino	Hispanic Latino	Other Non White	Unknown No Response	White Non Hispanic	Total
1	41%	44%	27%	58%	40%	44%	53%	44%	38%
2	20%	16%	16%	23%	21%	26%	19%	19%	19%
3	12%	8%	11%	9%	12%	10%	9%	13%	11%
4	12%	4%	9%	4%	8%	5%	5%	7%	8%
5	4%	0%	7%	2%	5%	2%	3%	4%	5%
6	5%	8%	5%	0%	4%	1%	2%	2%	4%
7	1%	8%	4%	1%	3%	3%	2%	2%	3%
8	2%	0%	4%	0%	2%	4%	1%	1%	2%
9	0%	0%	3%	1%	2%	2%	1%	1%	2%
10	1%	12%	3%	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	2%
11	2%	0%	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
12	0%	0%	2%	0%	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%
13	0%	0%	2%	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%
14	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%
15	0%	0%	1%	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	1%
16-21	1%	0%	2%	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%
Terms Persisted	Number								
	African American Non Hispanic	American Indian Alaskan Native	Asian Pacific Islander	Filipino	Hispanic Latino	Other Non White	Unknown No Response	White Non Hispanic	Total
1	78	11	3554	107	5602	96	4241	917	14606
2	38	4	2161	42	2878	56	1553	400	7132
3	22	2	1520	16	1680	21	719	263	4243
4	22	1	1224	8	1134	10	436	137	2972
5	8		891	3	710	4	265	93	1974
6	9	2	700		544	3	174	45	1477
7	2	2	595	1	405	7	137	52	1201
8	4		492		284	9	111	31	931
9			450	1	232	5	76	24	788
10	2	3	391	1	159	1	77	30	664
11	3		306	1	130	2	40	20	502
12			229		81		40	19	369
13			216	1	67		34	18	336
14	1		180		44	1	27	15	268
15			146	1	31	2	28	7	215
16-21	2		307	2	49		40	17	417
Total	191	25	13362	184	14030	217	7998	2088	38095

-Percents are rounded to the nearest whole number.

**Table 4.5 Persistence in Non-Credit ESL by Age**

Terms Persisted	Age								Unknown/No Response	Total
	Percent									
16 - 19	20 - 24	25 - 29	30 - 34	35 - 39	40 - 49	50+				
1	36%	39%	42%	39%	35%	30%	30%	64%	38%	
2	21%	20%	20%	20%	18%	17%	16%	19%	19%	
3	12%	12%	11%	11%	12%	11%	11%	8%	11%	
4	10%	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%	4%	8%	
5	6%	5%	5%	5%	6%	6%	5%	2%	5%	
6	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	5%	5%	1%	4%	
7	3%	3%	3%	3%	4%	4%	4%	1%	3%	
8	2%	2%	2%	3%	3%	4%	4%	0%	2%	
9	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	3%	3%	0%	2%	
10	2%	1%	2%	1%	2%	3%	3%	0%	2%	
11	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	2%	0%	1%	
12	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	2%	0%	1%	
13	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%	2%	1%	0%	1%	
14	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%	2%	0%	1%	
15	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%	
16-21	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%	2%	2%	0%	1%	
Terms Persisted	Number								Unknown/No Response	Total
	16 - 19	20 - 24	25 - 29	30 - 34	35 - 39	40 - 49	50+			
1	952	2541	2426	1852	1362	1677	1710	2086	14606	
2	559	1270	1171	942	703	958	899	630	7132	
3	327	786	616	552	447	622	625	268	4243	
4	254	518	448	389	329	449	463	122	2972	
5	173	343	272	254	225	333	308	66	1974	
6	103	259	215	173	172	256	268	31	1477	
7	84	195	163	140	144	214	241	20	1201	
8	47	145	97	121	98	206	205	12	931	
9	54	98	103	94	81	182	166	10	788	
10	40	84	87	70	72	141	163	7	664	
11	23	56	61	55	58	112	128	9	502	
12	11	43	29	43	40	96	101	6	369	
13	15	31	21	48	42	94	83	2	336	
14	9	29	23	22	25	70	86	4	268	
15	4	19	14	20	26	75	52	5	215	
16-21	8	27	27	32	47	131	138	7	417	
Total	2663	6444	5773	4807	3871	5616	5636	3285	38095	

-Percents are rounded to the nearest whole number.



## **5. Students with Fewer than Eight Hours of Attendance**

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, students with fewer than eight hours of ESLN and/or ESLF attendance were excluded from the cohort of non-credit ESL students examined by this study. However, it is of interest to know who these students were. Table 4.6 describes some characteristics of students who enrolled in non-credit ESL classes but attended fewer than eight hours over the seven years that the cohort was studied. There were 5,500 students with fewer than eight hours of attendance. If these students had been included in the cohort, the cohort would have totaled 43,595 students. So nearly 13% of the students who first enrolled in non-credit ESL in 1998, 1999, or 2000 (5,500 of 43,595) had fewer than eight total hours of ESLN and/or ESLF attendance.

Of the two largest ethnic groups in non-credit ESL, 13% (2,067) of Hispanics were enrolled for fewer than eight hours compared to 7% (1,002) of Asians. Twenty-one percent (2,081) of students whose ethnic group was unknown (represented as “Unknown/No Response” in the Table) attended for fewer than eight hours. Thus, it is possible that these percentages of ethnicity would be altered if information were available on these students. However, this finding about students with fewer than eight hours of attendance is consistent with the finding that Asians in the cohort had higher persistence rates than Hispanics.

Students in the 25-29 year old age group were most likely to have fewer than eight hours of attendance (13% or 839 students). Those students who were 50+ were least likely to have fewer than eight hours of attendance (8% or 526 students.) Those who were age 16-19 and 40-49 were the second least likely to have fewer than eight hours of attendance. Age was unknown (Unknown/No Response) for 31% (1,454). Thus, it is possible that these percentages would be altered if information were available on these students. However, this finding about students with fewer than eight hours of attendance is consistent with the finding that students in the cohort who were at the age extremes (younger and older) had higher persistence rates than those who in the age groups in between.

Students whose first level was Literacy were least likely to have fewer than eight hours of attendance (7% or 395 students). For the other levels, the percentages of those with fewer than eight hours of attendance ranged from 12-14% with the exception of those whose first level was Level 6 (9% or 104 students).

**Table 4.6 Students Enrolled In Non-Credit ESL from 1998-2000**  
**With Fewer than 8 Hours of Attendance**

	Percent of Students With Fewer than 8 Hours	Number of Students With Fewer Than 8 Hours	Total of Students Enrolled in Non- Credit ESLN and/or ESLF in 1998, 1999, 2000
<b>Ethnicity</b>	Percent	Number	
African American/Non Hispanic	14%	31	222
American Indian/Alaskan Native	7%	2	27
Asian/Pacific Islander	7%	1002	14364
Filipino	17%	37	221
Hispanic/Latino	13%	2067	16097
Other Non White	14%	35	252
Unknown/No Response	21%	2081	10079
White Non Hispanic	11%	245	2333
Grand Total	13%	5500	43595
<b>Age</b>			
16 - 19	9%	278	2941
20 - 24	11%	837	7281
25 - 29	13%	839	6612
30 - 34	10%	548	5355
35 - 39	10%	439	4310
40 - 49	9%	589	6205
50+	8%	516	6152
Unknown/No Response	31%	1454	4739
Grand Total	13%	5500	43595
<b>First Level of ESLN and/or ESLF</b>			
0	7%	395	5575
1	12%	2194	18905
2	12%	530	4380
3	13%	556	4187
4	14%	254	1771
5	12%	191	1554
6	9%	104	1113
7	12%	143	1203
8	14%	52	362
9	6%	2	32
No Level	24%	1079	4513
Grand Total	13%	5500	43595

## **D. DISCUSSION**

### **1. Cause for Concern**

Low persistence rates in ESL programs are a cause for concern, because (as Chapters 5 and 6 will show) low persistence has an adverse effect on level advancement and transfer to credit. Thirty-eight percent of non-credit ESL students in the cohort of students examined by this report persisted for only one term over a period of seven years. As Chapter 5 will explain, most students at CCSF cannot advance a level until the end of each term in which they are enrolled. *This means almost all of the students who were enrolled for only one term did not advance to a higher level.*

*There is additional cause for concern because most of the students in the cohort first enrolled at the lowest levels of English proficiency.* The majority (68% or 25,741) of students in the cohort started at the Literacy or Beginning Low levels (Levels 1 and 2), as defined by the California Model Standards for ESL.<sup>38</sup> Although students who first enrolled at these levels persisted at higher rates than students who began at the higher levels, 47% of students who began at the Literacy Level, 64% who started at Level 1, and 67% who began at Level 2 persisted for three or fewer terms.

Because level advancement at CCSF is largely related to terms taken, 47% of Literacy Level students would *at most* be able to progress to the Beginning Low level (Level 2) in three terms, and the 67% Beginning Low level (Level 2) students would at most be able to progress to the Beginning High Level (Level 4), if they advanced a level for every term in which they were enrolled. Students entering the Beginning High Level have “limited ability to read and write in English; they function in the use of English in a very limited way, speaking English in situations related to their immediate needs.”<sup>39</sup> In total, Literacy and Beginning Low Level students who persisted for three or fewer terms comprised 42% of the cohort. Thus, *at least 42% of the cohort did not persist long enough at CCSF to improve their English beyond the Beginning levels.*

### **2. Why Are Persistence Rates Low?**

It is difficult for most programs to learn a great deal about why students do not persist longer. Often students drop out without notice and cannot be located. Most programs do not have the resources to contact students who have stopped attending classes to determine their reasons. But people who work in the ESL field believe there are a variety of reasons why many do not continue their non-credit ESL classes, and evidence from this study supports some of these reasons.

According to anecdotal reports from instructors, some students drop out due to family and work obligations, or health issues. The lower persistence rates for younger, working

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<sup>38</sup> “ESL Model Standards For Adult Education Programs,” 1992. Sacramento: California Department of Education.

<sup>39</sup> See Chapter 1.

age students, age 20-34 (47% of the cohort studied) may be evidence that many of these students need to make work, not school, their first priority. Also, students in this age range may be more likely to have family responsibilities than are younger or older students.

Students at the Intermediate levels may not see a need to continue their ESL studies, perhaps believing they have learned enough English to function in their jobs and in most familiar situations. Also, Intermediate and Advanced Level students may have enough English to pursue other educational opportunities in vocational training or academic programs.

A variety of other factors may also affect persistence. Some students may feel they have achieved their personal goal of attaining the level of English they need to live and work in the United States. As a result, they may not see a need for further studies. Other students may be dissatisfied with their classes and/or teacher. Some of these students may find it difficult to navigate the process of changing the classes in which they are enrolled. Still others may believe they are able to improve their level of English by using it on the job.

Another reason that some students may not persist in their ESL studies is that in San Francisco, like many other large cities in the United States, it is possible to live comfortably in many ethnic neighborhoods without needing to use much English.

### **3. Geographic Mobility**

As noted in the Introduction of this report, one inherent limitation of any research based on student record data is that it cannot account for the effect of geographic mobility on enrollment, persistence, or other student characteristics. Chapter 1 indicated that Census figures show a net decrease in the number of immigrants living in CCSF's service area (largely the city of San Francisco) since the 1990s. Thus, one possible reason that students in the cohort examined did not enroll for more terms is that some of them moved to other areas. If they had remained in the San Francisco area, their persistence rates might have been higher.

Although geographic mobility may have had some effect on the number of students that enrolled for various numbers of terms, there is no evidence to indicate that it had an effect on the relative percentage of students who did so. That is, there is no evidence to indicate that students who enrolled for a smaller number of terms were immigrants who were more geographically mobile than students who enrolled for a greater number of terms.

Moreover, census data on the decrease in San Francisco's immigrant population do not describe a mass exodus. Rather, they describe a net decrease on the order of 1% per year (depending on how the numbers are represented). As a result, while out-migration of immigrants may have reduced the persistence of CCSF's ESL students somewhat, there is no reason to believe that the effect was large. It seems likely that most of the students

who first enrolled in the College's ESL program in 1998-2000 were still living in its service area in 2006. And regardless of the number of students who left the service area, the low persistence rates of a large percentage of students in the cohort who fell into every category analyzed by this report are cause for concern about those who remained.

#### **4. Program Design**

The nature of CCSF's non-credit ESL program could also have some effect on persistence. Classes are free. If students drop out, they do not lose any money, as they would if they dropped out from a fee-based credit ESL class. As noted in Chapter 1, CCSF (like many other adult ESL programs in the country) has adopted an "open-entry/open-exit" enrollment policy. This policy could possibly contribute to low persistence. Students can be added to a class at almost any time in the term up until the last few weeks. Some students may drop out because they find it difficult to learn in a class that is already underway. They may feel that they will not be able to "catch up" and/or they may have difficulty working together with other students who already know each other.

The major plus of an open-entry/open-exit policy is that students do not have to wait for a period of weeks or months to begin their studies. Like many programs, CCSF keeps waiting lists of students for its non-credit classes and adds students to classes from these waiting lists. The wait was often long when enrollment was high, but as enrollment has declined in recent years, the waiting lists have become smaller or non-existent.

CCSF's ESL program, like many other adult education programs, is dependent on student enrollment for funding. The College has believed it necessary to maintain an open-entry policy to ensure that new students throughout the term fill seats left open by students who drop out. Adult ESL instructors adapt to this continuing influx of new students by constantly recycling instructional material and making special efforts to incorporate new students.

#### **5. Facing the Challenge**

Non-credit ESL programs have recognized that improving persistence is a challenge that needs to be faced. This study confirms this challenge and provides further evidence to support the nature of the challenge. What can programs do?

ESL professionals from many programs are discussing learner persistence at conferences and sharing ideas for increasing persistence. For example, this problem was featured in a session on "Supporting Adult Student Retention" at CATESOL, 2006.<sup>40</sup> Many programs, including CCSF, have been inspired by NCSALL's Learner Persistence Study Circle Guide,<sup>41</sup> and are experimenting with a variety of efforts to increase persistence.

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<sup>40</sup> ce.sbccc.edu/SanFranciscoCATESOL4\_8\_06.doc

<sup>41</sup> [www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/teach/lp.pdf](http://www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/teach/lp.pdf)

CCSF decided to develop a welcome guide that instructors can give to students and use as the basis for instruction during the first week of each term. The guide orients students to their campus and their classes. It is also distributed to students who enter throughout the term, and teachers are provided with instructions about how new students can use it. One suggested use is for teachers to assign continuing students as buddies to help new students complete the activities in the welcome guide. CCSF also conducted a survey of Non-Credit ESL students to ask what they liked and did not like about studying at the College. Poorly maintained facilities were a major concern for many students, and improvements were made in that regard.

Some colleges have adopted a “managed enrollment” approach to improve persistence and other educational outcomes. Unlike the “open-entry/open-exit” program at CCSF, managed enrollment programs usually admit students only at the beginning of each term and terminate them if their attendance rates are not high. Two recent reports by the Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy on ESL instruction at community colleges (based on research at five colleges) explain various forms of managed enrollment, and show that this approach to program design has proved to be highly effective in improving virtually all educational outcomes.<sup>42</sup> In addition, other colleges, such as Mira Costa Community College in California, have found success in improving non-credit student persistence by adopting a managed enrollment program.<sup>43</sup>

Creative scheduling of classes may also help programs serve students who cannot attend during the week due to work schedules. CCSF has scheduled Saturday- and Sunday-only classes at several campuses. It has also tried early morning classes during the week at one campus and is considering Monday-only classes for those who work and have only Monday off.

In the State of Washington, all non-credit ESL students must pay a \$25 fee (which can be waived in case of hardship). This token fee may give students in open-entry programs a sense that they have something to lose by not attending classes. A small fee that would be refundable at the end of each term if students have good attendance records could create a greater incentive for persistence than the Washington system does. *Although state policy in California prohibits charging fees for adult education classes, both policymakers and programs may wish to reconsider this possibility as a way of increasing persistence.*

Finally, Chapter 5 shows that a number of features of CCSF’s program may make both persistence and advancement more difficult for non-credit students, and the chapter discusses how some of those features might be modified. It also discusses the importance of enhanced guidance and counseling services. Chapters 8 and 9 discuss several

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<sup>42</sup> Forrest P. Chisman and JoAnn Crandall, Passing the Torch: Strategies for Innovation in Community College ESL (New York: Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2007). Elizabeth Zachry & Emily Dibble, Sharon Seymour, Suzanne Leibman, Sandy Ares & Beth Larson, and Pam Ferguson, Torchlights in ESL (New York: Council for the Advancement of Adult Literacy 2007). Both reports are available at the CAAL website: [www.caalusa.org](http://www.caalusa.org).

<sup>43</sup> [www.miracosta.edu/Instruction/CommunityEducation/ESL/managedenrollment.html](http://www.miracosta.edu/Instruction/CommunityEducation/ESL/managedenrollment.html).

important features of CCSF's program – including appropriate matriculation services, accelerated classes, and allowing ESL students to enroll in other non-credit programs – that may also increase persistence. Expanding the availability and quality of these features would seem to be important steps other colleges can take to increase persistence.

## CHAPTER 5

### LEVEL ADVANCEMENT OF NON-CREDIT ESL STUDENTS

#### A. FOCUS OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter describes the rate at which students in the cohort examined by this study advanced levels in CCSF's ESL program. For the sake of brevity, the chapter discusses the level advancement of *only* the 38,095 non-credit students in the cohort, and omits a discussion of the learning gains of the 6,666 credit students, and it restricts its focus to courses that the College designates as either a single level or two levels.

Level advancement can be considered a proxy for learning gains, although it is not a precise measure of them. It can be considered a proxy, because students can only advance from one level to the next in CCSF's ESL program if they meet the objectives for English proficiency (as specified in course outlines) of each level in which they are enrolled. Because a student would not be placed in any given level if they could meet the objectives of that level, advancing to the next level indicates that the student's proficiency has increased enough to meet the objectives of the level in which they were placed. That is, the student has achieved some learning gains.

#### 1. CCSF Policy And Level Advancement

With rare exceptions, students are only advanced a level at the end of each term. As noted in the Chapter 1, instructors make decisions on whether to advance a student to the next level by using a variety of evaluation tools to determine if the student has achieved the objectives specified in the course outline. These evaluation tools include on-going observations of performance in class activities, as well as exercises, quizzes, and tests. As explained in Chapter 1, to evaluate whether students have met the objectives of Levels 2, 4, and 6, instructors also use the results of student performance on department-wide tests in Listening and Reading. The Level 4 test battery was expanded in 2006 to include an oral interview and a writing sample. As a result, all four core ESL skills are evaluated to help determine whether a student is ready to advance from the Beginning levels (Levels 1-4) to the lowest Intermediate level (Level 5). In addition, if a student takes more than one class during a term (for example a 10-hour/week ESLN class and a 5 hour/week ESLF class), instructors normally consult at the end of the term to discuss that student's readiness for the next level.

If a student does not attend class for the last few weeks at the end of a term, the teacher will usually remove the student from the class attendance list. These "dropped" students are usually not eligible to be promoted, because teachers do not believe they have sufficient evidence to make promotion decisions. Nevertheless, dropped students probably have achieved some learning gains from the hours they attended. Teachers have discretion about when to drop a student. Because attendance is taken every two weeks, most students are dropped if they are not attending four weeks before the end of the term. If these students return at a later date, they are placed in the same level at which they



were enrolled when they left, or if considerable time has passed, students may re-take the placement test to determine if their level has changed.

It should be noted that, except for a small number of cases, students who attend the summer term are not advanced to the next level when they enroll in that term, whether or not they are eligible for advancement. For example, a student who was enrolled in Level 1 during the spring and then enrolled in the summer term would receive Level 1 instruction during the summer. This would be the case whether or not he/she had been approved for promotion to Level 2. The student would only be promoted to Level 2 at the beginning of the fall term.

This policy of not promoting students during the summer has been adopted by CCSF because the summer term is shorter than the 17.5-week fall and spring terms. Instructional hours are only 25% - 35% of the full term since the summer term is only 6-8 weeks, and classes meet for eight hours a week instead of 10. Also the number of classes offered is considerably reduced, so the number of students served over the summer is only about one quarter the number served in other terms. Summer is considered a time for review and consolidation, even though most students who enroll in the summer term probably achieve learning gains.

Nevertheless, in this study, the summer term is counted in the same way as other terms. Thus, there are 21 terms (3 terms per year) in the seven years over which the cohort was studied.

## **B. MAJOR FINDINGS**

- Overall, this chapter shows that a significant number of students who began at all levels of English proficiency advanced levels, and hence achieved learning gains. Importantly, it shows that students who began at the lowest levels advanced the most. But only a small percentage of students who began at any level advanced very far. In part, this is because a large percentage of students attended for only a small number of hours and thus did not gain the skills they needed to advance.
- A majority of non-credit ESL students (56%) in the cohort studied did not advance even one level during the seven-year period in which their performance was examined. The percentage that did not advance one level varied depending on the first level in which they were enrolled and increased as the level of first enrollment increased. The only level from which a majority of students advanced even one level was the Literacy Level (Level 0).
- Half of the students who did not advance attended fewer than 50 hours of instruction over the seven-year period, and another 30% attended 150 or fewer hours. Thus, students who did not advance were primarily those who attended very few class hours. Ninety-five percent of the 44% of students who did advance received 50 or more hours of instruction.

- Of the 44% of students who did advance, 39% advanced only one level, and 26% advanced only two levels. Hence, of those who did advance, 65% advanced no more than two levels.
- Sixty-seven percent of non-credit students in the cohort first enrolled at the lowest levels – the Literacy or Low Beginning levels (0-2). Students who first enrolled at lower levels were more likely to advance than students who first enrolled at higher levels. However, only about 19% of students who first enrolled at the Literacy or Beginning Levels advanced to the Intermediate Level (Level 5).
- Students who enrolled for more terms advanced more levels than did students who enrolled for fewer terms. The low rates of persistence discussed in Chapter 4 are a major reason that level advancement was so limited.
- Students who advanced more levels attended more hours of instruction than students who advanced fewer levels.
- On average, it took those students who advanced levels about 100 hours to advance each level, although many of these students advanced in fewer hours and many attended for more hours before they advanced. Not only must students enroll in more terms if they wish to advance in levels of English proficiency, but they must also attend enough hours in the terms during which they are enrolled.
- Students who started at each successively higher level required fewer hours to advance each level. That is, students who initially enrolled at higher levels advanced more quickly than students who initially enrolled at lower levels. However, both the percentage and number of students at lower levels who advanced was greater than the percentage and number of students at higher levels who advanced. It appears that students at lower levels were more willing and able to devote the extra hours required to advance levels.
- Asians attended more hours before they advanced than did Hispanics, but a greater percentage and number of Asians than Hispanics advanced each level. Apparently Asians were more willing or able than Hispanics to attend the hours it took them to advance, even though the number of hours required was greater for them than it was for Hispanics.
- There was no systematic relationship between age and the number of levels taken or advanced. Students in different age groups advanced at different rates, but there was no systematic pattern to these differences, except that students in the 16-19 year old age group advanced at a slightly faster rate than students in other age groups.

Overall, these findings suggest that a major challenge for CCSF's ESL program, and for other programs, is to find ways to help students who do not advance very many levels ascend higher on the ladder of English proficiency. If some students can accomplish this, many more should be able to do so.

It is significant that some categories of students (such as those who began at the lowest levels and Asians) advanced more levels than others did, despite the fact that it took them more hours and terms to advance. This suggests that student motivation and goals were among the key factors affecting learning gains. And it suggests that anything colleges can do to increase motivation and expand student goals (such as increased guidance, counseling, and other support services) will increase level advancement.

Also, certain aspects of CCSF's ESL program structure (such as long terms and a policy of promoting students only at the end of terms) may slow both the rate at which students advance and how far they advance. CCSF and other colleges should examine their program structures to determine whether they create barriers to student advancement. In particular, they should try to ensure that students can advance levels as quickly as they master the skills taught at each level. For these purposes, they may wish to consider dividing their programs into fairly short instructional units and/or assessing the readiness of students to advance at frequent intervals. They may also wish to consider instituting accelerated high-intensity tracks for students who wish to advance as rapidly as possible. Likewise, colleges should consider augmenting their programs with features that may increase level advancement. Several features of this sort adopted by CCSF are discussed in Chapters 9 and 10.

## C. ANALYSIS

### 1. Level Advancement of Non-Credit ESL Students

Table 5.1 presents the number of non-credit students in the cohort by their starting level (the level at which they first enrolled) and the total number of levels they took (were enrolled in) during the seven years over which they were studied. While the Table presents levels taken, the primary focus of this analysis is on how many levels students advanced. Students who advanced one or more levels are those who took two or more levels (the level in which they initially enrolled plus the level or levels to which they advanced). This is, level advancement can be determined by subtracting one level from the number of levels taken. For example, students who took only one level did not advance any levels at all, and students who took two levels advanced one level (from their level of first enrollment to the next higher level).<sup>44</sup>

***Students who did not advance or advanced few levels.*** The most important thing Table 5.1 shows is that a majority of non-credit students (56%, 18,937 students) did not

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<sup>44</sup> This way of counting students' 'levels taken' leads to some irregularities in the data set. Not all students advanced in a linear fashion. In some cases, their last level was lower than their first. These students were removed from the analysis of level advancement. Other students may have taken levels out of sequence. They could have started at Level 2 and finished at Level 2, but have enrolled in Level 1 and Level 3 classes at some point during their seven years of study. The jumping around levels does not invalidate this approach to the assessment of learning. It merely introduces 'noise' into the numbers that appear in the tables. This noise will be apparent to the observant reader. It will be pointed out as it occurs throughout the rest of this chapter. If anything, if it were possible to rid the noise from the analysis, the relationships described here would be stronger.

advance even one level during the seven years over which they were studied. The percentage of students who did not advance differed depending on the level at which they were first enrolled. For example, the percentage of students who did not advance was 54% for students initially enrolled in Level 1 (Beginning Low) and 74% for those first enrolled in Level 5 (Low Intermediate). The only level from which a majority of students advanced at least one level was the Literacy Level (Level 0). Of these students, 44% took only one level. Thus, 56% advanced at least one level.

Table 5.1 also shows that the percentage of students who did not advance was greater for students who began at the higher levels than for students who began at the lower levels. However, because the number of students at higher levels was much smaller than the number at lower levels, the vast majority of the students who did not advance were at the Literacy or Low Beginning levels (Level 0 and Levels 1-2). Students who were initially enrolled at these levels comprised 69% of the 18,937 students who did not advance even one level over the seven-year time period.

Finally, Table 5.1 indicates that, of those students who did advance, 38% advanced only one level, and 26% advanced two levels.<sup>45</sup> Hence, 64% of the students who *did* advance advanced only one or two levels. Seventy-three percent of students did not advance at all or advanced only one level, and 84% of students (28,382 students) did not advance at all or advanced only one or two levels.

***Levels advanced and first level taken.*** Table 5.1 also shows that lower-level students were more likely than higher-level students to advance more than one level. For example, 30% of students who began at the Literacy Level or Levels 1-3 advanced two or more levels, whereas this was the case with only 18% who began at Levels 4, 15% who began at Level 5, 6% who began at Level 6, and 2% who began at Level 7. No students who began at Levels 8 and 9 did so. Overall, the percentage of students initially enrolled at the lowest levels (Literacy and Levels 1-3) that advanced more than one level was about the same, but the percentage was smaller for students initially enrolled at higher levels who advanced more than one level.

This finding is most pronounced for students who advanced three or more levels. For example, 17% of students who started at the Literacy Level did so, contrasted to 19% who started at Level 1, 16% who started at Level 2, and 18% who started at Level 3. Only 3% of students who began at Level 5 advanced three or more levels.<sup>46</sup>

Moreover, the percentage of higher-level students who took more than one level decreased at each successively higher level. Because of the larger numbers of students at lower levels, the number of students at those levels who advanced multiple levels was also much greater than the number at higher levels.

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<sup>45</sup> These percentages are calculated from the section of Table 5.1 that gives numbers of students, rather than the section that gives percentages. The percentages would be slightly different if the section that gives percentages was used, due to rounding of the percentages.

<sup>46</sup> This can be seen by adding the percentages of students at each level who took four levels or more.

Of course, one reason why a lower percentage of high-level students took multiple levels was probably that there were fewer levels for them to take. For example, students who began at Levels 8 or 9 could not have taken two or more levels, because there is only one more level available to Level 8 students, and no more levels available to Level 9 students. Still, the fact that students initially enrolled in the Literacy Level and Levels 1-3 were much more likely to advance two or more levels, than were students initially enrolled in Levels 4-6 (all of whom had two more levels available to them, and all of whom except Level 6 students had 4 more levels available to them) indicates that lower level students were, in fact, more likely to advance multiple levels.

In a sense, this is good news. It is distressing that so many students who began at all levels failed to advance at all, and that so many advanced only one level. However, the fact that non-trivial percentages and numbers of students who began at the Literacy and Beginning Levels 1-3 advanced two to four levels shows that significant progress for students with very limited English proficiency is possible. Although the numbers are not as large as might be desired, these, too, are impressive in some cases. For example, the fact that 7,626 students who began at Levels 1-3 advanced two or more levels, and 4,549 advanced three or more levels shows that at least some Beginning Level students can achieve a great deal.

***Advance to the Intermediate or Advanced levels.*** Table 5.1 can also be used to calculate the percentage of students who advanced to the Intermediate Level (Levels 5-8), which is often regarded as an important benchmark in discussing ESL programs. This can be accomplished by adding the percentages of students beginning at each level who advance to the first Intermediate level. The percentage of students initially enrolled at the Literacy Level who advanced to the first Intermediate Level (Level 5) or beyond was only 4%. Two percent of students who began at the Literacy Level advanced to level 5 (took 6 levels) and 1% advanced to Levels 6 and 7. For the Beginning Levels 1-3, 10% of students who began at Level 1 advanced to the first Intermediate Level (Level 5) or beyond, in contrast to 16% who began at Level 2, and 29% who began at Level 3.

Movement to the Advanced Level is also an important benchmark for ESL programs. Unfortunately, this study cannot analyze this advancement because CCSF only offers two levels of Low Advanced 9 at one campus. Students at other campuses who are ready to advance to Level 9 sometimes re-enroll in Level 8, or they may enroll in multi-level classes, other non-credit courses (such as ABE courses offered by the Transitional Studies Department), or credit ESL.

**Table 5.1 Levels Taken by First Level in Non-Credit ESL**

**Percent**

Levels Taken	First Non-Credit ESL Level										All Levels
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
1	44%	54%	52%	56%	71%	74%	78%	95%	100%	100%	56%
2	27%	16%	17%	15%	11%	11%	16%	3%	0%	0%	17%
3	13%	11%	14%	11%	9%	12%	5%	2%	0%	0%	11%
4	8%	9%	7%	9%	6%	2%	1%	0%	0%	0%	8%
5	5%	4%	5%	6%	2%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	4%
6	2%	3%	3%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%
7	1%	2%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%
8	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
9	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
10	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Grand Total	5180	16497	3663	3490	1392	1270	925	988	271	29	33705

**Number**

Levels Taken	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Grand Total
1	2271	8901	1912	1969	984	938	726	937	270	29	18937
2	1402	2615	613	531	155	139	144	31	1		5631
3	662	1886	529	392	126	156	43	20			3814
4	398	1444	269	315	89	21	12				2548
5	239	711	190	207	33	16					1396
6	88	545	107	56	5						801
7	63	257	37	20							377
8	42	114	6								162
9	14	24									38
10	1										1
Grand Total	5180	16497	3663	3490	1392	1270	925	988	271	29	33705

- Includes all students first enrolled in ESLN and/or ESLF in 1998, 1999, 2000, except that 4,390 students have been removed from the analysis. Of these students, 956 had a higher first level than last, and an additional 3,434 had no level designation because they were in a multi-level class. It was necessary to remove these students from the analysis in this chapter, because the chapter is concerned with level advancement, and no reliable first or subsequent level could be assigned to them. Because they are removed from the analysis, the number of students in the cohort described in this and all other tables in this chapter, except 5.2, is 33,705, rather than the full 38,095 members of the cohort defined in Chapter 3.

## 2. Level Advancement Related to Terms Taken

Table 5.2 shows the relationship between the number of ESLN and ESLF terms in which students were enrolled and the number of levels they took over the seven-year period. The first column lists the total number of terms in which students were enrolled. The second presents the mean (average) number of levels they took. For example, the Table shows that students who were enrolled for only one term took only one level during that term, and students who were enrolled for two terms took an average of 1.55 levels. Only 16 terms are listed because no student in the cohort enrolled for more than 16 of the 21 terms available to them during the seven-year period studied, and only 2,092 members of the cohort enrolled in more than 10 of the 21 terms available to them over the seven year period.

***Persistence and level advancement.*** The Table shows that persistence (terms taken) is strongly related to level advancement. Students who were enrolled for more terms enrolled in more levels, and hence achieved greater level advancement. For example, students who were enrolled for three terms took 1.97 levels, on average, whereas students who were enrolled for ten terms took 3.71 levels on average. Importantly, the numbers of levels taken increased with each successive term taken. *The relationship between terms taken and levels taken is, thus, both positive and strong.*

Of course, this relationship makes common sense. It is not surprising to find that the more students study (measured by terms taken), the more levels they advance. This is especially true at CCSF where, as explained above, students are usually advanced a level only at the end of each term. As a result, most students cannot possibly advance more than one level for each term in which they are enrolled. Table 5.2 confirms this common-sense expectation. Persistence pays off in terms of level advancement.

***Terms to advance a level.*** Table 5.2 also shows that, on average, it took students more than one term to advance a level. For example, students who enrolled for three terms had taken 1.97 levels on average by the beginning of their third term. That means that in two terms they had taken 1.97 levels – and hence advanced close to one level.<sup>47</sup> Likewise, students who enrolled for six terms had taken on average 2.93 levels by the beginning of their sixth term. That means that in five terms, they had taken an average of 2.93 levels – and hence advanced about two levels.

It is important to bear in mind that the numbers in Table 5.2 are averages. As a result, in the examples just given, some students who enrolled for three terms advanced more than two levels, and some advanced fewer levels. Likewise, some students who enrolled for six terms advanced more than two levels, and some advanced fewer levels. But Table 5.2 demonstrates that, on average, students did not advance a level for each term in which they were enrolled.

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<sup>47</sup> Strictly speaking, only students who took two levels would have advanced one level.

***Relationship to persistence rates.*** Finally, Table 5.2 confirms the Chapter 4 findings that persistence is very low. Thirty-five percent of students enrolled for only one term and, thus, enrolled in only one level. And, almost two-thirds of students enrolled for three terms or less during the seven-year period studied. These low persistence levels clearly have a negative effect on level advancement. On average, students who enrolled for one, two, and three terms took 1.0, 1.55, and 1.97 levels, respectively. But students who enrolled for more terms achieved far greater level advancement – as measured by the number of levels in which they were enrolled. For example, students who enrolled for 10 terms took 3.71 levels, on average. Regrettably only small numbers of students persisted for large numbers of terms and achieved these greater rates of level advancement. For example only 662 students were enrolled for 10 terms.

**Table 5.2 Mean Levels Taken by Total Terms Taken**<sup>48</sup>

ESLN&ESLF Terms Taken	Mean ESLN&ESLF Levels Taken	Number
1	1	12035
2	1.55	6566
3	1.97	4076
4	2.39	2914
5	2.72	1949
6	2.93	1461
7	5.21	1193
8	5.29	928
9	5.5	785
10	3.71	662
11	3.82	499
12	3.87	366
13	3.96	334
14	4.06	267
15	4.09	213
16	4.39	413
Total	2.11	34661

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<sup>48</sup> The total number of students in this table is 34,661, rather than 33,705 as it is in other tables in this chapter because this table includes 956 students whose last level was higher than their first level. These students are included in this table, because the software program used to generate the tables, SAS, does not exclude records with zero or negative numbers. The 956 students had zero or negative numbers as part of their “levels taken” field and hence these numbers were used in the computation of the means in this table. In other tables zero or negative levels taken were manually removed from the analysis.



### 3. Level Advancement Related to Hours of Study

**Hours and terms.** Table 5.2 shows that persistence (from the standpoint of taking more terms) pays off in level advancement, and that low rates of persistence are a major reason why CCSF's ESL students do not advance very many levels. But there are other factors at work. One of these is the number of hours that students attend.

Not surprisingly, the number of hours students attend and the number of terms during which they are enrolled are closely related. It is probable that the major way in which students accumulate larger numbers of hours of instruction is by taking more terms, although some students undoubtedly enroll for multiple terms but fail to attend very many hours.

In fact, this study found that hours of instruction have a .57 correlation with the number of levels students take (and hence advance), and that the number of terms taken has a .59 correlation. There was a .85 correlation between hours of instruction and terms enrolled. When both of the factors are taken together, terms account for 35% of the variance in levels taken. In short, *those students who advanced levels enrolled in more terms and attended for more hours.*<sup>49</sup>

This section explains the attendance hours on which these regressions are based. More importantly, it examines aspects of the relationship between hours of instruction and level advancement that are not apparent from regression analysis.

**The effect of hours of instruction.** Consistent with the correlations just mentioned, Table 5.31 demonstrates that hours of instruction have a strong effect on level advancement.<sup>50</sup> The table shows how the number of levels taken is related to the number of hours of non-credit instruction ESL students attended. The numbers of hours shown in the table are the total number of hours students attended at any time in the seven-year period during which they were studied. The numbers of hours students attended are shown in 100-hour

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<sup>49</sup> The SAS correlation protocol was used to calculate the zero order correlations and the SAS regression protocol was used to calculate the multiple regression coefficients.

<sup>50</sup> This and the following tables in this chapter often state the number of levels or hours that students advance in terms of "median" numbers of levels or hours. In other chapters, and in Table 5.2 "mean" values were used. "Median" was selected for use in this and the following tables in this chapter to help the reader understand complex relationships more easily. In particular, the following tables in this chapter primarily refer to median values, because calculations in terms of medians lead to round numbers, rather than fractional numbers. Both median and mean are measures of central tendency. When the distribution of the underlying variable is normal they are the same. However, when the distribution is skewed they can differ - sometimes markedly. The difference is that the mean is the sum of all the values (such as the number of hours) divided by the number of cases (such as levels enrolled). For the median, it is the number (such as number of hours) above and below which 50% of the cases fall. Calculations in terms of both median and mean represent the common sense notion of "average." All the tables in this chapter were calculated using both the median and the mean, and it was discovered that, the relationships discussed in this chapter, and hence the conclusions that could be drawn, did not differ. However, these relationships and conclusions are often easier to see and explain using median values, rather than mean values.

increments after the first 8-49 hours (represented by “0”). These increments are rounded off to even numbers (such as 100 and 200) for presentation purposes. Thus, “100” represents the range of 50-149 hours of attendance, “200” represents the range of 150-249 hours of attendance, and so forth.

The cells of Table 5.31 show the number of students in each combination of hours of attendance and levels taken. For example, there were 9,406 students in the 0 hours of attendance category (8-49 hours represented as “0”) who took only one level. In the next to last columns at the right side of the Table are the median and mean levels taken by all students in each attendance hour category. The last column at the right side of the Table is the total number of students in each hour category. At the bottom of the Table is the summed total number of students in each ‘Levels Taken’ category.

The most important finding of Table 5.31 is that the number of hours students attended is positively related to the number of levels in which they were enrolled, and hence the number of levels they advanced. That is, *students who attended more hours took (and advanced) more levels.*

This can be seen most clearly by comparing the “ESLN and ESLF Hours Attended” column at the far left side of the Table with the “Median Levels Taken” and “Mean Levels Taken” columns at the right side of the Table. Overall, as the number of hours increased, the number of levels taken (and hence advanced) increased. For example, students who attended 200 hours took a median number of two levels (and thus advanced one level), whereas, students who attended 600 hours took a median number of three levels (and thus advanced two levels). *The number of hours students attended as well as the number of terms in which they were enrolled (Table 5.2) influenced their level advancement.*

***Hours taken explain why students did not advance even one level.*** Unfortunately, the vast majority of students in the cohort studied did not attend classes for very many hours. The first row in Table 5.31 shows that 10,175 of the students in the cohort attended less than 50 hours of instruction (represented by “0”) over the seven-year time period. Not surprisingly, the median number of levels taken by these students was one level – representing no level advancement or learning gain. Because this number is a median, however, the same row shows that some students (a total of 769) who attended less than 50 hours did, in fact, advance levels. The vast majority (9,406 or 92%) students who attended less than 50 hours did not advance a level.

The “Grand Total” row at the bottom of Table 5.31 indicates that 18,937 students took only one level, and hence did not advance a level – the same number indicated in Table 5.1. Thus, the 9,406 students who took fewer than 50 hours comprised 49.7% (9,406 of 18,937) of all students in the cohort who did not advance even one level.

Table 5.31 also indicates that 5,871 students who attended at most 100 hours of instruction (representing 50-149 hours) took only one level of instruction. Like the students who attended less than 50 hours, their median number of levels taken was also

one level. The majority of students who attended for at most 100 hours (72%) took only one level, and hence did not advance a level. These 5,871 students who attended 100 hours comprised 31% of the students in the cohort who did not advance even one level.

As a result, Table 5.31 shows that 81% of the students in the cohort who did not advance one level attended fewer than 150 hours of instruction.<sup>51</sup> This means that, descriptively at least, the major reason that so large a number and percentage of CCSF's students did not advance is that these students attended only a very small number of hours over the seven-year time period during which they were studied. In short, *the major reason 56% of CCSF's non-credit students did not advance levels was that they did not attend enough hours of instruction.*

***Median number of hours to advance a level.*** Because Table 5.31 presents the total number of hours that students attended over the seven-year period during which they were studied, it cannot be used to calculate how many hours it took students to advance levels. To estimate how many hours it took to advance, it is necessary to calculate how many hours students attended *prior to* the last level in which they were enrolled. This is because the last level in which students were enrolled is not necessarily a level that they completed. However, in order to enroll in that last level, they must have completed the levels below it. As a result, calculating the number of hours students who took any given number of levels attended prior to their last level indicates how many hours it took them to complete various numbers of levels.

The results of this calculation are presented in Table 5.32, "Hours of Attendance Prior to Last Level By Levels Taken." This Table shows the median number of levels attended by students who took 1-9 levels, respectively, prior to the last level in which they were enrolled.

The Table indicates that the median number of prior hours attended by students who were enrolled for only one level was 0. This is because of the way hours of attendance are defined for purposes of Table 5.32. If students enrolled for only one level, that level was both their first and last level, and there is no way to know if they completed it. As a result, there is no way in which they could have accumulated "hours of attendance prior to [their] last level taken" – which is what Table 5.32 shows – because they did not enroll in any other level where they could have accumulated hours of attendance prior to their last level. Thus, for purposes of the calculations in Table 5.32, their hours of attendance were 0, although they undoubtedly attended classes for at least some hours.

More interestingly, Table 5.32 shows that the median number of hours attended by students who completed two levels (and hence advanced one level) was 108 hours, and the median number of hours it took students to complete three levels (and advance two levels) was 216 hours. The median number of hours it took students who attended two levels to advance *an additional level* can be determined by subtracting the median

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<sup>51</sup> The 100-hour category is the rounded number for all hours from 50-149. The 81% figure is the sum of the percent of students in the cohort who attended fewer than 50 hours and did not advance a level (49.7%) plus the percent of students in the cohort who attended 50-149 hours and did not advance a level (31%).

number of hours it took them to advance two levels from the number of hours it took students to advance three levels.<sup>52</sup> If this subtraction is performed, it shows that it took students who advanced three levels 108 hours to advance a second level.

A similar calculation can be performed to determine the number of hours it took for students to advance from any number of “Levels Taken” to the next number of “Levels Taken.” In all cases, these calculations show that it took students approximately 100 hours or slightly less time to advance one level. In fact, after five levels taken, the median number of hours it took students to advance one additional level was in the range of 50-70 median hours – although only 19% of students who advanced levels advanced five or more levels.

*For the vast majority of students who advanced levels, therefore, it took approximately 100 hours to complete a level.* It is interesting, however, that the small number of students who took a very large number of levels took significantly fewer hours to complete each of the higher levels.

***Hours taken do not necessarily result in level advancement.*** Of course, this finding was true only of those students who *did* attend for 100 hours or more and *did* advance a level. And the 100-hour number represents median hours. That is, it cannot be said that if students are enrolled for 100 hours they will always advance a level, because many students did not advance at all regardless of the number of hours in which they were enrolled, and some students took more than 100 hours to advance a level, while others took fewer.

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<sup>52</sup> By definition, this must be the case, because in order to advance three levels, students must at some point have advanced two levels.

**Table 5.31 Total Number of Hours Attended  
by Levels Taken and Number of Students**

ESLN &ESLF Hours	Levels Taken										Median Levels Taken	Mean Levels Taken	Grand Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9				
0	9406	449	169	90	35	18	4	4			1	1.1	10175
100	5871	1346	505	220	96	36	22	9	3		1	1.39	8108
200	1803	1153	544	259	82	53	16	6			2	1.86	3916
300	725	851	526	251	84	43	18	11	2		2	2.25	2511
400	383	483	415	255	112	40	10	5	5		2	2.57	1708
500	226	316	330	257	115	50	22	11	1		3	2.94	1328
600	131	248	264	187	109	58	19	15	1		3	5.13	1032
700	99	206	189	178	88	46	19	7	2		3	5.16	834
800	68	153	177	140	91	58	22	13	3		3	3.46	725
900	56	88	131	118	78	41	20	5	5		3	5.52	542
1000	32	71	118	106	60	43	22	10	1		4	5.69	463
1100	31	64	79	72	68	48	23	11	3		4	3.95	399
1200	19	39	66	65	66	35	19	7	1		4	3.92	317
1300	26	38	49	65	50	28	20	5	2		4	3.9	283
1400	13	33	51	50	40	24	19	2	1		4	4.01	233
1500	9	22	42	37	29	29	17	8	1		4	4.32	194
1600+	39	71	159	198	193	151	85	33	7		4	4.5	937
Grand Total	18937	5631	3814	2548	1396	801	377	162	38				33705

-Includes all students first enrolled in ESLN and/or ESLF in 1998, 9999, 2000, except that. 4390 students have been removed from the analysis. Of these students, 956 had a higher first level than last, and an additional 3434 had no level designation because they were in a multi-level class

**Table 5.32 Hours of Attendance Prior to Last Level by Number of Levels Taken**

Levels Taken	Median Hours Enrolled	Number
1	0	18937
2	108	5631
3	216	3814
4	320	2548
5	377	1396
6	418	801
7	472	377
8	539	162
9	589	38
Total		33704

- 4,390 students have been removed from the analysis.  
 956 had a higher first level than last. An additional 3,434 had no level designation because they were in a multi-level class.

**4. Level Advancement by First Level Taken**

Table 5.4 shows the median numbers of hours attended by non-credit ESL students in the cohort by the first level in which they were enrolled and total number of levels in which they were enrolled. The hours listed are the total number of hours attended prior to each successive level in which students enrolled. For example, students who initially enrolled in Level 1 attended 114 median hours before they enrolled in Level 2 (and hence advanced one level), and 230 median hours before they enrolled in Level 3 (and hence advanced two levels).

Because the Table shows the median number of hours students attended *prior* to each level in which they were enrolled, it shows only the hours attended by students who advanced levels, *not* the hours attended by students who did not advance. This is because only students who advanced levels could have accumulated hours of attendance prior to their last level of enrollment. Thus, the number of hours given for students who took only one level is 0, for the same reason as it is 0 in Table 5.32: these students did not advance a level.

**Hours to advance a level.** Overall, the major conclusion that can be drawn from this Table is that it took students who initially enrolled at higher levels fewer hours to advance one or more levels than it took students who initially enrolled at lower levels.

One way to see differences in the number of hours it took students to complete levels is to read across any of the rows in Table 5.4 that indicate the total number of levels taken.

For each total number of levels taken, the median numbers of hours that students attended decreases as the first level of enrollment (“First Level Taken”) increases.

For example, those students who began at the Literacy Level (Level 0) and took two levels attended a median number of 156 hours. Those students who began at Level 1 and took two levels attended a median number of 114 hours; and those who began at each successively higher level attended progressively fewer numbers of hours to advance two levels.<sup>53</sup> The same pattern can be seen for students who took three or more levels.

The conclusion that can be drawn from this pattern is that it took students at lower levels more hours to advance than it took students at higher levels. The likely reason for this is that students who began at lower levels had fewer skills – both literacy skills in any language and initial acquaintance with English – to build on. Because CCSF does not have comprehensive information on the prior educational level of its non-credit students, it is not possible to determine whether students who began at lower levels took more hours to advance because they had lower literacy skills (defined by educational level) or less initial acquaintance with English. Whichever is the case, CCSF assumes that lower level students have limited foundation skills in both language and literacy, and the ESL Department has designed lower level classes to focus on developing those skills.<sup>54</sup>

***Percent advanced.*** This finding about the number of hours it takes lower level students to advance may appear to be troubling, because the vast majority of CCSF’s ESL students began at the lowest levels. If it took lower level students more hours to advance, they may have become discouraged. They may not have advanced levels as a result of the longer time it takes students with limited foundation skills to do so. But as the discussion of Table 5.1 (above) shows, this concern is unfounded. *The percentage and number of students who began at the lowest levels and advanced any levels at all (and advanced multiple levels) was greater than the percentage and number of students who began at higher levels.*

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<sup>53</sup> The only category for which this relationship does not hold is students in Levels 0-7 who enrolled in the maximum number of levels available to them. Because there are nine levels to which students can advance, these are all students who eventually enrolled in Level 9. This aberration is probably due to the fact that very few sections of Level 9 are offered and very few students in the cohort (only 105 over the seven year period) enrolled in this level. Because of these small numbers, generalizations based on data about Level 9 are unreliable.

<sup>54</sup> It is important to bear in mind that the same cautionary note that was mentioned with regard to the findings of Table 5.3 applies to all the findings based on Table 5.4. The number of hours it took students who began at different levels are median numbers of hours. This means that half the number of students who began at each level took that number of hours or more to advance a level and half took that number of hours or fewer. Table 5.4 displays only the relative trends in the number of hours attended.

**Table 5.4 Median Hours Enrolled Prior to Last Level Taken  
by number Non-Credit ESL Levels Taken and First Level Taken**

Levels Taken	First Level Taken										Grand Total
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	156	114	85	70	72	45	39	30	0		108
3	360	230	168	135	109	69	48	54			216
4	582	322	280	203	72	83	142				320
5	695	414	259	126	185	248					377
6	762	448	304	182	672						418
7	1000	394	430	537							472
8	625	529	224								539
9	412	601									589

**5. Non-Credit ESL Advancement by Hours and Ethnicity**

The number of hours it took members of the cohort to advance one or more levels varied by ethnicity. As noted above, the two ethnic groups that make up the vast majority of CCSF’s ESL non-credit enrollment are Asians and Hispanics. Table 5.5 shows that Hispanics advanced levels more quickly than Asians. At least one major reason for this difference is probably that Asian languages, such as Chinese, differ much more from English in alphabet, phonemes, cognates, and other characteristics than Spanish does.

The greater number of hours required by Asians to advance a level can be seen by interpreting the top portion of Table 5.5 in the same way as Table 5.4 was interpreted. For any of the “Levels Taken” the median number of hours attended by Asians is greater than the median number of hours attended by Hispanics. For example, Asians who took two levels (and hence advanced one level) attended classes for 152 median hours, whereas Hispanics attended for 86 median hours. The same differential can be seen for any number of “Levels Taken.”

However, Table 5.5 indicates that both the percentage and number of Asians who advanced one or more levels was greater than the percentage and number of Hispanics. This difference between the two groups can be seen in the percentage and number portions of the table. The percent and number of Asians who took only one level (and hence did not advance a level) was smaller than the percent and number of Hispanics. The percent of Asians who took only one level was 46% (5,501 students), while the percent of Hispanics was 59% (7,520 students). This means that the percent and number of Asians who advanced at least one level was greater than the percentage and number of Hispanics. And this is the case at every number of “Levels Taken.” For example, 21% of Asians (2,493 students) compared to 16% of Hispanics (2,042 students) took two levels and 14% of Asians (1,691 students) compared to 10% of Hispanics (1,284 students) took three levels.



This differential appears at all “Levels Taken” except 7-10 levels. But very few students took those large numbers of levels. In total, the number of Asians who advanced one or more levels was 6,520 students and the number of Hispanics was 5,177 students. This difference in the numbers who advanced was entirely due to the greater percentage of Asians who advanced, because the number of Asians represented in Table 5.5 was slightly smaller than the number of Hispanics, as it was in the non-credit portion of the cohort as a whole (see Chapter 3).

These percentage and numerical differences indicate that Asians were more willing or able than Hispanics to devote the hours required to advance levels, despite the fact that it took them more hours to advance each level. This finding is consistent with the finding in Chapter 4, that the persistence rate of Asians was higher than the persistence rate of Hispanics.

**Table 5.5 Median Prior ESLNF Hours by Non-Credit ESL Levels Taken and Ethnicity**<sup>55</sup>

**Median Hours**

Levels Taken	Ethnicity Median								
	African American	American Indian	Asian Pacific Islander	Filipino	Hispanic Latino	Other Non White	Unknown No Response	White Non Hispanic	Median Hours All
1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	50	110	152	127	86	77	64	104	108
3	223	214	316	63	167	190	140	136	216
4	126	116	487	58	246	89	200	249	320
5	145	387	500	176	244	348	348	305	377
6	296	359	639	136	330	18	282	304	418
7	395		738		385	644	215	84	472
8	738		876		487		326	462	539
9			597		397		604	904	589

-Table 5.5, cont'd on next page-

<sup>55</sup> Includes all students first enrolled in ESLN and/or ESLF in 1998, 1999, 2000, except that 4,390 students have been removed from the analysis. Of these students, 956 had a higher first level than last, and an additional 3,434 had no level designation because they were in a multi-level class

**Table 5.5, cont'd**

**Number of Students**

Levels Taken	African American	American Indian	Asian Pacific Islander	Filipino	Hispanic Latino	Other Non White	Unknown No Response	White Non Hispanic	Grand Total
1	86	11	5501	92	7520	124	4634	969	18937
2	24	2	2493	22	2042	20	802	226	5631
3	16	2	1691	10	1284	16	544	251	3814
4	18	3	1117	4	871	18	361	156	2548
5	7	2	688	5	413	9	176	96	1396
6	9	2	316	2	316	4	97	55	801
7	2		165		137	6	46	21	377
8	2		40		94		21	5	162
9			9		20		5	4	38
Grand Total	164	22	12021	135	12697	197	6686	1783	33704

**Percent of Students**

Levels Taken	African American	American Indian	Asian Pacific Islander	Filipino	Hispanic Latino	Other Non White	Unknown No Response	White Non Hispanic	Grand Total
1	52%	50%	46%	68%	59%	63%	69%	54%	56%
2	15%	9%	21%	16%	16%	10%	12%	13%	17%
3	10%	9%	14%	7%	10%	8%	8%	14%	11%
4	11%	14%	9%	3%	7%	9%	5%	9%	8%
5	4%	9%	6%	4%	3%	5%	3%	5%	4%
6	5%	9%	3%	1%	2%	2%	1%	3%	2%
7	1%	0%	1%	0%	1%	3%	1%	1%	1%
8	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%
9	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

**6. Non-Credit ESL Advancement by Hours and Age**

Regression analysis shows that there is a very weak relationship between age and hours attended as well as levels advanced. The most accurate conclusion is that there is little or no systematic relationship between age and these other variables.

Table 5.6 illustrates this conclusion. This Table shows advancement of non-credit ESL students by hours and age. Overall, the Table shows no systematic relationship between age and the number of hours taken or levels advanced, except that 16-19 year old students

attended fewer hours for each level they took or advanced than members of other age groups. Although there are differences in the numbers of hours taken and advanced by different age groups, the pattern is erratic.

The lack of a systematic relationship can be seen in examining the percentage of each age group who took various numbers of levels. The differences are very small. About the same percentage of students in each age group took each of the “ESLN and ESLF Levels” and advanced a corresponding number of levels.

**Table 5.6 Median Prior Non-Credit ESL Hours by Non-Credit ESL Levels Taken and Age<sup>56</sup>**

**Median Prior Hours**

Levels ESLN and ESLF	Age Group Median							Unknown No Response	Median Hours
	16 - 19	20 - 24	25 - 29	30 - 34	35 - 39	40 - 49	50+		
1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	58	70	70	56	106	153	88	24	108
3	116	124	112	145	153	181	266	60	216
4	215	253	182	246	367	388	310	57	320
5	300	267	335	284	303	462	415	226	377
6	390	361	322	254	499	461	828	320	418
7	421	443	444	693	798	783	399	525	472
8	254	361	385	927	872	648	600	763	539
9	601	467	204	465	232	665	1218	1245	589

-Table 5.6 cont'd on next page-

<sup>56</sup> Includes all students first enrolled in ESLN and/or ESLF in 1998, 1999, 2000, except that 4,390 students have been removed from the analysis. Of these students, 956 had a higher first level than last, and an additional 3,434 had no level designation because they were in a multi-level class

**Table 5.6 cont'd**

**Percent of Students**

Levels Taken	Age Group								All Age Groups
	16 - 19	20 - 24	25 - 29	30 - 34	35 - 39	40 - 49	50+	Unknown	
1	52%	55%	58%	55%	54%	51%	54%	80%	56%
2	16%	16%	14%	16%	17%	20%	23%	8%	17%
3	11%	11%	11%	12%	12%	14%	12%	5%	11%
4	9%	8%	8%	9%	8%	8%	6%	4%	8%
5	5%	5%	5%	5%	4%	4%	3%	1%	4%
6	4%	3%	3%	3%	3%	2%	1%	1%	2%
7	1%	2%	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%
8	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
9	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Total Number	2663	6444	5773	4807	3871	5616	5636	3285	38095

**D. DISCUSSION**

**1. Low Advancement Rates**

This study found that most of CCSF’s ESL students in the cohort examined did not advance very many levels of English proficiency. This is cause for concern, because the study used level advancement as a proxy for learning gains. Fifty-six percent of the students in the cohort did not advance even one level of proficiency, and 84% did not advance at all or advanced, at most, two levels during the seven-year period over which they were studied.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Broadly speaking, these findings are consistent with the findings about ESL level advancement by the U.S. Department of Education’s National Reporting System for Adult Education (NRS). NRS reports for recent years show that about 36% of ESL students advance one level in a year. That means that 63% do not advance a level – a somewhat higher percentage than reported for CCSF. However, as explained in Chapter 1, the CCSF levels do not equate with NRS levels, and the figure for CCSF is for the number of students who did not advance over a seven-year time period, rather than only a single year. Also, for various reasons, some (perhaps many) programs do assess the levels of all their students using the standardized ESL tests approved by the NRS. As a result, they do not include either the initial level or level advancement of all students to their reports to the NRS. It appears that students at the lowest levels are least likely to be assessed with NRS tests, in part because many programs (and some of the companies that produce the tests) do not believe they are a very accurate means of assessing very low-level students. As a result, NRS reports on ESL level advancement can at best be considered an approximation, and they may overstate the percent of students that advance a level each year.

This finding is particularly distressing, because the vast majority of CCSF's ESL students start at very low levels of English language proficiency. Most begin their study of English at the Literacy or Low Beginning levels. Because most of these students did not advance very many levels (or any levels at all), their proficiency was very low when they stop attending classes. Importantly, only 19% of students who began at these low levels reached the Intermediate levels of proficiency. This is important, because reaching the Intermediate levels greatly expands the opportunities of ESL students. As Chapter 1 indicated (and subsequent chapters will explain in more detail), one of the most important opportunities it provides is the ability to enroll in the wide range of vocational courses offered by CCSF, as well as to make transitions to credit ESL and other types of postsecondary education, from which students can reap large economic and personal gains.

More fundamentally, one of the major goals of any ESL program is to help students climb the ladder of English language learning as high as they can go. Regrettably, the vast majority of students examined by this study did not climb very far, regardless of the level of proficiency at which they began.

## **2. Achievement in ESL**

But there is another side to this coin. Half of the students who did not advance a level were students who attended fewer than 50 hours of instruction, and another 30% attended 150 or fewer hours over seven years. In a way, these students (especially those who attended fewer than 50 hours) were only nominally enrolled. They might have been excluded from this study and from the College's enrollment numbers – as were the students who attended fewer than eight hours of instruction. In fact, students who attend fewer than 12 hours of instruction are excluded from reports to the federal Reporting System for Adult Education (NRS). The major reasons for including students who attended fewer than 50 hours in this study were that they make up a large percentage of CCSF's enrollment and that a small percentage of them advanced one or more levels.<sup>58</sup>

In a sense, including these students in the study distorts findings about level advancement and learning gains. If students who enrolled fewer than 50 hours are removed from the analysis of level advancement, the learning gains of CCSF's students appear to be greater than if those students are included. About 70% of the students who comprised the cohort (23,530 students) attended classes for 50 hours or more over the seven-year period. Sixty percent (13,998) of these students advanced one or more levels, and thirty-five percent advanced more than two levels. Significant percentages and numbers of students who attended 50 hours or more advanced three or more levels. A very small number and percent even climbed to the top of the ESL ladder, and some of these students began at the very lowest levels of proficiency. Although even students who attended for more than

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<sup>58</sup> The fact that a small number of these students advanced more than one level was probably due to instructor determinations that they were placed in too low a level when initially enrolled and thus moved to a higher level.

50 hours may not have advanced as many levels as might be desired, their level advancement was far more substantial than that of students who attended for fewer than 50 hours.

In short, if an assessment of level advancement focuses on the 70% of CCSF's ESL students who attended classes for more than a very small number of hours, the findings are more encouraging than if it focuses on the cohort as a whole.

As a result, just as this study found cause for concern, it found cause for hope. ESL instruction at CCSF pays off for students who attend classes for a significant number of hours. In particular, it pays off for students who begin at the very lowest levels of proficiency – those who comprise the vast majority of the college's ESL students. These low level students were more likely than other students to advance multiple levels, even though it took them more hours of instruction to do so.

These findings provide reassurance that there is nothing fundamentally flawed in non-credit ESL instruction. It can and does accomplish a great deal. But these same findings present a challenge to CCSF and other ESL programs. Even if students who did not attend very many hours of instruction are excluded from the analysis, most students in the cohort examined did not advance very many levels or cross important thresholds such as reaching the Intermediate levels. The challenge for the College's ESL program, and for other programs, is to find ways to help students who do not advance very many levels ascend higher on the ladder of English proficiency. If some students can accomplish this, many more should be able to do so.

To meet that challenge, the first step is to consider why so many students do not advance at all and why those students who do advance are not achieving more.

### **3. Reasons for Low Level Advancement**

This study shows that major reasons most ESL students did not advance very far are that they did not enroll for enough terms or attend enough hours of instruction, and that these two reasons were closely related. Anything that can be done to increase persistence (the number of terms for which students enroll) and hours of attendance will be of enormous benefit.

But what measures would be effective? To answer this question it is necessary to understand the reasons why students do not attend more instruction. This study could not provide a definitive explanation for low levels of attendance, but its findings provide the basis for some informed speculation about what those reasons might be. Many of these were mentioned in the discussion of persistence in Chapter 4. That is to be expected, because this chapter shows that persistence, attendance, and level advancement are closely linked. Thus, the findings of this chapter reinforce the explanation of low persistence rates in Chapter 4 and extend that explanation to low rates of attendance and level advancement.

***Time and responsibilities.*** It is probable that, like all adult education students, the two major reasons that many ESL students attend so few hours of instruction and advance so few levels are (a) the amount of time it takes to achieve significant learning gains, and (b) the need to deal with adult responsibilities, which makes it difficult for them devote that amount of time to attending classes.

This chapter shows that the median number of hours attended by students who advanced each level of proficiency was about 100 hours, and the median number of hours to advance even higher was significantly less for students who began at higher levels. This is consistent with the conclusions of the most widely cited research on ESL learning rates – the Mainstream English Training (MELT) project, which developed ESL curriculum and assessment standards for Southeast Asian refugees in the early 1980s and has subsequently been updated.<sup>59</sup> It is also consistent with the observations of many practitioners and researchers in the ESL field.

But at the rate of 100 hours per level it would take most of CCSF's students a long time to advance very many levels. In fact, the time required to advance at CCSF is even longer, because most of the College's general ESL courses (ESLN) meet for 175 hours during the fall and spring terms, and most students cannot advance levels until the end of each term. Many students may be intimidated by how many hours, terms, and even years of instruction it will take them to advance very many levels. Because the majority of students begin at very low levels of proficiency, they may believe that advancement to the Intermediate levels or beyond is an unobtainable goal. This may be why so few students in the cohort who began at the Literacy or Low Beginning levels advanced to even the lowest Intermediate level.

Even if they are not intimidated by how long it takes to climb very high on the ESL ladder, many students may find that the demands of work, family, and other responsibilities of adult life make it very difficult for them to continue attending classes for more than a few terms. And even if they enroll for multiple terms, they may find that these same demands make it difficult for them to attend enough hours per term to improve their proficiency by very many levels.

***Motivation and goals.*** In these circumstances, those students in the cohort studied who persisted for a great many terms and hours must have been more motivated than others to learn English and/or more able to rearrange their priorities so that they could attend classes. *Motivation appears to be one of the major keys to level advancement.*

An important clue to what motivated students to advance may be the finding that students who began at lower levels attended more terms and advanced more levels than did students who began at higher levels. A related clue is the finding that lower level students attended more hours, on average, before they advanced a level. A final clue is the finding that few students advanced more than two or three levels.

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<sup>59</sup> See: Allene G. Grognet, *Performance-based Curricula and Outcomes: The MELT Updated for the 1990's* (Denver: the Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning, 1997). Available at: [www.spring-institute.org](http://www.spring-institute.org).

Taken together, these findings suggest that the goals of students at different levels may not be the same. That is, most students at lower levels may have the goal of becoming at least minimally functional in English to meet the everyday demands of life and work in America – to acquire the foundation skills in English that lower levels teach.<sup>60</sup> In fact, given limited time and other demands, they may believe this is their only achievable goal in attending ESL classes. As a result, they may be motivated to devote the amount of time it takes (to enroll in as many terms and attend as many hours as necessary) to achieve that goal. Once they have achieved it by advancing levels within the Beginning range, they may find that they no longer have the time or motivation to climb higher up the ESL ladder. They may feel that they have acquired sufficient English to function satisfactorily at work and/or in their community. As Chapter 4 pointed out, many students with low levels of English proficiency live in communities or work in jobs where little English is required.

In contrast, students who begin at higher levels already have at least a minimal level of English proficiency. Their goal in attending ESL classes may be to improve their English incrementally for special purposes – for example, to increase their job prospects, or to prepare for vocational training or postsecondary education. For these purposes, they may be seeking to improve their reading and writing skills – skills that are more strongly emphasized at higher levels. Many of these students may believe that “brushing up” their English for one or two terms is enough to achieve these goals. Alternatively, some of these students may be “trying out” ESL, and they may conclude that, because their English proficiency is already fairly high, they do not wish to devote the time and effort required to increase it by a few more levels.

In short, one reason why more students do not advance very many levels may be that the personal goals that motivate them to enroll in ESL classes may not be to advance very far up the ESL ladder from the point at which they began. Rather, the personal goals of most students may be more modest, and it may be possible for them to achieve those goals by fairly limited learning gains. Sixty-four percent of those who advanced any levels at all advanced only two levels.

***Difficulty of levels.*** The findings of this study are *not* consistent with the notion that students did not advance because some levels of ESL are “more difficult” in their content. The fact that students who began at lower levels took more hours to advance a level than students who began at higher levels might be interpreted to indicate that lower level students found level advancement in some sense more difficult. However, this apparently did not affect their rate of level advancement, because a greater percentage and number of students who began at lower levels advanced multiple levels than did students who began at higher levels. Likewise, the finding that a smaller percentage and

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<sup>60</sup> The importance of these foundation skills for students who begin with very low levels of proficiency is demonstrated by the finding that Asians attend more terms and advanced more levels than did Hispanics, despite the fact that it took them more hours to advance a level. For Asians two of the foundation skills taught at the lowest levels are the English alphabet and sounds not found in their native languages. These are both more difficult for them than for Hispanics to master, but also essential to functioning in everyday American life.



number of higher-level students advanced multiple levels might be interpreted to indicate that higher levels are more difficult. But if this was the case, it is hard to explain why students who began at higher levels took fewer hours to advance levels.

More fundamentally, difficulty of instructional content is relative to the skills and knowledge students bring to it. As a result, it is hard to say in what sense it is “harder” or “easier” for a Literacy Level student who has little or no English or literacy skills to advance a level than it is for a student who begins at the Intermediate Level and already has some English and literacy skills. Although there may be some sense in which some ESL levels are more difficult, this study found no evidence that any differences in difficulty affected level advancement.

**Prior education.** As noted in Chapter 1, CCSF does not have comprehensive data on the prior education of its ESL students. As a result, it is not possible to determine the effect of prior education on persistence or level advancement. It is probably safe to assume that students who begin at lower levels are more likely to have limited prior education than students who begin at higher levels. And it may be safe to assume that this is one reason why they take more hours, on average, to advance levels. However, even if these assumptions are correct, the finding that students who began at lower levels were more likely to advance suggests that limited prior education did not affect learning gains at CCSF. This may be because the lower level courses in CCSF’s ESL program (and in virtually all ESL Programs) are specifically designed to meet the special needs of students with limited education and exposure to English.

This study also found little evidence that students who have not attended school for a long time have a harder time orienting themselves to the routines and expectations of attending courses. If this were the case, then older students (who have presumably been out of school longer) would have advanced at a lower rate than younger students. But this study found practically no relationship between age and either hours of attendance or level advancement. The only relationship it found was that 16-19 year olds advanced at a somewhat faster rate than other students. However, in large part, this may have been because these teenagers had not yet formed families or found steady work and could, therefore, devote more time to ESL classes.

Certainly, all new students need services to orient them to the expectations and routines of attending ESL courses at a college, regardless of their prior education. Chapter 4 described the welcome guide CCSF has developed to meet this need. Chapter 9 will discuss other services the College provides to new students.

**Limits.** Overall, the findings of this study about level advancement suggest that there may be limits to the amount of time most students are willing or able to devote to ESL instruction. Members of the cohort studied had 21 terms available to them over the seven-years during which they were examined, and all except the summer terms provided more than enough hours of instruction to help them advance a level. But very few students took enough of these terms or attended enough hours to advance many levels.

#### **4. What Can Be Done?**

***Increasing motivation and support.*** If motivation, limited goals, and life circumstances are the major reasons why most students do not advance very many levels, then anything that can be done to overcome these barriers should be attempted. This almost certainly includes increased guidance, counseling, mentoring, coaching and any other measures that will help ESL students to recognize the importance of attending more terms and hours as well as encourage them to do so.

All students should be encouraged to increase their motivation and expand their goals. They should be fully aware of the benefits they can derive from ascending ESL levels. Importantly, they should be aware that they can do so. They should know that non-trivial numbers of students beginning at the lowest levels advance well into the Intermediate Level and beyond. At least some students move on to obtain the benefits of postsecondary education. They should be encouraged to believe that if other students can do this, they can, too, if they “get with the program” and attend hours and terms on a regular basis. They should understand that the program works if they do their part, and that they have an enormous amount to gain by doing so.

This message should be conveyed to all students from the time of their first enrollment and repeatedly reinforced by all means possible. Students should be exposed to concrete examples of what can be achieved, as well as findings such as those in this report, that show greater learning gains are possible and what it takes to make those gains.

In addition, a survey of students should be undertaken to determine what the College might do, either by itself or in collaboration with other organizations, to help overcome barriers to attendance posed by personal responsibilities. For example, at least some colleges provide on-site daycare, and many adult education teachers nationwide report that they spend a significant amount of time helping students solve personal problems – often by helping them obtain assistance from social service agencies. It may be that a more systematic approach to providing supportive services can be devised, if the need for those services is better understood. Such a survey should ask questions about issues such as transportation, day, time and location of classes, financial aid, and child care.

Based on the findings of this study, it may be particularly important to focus efforts on increasing motivation and overcoming barriers of students who succeed in advancing at least one level. This study found that students who have “done the right thing” by advancing one or two levels often do not advance any further. These students have shown that they have motivation and potential. Special efforts should be made to help and encourage them to continue their studies.

***Removing possible program barriers.*** Beyond these measures for increasing motivation, CCSF should examine aspects of its program structure that may be making it harder for some students to advance as quickly as possible. If students do not advance as quickly as they can, some may become discouraged. Conversely, if students can advance as quickly as possible, they may advance more levels during the time they are able to attend ESL

classes, and they may gain in motivation with each level they advance. In short, if students can advance more quickly, the percentage and number of students who advance multiple levels may increase. More students may climb higher up the ESL ladder.

Several aspects of CCSF's program design may make it harder for students to advance as quickly as they are capable of doing so. Most of these were mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. The College should review them, and make appropriate adjustments in its program design. Briefly, these possible program barriers are as follows.

- Length of term and promotion decisions. The terms at CCSF are 17.5 weeks long, and most ESLN classes meet for 10 hours a week for a total of 175 hours per term. For the most part, promotion decisions are made only at the end of each term. Yet the median number of hours it takes those students who advance a level is 100 hours or less. As a result, some students may be held back from advancing by the length of the term and the College's promotion policy.

If this is the case, there are at least three possible solutions to the problem. In all three cases, some students might advance in a shorter period of time, and those students could advance more levels during the course of a year.

- *Students might be assessed for advancement at mid-term or more frequently.*
- *The College might shorten the length of instructional units for ESLN students. The fall and spring terms might be divided into two half-term length ESLN terms. Students would be eligible for advancement at the end of each term.*
- *Rather than change its program structure for all ESLN students, the College might create intensive, accelerated tracks within its existing program. For example, it might create a "pathways to college" track. The purpose of this track would be to help non-credit students gain college-level English skills as quickly as possible.*

*A "pathways to college" track might combine half-term length ESL terms with a curriculum that emphasizes college-level English and study skills (rather than life skills), articulation with high school completion courses (for students who need additional preparation in skills not taught by ESL courses), pre-collegiate guidance, counseling, and mentoring, and possibly more than 10 hours of instruction per week. Courses in "pathways to college" might also be two-level courses (combining, for example, Levels 1 and 2).<sup>61</sup> Similar special tracks might be created for*

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<sup>61</sup> See Chapter 10 for a discussion of CCSF's existing two-level courses.

*students who wish to pursue vocational programs or other goals, or for students who simply wish to increase their life skills English more quickly.*

- Summer term: At CCSF, ESL students enrolled during the summer term acquire hours of instruction, but they are not promoted to the next level until the fall. Over the summer, they receive instruction at the last level in which they were enrolled during the spring, whether or not they completed that level. If CCSF adopted the option of dividing the fall and spring terms into two half-term length ESL terms (mentioned above), the summer term could become a fifth full term, and students could be promoted at the end of any of these five terms.
- Students who stop attending: At CCSF, students not in class at or near the end of the term are considered to have terminated their studies. If one of these students returns the following term, the student is usually placed in the level at which they were enrolled when they stopped attending, unless they are re-tested. Unfortunately, many re-entry students are not re-tested. But some of these students may have stopped attending because of other demands on their time, and they may have mastered the material taught at the level in which they were enrolled. It is possible that if all re-entry students were re-tested, or if instructors could make decisions about whether to promote them with or without test results, some of them might re-place at higher levels.
- Open-entry/open-exit program: As noted in Chapter 4, CCSF's ESL program has adopted an "open-entry/open-exit" policy. As a result, students probably have lapses in attendance more often than would be the case if the College adopted a "managed enrollment" policy, as discussed in Chapter 4. In fact, College enrollment data indicates that most students attend only about 100 of the 175 hours presently offered each term. If the College adopted a managed enrollment policy, or created a managed enrollment track within its existing program, with (for example) 90 or 100 hour terms, some students might accumulate the hours they need to advance more quickly and advance more levels over the course of a year or multiple years.
- Matriculation services. A managed enrollment policy might screen out many of the students who presently attend fewer than 50 hours, and who do not advance even one level. On the other hand, it might challenge some of them to improve their attendance by setting high expectations. It is an open question whether these students should be screened out, because at least some of them can advance levels. Others may have the potential to do so if they are challenged. At the very least, CCSF should review its matriculation services to ensure that students who may have very low motivation or great barriers to attendance fully understand the challenges, expectations and opportunities of ESL instruction, and receive the support they need. The benefits of a full range of matriculation services are discussed in Chapter 9.

This study lacked the resources to determine whether, or to what extent, any of these aspects of CCSF's program are barriers to students' advancing levels. But one of the values of longitudinal analysis is that it raises questions that might not otherwise be so carefully examined. By highlighting the facts that few ESL students advance very many levels and that the length of CCSF's terms are greater than the median level of hours students attend to advance a level, this study may help both CCSF and other colleges to focus on program improvements that could increase learning gains.

***Program enhancements.*** In addition to removing possible barriers to advancement, CCSF should also consider program enhancements that will increase learning gains. In fact, it has already adopted some of these, and they will be discussed in Chapters 9-10.

## CHAPTER 6

### TRANSITIONS TO CREDIT

This chapter discusses the transition of non-credit ESL students to credit courses. Transition to credit has been a subject of interest to both ESL professionals and other educators because of the increasing need to raise the education and literacy levels of adults in the U.S.<sup>62</sup> To date, little data about transitions of non-credit ESL students to credit programs has been available. This chapter and Chapter 7 attempt to rectify that deficit by providing longitudinal data about transition to credit for the 38,095 non-credit ESL students in the cohort studied.

#### A. BACKGROUND

To understand how non-credit ESL students make the transition to credit at CCSF, it is important to recall the elements of the College's credit intake (matriculation) process and some other basic facts about credit ESL described in Chapter 1. As that chapter indicates, there is no formal articulation between non-credit and credit ESL. Anyone who wishes to enroll in credit courses of any kind must complete a five-step process: application, placement testing, orientation, counseling and registration. For placement, students who wish to enroll in credit ESL must take the credit ESL placement test<sup>63</sup>.

Credit courses are of three types – transfer, degree-applicable, and non-degree applicable. Academic *transfer* courses are those for which students receive credit if they transfer to any of the colleges in the California State University system. If students pass one of these courses at CCSF and subsequently transfer to any of the colleges in the California State system, they will receive credit counting toward a degree at the college to which they transfer. *Degree applicable* courses fulfill requirements for an associate degree at CCSF. They are considered baccalaureate in nature, and they usually, but not always, carry transfer credit. *Non-degree applicable* courses are foundation courses that prepare students to complete college level courses. Credit for these courses is not accepted for associate degrees. Seven of the credit ESL courses offered by CCSF are degree applicable and transferable and thirteen are non-degree applicable.

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<sup>62</sup> See, for example: Dennis Jones and Patrick Kelley., “Mounting Pressures Facing the U.S. Workforce and the Increasing need for Adult Education and Literacy.” Prepared for the National Commission on Adult Literacy. (New York: Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2007). Available at: [www.caalusa.org](http://www.caalusa.org). For a synopsis of labor market research related to adult education see: [To Ensure America's Future: Building A National Opportunity System For Adults](#) ( New York: Council for the Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2005) pp. 13-15.

<sup>63</sup> See Chapter 1 for more information on the matriculation process and the exemption from assessment policies. Further information about matriculation is provided in Chapter 9, which is devoted to explaining the effects of certain matriculation services.

ESL students at CCSF do not have to complete the ESL credit sequence before enrolling in other credit courses. In fact, studies conducted by the CCSF Research Office indicate that most students who are enrolled in credit ESL also take other credit courses, and most take those courses concurrently with ESL. Some credit courses have ESL or English prerequisites but others do not. Counselors advise ESL students about which credit courses they can probably complete at their level of English proficiency.

The credit departments that have the highest enrollments of ESL students include English, Physical Education, Math, Social Science, Foreign Languages, Business, Behavioral Sciences and Learning Assistance (which offers college success and tutoring courses). Physical Education courses and tutoring courses offered by the Learning Assistance Department are excluded from the analysis in this chapter. Thus, the chapter focuses on enrollment in credit ESL and enrollment in core academic courses.

## **B. MAJOR FINDINGS**

- Only 8% (3,232 students) of the non-credit ESL cohort examined by this study transitioned to credit courses of some kind (transfer, degree applicable, or non-degree applicable) during the years in which they were studied.
- Most of the students who transitioned to credit (88% -- 2,855 students) took academic transfer courses, and slightly fewer (74% of those who transitioned – 2,377 students) took credit ESL courses of some kind (transfer, degree applicable or non-degree applicable).
- Only a small number of students in the cohort (478) who took academic transfer courses did not enroll in credit ESL. Thus, credit ESL was part of the pathway to enrollment in academic transfer courses for most non-credit students who took those courses. Students may have followed this pathway by co-enrollment in credit ESL and transfer courses, or by enrollment in transfer courses prior to or subsequent to taking credit ESL.
- By far the strongest predictor of whether students would make the transition to credit was the last level of non-credit ESL in which they were enrolled. The higher the last level of non-credit ESL in which they were enrolled, the more likely they were to transition to credit, regardless of the first level of non-credit in which they enrolled. A majority of students who made transitions were last enrolled in one of CCSF's Intermediate Level courses (Levels 5-8).
- The more non-credit ESL levels students completed, the more likely they were to transition to credit, but the number of levels completed was less strongly related to transitions than was the last level of non-credit enrollment. Nevertheless, a majority of students who made transitions “worked their way up” to the Intermediate levels by completing multiple levels of non-credit ESL.

- Transition to credit was positively related to the number of hours of attendance in non-credit ESL for most students, but the increase in transition rates for each additional 100 hours of attendance was modest.
- Of the two largest ethnic groups in Non-Credit ESL, Asians transitioned to credit at a higher rate than Hispanics (16% compared to 5%).
- Students age 16-19, transitioned to credit at the highest rate (17%) of any age group. Transition rates were about the same for other age groups (8%-11%) but declined to 3% of students aged 50 years or older.
- It is encouraging that significant numbers of non-credit students are willing and able to make transitions to credit studies, and it is even more encouraging that many are prepared to devote the effort required to advance multiple levels in order to do so. However, labor market studies indicate that it is in the national interest, as well as that of students and colleges, to greatly increase transition rates.
- To increase transitions rates, colleges must establish transitions as a high priority. In particular, they must establish the goal of ensuring that as many students as possible attain the Intermediate levels of English proficiency (CCSF Levels 5-8) that prepare most students for transitions. Because transition rates are so closely linked to the advancement of students to the Intermediate levels, most of the measures colleges must take to increase these rates are similar to the measures discussed in Chapter 5 to increase level advancement.
- These measures include enhanced guidance and counseling with a strong emphasis on expanding the goals of non-credit students, program re-designs (such as shorter terms, increased opportunities for promotion, and accelerated tracks) that will allow students to advance more levels more quickly, and targeting assistance to those types of students most likely to make transitions – such as those in the 16-19 year old age group.

## C. ANALYSIS

### 1. Transition Rates

**Data definitions.** Table 6.1 describes the transition of non-credit ESL students in the cohort examined by this study to credit courses by their last non-credit ESL level. It divides transitions into three categories – all credit, transfer credit, and ESL credit.

In this Table 6.1 the “All Credit” columns include all credit courses (ESL and non-ESL, transfer, degree applicable, and non-degree applicable). The “Transfer Credit” columns are a sub-set of “All Credit” that include enrollment in any course accepted for transfer to the colleges in the California State University system. The data in these columns exclude enrollment in credit ESL, Physical Education, and Learning Assistance. As a result, the



columns present information solely on students who took academic credit courses outside credit ESL. The data in the “ESL Credit” columns include enrollment in all credit ESL.

The transition data in Table 6.1 is duplicative. All students transitioning to credit are counted in the “All Credit” column, and they are counted again in the “Transfer Credit” and “ESL Credit” columns if they took those kinds of courses.

In other chapters of this report, the analysis of non-credit course work by students in the cohort was limited to seven years after each student first enrolled in non-credit ESL. In this chapter, the academic history of all students in the cohort through spring 2007 was examined to determine whether students transitioned to credit.

**Transition rates.** Table 6.1 shows that 8% (3,323) of the non-credit students in the cohort took at least one credit course of some type during the time period examined. The Table shows that most of these students – 88% (2,855 of 3,232) – took at least one transfer credit course other than credit ESL. They comprised 7.4% of the total cohort of 38,095. Most, but not all, non-credit students who transitioned to credit, 74% (2,377 of 3,232) took credit ESL. They comprised 6.2% of the total cohort.

This means that a few students (478) took academic transfer courses, but did not take credit ESL courses. These students may have enrolled in English Department courses rather than ESL courses to satisfy the written composition requirement for graduation. Alternatively, they may have delayed taking credit ESL courses until they completed transfer courses they could pass at their level of English proficiency. Or they may have wished to take only certain individual transfer courses.

Table 6.1 shows, however, that a substantial majority of non-credit ESL students who made the transition to academic transfer courses also took credit ESL. They may have taken academic transfer courses concurrently with, prior to, or subsequent to enrollment in credit ESL. As mentioned above, CCSF research indicates that most enrollments in academic transfer and credit ESL were concurrent. Regardless of when they enrolled in credit ESL courses, these courses were clearly part of the pathway to academic credit for most non-credit ESL students who made the transition to credit studies.

**Transitions by last non-credit ESL level.** Table 6.1 also describes transition to credit by the last level in which members of the cohort were enrolled before transitioning to credit. The most important finding from table 6.1 is that the higher the last level of non-credit ESL, the higher the percentage of students who transitioned to credit. Only 1% (24) of those whose last level was Literacy and 2% (162 students) of those whose last level was Level 1 transitioned to credit. In comparison, 28% (550 students) of those whose last level was Level 7 transitioned to credit.

An equally interesting finding that can be derived from Table 6.1 is that most, but not all, students who transitioned to credit had a last non-credit level in the Intermediate range. The “All Credit” section of the table shows that 11% of students whose last level was the highest Beginning Level (Level 4) made transitions, and the transition rates of students

with lower last levels (all other Beginning Level students and Literacy Level students) were between 1% and 7%. At Level 5 (the lowest Intermediate Level) the transition rate almost doubled (compared to Level 4) to 21%, and it rose to 28% at Levels 7 and 8. The 40% transition rate for Level 9 students may be an unreliable number, because so few students (134) had this as their last level.

In total, 53% of all students (1,700 students) who made transitions had a last level in the Intermediate range (Levels 5-8), and 23% (766 students) had a last level in the Beginning High (Levels 3-4) range. The large percentage of students who made transitions from the Intermediate range cannot be explained by the percentage of students who had a last level in that range. Only 19% of the cohort had a last level in the Intermediate range, but 53% of the cohort who made transitions had a last level in that range.

In short, more than half the students who made transitions had a last level in the Intermediate range, and students in this range were far more likely to make transitions than students at the Beginning Level or Literacy Level. However, a non-trivial number and percentage of students with a last level in the Beginning High range, some in the Beginning Low range, and a few (24) at the Literacy Level made transitions.

This data suggests that a majority of non-credit ESL students may have believed (perhaps based on the advice of teachers and counselors) that their English proficiency would not be high enough to succeed in credit courses until they had attained an Intermediate Level. It may also suggest that those who wished to enroll in credit ESL could not score high enough on the credit ESL placement test to place into a credit ESL course until they had attained the levels of English proficiency associated with Levels 5-8.

The fact that some Beginning Level students were able to make the transition to transfer credit courses may be explained in several ways. Some of these students may have been judicious in choosing transfer courses in which they could succeed at fairly low levels of English proficiency. For example, students with high skills and prior education in certain subjects (such as math or business) may have been able to succeed in transfer courses in those subjects even if their English level was at the Beginning Level. Also, Beginning Level students may have chosen foreign language or other transfer courses that do not require much English capability and/or do not have a language prerequisite.<sup>64</sup> Chapter 7 explains the credit course selection of non-credit students in greater detail.

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<sup>64</sup> A previous CCSF study that showed the transfer courses most often chosen by students enrolled in ESL 110 (a low-level credit ESL course) differed markedly from the transfer courses chosen by students enrolled in ESL 82 (a much higher level credit ESL course). The courses most often chosen by ESL 110 students were Math (Basic Arithmetic and Elementary Algebra), Chinese, and Physical Education. In comparison, students in ESL 82 enrolled in English 94, Economics 1, Psychology 1, Political Science 1, and Math 110 A (Calculus.)

**Table 6.1 Number and Percent of Non-Credit ESL Students Transitioning to Credit by Last Non-Credit ESL Level**

Last Non-Credit ESL Level Taken	All Credit			Transfer Credit		ESL Credit	
	Total Number Of Students In The Cohort	Percent of Students in The Cohort Who Transitioned To Credit From Each Last Level	Number of Students In The Cohort Who Transitioned To Credit From Each Last Level	Percent Of "All Credit" Students Who Transitioned To Credit From Each Last Level	Number Of Students Who Transitioned To Transfer Credit From Each Last Level	Percent of "All Credit" Students Who Transitioned To ESL Credit From Each Last Level	Number Of Students Who Transitioned To ESL Credit From Each Last Level
0	2542	1%	24	96%	23	50%	12
1	10588	2%	162	88%	143	52%	84
2	5292	2%	125	86%	108	53%	66
3	5000	7%	351	84%	296	65%	229
4	3773	11%	415	83%	345	71%	293
5	2626	21%	539	89%	480	79%	428
6	2130	21%	438	85%	372	78%	342
7	1957	28%	550	92%	506	83%	455
8	619	28%	173	91%	157	82%	142
9	134	40%	54	96%	52	81%	44
No Level	3434	12%	401	93%	373	70%	282
Total	38095	8%	3232	88%	2855	74%	2377

-The transfer credit column excludes transfer ESL and Physical Education and tutoring courses in Learning Assistance.

-The ESL credit column includes enrollment in all types of ESL courses: degree applicable, non-degree applicable and transfer.

## **2. Transition to Credit by Levels of Non-Credit ESL Taken**

Table 6.2 shows the total number of students in the cohort who transitioned to credit by the number of levels of non-credit ESL in which they were enrolled (levels taken). In the interest of brevity, this and subsequent tables only show transition to *any* credit course. That is, they do not include separate figures for transitions to transfer credit and credit ESL. Separate analyses show that transitions to transfer and credit ESL courses are very similar to these figures for transfer to any credit course.

Table 6.2 shows that students who took more levels of non-credit ESL transitioned to credit in greater percentages. For example, 11% (419 students) transitioned after taking three levels of non-credit ESL, but 22% (313 students) transitioned after taking six levels.

The number of students who made transitions after taking each number of levels varies depending on the number of students who took that number of levels. For example, the

largest category of students who made transitions to credit was comprised of students who took only one level (1033). This is because, by far, the largest number of students in the cohort (18,937) *took* only one level. Although only 5% of these single level students made transitions, their greater total number resulted in a large number making transitions. It is important to note, however, that 67% of students who made transitions (2,086 of 3,119 students) took two or more levels.

Thus, although it may appear that the number and percentage of students making transitions tell somewhat different stories, this is not the case when Table 6.2 is examined as a whole. Not only did the percentage of students who made transitions increase as the number of levels taken increased, but more students who took multiple levels made transitions than did students who took a single level. Nevertheless, the next section will show that the “single level effect” – the fact that the smallest percentage but the largest number of students in any category “levels taken” took only one level – can be problematic for some analyses of transition. It will be more fully discussed in that section.

Because some of the students in the cohort were in multi-level classes this and subsequent tables include information for these multi-level students. These are designated as “no level.” Table 6.1 shows that 12% (401) of the non-credit students who were in multi-level classes transitioned to credit, but as explained in previous chapters, data about how many levels these students took is unavailable because level advancement data is only available for single level classes.

**Table 6.2 Transition to Credit By Non-Credit ESL Levels Taken**

Levels Taken	Total Number	Percent Transitioning to Credit	Number Transitioning To Credit
1	18937	5%	1033
2	5631	5%	271
3	3814	11%	419
4	2548	14%	351
5	1396	22%	313
6	801	22%	180
7	377	28%	105
8	162	20%	32
9	38	34%	13
10	1	100%	1
No Level	3434	12%	401
Total	37139	8%	3119

-956 students with a negative level movement in the total cohort of 38,095 have been removed from the analysis.

### 3. Transition to Credit by Last Level in Non-Credit ESL and Levels Taken

**Transition rates.** Table 6.3 shows the percentage and number of students who transitioned to credit by the last level they were enrolled in non-credit ESL and the total number of levels in which they were enrolled. Like Table 6.1, it shows that the percentage of students transitioning to credit systematically increased with last level taken. More significantly, it shows that students who enrolled in the same last level transitioned to credit at the about same rate regardless of the number of previous levels in which they were enrolled (the number of “Levels Taken”). From this it can be inferred that students with the same last level transition to credit at about the same rate regardless of the level at which they first enrolled in non-credit ESL. This is because students who advanced levels to reach each last level must have begun at lower levels than that last level. The level at which they enrolled can be determined by subtracting the number of levels they took before reaching their last level from whatever that last level was. Hence, if the number of levels taken by students who enrolled in the same last level did not affect the rates at which they made transitions, then the level at which they first enrolled did not affect their transition rates either.

In short, Table 6.3 shows that the most important factor that determined whether students made transitions to credit was the last level they attained, rather than the number of levels they advanced or the level at which they began. Students who began at very low levels made transitions at the same rate as students who began at higher levels if (*but only if*) they progressed to the higher levels from which most students made transitions. As Table 6.1 shows, a majority of students made transitions from the Intermediate Level (Levels 5-8).

Take, for example, students whose last level was level 6. Students who started at level 6 took only one level, and they transitioned to credit at a 15% rate. Students who started at Level 5 would have had to take two levels to advance to Level 6. (The two levels would be Level 5 and Level 6.) Reading down the Level 6 column in Table 6.5, it is apparent that the transition rate for students who took two levels and had a last level of Level 6 (students who began at Level 5) was 20% – only slightly higher than the rate of those who began at Level 6. Likewise, students who began at Level 1 and had a last level of Level 6 would have had to take six levels (Levels 1-6) to reach Level 6. Reading down the Level 6 column, it is apparent that the transition rate for students who took six levels and had a last level of Level 6 (students who began at Level 1) was also 20% – the same as the rate for students who began at Level 5 and progressed to Level 6. In fact, the transition rates for all students whose last level was Level six was about the same (20-27%), regardless of the number of levels they took, and hence regardless of the levels at which they began.

An examination of all of the “last level” columns in Table 6.3 shows the same thing as these examples from Level 6 show. With a few aberrations, the transition rates of students who reached the same last level were about the same, regardless of the number of levels they took before reaching that last level, and hence regardless of the first non-credit level in which they enrolled.

***Single level students.*** The major exception to this finding is students who made transitions after taking only one level – that is, students whose first level was the same as their last level. As Table 6.2 showed, the transition rates of single-level students was lower than that of students who took multiple levels, but the number of single-level students who made transitions was greater than the number who made transitions after taking two levels, three levels, or any number of additional levels. Table 6.3 also shows this “single level effect.”

For example, in Table 6.3 the transition rates of single level students whose last level was Level 5-8 was substantially lower than the transition rates of most other students at the same last level – students who had taken two or more levels to advance to that last level. But the number of single level students who made transitions from Levels 5-8 was greater than the number of students who took two, three, or almost any other number of levels before they reached each of these levels. This is noteworthy, because, as Table 6.1 showed, a majority of students who made transitions did so from Levels 5-8.

As the discussion of Table 6.2 indicated, this “single level effect” was primarily due to the fact that the number of students who took only one level was greater than the number who took each additional level, and the total number of single-level students who made transitions was much smaller than the total number of students who took multiple levels.

However, this does not explain why a smaller percentage of single-level students than students who advanced levels made transitions. This fact is an exception to the major finding that can be derived from Table 6.3 – that the transition rates of students with the same last level were usually about the same, regardless of the number of levels in which they enrolled.

The data gathered by this study cannot fully explain this exception. But because single-level students did not advance levels, it appears that the reasons they did not make transitions to credit at a higher rate are probably the same as why students did not advance levels discussed in Chapter 5. These reasons and their relevance to transition rates are reviewed at the end of this chapter. Here it is only important to note that the reasons why more members of the cohort as a whole did not make transitions discussed at the end of this chapter appear to have been particularly salient for single-level students.

Whatever the reasons for “the single level effect,” it is a minor exception to the most important findings that can be derived from Table 6.3. If that Table is viewed as a whole, it shows that the total number and percent of students who “worked their way up” to each last level by taking two or more levels far exceeded the number of students who began at that last level. For example, although 110 single-level students made transitions from Level 6, 317 students who made transitions from Level 6 took two or more levels. Moreover, the number of students who took six levels and made transitions from Level 6 (students who began at Level 1) was about the same (111 students) as the number of single-level students who made transitions from that level.

In short, if Table 6.3 is viewed as a whole, it shows the vast majority of students who made transitions “worked their way up” to the last level from which they moved on to credit studies. For these students the last level they attained had a much stronger relationship to whether they made transitions than did the number of levels in which they enrolled or the level at which they began.

**Table 6.3 Transition to Credit by Last Level  
in Non-Credit ESL and Levels Taken**

Levels Taken	Last Non-Credit ESL										
	Percent Transitioning										
	Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8	Level 9	No Level
1	1%	1%	2%	8%	10%	19%	15%	25%	22%	34%	
2		1%	2%	5%	12%	14%	20%	33%	42%	0%	
3			3%	6%	12%	25%	25%	40%	44%	60%	
4				6%	10%	21%	27%	31%	48%	17%	
5					12%	22%	25%	30%	39%	50%	
6						15%	20%	31%	41%	0%	
7							25%	26%	30%	50%	
8								24%	18%	17%	
9									21%	42%	
10										100%	
No Levels											12%

Levels Taken	Number Transitioning											Grand Total
	Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8	Level 9	No Level	
1	17	122	47	157	103	176	110	231	60	10		1033
2		17	49	31	64	22	28	47	13	0		271
3			23	109	66	97	31	62	19	12		419
4				25	146	56	84	28	10	2		351
5					28	155	47	62	13	8		313
6						13	111	33	23	0		180
7							16	68	11	10		105
8								10	21	1		32
9									3	10		13
10										1		1
No Levels											401	401
Grand Total	17	139	119	322	407	519	427	541	173	54	401	3119

-Removed at 956 students who had a negative level movement

#### **4. Transition to Credit Related to Hours of Attendance in Non-Credit ESL**

Chapter 5 showed that the number of hours of ESL instruction students attended was strongly related to the number of levels they advanced. Because, as shown above, the number of levels taken was related to the transition rates of students, it should be expected that the number of hours they attended would be related to transition rates as well.

Table 6.4 shows how transition rates were related to the number of hours students attended non-credit ESL classes. It shows that there was a positive relationship between hours of attendance and the likelihood of transitioning to credit. The more hours of study in non-credit ESL, up to 500 hours, the higher the likelihood of transitioning to credit, although the percentage increases in transition rates for each additional 100 hours of attendance were not great. Only 4% of those who attended 8-49 hours of non-credit instruction transferred to credit, compared to 15% of those who attended 500 hours.

After 500 hours of attendance, the percent of students who made transitions was erratic. For example, the percent of students who made transitions after attending 800, 1100, 1200, and 1400-1500 hours was higher than 15%, but the percentage in all other hour categories was 15% or slightly less. A separate analysis (not presented) shows that this erratic relationship between hours of attendance and transition rates beyond 500 hours occurred regardless of the last level from which students made transitions.

This study cannot explain this erratic relationship. It can only note that a similar relationship can be seen in Table 5.31 of Chapter 5 where the relationship between hours of attendance and levels taken for the cohort as a whole is described. In that Table, the relationship becomes erratic after 700 hours of attendance. Hence, the findings of Chapter 5 about the relationship between hours of attendance and levels taken are primarily based on students who took 700 or fewer hours.

It is also important to note that this erratic relationship was relevant to only a small number and percentage of non-credit ESL students. Only 16% of members of the cohort described in Table 6.4 (6,105 of 38,095 students) attended for more than 500 hours, and 71% of students who made transitions (2309 of 3232 students) attended for 500 hours or less. Thus, there was a positive relationship between hours taken and transition rates for 84% of the students in the cohort and for 71% of students who made transitions.

Thus, the major finding that can be derived from combining Tables 6.3 and 6.4 is that the students most likely to make transitions were those who took enough hours of instruction to advance multiple levels, and especially those who took enough hours to advance as many levels as required from their first level of enrollment to the Intermediate range.



**Table 6.4 Transition to Credit by Hours of Study in Non-Credit ESL**

ESLN and ESLF Non-Credit Hours	Percent Transition	Number Transition	Total Number
0	4%	516	12327
100	6%	611	9446
200	10%	412	4327
300	11%	311	2705
400	14%	248	1809
500	15%	211	1376
600	13%	143	1067
700	14%	119	859
800	18%	131	744
900	15%	84	557
1000	14%	68	477
1100	16%	65	402
1200	19%	62	331
1300	15%	43	291
1400	17%	39	233
1500	18%	34	194
1600+	14%	135	950
Total	8%	3232	38095

-Students with fewer than eight hours of attendance were excluded from this analysis. 0 hours=8-49 hours. All other numbers of hours represent a range of hours in 100-hour increments. Thus, 100 hours=50-149 hours, 200 hours=150-249 hours, and so forth.

## **5. Demographics of Non-Credit ESL Students Who Transition to Credit**

***Transition by ethnicity.*** Table 6.5 describes the ethnicity of the students who transitioned to credit. A majority of the students who transitioned were Asian. They made up 59% (1,912 of the 3,232 students) of those who transitioned to any credit courses, 60% (1,720 of 2,855) of those who transitioned to transfer credit, and 62% (1,489 of 2,377) of those who transitioned to ESL credit. In comparison, even though Hispanics were a majority of the cohort, they comprised only 20% (657 of 3,232) of those who transitioned to any credit courses.

Asians also transitioned to credit at a significantly higher rate relative to their numbers in the cohort (14% or 1,912 of 13,362 students) than did Hispanics (5% or 657 of 14,030 students). White Non-Hispanics (16% or 329 of 2,088 students) and Filipinos (16% or 30 of 184 students) transitioned at the highest rates, although their total numbers in the cohort were small.

Of those transitioning, all ethnic groups enrolled in academic transfer courses at a high rate but transitioned to credit ESL courses at a lower rate. This mirrors the fact that members of the cohort as a whole who made transitions were somewhat more likely to enroll in academic credit than in credit ESL.

**Table 6.5 Transition to Credit by Ethnicity**

Ethnic Group	Total Students in the cohort	All Credit		Transfer Credit		ESL Credit	
		Percent of Students Who Transitioned to Credit	Number of Students Who Transitioned to Credit	Percent Of Transitioning Students Who Took Transfer Credit	Number of Students Who Took Transfer Credit	Percent Of Transitioning Students Who Took ESL Credit	Number of Students Who Took ESL Credit
African American / Non-Hispanic	191	16%	30	93%	28	60%	18
American Indian / Alaskan Native	25	0%					
Asian / Pacific Islander	13362	14%	1912	90%	1720	78%	1489
Filipino	184	16%	30	93%	28	60%	18
Hispanic	14030	5%	657	84%	549	65%	428
Other Non White	217	11%	24	92%	22	75%	18
Unknown / No Response	7998	3%	250	84%	209	67%	168
White / Non-Hispanic	2088	16%	329	91%	299	72%	238
Grand Total	38095	8%	3232	88%	2855	74%	2377

**Transition by age.** Table 6.6 describes transition to credit by the age of students when they first enrolled in non-credit ESL. Although the transition rates progressively decreased as the age of the student increased, the differences were minor. Students in most age groups made transitions to credit at about the same rate, 8-11%. There were two exceptions: students in the 16-19 and 50+ age groups.

Students in the 16-19 age group were significantly more likely to make transitions than students in other age groups. Seventeen percent of students in this age group (457 of 2,663 students) made transitions. These young students accounted for 14% of all students who made transitions, although they comprised only 7% of the cohort as a whole. They were also more likely than students in other age groups to make transitions to transfer credit and credit ESL. Fifteen percent of 16-19 year old students enrolled in transfer credit and 14% enrolled in credit ESL.

In contrast, only 3% of students in the 50+ age group (196 of 5636 students) made transitions to credit. Students in this age group accounted for only 6% of students who made transitions, although they comprised 15% of the cohort as a whole. About 3% of these students enrolled in transfer credit and about 1.5% enrolled in credit ESL.

Because students in the 50+ age group make up such a large percent of the cohort, their low transition rates skew findings about transition rates for the cohort as a whole. If they were removed from the analysis, the transition rate of the remaining students in the cohort studied would be 9.4%. Because students in this age group may be well-established in their line of work, and some may be retired, they may pose a special challenge to any efforts to increase transition rates. On the other hand, a great many older Americans have made inadequate financial provisions for retirement, and longevity has increased. These two factors may keep a larger percentage of older Americans in the workforce until they reach at least their late 60's or early 70's. If older immigrants are affected by these factors in the same way, the number of them seeking retraining or "retooling" to remain employable and maintain their standard of living may increase dramatically in coming years, and increasing numbers may turn to some form of postsecondary education for help.

**Table 6.6 Transition to Credit by Age**

Age Group	Total Students in the cohort	Percent of Students Who Transitioned to Credit	Number of Students Who Transitioned to Credit	Percent Of Transitioning Students Who Took Transfer Credit	Number of Students Who Took Transfer Credit	Percent Of Transitioning Students Who Took ESL Credit	Number of Students Who Took ESL Credit
16 - 19	2663	17%	457	90%	412	84%	386
20 - 24	6444	11%	689	89%	615	84%	582
25 - 29	5773	10%	573	88%	504	81%	463
30 - 34	4807	10%	485	88%	425	74%	357
35 - 39	3871	9%	364	87%	318	66%	239
40 - 49	5616	8%	444	88%	390	57%	252
50+	5636	3%	196	88%	173	42%	83
Unknown / No Response	3285	1%	24	75%	18	63%	15
Grand Total	38095	8%	3232	88%	2855	74%	2377

## **D. DISCUSSION**

### **1. Percentage of Non-Credit ESL Students Transitioning to Credit**

***Achievements.*** It is encouraging to find that some non-credit ESL students made the transition to credit courses, although the total percentage of students in the cohort studied who did so was fairly small (8%). It is also encouraging that most students who made transitions eventually enrolled in academic transfer courses, and that credit ESL appears to have been part of their pathway to those courses. These students took at least the first steps toward obtaining a college degree and the economic benefits that come from postsecondary education.

It is even more encouraging to find that some categories of students had much higher transition rates than those of the cohort as a whole. In demographic terms, these were Asian and younger (aged 16-19) students. In terms of their experiences in non-credit ESL, students who made transitions were most likely to be those who advanced multiple levels and took fairly large numbers of hours of instruction until they reached the Intermediate levels (Levels 5-8) of English proficiency. It was from these levels that a majority of CCSF's non-credit students made transitions, and the transition rates of students who attained these levels were in the 20%-30% range (depending on how far they advanced into the Intermediate levels).

Because the overwhelming percentage of the College's non-credit ESL students first enrolled at the Literacy or Beginning Levels, most students had to be willing and able to devote the time and energy required to advance multiple levels before they reach the Intermediate levels. It is, therefore, encouraging that so many did so. Most of the students in the cohort studied who made transitions began at fairly low levels of English proficiency and worked their way up through the non-credit sequence of courses to reach levels from which they could make transitions. This is a tribute to their persistence and to the College's program that helps students advance up the ESL ladder if they are determined to do so.

***Concerns.*** Although there is no comprehensive data on the percentage of non-credit ESL students nationwide who make transitions to credit, the limited data available indicates that the transition rates at CCSF are typical, at least of the better community college ESL programs.<sup>65</sup> This should be cause for concern. Not only do the 92% of non-credit students who *do not* make transitions miss the opportunity to better themselves economically, but they also pose a problem in terms of national and local workforce needs.

The labor market research cited at the beginning of this Chapter shows that immigrants will constitute an increasing portion of the American workforce in the decades to come and that an increasing percentage of American jobs will require at least some college education. Putting these two facts together, *it is an inescapable conclusion that it is in the*

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<sup>65</sup> See the transition rates reported for five community colleges in: Elizabeth M. Zachry, et. al., Torchlights in ESL: Five Community College Programs (New York: Council for the Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2007)

*national interest for a much larger number of immigrants to attend college. And because a large percentage of today's immigrant population has limited English proficiency, it is in the national interest for far more ESL students, and other immigrants with limited English, to make the transition to credit programs at postsecondary institutions.*

As a result, it should be a high priority for community colleges, such as CCSF, that provide non-credit ESL service to greatly increase the rates at which non-credit students make the transition to credit. Not only is it in the interest of students and the national economy for them to do so, but it is also in the parochial interest of colleges. In many states (including California) colleges gain more revenues from a combination of state reimbursements and tuition by enrolling credit students than they do from enrolling non-credit students. And in virtually all states they gain more revenues if students persist longer in a combination of non-credit and credit studies. As a result, colleges will be rewarded financially for doing what is in the personal interest of students and the national interest: increasing the transition rates of non-credit ESL students.

In fact, it is in the national interest and the interest of students for all adult education programs to increase the transition rates of ESL students, both through their own efforts and through partnerships with colleges. Because this study focuses on a community college ESL program, its recommendations are framed in terms of what colleges can do to increase transitions. But many of the same measures can and should be adopted by ESL programs that operate under other auspices – such as local school systems. For the same reasons that increasing transition rates should be a high priority for colleges, it should also be a high priority for them, and they should adopt whatever measures are necessary to ensure that far more of their ESL students enroll in college.

## **2. Why Students Do Not Make Transitions**

This study did not gather any direct evidence about why more non-credit ESL students do not make transitions to credit courses. Certainly CCSF has the rudiments of a transition pipeline in place. That is, it offers the courses that allow students to advance up the ladder of English language proficiency. It provides information and workshops to students who have an interest in making transitions. It has a policy of allowing students to attempt credit studies at any time. And it has a credit ESL program to help them obtain college-level English skills. As a result, any ideas this report can offer about why more students do not make transitions can be only informed speculation.

Based on the findings of the CCSF study and the professional judgment of the authors and others, it seems likely that the reasons students do not make transitions are very much the same as the reasons they do not advance levels discussed in Chapter 5. Too many students lack the time and motivation to advance the non-credit levels required to gain enough English proficiency to make transitions. Too many are unable to attend ESL classes for very long because of their personal circumstances.

For the majority of non-credit students who begin at very low levels of ESL, transitions to college may seem an unobtainable goal. In many cases, few of their family members or

friends have attended college, and this may mean that they do not consider the possibility of doing so. Many come from countries where attending college is understood to be the privilege of a small elite. Moreover, the ladder from the low levels of proficiency at which most students begin non-credit studies to completing a postsecondary degree or diploma is very long. It would take many years for most non-credit ESL students to advance to college and complete a postsecondary program. Many students are probably unwilling to begin such a long-term project, regardless of its possible benefits.

Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 5, students appear to have different goals in enrolling in non-credit ESL. Many simply wish to improve their English for life skills purposes. After a few terms of non-credit study they may believe they have met this goal and have no further interest in advancing further. Other students may wish to improve their English enough to gain the threshold levels of proficiency required to improve their employment prospects somewhat.

Finally, students who reach the Intermediate levels from which most students make transitions face an abundance of options. At those levels of proficiency, they may realistically believe that the primary goal of further ESL instruction should be to improve their employment prospects, rather than to advance to college. This may be particularly true of older students who have established themselves in a certain type of employment. Improving their English may help these students advance in their present type of employment – for example to move from being a frontline worker to being a supervisor. It may be a rational decision for them to select this near-term gain in income, rather than the longer-term prospects of college education. Or, if they wish to improve their employment skills beyond the study of ESL, they may enroll in non-credit vocational courses, rather than credit courses leading to degrees.

As Chapter 10 will discuss, CCSF offers a wide range of vocational courses in which students at the Intermediate levels can probably succeed. Many non-credit ESL students take advantage of these opportunities, although many also continue their ESL studies. Short-term vocational training is doubtless available from many other institutions in the San Francisco area as well.

In short, there are a great many reasons why non-credit ESL students may not be willing or able to make transitions to credit courses, and many of these reasons are fairly compelling – in the short term at least. For all of these reasons, transitioning to credit is probably a “hard sell” to many non-credit students.

Realistically, then, increasing the percentage of students who transition to credit can be only one of the goals colleges should pursue to improve the service provided by their ESL programs. Simply transitioning from the Beginning to the Intermediate levels is an important benchmark for many students. Chapter 5 showed that colleges have a great deal of work to do if they wish to significantly increase the number of students who advance to the Intermediate levels. Enrolling in non-credit programs to obtain job training and perhaps a certificate is another important benchmark. Regrettably, it was not within the scope of this study to measure the success of colleges in achieving that benchmark.

### 3. What Can Be Done?

In large part, the measures any college must adopt to increase transition rates to credit are very much the same as those discussed in Chapter 5 to increase the number of levels students advance. This is not surprising, because the more levels non-credit ESL students advance, the more likely they are to make transitions. Briefly, the measures are as follows.

*First*, colleges must make a top-down commitment to increase transition rates and to take whatever measures are necessary. It is not clear that most colleges have adopted increasing transition rates as a high priority – or any priority at all. To a remarkable extent, it is not accepted that a major purpose of non-credit ESL should be to prepare students for college. In many respects, non-credit and credit ESL programs are understood as having different goals for different students, and they are often managed separately.

Non-credit ESL is too often seen as primarily a means of improving life skills English for its own sake, and it is largely intended to serve low-skilled, low-income students who have limited potential for educational or economic advancement. Credit ESL is too often seen as primarily a means of assisting students with limited English who have already made the commitment to college when they first enroll. Its primary goal is to help them succeed in academic studies.

*Unless and until colleges come to see significantly more non-credit students as potential credit students, devise programs that will more closely integrate the two services, and hold ESL departments and others accountable for increasing transitions, it is unlikely that transition rates will increase.*

*Second*, colleges must implement guidance and counseling programs that encourage non-credit students to aspire to college education and support them in climbing the ESL ladder toward that goal. CCSF already has some programs of this sort in place. For example, it offers “Steps to Credit” workshops, distributes information about opportunities for credit study to non-credit students, and facilitates the matriculation process to credit in a variety of ways. In addition, the ESL Department is developing career ladder charts that will show students the steps they need to take to prepare for specific careers. The charts will show the level of ESL needed to enter a particular career program, the courses that must be taken to complete certificate or degree requirements, and the number of terms of study it will take.

This study did not examine how effective these measures are or might be, nor did it examine how many students they reach. But other colleges should consider the efforts to enhance transitions that CCSF has in place or in the pipeline.

Whatever the effectiveness of existing guidance and counseling efforts at CCSF and elsewhere, the ideas just discussed about why students do not make transitions suggest a number of guidelines for such efforts. For example, they suggest that guidance and

counseling to increase transition rates should begin at the time students first enroll in non-credit ESL and should continue throughout their non-credit careers. Moreover, it would appear to be particularly important to encourage students who begin at very low levels (and hence have to advance farther to make transitions) that enrollment in college is both a highly beneficial and achievable goal. This study showed that non-trivial numbers of students advanced from the lowest levels of non-credit ESL to academic credit courses. All non-credit students should be aware of these examples and encouraged to emulate them.

Ideally, guidance and counseling to encourage level advancement and transitions should be mandatory for all students in each term or year during which they are enrolled, rather than left to the initiative of the students. That is, non-credit students should have advisors and should be required to devote time to meeting with them, just as credit students do. Realistically, this level of guidance and counseling would be very expensive and could probably only be offered to those students most likely to make transitions (see below). But colleges that make a top-down commitment to increasing transition rates must be prepared to make much greater investments in enhanced services of this kind.

**Third**, because the pathway to credit enrollment is very long for many students, any of the aspects of program design that Chapter 5 suggested may increase the number of levels students advance, and how fast they advance those levels will help to increase transitions. In fact, *because this study showed that the last level of non-credit enrollment was the strongest predictor of transitions, adopting program designs that may increase level advancement is probably the most important measure any college can take to increase transitions.* The measures discussed in Chapter 5 included shorter terms, more frequent opportunities for advancement, and accelerated “pathways to college” tracks that place a strong emphasis on college-level English and college readiness. Chapter 10 will discuss other aspects of CCSF’s program that might be expanded to increase transitions.

**Fourth**, because resources for any of these initiatives are certain to be limited, colleges should consider targeting their efforts on students who are most likely to make transitions. Generically, these are students who express an interest in credit studies and those who have already shown that they have the motivation and ability to advance multiple levels. Three more narrowly defined groups are suggested by this study: younger students, students who have already advanced multiple levels of proficiency, and students at higher levels of proficiency.

**Younger students.** This study showed that students who were 16-19 years old when they entered non-credit ESL made transitions at more than twice the rate (17%) as other students. These teenagers probably included many students who have not completed high school (either in their native country or in the United States) and “Generation 1.5” students (students who began their schooling in their native country and eventually completed high school in the United States). In either case, many of them may be young enough to have high aspirations – in part because their plans for the future have not been formed. And they may be more able to devote time to attending ESL classes than other students, because they may be less likely to be encumbered by family, work, and other



responsibilities. Equally important, they may have more time to devote to climbing the ESL ladder than other students simply because they are younger.

Colleges may wish to focus on recruiting these teenaged students for college via ESL programs in many of the same ways and for many of the same reasons that they are increasingly targeting native-born high school dropouts. These include efforts to recruit them through stronger relationships with schools and social service agencies, individualized counseling and career plans, and special accelerated programs that provide them with peer support by treating them as a special cohort.

***Students who advance.*** This study showed that most students who made transitions advanced multiple levels of proficiency before they reached the Intermediate levels. But only about 20-30% of students who reached Levels 5-7 and about 30-40% who reached Level 8 made transitions. Because many of these students advanced from very low levels, they must have been highly motivated. Colleges should consider targeting efforts to increase transitions on encouraging more of these students to enroll in credit studies.

***Recruiting higher level students.*** The idea of recruiting higher level students may seem alien to many ESL programs. Most programs in the United States lack the resources to serve the large number of students who are already seeking admission. Thus, recruiting additional students of any kind may appear to be out of the question. But enrollment in CCSF's ESL programs has been falling in recent years, and this may be the case in other areas as well. Whether or not it is, colleges should consider that the effect of "open-door" ESL programs is almost invariably a non-credit population that consists predominantly of students with very low levels of English proficiency. These students have a long ladder to climb before they can make transitions to credit. Even in the best of circumstances many will not be able to climb that ladder. In contrast, students who begin at higher levels can reach the ESL levels required for transitions more quickly.

Because immigrants whose English proficiency is already fairly high may not believe they need non-credit ESL to achieve their personal and economic goals, many of them may not consider enrolling in ESL programs. However, if increasing transition rates is a priority for colleges, they may wish to consider marketing non-credit ESL to this population as a pathway to college and the benefits that can be derived from postsecondary education. Moreover, it may be possible to persuade state and national funders of ESL programs to increase their support if some of the additional support is used to recruit and accommodate these students. Colleges might argue that recruiting more high-level students is an efficient way to meet state and national workforce needs.

## CHAPTER 7

### SUCCESS IN CREDIT

#### A. BACKGROUND

Chapter 6 examined the transition rates of non-credit students to credit ESL as well as various factors affecting those rates. This chapter examines the success in credit courses of non-credit students who made transitions.

This chapter *does not*, however, follow the progress through credit studies of the 3,232 non-credit students who made transitions identified in Chapter 6. This is because most of those students enrolled in credit courses only after several years of enrollment in non-credit ESL. Because their academic history was tracked for only seven years, most of them were not enrolled in credit courses long enough to allow a very extensive assessment of their performance in those courses. Instead, this chapter examines the success of the 6,666 students who comprised the *credit portion of the cohort* defined and described in Chapter 3. These were students *who first enrolled in credit ESL in 1998-2000*, and they are a different group of students from the 38,095 members of the non-credit portion of the cohort who have been the primary focus of the preceding chapters.

The success in credit studies of the 6666 members of the credit portion of the cohort was determined by reviewing their academic history from the year in which they first enrolled in credit studies until the fall of 2007. To determine which of these students had previously enrolled in non-credit ESL and various aspects of their non-credit careers, their academic history was traced back to 1985 (13-15 years before they first enrolled in credit ESL). This “backward look” at the credit portion of the cohort resulted in four categories of students that will be examined in this chapter.

1. Transition students – students who had been enrolled in General Non-Credit ESL courses (ESLF) and/or in ESL Focus courses (ESLF) prior to enrolling in credit ESL. They are designated as “transition” students in this chapter because they had been enrolled in the same types of non-credit courses in which the transition students examined in Chapter 6 were enrolled.
2. Credit origin students – students who had never enrolled in any non-credit course at CCSF prior to the time they first enrolled in credit ESL. Some of these students may, however, have enrolled in other credit courses at the College prior to their first enrollment in credit ESL.
3. Other Non-Credit students – students who had been enrolled in other non-credit courses (including ESL courses other than ESLN and ESLF) prior to enrolling in credit ESL.
4. Credit + Non-Credit students – students who first enrolled in credit ESL and some non-credit course at the same time.

This chapter compares the success in credit of these four categories of students in terms of their grade point averages (GPAs) in credit ESL and academic credit courses, the

number of credit hours in which they enrolled (units taken), the number of credit courses they passed, their attainment of degrees and certificates, their transfer to other two-year and four-year institutions, and other variables. Because transition and credit origin students far outnumbered students in the other two categories, the primary focus of the chapter will be on them.

This method of assessing the success of non-credit ESL students in credit studies was adopted because the authors believed it was the most feasible approach available to them. Ideally, the success of all non-credit ESL students who first enrolled in credit from 1998-2000 would have been compared with the success of all other credit students who first enrolled at CCSF during those years. But this would have required analyzing the academic histories of hundreds of thousands of students who first enrolled in credit studies at CCSF from 1998-2000 to determine which of them had at some time been non-credit ESL students. It would have also have required calculating the grade point averages and other measures of success of these hundreds of thousands of students. The resources available to this study were not adequate to conduct an analysis of such magnitude. In addition, this is a study of ESL. As a result, the success of credit ESL students, and possible effects on success of differences in their academic backgrounds, is of special interest.

This chapter is, therefore, almost exclusively an analysis of the success rates of different categories of the 6666 students who first enrolled in credit ESL (rather than all students who first enrolled in credit at CCSF) from 1998-2000. With a few exceptions, it compares students who made transitions from non-credit ESL only to other students who first enrolled in credit ESL during those years.

However, various analyses of student performance conducted by CCSF suggest that the findings in this chapter about the relative success rates of the students examined in this chapter are about the same as the relative success rates of all non-credit ESL students and all other students who first enrolled in credit during this period. In the interests of brevity, these analyses are not presented here.

In comparing the success of different categories of credit ESL students, it is important to recall some aspects of CCSF's policies with regard to credit ESL that are explained in Chapter 1. In particular, it should be recalled that credit ESL students at CCSF are not required to complete the sequence of credit ESL courses before enrolling in other credit courses. ESL students commonly take credit ESL courses and other credit courses concurrently. ESL students are free to take any credit courses that do not have an ESL or English prerequisite. Some departments have established ESL prerequisites for some of their courses, although many have not. In practice, counselors have lists of courses that they recommend to ESL students depending on their language level. Also, students often learn from others which credit courses offer a reasonable chance of success.

## B. MAJOR FINDINGS

- Almost half (45% or 2,978) of the students in the credit ESL cohort examined had previously been enrolled in non-credit ESL at some time. These students had made the transition to credit.
- Most credit ESL students in the cohort (80%) enrolled in academic transfer classes at some time, and more than three quarters of their credit hours, on average, were in those courses. *Credit ESL was, therefore, part of the pathway to academic credit for the overwhelming majority of students who enrolled in it.*
- Transition students were as successful in both credit ESL and academic credit courses as were credit-origin students in terms of GPAs and credit hours passed.
- Transition students placed at lower levels in credit ESL than credit origin students did. But transition students took the same number of levels of credit ESL as credit origin students took.
- The success of most transition students in credit courses did not vary significantly depending on the number of non-credit ESL levels taken or the last non-credit level taken. Chapter 6 showed that both of these factors were predictors of whether students would make transitions to credit. The probable reason that the prior history of transition students in non-credit ESL did not affect their success in credit studies is that most students made transitions from the Intermediate Level of non-credit ESL, whatever their first level of enrollment may have been. They therefore began credit studies with about the same level of English proficiency regardless of their prior history in non-credit ESL.
- However, students who made transitions from the Intermediate High levels of non-credit ESL (Levels 7 and 8) were slightly more successful than other transition students, although their numbers were very small.
- Most credit ESL students did not complete the full credit ESL sequence during the period over which they were studied. It is unclear whether this had any adverse effect on their academic performance outside ESL, except that it may have reduced somewhat the number of transition students who transferred to other two-year and four-year institutions.
- About 25% of the students who first enrolled in credit ESL from 1998-2000 attained a degree, certificate, or both by the fall of 2007, and the percentage was about the same for transition and credit-origin students. In comparison, only about 8% of all students who first enrolled in credit courses at CCSF from 1998-2000 received a degree, certificate, or both over this time period. Credit ESL students attained 29% of all certificates and 48% of all degrees awarded to students who first enrolled in credit during the 1998-2000 time period.

- Between 1998-2000 and the fall of 2007, credit-origin credit ESL students transferred to two-year and four-year institutions at about the same rate as all students who first enrolled in credit studies in 1998-2000. Transition credit ESL students transferred at about 70% of this rate.
- Overall, this chapter shows that students who made the transition from non-credit were as successful in both credit ESL and academic transfer courses as other credit ESL students. They were also as successful in obtaining degrees and certificates, although somewhat less successful in transferring to two-year or four-year institutions.
- This is a tribute to the students themselves, because many of them devoted long periods of time to non-credit ESL before they made the transitions to credit. Yet even after making that transition they took as many units of credit studies and were as successful as other credit ESL students by almost all measures. Their success is also a tribute to the effectiveness of CCSF's ESL credit placement system in selecting students who can succeed in credit and placing them in courses where they can succeed. Finally, it is a tribute to credit ESL as an effective pathway to college for a great many students.
- To increase credit enrollments, extend the benefits of postsecondary education, and meet national workforce needs, colleges should encourage and equip far more non-credit ESL students to make transitions. By all indications transition students can do well in college.
- In particular, if CCSF and other colleges wish to increase both their transfer rates and their completion rates of degrees and certificates, they may wish to focus on expanding their credit ESL programs. If CCSF's experience is typical, a large percentage of credit ESL students begin in non-credit ESL. This means that if colleges wish to increase their transfer and completion rates they may wish to focus on increasing their transition rates from non-credit ESL and on assuring that transition students are well-equipped for credit studies. One possible approach colleges should consider to assure that non-credit students are well-equipped for credit is the creation of "Pathways to College" tracks, such as those discussed in Chapter 5.
- Other colleges also should be aware of CCSF's policy of allowing credit ESL students to enroll in other credit courses before they complete the credit ESL sequence and of the benefits of that policy in terms of broadening student options and shortening the time it takes students to complete credit programs.

## C. ANALYSIS

### 1. Enrollment and Placement

**Enrollment.** Table 7.1 shows the number of students with various prior academic histories who first enrolled in credit ESL from 1998-2000. The total numbers can be

found in the bottom row of the right side of the table. These figures indicate that 2,978 (45%) members of the credit cohort examined were students who had made the transition from non-credit ESL. Slightly more members of the credit cohort (3,269 students, or 49% of the cohort) were “credit origin” students – students who had not previously been enrolled in any non-credit course at CCSF. There were a total of 415 students in the “credit + non-credit” and “other Non-Credit” categories, and they accounted for 6% of the cohort.

This pattern of enrollment shows that non-credit ESL was a major source of enrollment in credit ESL. Students who made transitions from non-credit ESL comprised almost half of the new enrollments in credit ESL during the period studied. Because, as Chapter 2 indicated, enrollment in credit ESL at CCSF has been falling in recent years, this finding is important. It suggests that one means of increasing credit enrollment is to increase transition rates from ESLN/ESLF.

**Placement.** Table 7.1 also indicates the credit ESL courses in which students with various prior academic histories were initially placed by CCSF’s credit ESL placement system.<sup>66</sup> The courses are listed in ascending levels of difficulty (from 0-6).

In 1998-2000, the lowest credit ESL course that was offered was Level 0 (ESL 22, now discontinued). Students were referred to non-credit ESL if their score on the credit ESL placement test was below the cut-off for placement into ESL 22. The highest ESL credit course that was offered was Level 6 (ESL 82).<sup>67</sup> A few students placed into English 94, “Intermediate Training in Expository and Argumentative Reading and Composition”, a course in the English Department sequence that is two levels below Freshman Composition and one level above ESL 82 (level 6).<sup>68</sup>

Table 7.1 shows that a larger percent of transition students than credit-origin students were first placed at lower levels of credit ESL. Sixty-seven percent (1,946) of students who made the transition from non-credit ESL were first placed in credit levels ESL 0-3, compared to 33% (1,069) of credit origin ESL students.

The most common first level of placement for transition students was Level 3. Twenty-six percent 26% (763) of transition students were placed at that level. In contrast, the most common first level of placement for credit origin students was Level 4. Twenty-four percent of credit origin students (743) were first placed at that level. Only 22 students in

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<sup>66</sup> See Chapter 1 for a description of that system.

<sup>67</sup> See Chapter 1 for more information about these and other credit ESL courses and a description of the differences between the curricula in non-credit and credit ESL courses. A more complete discussion of curricular differences can be found in: Sharon Seymour, “City College of San Francisco” in [Torchlights in ESL](#) (New York: Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2007). This report is available at [www.caalusa.org](http://www.caalusa.org). Information about the matriculation process for enrolling in credit courses can be found in the Chapter 1 and in Background section of Chapter 6.

<sup>68</sup> See Chapter 1 for a discussion of the relationship between the credit ESL and English Department sequences of courses.

the credit cohort were placed in English 94, and only 12 students were initially referred to non-credit courses – indicating that these placement options were rarely used by the ESL Department.

These differences in placement levels indicate that transition students began their careers in credit ESL at lower levels than did credit origin students. Subsequent sections will show whether this made any difference in their performance in credit studies.

**Table 7.1 Placement in Credit ESL by Origin**

ESL Credit Placement	Percent				Number				Total	
	Credit +Non- Credit	Credit- Origin	Transition from ESLN/F	Other Non- Credit	Other Non- Credit	Credit- Origin	Transition from ESLN/F	Other Non- Credit	%	#
22 (0)	0%	1%	6%	1%		35	165	2	3%	202
110 (1)	1%	3%	11%	1%	1	87	314	5	6%	407
120 (2)	6%	8%	24%	8%	5	248	704	28	15%	985
130 (3)	14%	21%	26%	21%	12	699	763	72	23%	1546
140 (4)	21%	23%	15%	21%	18	743	442	70	19%	1273
150 (5)	24%	20%	8%	18%	20	653	246	60	15%	979
160 (6)	7%	11%	3%	11%	6	355	103	38	8%	502
English 94	1%	0%	0%	1%	1	15	4	2	0%	22
Non- Credit	0%	0%	0%	0%		2	10		0%	12
No Placement	25%	13%	8%	17%	21	432	227	58	11%	738
Grand Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	84	3269	2978	335	100%	6666

-“NCR” indicates students who were initially referred to non-credit courses before they enrolled in credit ESL from 1998-2000.

-“No Placement” indicates students who did not take the credit ESL placement test and whose first level of enrollment in credit ESL could not be determined.

## 2. Success in Credit Studies

***Success in all credit courses.*** Table 7.2 shows the success of members of the credit ESL cohort in credit courses by their origin. The Table shows success rates in all credit courses taken by members of the cohort – both credit ESL and academic transfer courses, as well as degree-applicable and non-degree applicable courses.<sup>69</sup>

The Table shows that students who made transitions from ESLN/ESLF (transition students) succeeded at the same rates as credit-origin students, as measured by average GPA and units (credit hours) passed. By these measures, students were equally successful in credit studies, on average, whether they made transitions from ESLN/ESLF or whether they started in credit. In fact, the average success rates of all students enrolled in credit were about the same. Prior academic background did not appear to affect success.

Table 7.2 also shows, however, that transition students took slightly fewer credit hours (units) than credit origin students did. That is, their persistence rates in credit studies were slightly lower, although the difference is not great, given the fairly small number of students in each category.

Equally important are the large total number of credit hours in which credit ESL students enrolled, on average. Clearly most of these students were not just dabbling in credit studies. They took substantial numbers of courses for a substantial number of hours.

***Success in credit ESL.*** Table 7.3 examines the success of members of the credit cohort in credit ESL separately from their success in other credit courses. Like Table 7.2, it shows that the average GPA and percent of units passed was almost the same for credit-origin and transition students, and they did not differ greatly for other categories of credit ESL students. Prior academic background did not affect success in credit ESL, just as it did not affect success in all credit courses.

Table 7.3 also shows, however, that transition students took slightly more credit ESL units, on average, than did credit-origin students – 17.79 units compared to 12.08. This is probably due to the fact that, as Table 7.1 shows, they placed at lower levels in credit ESL. As a result, they had to take more ESL credit courses, on average, to ascend the ESL ladder to the point where they could focus primarily on academic transfer courses or achieve their other goals.

***Success in transfer courses.*** Table 7.4 examines the success of members of the credit cohort in academic transfer courses separately from their success in other courses. Like the previous tables, it shows that success rates in these courses were about the same for transition students as for credit-origin students. In fact, the success rates for all categories of credit ESL students were about the same, regardless of their prior academic background. The only difference that may be significant is the fact that the GPAs of

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<sup>69</sup> See Chapter 6 for a description of the types of credit courses.



transition students (2.88) were slightly higher than those of other categories of students, although the small number of students in any category diminishes the significance of this difference.

Table 7.4 shows that 86% of all students who enrolled in credit ESL also enrolled in academic transfer courses at some time and that all categories of credit ESL students took large numbers of academic transfer units during the time period studied. In fact, comparing the number of transfer units taken in Table 7.4 with the total number of units taken in Table 7.1, it appears that, on average, 77% of the units taken by credit-origin students and 76% of the units taken by transition students were in academic transfer courses.

In short, based on the types of courses in which they enrolled, students in the credit ESL cohort were primarily academic transfer students. This confirms the finding in Chapter 6 that most students who enrolled in credit ESL courses also enrolled in transfer credit courses. Table 7.4 is also consistent with another finding of Chapter 6. Eighty-eight percent of the students in the non-credit cohort examined in that chapter who made transitions enrolled in transfer credit courses. Table 7.4 shows that 80% of transition students (2384 of 2978) enrolled in transfer courses. The 8% difference may be due to the fact that Chapter 6 examined the transfer credit enrollment of all non-credit students who made transitions – including those who made transitions directly from non-credit ESL to transfer credit courses. In contrast, this chapter examines the transfer credit enrollment of only those students who enrolled in credit ESL.

***Conclusion.*** In sum, this series of tables shows that, on average, *prior academic background made little or no difference in the success rates of credit ESL students, either in all the courses they took, or in credit ESL and academic transfer courses, considered separately.* Transition students succeeded at the same rates as credit-origin students, and all categories of credit ESL students took the overwhelming majority of their credit hours in academic transfer courses. Credit ESL was part of the pathway to academic courses for the overwhelming majority of students enrolled in it.

**Table 7.2 Success of ESL Students in All Credit by Origin<sup>70</sup>**

Division of Origin	GPA	Percent of Units Passed	Units Taken	Number of Students
Both Credit + Non-Credit	2.66	67%	54.65	84
Credit-Origin	2.62	69%	57.33	3269
Transition From ESLN/ESLF	2.66	68%	50.41	2978
Other Non-Credit	2.53	63%	45.53	335
Grand Total	2.63	69%	53.62	6666

-“Both” includes students who enrolled in both credit and non-credit ESL in their first term of enrollment.

**Table 7.3 Success in Credit ESL Courses of Credit ESL Students by Origin**

Division of Origin	GPA ESL	Percent of Units Passed ESL	ESL Units Taken	Number of Students
Credit + Non-Credit	2.62	69%	11.29	84
Credit-Origin	2.52	71%	12.08	3269
Transition From ESLN/ESLF	2.49	69%	17.79	2978
Other Non-Credit	2.52	65%	10.08	335
Grand Total	2.54	69%	12.81	6666

**Table 7.4 ESL Student Success in Credit Transfer by Origin**

Origin	GPA Transfer	% of Units Passed Transfer	Units Taken Transfer	Number of Students
Credit + Non-Credit	2.80	69%	44.89	76
Credit-Origin	2.71	71%	47.03	2992
Non-Credit ESLNF	2.88	72%	38.47	2384
Other Non-Credit	2.61	68%	39.05	281
Grand Total	2.78	71%	43.05	5733

-The total of 5,733 excludes 933 students of the 6666 in the cohort that did not take transfer credit courses.

<sup>70</sup> Excluded in this and all following tables in this chapter are enrollments in Physical Education and tutoring classes in Learning Assistance courses.

### 3. Success In Credit ESL By Credit Levels Taken

**Findings.** Table 7.5 compares the success in credit ESL of all credit ESL students, transition students, and credit-origin students in terms of the mean number of credit ESL levels in which they enrolled. It compares these mean levels taken by the first level of credit ESL in which students were enrolled. This Table provides the basis for four important findings.

First, it shows that the number of mean levels taken was about the same for credit-origin and transition students who began at the same credit ESL level. For example, of students whose first credit level was Level 3, the mean number of levels taken was 2.62 for all categories of credit ESL students and 2.64 for both credit-origin and transition students. This shows that *students who began at the same credit ESL level advanced levels at the same rate, regardless of their prior academic background.*

Second, *students who began at lower levels of credit ESL took more levels, on average, than did students who began at higher levels.* For example, the columns representing all categories of credit ESL students (the “All” category) indicate that students who began at Level 0 took 3.22 levels on average, and those who began at Level 1 took 3.21 levels on average. But those who began at Level 4 took 2.26 levels on average, and those who began at level 5 took 1.72 levels on average.

Third, Table 7.5 shows that, *on average, credit ESL students who first enrolled at low levels did not complete the six-level ESL credit sequence.* For example, students first enrolled at level 0 would have had to take six levels to complete the sequence, but the “All” category indicates that, on average, they took only 3.22 levels – reaching Level 2 or slightly higher. (That is, on average, they took Levels 0, 1, and 2 – three levels – plus a fractional number of additional levels). Students who began at Level 1 would have had to take 5 levels to complete the sequence, but on average, they took only 3.21 levels – reaching Level 3 or slightly higher. Only students who began at Levels 5 and 6, and possibly some who began at Level 4, completed the sequence. If only Level 5 and 6 students are counted, only 32% of students (1,857 students) completed the sequence, and if Level 4 students are counted 53% of students (3,123 students) did so.

Fourth, *transition students were less likely to complete the credit sequence than were credit-origin students.* Based on mean levels taken, if students who began at levels 4-6 are counted, 35% of transition students (928 students) completed the sequence compared to 68% of credit-origin students (1,959). If only Levels 5-6 are counted, 17% of transition students (440 students) completed the sequence compared to 44% of credit-origin students (1,262 students). But because the numbers of levels taken in Table 7.5 are averages, the exact number of students who completed the sequence cannot be determined from that Table. On the whole, it seems fair to estimate that about half of the students in the credit ESL cohort finished the sequence. *Finishing the sequence is important, because the last course in the sequence, ESL 82 (Level 6) was the course*

*required for degree attainment at CCSF, or for enrollment in English 94, which many students who planned to transfer to a four-year university took next to satisfy transfer requirements.*

**Significance.** This study cannot fully explain these findings. However, the probable explanations that can be offered indicate that they were all significant in different ways.

The first finding – that *prior academic background did not affect the number of levels taken by students who began at the same first level in credit ESL* – speaks for itself. Many factors may have determined the number of credit ESL levels taken, but prior academic background was not one of them. Apparently transition students and credit-origin students who began at the same credit ESL levels had not only the same skills (as determined by the credit placement process), but they also had (on average) the same motivation, time, goals, ability to deal with personal responsibilities, and other characteristics that affect progress in ESL. This finding is significant because it indicates that *non-credit students who make the transition to credit were as successful as other students placed at the same level in credit ESL, if success is measured by levels taken.* This reflects well on transition students, but it does not appear to have any larger significance, taken by itself.

The second finding – that *the number of levels taken diminished as the level of first enrollment increased* – is significant in a different way. This finding is similar to the finding in Chapter 5 that students who began at lower levels of non-credit ESL were more likely to advance multiple levels than were students who began at higher levels, and it probably has a similar explanation.

The most likely explanation is that students who started at lower levels in either program realized they had to advance multiple levels if they were to improve their proficiency enough to benefit very much from either non-credit or credit ESL. In the case of non-credit students, those who began at very low levels had to improve their proficiency by multiple levels in order to significantly increase their ability to function in American life. In the case of credit ESL students, those who began at very low levels had to improve their proficiency by multiple levels if they were to either complete the credit ESL sequence or enroll in transfer credit courses that required a fairly high level of English ability.

The third finding – that, *on average, students who began at lower levels did not complete the credit ESL sequence, whereas students who began at Levels 4-6 did* – can be explained in part by the fact that students who began at higher levels had to advance fewer levels than did students who began at lower levels to complete the sequence. As a result, *it took students who began at higher levels less time and effort to reach the highest level of credit ESL*, and this may have been one reason why they were more likely to do so. Moreover, some students who did not complete the credit ESL sequence during the time period over which they were studied (1998 to fall 2007) may do so in subsequent years.

It may be, too, that finishing the credit ESL sequence was not, by itself, a goal for a great many students, regardless of their first level of enrollment. As tables 7.2-7.4 show, credit ESL students took large numbers of academic transfer units. In fact, they took far more transfer units than credit ESL units. Thus, *it may be that many credit ESL students who began at any level were primarily interested in improving their college-level English only to the point where they could succeed in transfer courses of interest to them.*

This may also be a partial explanation of the second finding – that the number of levels taken diminished as the level of first enrollment increased. Completing the credit ESL sequence may have been valuable to some students as a means of satisfying the English requirements for receiving certificates and degrees from CCSF or transferring to other institutions. But many students may have been more interested in taking courses, rather than in further academic advancement (at least within the time period over which they were studied). Others may have deferred satisfying the English requirements for CCSF degrees and transfer. And still others may have been able to satisfy the English requirement by enrolling in courses in the English Department without completing the credit ESL sequence. Chapter 1 discusses alternative means of satisfying CCSF’s English requirements in greater detail. For any and all of these reasons, many credit ESL students may not have considered completing the credit sequence a priority.

It is easier to explain the fourth finding – that transition students were less likely to complete the credit ESL sequence than were credit-origin students. As the discussion of Table 7.1 noted, transition students were initially placed at lower levels than were credit origin students. As a result, like other students who began at lower levels, they were less likely to complete the credit sequence. *Lower placement rates for transition students translated into lower levels of credit ESL taken* – at least in the time period examined.

Because there appear to be several possible reasons why students did not complete the credit ESL sequence, it is hard to know whether findings about non-completion are cause for concern. As noted above, non-completion probably reduces the chances that students will be able to receive degrees or certificates from CCSF or transfer to other institutions. From this perspective, findings about non-completion and speculation about the probable reasons for it are significant and should be of concern, because non-completion limits the academic options of students.

However, insofar as non-completion, as well as the limited number of levels completed by credit students, reflects student goals other than academic advancement and/or students took advantage of the variety of options available to them for satisfying degree and transfer requirements, these findings are significant in a different way and may be less of a concern. From the perspective of student goals, non-completion and the limited number of levels taken may signify that credit ESL helps students to achieve goals other than academic advancement, and that it is a valuable service for many students whether or not they complete the sequence or advance a large number of levels. From the perspective of CCSF’s program structure, non-completion of the credit ESL sequence may mask the variety of pathways to academic advancement provided by the College.

**Table 7.5 Mean Credit ESL Levels Taken  
Credit-Origin and Transition Students By First Credit Level Taken**

First Credit Level	All		Credit origin		Transition From ESLN/ESLF	
	Mean Levels Taken	N	Mean Levels Taken	N	Mean Levels Taken	N
0	3.22	156	3.34	29	3.17	126
1	3.21	372	3.23	75	3.23	293
2	2.66	806	2.64	203	2.68	570
3	2.62	1373	2.64	597	2.64	702
4	2.26	1266	2.26	697	2.29	488
5	1.72	1300	1.72	859	1.71	336
6	1.00	557	1.00	403	0.99	104
All	2.25	5830	2.06	2863	2.49	2619

-Removed from the analysis were 836 students for whom no level designation data was available.

#### **4. Components of Success – Last Level Taken**

Chapter 6 showed that the last level taken by non-credit ESL students was the major predictor of whether they would make transitions to credit studies. Table 7.6 examines whether the last non-credit level taken by transition students was also a predictor of their success in credit. Table 7.6 shows the success of transition students in all credit courses (both credit ESL and transfer courses) by the last level of non-credit ESL in which they were enrolled. Separate analyses were conducted of the success of transition students in academic transfer and credit ESL courses, respectively. For the sake of brevity, they are not presented here because, except where noted, they showed the same pattern as Table 7.6.

**Findings.** Overall, Table 7.6 shows that success rates of transition students in credit courses were about the same, regardless of the last level of non-credit ESL in which they were enrolled, with the exception of the five students whose last level was Level 0.

The average GPAs of most transition students with different last levels of enrollment in non-credit ESL were all in the same range – about 2.5 – with the exception of those who were last enrolled in Levels 7 and 8. The GPAs of those students were in the 2.8 range. This is not a very significant difference, but it suggests that transition students with higher last non-credit levels may have received slightly higher grades. Likewise, the percent of units passed was slightly higher for transition students last enrolled in Levels 7 and 8, but the difference was only between pass rates in the high 60% range and pass rates of 72%.

The number of units taken by transition students showed no consistent pattern relative to their last level of enrollment in non-credit ESL, but in all cases it varied from the average number of units taken (51.37) by 10% (5 units) or less. It is curious to find that the 87 transition students whose last non-credit level was Level 1 took the largest number of units and had fairly high GPAs and numbers of units passed, but their small number probably means that their success by these measures is not significant.

Separate analyses (not presented) of the success of transition students in academic transfer and credit ESL courses show that the GPAs of transition students in transfer credit courses were slightly higher, on average, than their GPAs in credit ESL, although the difference was only between an average of 2.85 in academic transfer and 2.45 in credit ESL. Likewise, the percent of units passed was slightly higher in academic transfer courses, but the difference was only between 71% of units completed in academic transfer and 67% of units completed in credit ESL. As discussed above, transition students (and all credit ESL students) took far more units in academic transfer courses than in credit ESL courses.

***Significance.*** The most important conclusion that can be drawn from these findings is that the success rates of transition students in credit courses was about the same whether they made transitions from the Beginning levels of non-credit ESL (Levels 1-4) or the Intermediate levels (Levels 5-8). Chapter 6 showed that most students who made transitions had last levels in the Intermediate range, and Table 7.6 shows this was the case for 66% of the transition students (1,357 students) examined in this chapter for whom the last level of non-credit enrollment could be determined.

It might be expected that students who made transitions from the Intermediate levels would be more successful than students who made transitions from the Beginning levels, because students at the Intermediate levels had higher levels of English skills (at least as measured by teachers and tests in the Non-Credit Division) when they began credit studies. However Table 7.6 shows that, on average, the success rates of these two groups of students were about the same.

In part, these findings can be explained by the fact that most beginning level students who made transitions had last levels in the Beginning High range – close to the Intermediate range. In part, it may also be that Beginning level students were placed in credit ESL courses that required less initial ability in English (lower level courses) and selected academic transfer courses that also required less English ability – at least until their proficiency in college-level English increased through credit ESL courses.

But, on the whole, the most satisfying explanation is that CCSF's system of assessment and placement for credit ESL is fairly effective. Regardless of the Non-Credit level at which students were enrolled, if those students applied to enroll in credit ESL courses, the College's assessment and placement system was able to screen out most students who could not succeed in credit, and admit those who could. And this gatekeeper system managed to place non-credit students who were admitted to credit ESL in levels where they could succeed.

Although most students made transitions from the Intermediate level, at least some Beginning level students obviously had characteristics that allowed them to succeed in credit studies. For example, they may have had fairly high levels of prior education. Or they may have improved their English by attending other non-credit classes at CCSF (including ESLC, ESLB, and ESLV) or by taking ESL classes at another college or organization. In addition, they may have gained English proficiency in their work life. Whatever the sources of their abilities to succeed in credit studies, *CCSF's credit assessment and placement system appears to have done a good job in identifying those abilities and in placing transition students for success.*

**Table 7.6 Success of Transition Students in Credit Courses  
By Last Non-Credit ESL Levels Taken**

Last Non-Credit ESL Level	GPA	Percent of Units Passed	Units Taken	Number of Students
0	2.17	43%	43.80	5
1	2.53	67%	56.14	87
2	2.59	59%	47.13	71
3	2.58	62%	48.98	196
4	2.51	63%	55.21	333
5	2.52	65%	50.95	383
6	2.58	67%	49.98	399
7	2.78	72%	52.14	434
8	2.80	72%	48.25	141
9	2.52	65%	46.81	13
Grand Total	2.62	67%	51.37	2062

- Missing from the analysis are 916 students for whom there was no academic history available about their last level in non-credit ESLN/ESLF.

## **5. Components of Success – Number of Non-Credit Levels Taken**

Chapter 6 showed that the number of non-credit levels taken was a predictor of the likelihood that students would make transitions to credit studies. Table 7.7 examines whether this was a predictor of success in credit studies as well. This Table shows the success of transition students in all credit courses (both credit ESL and academic transfer courses) by the number of non-credit levels in which they were enrolled. Separate analyses were conducted of the success of transition students by number of non-credit levels in academic credit ESL and transfer courses, respectively. For the sake of brevity, they are not presented here, because they show the same pattern as Table 7.7.

Table 7.7 shows that students who took any number of levels of non-credit ESL, beginning with those who took one level and extending to those who took six levels, succeeded at approximately the same rate as measured by GPA and percent of credit units passed. The Table also shows that there was no systematic relationship between the



number of non-credit ESL levels taken and the number of credit units taken. The number of units taken did not differ significantly as the number of Non-Credit ESL levels taken increased.

Students who took seven and eight levels of non-credit ESL had slightly higher GPAs and percents of units passed than those who took between one and six levels of no-credit ESL. This finding is consistent with the findings about success in credit by last level taken in Table 7.6, because the last non-credit level taken by students who took seven and eight levels was probably Level 7 or 8. However, because the number of students who took such large numbers of levels is very small, this finding may not be significant.

Table 7.7 is also consistent with the findings in Chapter 6 that the largest single group of students who made transitions was those who took only one non-credit level (410 students in this Table). But single-level students comprised only 27% of transition students in the credit ESL cohort for whom the number of non-credit levels taken could be determined. Chapter 6 noted that the percent of single-level students who made transitions was smaller than the percent of students who took multiple levels of non-credit ESL and it speculated about some of the reasons why this may have been the case. Whatever those reasons, it appears that those single-level students who succeeded in making transitions had about the same success rates in credit studies as did students who took multiple levels of non-credit ESL.

In short, Table 7.7 shows that the greater likelihood that students who took multiple levels would make transitions to credit discovered in Chapter 6 did not translate into higher (or lower) rates of success after students who took multiple levels had made the transition. It appears that taking multiple levels in non-credit primarily had a threshold effect for transitions. That is *students who took multiple levels had a greater chance of making transitions, because most students began at very low levels and had to take multiple levels to attain the Intermediate levels of proficiency required by most students to pass the credit ESL placement requirements and succeed in credit courses*. Once they had taken enough levels to get to the Intermediate range, they were on an equal footing with other credit ESL students, and their success rates were about the same.

Apparently the transition process at CCSF, and the decisions of students themselves, identified the non-credit students who had the skills and motivation to succeed in credit studies, regardless of how many levels of non-credit levels they had taken. Of course, the measures of success in this and other tables are averages, and that means some students were not very successful. However, the overall pattern of success is impressive.

**Table 7.7 Success of Transition Students in All Credit Courses**

**By Number of Non-Credit ESL Levels Taken**

Non-Credit ESL Levels Taken	GPA	Percent of Units Passed	Units Taken	Number of Students
1	2.53	63%	48.59	410
2	2.62	69%	50.66	176
3	2.56	63%	49.84	218
4	2.58	65%	51.31	259
5	2.54	66%	53.06	169
6	2.53	67%	50.83	158
7	2.71	69%	50.76	72
8	2.79	75%	60.97	15
9	2.20	61%	37.40	5
Grand Total	2.57	65%	50.59	1527

- The total is 1,527 (rather than the 2,978 transition students in the cohort) because 916 students without a level designation and 535 students with a negative level movement have been removed from the analysis. Negative level movement may occur when instructors recommend that students should be moved to a lower-level course or counselors determine that their levels should be adjusted due to initial misplacement or because gaps in enrollment or health reasons have made it difficult for students to continue in the level where they were previously placed.

## **6. Academic Credentials**

The previous sections of this chapter have focused on the success of transition students and other credit ESL students in credit courses. This section examines their success in terms of more traditional measures of academic achievement at community colleges – the completion of academic programs and the attainment of academic credentials (degrees and certificates) those programs confer.

Table 7.8 shows the degree and certificate attainment of credit ESL students by their academic origin. The most important findings that can be derived from this Table are based on the percentages in the “Award Total” column. That column shows that 24% of transition students and 26% of credit origin students who first enrolled in credit ESL in 1998-2000 had received a degree, certificate, or both from CCSF prior to the fall of 2007. The other columns in the Table show that both transition and credit-origin students were more likely to receive degrees than certificates. Twelve percent of credit ESL students received degrees and 7% received certificates. For credit-origin students, the corresponding percentages were 14% and 5%.

Although only about one quarter of these and other categories of credit ESL students received degrees, certificates, or both, this was an impressive achievement, compared to the rate at which other students who first enrolled in credit studies attained degrees and certificates over the period studied. The “Award Total” column shows that only 8% of all students who were new to credit in 1998-2000 received degrees, certificates, or both. The “All New Credit” category includes credit ESL students, but they comprised only 14%

(6666 of 46,196) of “All New Credit” students. As a result, all categories of credit ESL students attained degrees, certificates, or both at about three times the rate of credit students – a rate that was greatly disproportionate to the number of credit ESL students in the total population of students who first enrolled in credit from 1998-2000.

Moreover, the bottom row of Table 7.8 shows that credit ESL students accounted for 29% of the students first enrolled in credit studies in 1998-2000 who received certificates, 48% of the students who received degrees, and 52% of the students who received both degrees and certificates.

Importantly, Table 7.8 shows that transition students were as successful as other credit ESL students in attaining these measures of academic success, despite the fact (discussed above) that they were less likely than credit-origin students to complete the credit ESL sequence. Apparently, their lower completion rate in this respect did not translate to a lower completion rate in terms of degree and certificate attainment. This may have been because, as suggested above, many transition students made use of another pathway CCSF provides for credit ESL students to fulfill the requirements for degrees – enrollment in English Department classes before they completed credit ESL.

**Table 7.8 Degree and Certificate Attainment of the Credit ESL Cohort  
Compared to all New Credit Students 1998-2000**

Origin of ESL Credit Students	Certificate	Degree	Degree + Certificate	Award Total	Certificate	Degree	Degree + Certificate	Award Total	Total Number
Credit + Non-Credit	7%	10%	8%	25%	6	8	7	21	84
Credit-Origin	5%	14%	7%	26%	147	460	241	848	3266
Transition From ESLN/ESLF	7%	12%	6%	24%	206	349	170	725	2981
Other Non-Credit	7%	7%	6%	21%	24	25	20	69	335
ESL Cohort Total	6%	13%	7%	25%	383	842	438	1663	6666
All New Credit Students	3%	4%	2%	8%	1310	1764	835	3909	46196
ESL Cohort Award Percent of Total					29%	48%	52%	43%	14%

## 7. Transfer Rates

At CCSF, as at most community colleges, the attainment of degrees and certificates is only one academic outcome that is considered important for credit students. The other academic outcome to which colleges usually attach great significance is transfer to other academic institutions – particularly to four-year colleges and universities. In fact, at most colleges, a larger number of credit students transfer than complete degrees or certificates.

Table 7.9 shows the transfer rates of various categories of credit ESL students and of all students who first enrolled in credit studies at CCSF from 1998-2000. The Table shows that far more students who first enrolled in credit studies from 1998-2000 (39% or 18,295 students) transferred to two-year or four-year institutions than took degrees or certificates at CCSF (8% or 3909 students, as indicated by Table 7.8). It also shows that 59% of these students (10,754) transferred to four-year institutions.

But Table 7.9 shows that credit-origin credit ESL students were also more likely to transfer than to take degrees or certificates. Thirty-eight percent of credit origin students transferred – about the same percentage as all credit students who were first enrolled in credit in 1998-2000. Moreover, the percent of credit-origin students who transferred to four-year institutions was slightly higher than the percent of all new credit students who did so (25% of credit-origin students compared to 23% of “All New Credit” students). And it was higher than the percentage of credit-origin students who took degrees and certificates (26%).

However, Table 7.9 shows that transition students were less likely than credit-origin ESL students or other credit students to transfer and to transfer to four-year institutions. Twenty-five percent of transition students (745 students) transferred – compared to 39% of all credit students and 38% of credit origin students. Thus, transition students transferred at about the same rate as they completed degrees and certificates. These percentages are not additive, because some transition students may have transferred after they attained degrees or certificates. Sixteen percent of transition students (489 students) transferred to four-year institutions – compared to 23% of all credit students and 25% of credit origin students. Although this transfer rate was lower, it was still impressive. Transition students transferred to four-year institutions at 70% the rate that all credit students at CCSF did.

One reason that transition students may have been less likely to transfer was that, as mentioned above, they were less likely to complete the credit ESL sequence than were credit-origin students (probably due to their lower rates placement in credit ESL). These lower completion rates may have made it less likely that transition students would complete Freshman English (English 1-A), which Chapter 1 explains is required for transfer to four-year colleges and universities in California.

Overall, Table 7.9 shows that credit ESL made a respectable contribution to the number of students who transferred from CCSF, and that transition students comprised a substantial portion of that total. Because the number of all credit students who transferred

was much larger than the number who took degrees or certificates, credit ESL students did not account for as large a percentage of transfers as they did of degrees and certificates. Nevertheless, relative to their numbers, *all categories of credit ESL students had a high rate of success in transferring to other institutions*. Credit ESL was clearly a viable method for helping credit students to transfer, as it was for helping them to obtain degrees and certificates.

Moreover, it would be wrong to think that the major goal and academic outcome of credit ESL students was to attain degrees and certificates, rather than to transfer. In fact, a higher percentage of credit ESL students (31%) transferred than attained degrees or certificates (25%). And transition students transferred at the same rate as they attained degrees and certificates. The major difference between credit ESL students and other credit students in this regard was not that credit ESL students were less interested in transferring, but that other credit students appear to have been less interested in taking degrees and certificates.

**Table 7.9 Two- and Four-Year Educational Institution Transfer of the ESL Cohort Compared to All New Credit Students 1998-2000**

**Institution Type (College or University)**

Origin of ESL Credit Students	2-Year	4-year	Transfer Total Percent	2-Year	4-year	Transfer Total	Total Number
Credit + Non-Credit	13%	17%	30%	11	14	25	84
Credit-Origin	13%	25%	38%	416	827	1243	3265
Transition From ESLN/ESLF	9%	16%	25%	256	489	745	2980
Other Non-Credit	10%	14%	24%	33	47	80	335
ESL Cohort Total	11%	21%	31%	718	1377	2095	6666
All New Credit Students	16%	23%	39%	7541	10754	18295	46196
ESL Cohort Percent of Total				10%	13%	11%	14%

**D. DISCUSSION**

**1. Transition Students Do As Well in Credit as Credit-Origin ESL Students**

In this examination of the success of non-credit students who transitioned to credit ESL, it is good news to find that these students were as successful in both credit ESL and transfer credit courses as were other credit ESL students. Students from all levels of non-credit ESL succeeded in credit studies, but students who reached the Intermediate High levels (Levels 7 and 8) before transferring were slightly more successful than those who transferred from lower levels. *This confirms the view of many members of CCSF's ESL Department that non-credit students should be encouraged to reach at least an*

*Intermediate level of English before considering credit studies.* In addition, if students reach the Intermediate non-credit levels, they will be more likely to succeed in transfer credit courses that require a relatively high level of English.

Also, there may be financial limits on the number of units of credit ESL that students can take, due to limits on their eligibility for financial support and their own resources. As a result, it makes sense for them to increase their level of English proficiency to fairly high levels in free non-credit courses. This is because transition students who have reached higher non-credit levels are more likely to place higher in the credit ESL sequence of courses and thereby need to take fewer fee-based credit courses to complete that sequence.

## **2. Spreading the Word**

CCSF's faculty has found that non-credit ESL students are often reluctant to consider credit studies because they think credit courses will be too difficult. They need to know that their chances of success are good if they work their way up to the Intermediate level. In fact, students who began at fairly low non-credit levels and advanced multiple levels were more likely to make transitions than were students who began at higher levels, and they were equally successful in credit studies. *An important part of the guidance and counseling of non-credit students should be to encourage them to consider making transitions to credit. And an important part of that encouragement should be making them aware that both transition to credit programs and success those programs are within their reach.* For example, information of this type should be included in CCSF's "Steps to Credit" workshops, in the initial meetings with counselors that are part of the college's matriculation process (see Chapter 9), and in other counseling sessions. *It is also important for ESL instructors to be aware of the prospects of non-credit student success in credit courses, so that they can use this information to encourage students to consider credit studies.*

In addition, both students and teachers should understand that most credit ESL students take transfer credit courses in the same time period that they are taking credit ESL courses, and that they succeed in these transfer courses. Thus, credit ESL students are completing at least some of the requirements for degrees, certificates, and transfer to four-year institutions, as well as gaining valuable skills from individual transfer courses, at the same time they are enrolled in credit ESL. *This shortens the time it takes for ESL students to complete academic programs or transfer.* If students and teachers were more aware of this, they might understand that transitions from non-credit ESL to credit studies have short-term benefits beyond simply taking more English courses, and that the road to degrees, certificates, and transfer is not as long as they might imagine.

Moreover, other ESL programs should be aware of CCSF's policy of allowing credit ESL students to co-enroll in transfer credit courses and the benefits of that policy. Based on the findings in this chapter, there appears to be no reason to restrict ESL students from taking other credit courses until they complete the credit ESL sequence. Allowing them to co-enroll in other courses appears to have many benefits. Many ESL programs

(especially those at community colleges) are concerned about the length of time it takes ESL students to complete credit programs – to attain degrees and certificates or to transfer. They should be aware that *allowing credit ESL students to take other courses before completing the ESL sequence can shorten the time required to attain these goals.*

### **3. Transition Students Place at Lower Levels of Credit ESL Than Credit-Origin Students**

Perhaps the primary reason why transition students place at lower levels in credit ESL than credit-origin students do is because of the difference in content of credit and non-credit ESL courses.<sup>71</sup> A major difference is that the credit program focuses on teaching academic reading and writing, whereas the non-credit program does not. Students may have achieved a High Intermediate Level of proficiency in listening and speaking in non-credit, but they may have lower reading and writing proficiency and/or may not have much experience reading and writing academic material.

Because students are placed in the credit ESL program based in part on a writing sample, those with less experience in writing may place lower in the reading/writing/grammar courses than they do in the listening/speaking courses in credit.<sup>72</sup> Perhaps, too, the lower placement levels of transition students in credit ESL can partially be explained by differences in student characteristics that affect language acquisition. Although the educational background data on non-credit ESL students is not available for a large percentage of students, the information that is available indicates that credit-origin ESL students have a higher educational level on average. Higher educational levels increase the rate at which students acquire a second language. Credit-origin students may have placed higher than transition students because they were more likely to bring a higher level of academic skills to credit ESL than were transition students.

Content instruction also contributes to language development. *Anecdotal reports from CCSF instructors indicate that students who have completed some high school in the United States are more likely to enroll in credit courses, and they are most likely to enroll as credit-origin students.* These students have already spent some time studying English, studying other subjects taught in English, and interacting with English-speaking students, and they have acquired substantial cultural background knowledge from their high school experiences. Credit-origin students who have this background may place at slightly higher levels in credit ESL than other students.

Finally, some students who have the personal goals of obtaining a college degree or certificate (or at least of taking selected credit courses they need to advance vocationally)

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<sup>71</sup> See Chapter 1 and Sharon Seymour, “City College of San Francisco” op. cit. for a discussion of differences in the content and English skill levels of credit and Non-credit courses at CCSF.

<sup>72</sup> See Chapter 1 for a more complete description of the differences between curricula in the non-credit and credit ESL programs.

may have arrived in the United States with fairly high levels of English proficiency. Because of their goals and their higher levels of proficiency, they may be more likely to enter credit studies as credit-origin students.

#### **4. Transition Students Are as Successful as Credit-Origin Students in Credit ESL**

Although transition students initially place lower in the credit ESL sequence than credit origin students, an important finding of this chapter is that transition students succeed at the same or slightly higher rates than credit-origin students in credit ESL. Transition students take the same number of credit ESL levels, on average, and have the same GPAs and percent of units passed in credit ESL courses as do comparable credit-origin students. In addition, they attain degrees and certificates at the same rate as credit-origin ESL students. As the Analysis section of this chapter indicates, this is a tribute to the motivation and perseverance of transition students. It is also a tribute to the effectiveness of CCSF's credit ESL placement system. Apparently that system selects students for credit ESL who can also succeed not only in ESL courses but also in academic transfer courses. And it places them in courses where they are most likely to succeed.

#### **5. Attainment of Degrees, Certificates, and Transfer**

The degree and certificate attainment of credit ESL students is a testimony to how much students can achieve who make transitions from non-credit ESL and the credit ESL program taken as a whole. Both transition and credit-origin students enrolled in credit ESL attained degrees and certificates at three times the rate of the other credit students at CCSF. One reason for that is that credit ESL students were apparently more interested in obtaining degrees and certificates than other credit students at the College were. But this was not their only goal. ESL credit-origin students transferred to two-year and four-year institutions at the same rate as other credit students. And transition students transferred to four-year institutions at 70% of that rate.

It appears that transition students transferred at a somewhat lower rate because they were less likely than credit-origin students to complete the credit ESL sequence. This was partly because their initial placement in credit ESL was somewhat lower than the initial placement of credit-origin students. Nonetheless, their degree and certificate attainment combined with their transfer rate was quite impressive.

Overall, it appears that credit ESL is a viable route to the attainment of community college degrees and certificates and to transfer. As a result, *if CCSF and other colleges wish to increase their transfer rates and their degree and certificate completion rates, they may wish to focus on expanding their credit ESL programs.* Moreover, if the experience of CCSF is typical, a large percent of credit ESL students begin in non-credit ESL. This means that if colleges want to improve their transfer and completion rates, they may wish to focus on increasing transition rates as well as the credit ESL completion rates of transition students. And colleges should consider instituting the types of "Pathways to College" courses discussed in Chapter 5 and 6 as way to increase credit ESL completion rates.



## CHAPTER 8

### STOP-OUTS

#### A. BACKGROUND

Chapters 5-6 analyzed the learning gains (indicated by levels taken) and transitions to credit courses of non-credit ESL students at CCSF. The analysis in those chapters showed that both learning gains and transitions are strongly influenced by two variables: terms taken and hours of attendance. This chapter addresses the question of how learning gains and transitions are related to patterns of student enrollment: whether these measures of student performance differ depending on whether students enroll in ESL courses continuously (if they enroll for each consecutive term available to them) or have breaks in their enrollment.

#### 1. The Importance of Stop-Outs

Breaks in enrollment are matters of considerable interest to the ESL field, and to adult educators generally. ESL instructors have long been familiar with the pattern of students enrolling in classes, dropping out for a period of time, and then returning at a later date. But since these students have not totally dropped out, educators have coined a new term for them – “stop-outs.” Educators have begun to study stop-outs to look for answers to various questions – who they are, how many stop-out, how frequently they stop-out, for how long, how many hours of instruction they take, the effects that stopping out has on their learning, and how many stop-out students transitions to credit. The National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy’s (NCSALL) Study Circle Guide devoted one session for instructors and administrators to focus on stop-outs as one of the key concepts related to learner persistence.<sup>73</sup> The findings of this study contribute additional knowledge about stop-outs in adult education.

#### 2. Definition

This study defines a stop-out as any student in the 1998-2000 non-credit cohort analyzed in other chapters who: (a) initially enrolled in a non-credit ESL class at any level during any term from 1988-2000, (b) subsequently re-enrolled in a non-credit ESL class, but (c) did not re-enroll until two terms or more after they had enrolled in the first class. That is, stop-outs are defined as students who did not re-enroll during the equivalent of an academic year (three terms) or longer. They enrolled for one term in the equivalent of an academic year, but did not enroll for the other two terms (or longer) before they re-enrolled. For example, a student who enrolled in the fall term of 1998 and who next enrolled in the fall term of 1999 (or later) is defined as a stop-out. But a student who enrolled in the fall term of 1998 and next enrolled in the spring or summer terms of 1999 is not defined as a stop-out.

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<sup>73</sup> <http://www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/teach/lp.d.pdf>

It might appear to make more sense to define a stop-out as a student who did not re-enroll for any consecutive term. This study did not adopt that definition primarily because (as noted in Chapter 1), all terms in CCSF's ESL program are not the same. In particular, the program includes a short summer term that offers fewer classes for fewer weeks and has a lower attendance than its fall and spring terms. Also, students usually cannot advance levels based on attending the summer term. That term is primarily used for review of course content taken in the spring term. Because the summer term differs from other terms in these and other ways, students who do not enroll in it are "missing" instruction that may affect their learning gains or prospects for making transitions, but the instruction they are missing is different in intensity, duration, and purpose than in other terms. Moreover, some students may not need or benefit from the "review" provided by the summer term, and others may not be able to attend during the summer because the number of classes offered is limited.

Because the summer term is so different from other terms at CCSF in these and other ways, this study adopted a definition of stopping out that effectively does not count the summer term in determining whether students stopped out. *Only students who missed the fall or spring terms in the equivalent of an academic year are considered stop-outs.*<sup>74</sup>

This definition is to some extent arbitrary, but it appears to be the best way to determine what effect stopping out has on learning gains and transitions. Although missing only the summer term undoubtedly has some effect on students, this study did not have the resources to determine what that effect might be. If stop-outs were defined as students who missed *any* term, the number of stop-outs would increase, but the students assigned to this category would include students who had very different classroom experiences: those who did not, and possibly could not, attend the summer term.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> For example, by the definition adopted in this study, a student who enrolled in the spring term, missed the summer term, and re-enrolled in the fall would not be counted as a stop-out. If stop-outs were defined as students who missed any consecutive term, they would be counted as a stop-out. A student who enrolled in the fall term and missed the spring and summer terms would be counted as a stop-out by either definition. Of course, students defined as stop-outs who did not re-enroll for more than one year may have missed one or more summer terms and multiple spring and/or fall terms.

<sup>75</sup> The definition also fails to fully capture the learning experiences of students who enrolled in the summer term and did not enroll again until the following summer. These students are categorized as stop-outs, although they missed both the fall and spring terms, whereas other students categorized as stop-outs missed only one of these terms in the equivalent of an academic year. Because of limits on summer enrollment and the greater opportunities offered during the fall and spring there are probably only a small number of these students. Nevertheless, one limit of this study is that it does not consider what difference their pattern of enrollment makes in an analysis of stop-outs.

## B. MAJOR FINDINGS

- Stopping out was a fairly common practice for non-credit ESL students in the cohort studied. Nearly half (48%) of students in the cohort who logically could stop out (those who are enrolled for more than one term) did so. These stop-outs comprised 30% of all students in the cohort.
- Some students stopped out repeatedly, but most students (74%) who stopped out did so only once, and only a small number of students stopped out more than twice.
- The median length of stop-outs was remarkably long – the equivalent of two academic years for those students who stopped out once, and slightly less during each absence from the program for students who stopped out twice.
- Most stop-outs (80%) began their ESL studies at very low levels (the Literacy and Low Beginning Levels), and they were more likely to begin at these levels than were members of the cohort as a whole or students who were continuously enrolled for more than one term.
- An examination of the demographics of stop-outs indicates that Asians were somewhat less likely to stop-out than Hispanics, but age was not significantly related to stopping out.
- Students who stopped out enrolled for more terms, but attended about the same number of hours and advanced about the same number of levels (on average) as students who were continuously enrolled. Stop-outs arrived at the same goals in terms of learning gains as did students who were continuously enrolled. It simply took them longer to do so.
- This finding about the terms taken and levels advanced of stop-outs contradicts the notion that stopping out has a negative effect on persistence and learning gains.
- A significantly smaller percentage of students who stopped out (8%) made the transition to enrollment in credit classes than did students who were continuously enrolled (13%). One of the major reasons for this difference may have been that stop-outs began their studies at lower levels of English proficiency than did students who were continuously enrolled. As a result, they had to advance more levels to reach the levels of proficiency from which they could make transitions. Also, stop-outs may have been less likely to have the goal of enrolling in credit courses, and because they were absent from the program for such long periods of time, some of them may have made transitions after the seven-year period during which they were studied.
- This study discovered no strong evidence that stopping out, by itself, had a negative effect on persistence, learning gains, or transitions. It seems more probable that

stopping out – as well as the limited persistence, learning gains, and transition rates of both stop-outs and continuously enrolled students – was due to factors such as student goals, motivation, the demands of personal lives, and the features of ESL program design discussed in Chapter 5. If CCSF and other institutions that provide ESL service wish to address stop-outs’ performance problems, they should probably adopt the same measures to assist these students that Chapter 5 and 6 suggests they should adopt to assist all non-credit students. And they should recognize that, because of their manifest willingness to persist in ESL studies, stop-outs may be among their most promising students. As a result targeting efforts to improve student outcomes on stop-outs may have especially good results.

## C. ANALYSIS

### 1. Frequency of Stopping Out

Table 8.1 shows the number of students in the cohort studied who stopped out by the number of times they stopped out over a seven-year time period. The Table includes only those students who were enrolled for more than one term, because only students enrolled for more than one term can stop out. Only these students can enroll and re-enroll at some subsequent time – which is central to any definition of a stop-out.

The total number of non-credit ESL students in the cohort studied was 38,095 students. Table 8.1 shows that the number of these students who persisted for more than one term was 23,489, or 62% of the cohort.<sup>76</sup> Of those students who were enrolled for more than one term, slightly over half, 52% (12,142) did not stop-out during the seven-year period studied. This is indicated by the “0” Stop-Outs row in Table 8.1. These students were enrolled for one term and re-enrolled for one or more sequential terms (with the possible exception of the summer term) until they stopped attending non-credit ESL classes. The remaining 48% of those who enrolled for more than one term (11,347 students) were stop-outs. These stop-outs were 30% of the 38,095 students in the cohort.

Although a significant portion of students in the cohort stopped out, they did not do so very often. Almost three quarters of those who stopped out did so only once. Of the total number of stop-out students, 74% (8379 students) stopped out only once, and 21% (2308 students) stopped out twice. Only a negligible percentage and number (5% or 561 students) stopped out more than twice.

The fairly small percentage of students who stopped out more than once is impressive when compared to the persistence rates of students in the cohort as a whole reported in Chapter 4. For example, Table 4.1 in that chapter shows that 16,357 students enrolled for three or more terms. These students comprised 70% of those who enrolled for more than one term. It would have been possible for any of these students to have stopped out at least twice – once between the first and second term in which they were enrolled, and once between the second and third terms in which they were enrolled. But only 21% of students stopped out twice, less than one third of those who had the opportunity to do so.

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<sup>76</sup> This is consistent with the finding about persistence in Chapter 4.

Moreover, students who stopped out twice had a higher persistence rate than most students in the cohort as a whole. By definition, all of the 2408 students who stopped out twice enrolled for three terms or longer. Only 43% of students in the cohort (the 16,357 just mentioned) persisted for this long.

**Table 8.1 Students First Enrolled in Non-Credit ESL in 1998, 1999, 2000 and Persisted For More Than One Term by Number of Stop-Outs**

Stop-Outs	All Students		Students Enrolled more than 1 Term	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
0	26748	70%	12142	52%
1	8378	22%	8378	36%
2	2408	6%	2408	10%
3	508	1%	508	2%
4	49	0%	49	0%
5	4	0%	4	0%
Grand Total	38095	100%	23489	100%

## **2. Demographics of Stop-Outs**

Tables 8.2 and 8.3 answer the question “Who stopped out?” in demographic terms.

***Ethnicity.*** Table 8.2 shows stop-outs by ethnicity. Of the two largest ethnic groups at CCSF, Hispanics were somewhat more likely to stop-out than were Asians. The Table shows that 55% of Asians had no stop-outs, compared to 46% of Hispanics. But the difference in the number of stop-outs between these two ethnic groups is fairly small. Table 8.3 shows that 33% of Asians had one stop-out compared to 38% of Hispanics, and 11% of Asians had three or more stop-outs compared to 15% of Hispanics. Thus, although Asians were less likely to stop-out than were Hispanics, most students in both groups who stopped out did so only once. Overall, these findings are consistent with the findings in Chapter 4 that Asians have a higher persistence rate.

The group with the lowest percentage of stop-outs was White Non-Hispanic. Of this group, 72% had no stop-outs. Although data on the background of these students is not available, a large percentage of them were most likely from the former Soviet Union, because in 1998-2000 CCSF served a sizeable number of students who emigrated from this region.

***Age.*** Table 8.3 shows stop-outs by age. It appears that the percentage of students who stopped out did not vary significantly by age at the time of their first enrollment in non-credit ESL. The percentage of students with no stop-outs ranged between 50% and 53% for all age groups, except those who were 50 years of age or older. Fifty-eight percent of

students in this older age group had no stop-outs. This reflects the finding in Chapter 4 that students in this age group were somewhat more persistent than younger students. However, as Chapters 5 and 6 show, this increased persistence did not translate into higher learning gains or rates of transition to credit courses, on average.

Table 8.3 shows no major differences in the number of stop-outs among the groups it describes (except those 50 years of age or older). Most students in all age groups who stopped out did so only once.

**Table 8.2 Percent of Stop-outs of Non-Credit ESL Students With More Than One Term – by Ethnicity**

Stop-Outs	African American Non Hispanic	American Indian Alaskan Native	Asian Pacific Islander	Filipino	Hispanic Latino	Other Non White	Unknown No Response	White Non Hispanic
0	61%	36%	55%	71%	46%	54%	48%	72%
1	31%	43%	33%	23%	38%	36%	40%	24%
2	6%	7%	9%	5%	12%	9%	10%	3%
3	2%	7%	2%	0%	3%	1%	2%	1%
4	0%	7%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
5	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Number of Students	113	14	9808	77	8428	121	3757	1171

-Missing from this table are 14,606 students in the cohort who only enrolled for one term

**Table 8.3 Percent of Stop-Outs of Non-Credit ESL Students With More Than One Term – by Age**

Stop-Outs	16 - 19	20 - 24	25 - 29	30 - 34	35 - 39	40 - 49	50+	Unknown/ No Response
0	52%	50%	51%	53%	51%	52%	58%	37%
1	35%	35%	35%	35%	36%	37%	32%	49%
2	11%	11%	11%	9%	10%	10%	9%	12%
3	2%	3%	2%	3%	3%	2%	1%	3%
4	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
5	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	1711	3903	3347	2955	2509	3939	3926	1199

-Missing from this table are 14,606 students in the cohort who only enrolled for one term.

### 3. Stop-Outs by First Level of Enrollment

Table 8.4 shows the first level at which stop-outs enrolled in non-credit ESL. The Table shows that most stop-outs began at very low levels, and that they were more likely to begin at these low levels than members of the cohort as a whole. It shows that 2,131 students who first enrolled at the Literacy Level and 5,819 students who initially enrolled at Level 1 stopped out. Taken together, these students comprised 70% of the 11,347 students who stopped out. If the 1,173 stop-outs who initially enrolled at Level 2 are added to this total, the percentage of stop-outs initially enrolled at the Literacy Level or the two Beginning Low Levels is 80%. This is a higher percentage than the percent of all students in the cohort who were initially enrolled at these levels. Chapter 2 shows that 60% of all students in the cohort were initially enrolled at the Literacy or Beginning Low Levels. In short, *students who stopped out were somewhat more likely than other ESL students to begin at very low levels.*

More importantly, Table 8.4 shows that *students who stopped out were somewhat more likely than those who were continuously enrolled for more than one term to begin at low levels of non-credit ESL.* The Table shows that, whereas 80% of students who stopped out began at the three lowest levels of ESL, 70% of continuously-enrolled students (8,463 of 12,142 students) began at these levels. Although this difference is not great, it may be one reason why stop-outs differed from continuously-enrolled students in at least some of the performance measures discussed below.

**Table 8.4 Number of Stop-Outs by First Non-Credit Level for Students Enrolled for More than One Term**

Stop-Outs	First ESL Non-Credit Level										No Level	Total
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9		
0	1924	5246	1293	1327	438	458	335	376	88	9	648	12142
1	1537	4207	866	710	306	228	144	136	39	17	188	8378
2	489	1285	255	171	55	58	36	24	9	3	23	2408
3	97	294	47	36	15	9	3	3			4	508
4	8	30	4	3	2	2						49
5		3	1									4
Number Stopped Out	2131	5819	1173	920	378	297	183	163	48	20	215	11347
Grand Total	4055	11065	2466	2247	816	755	518	539	136	29	863	23489

-Students with "No Level" were students to whom a level could not be assigned because their final level that was lower than their beginning level.

-Missing are 14,606 students who were enrolled for only one term.

#### **4. Length of Time Students Stopped Out**

Table 8.5 shows the length of time that students stopped out. The Table shows that, on average, students who stopped out had fairly long breaks in enrollment. Students who stopped out once comprised 74% of all stop-outs. The Table shows that the mean length of time between enrollments for these students was 2.31 years, and the median length was two years. The mean and median lengths of time for students who stopped out twice were slightly less, about 1.75 years. However, the total amount of time these students were absent from the program between enrollments was twice as long: 3.5 years (twice the length of each stopping out). Because this study tracked students for only seven years, this means that students who stopped out twice were absent from the program between enrollments for half the time during the seven years that the cohort was studied.

Students who stopped out more than twice are not discussed in this analysis, because their numbers were so small (561 students), but it interesting that they stopped out for shorter periods of time during each stopping out period, but were absent from the program for even more total years.

Following the definition of stop-outs adopted by this study, the numbers in Table 8.5 are academic year equivalents that count three terms (including summer) as an academic year. As a result, students who stopped out once did not re-enroll again for two or more academic years, on average. For example (using the mean number of 2.31 years), a student who stopped out once might have first enrolled in the fall of 1998 and not re-enrolled again until the spring of 2001. A student who stopped out twice would have been absent from the program for one or two fewer terms before re-enrolling each time.

These long absences are all the more striking, because they were not unusual. As noted above, almost half the students enrolled for more than one term and 30% of the cohort studied stopped out over a period of seven years. As a result, quite long absences between enrollments were not uncommon in CCSF's ESL program.

It is important to bear in mind, however, that the durations of being stopped out in Table 8.5 are statistical averages. As a result, some students stopped out for only one year (the minimum amount of time that defines a stop-out), and some stopped out far longer.

#### **5. Levels Taken and Their Components**

Table 8.5 also shows how students who stopped out differed from other students enrolled for more than one term by the number of levels of ESL in which they were enrolled. As Chapter 5 points out, the number of levels in which students were enrolled is the best available measure of learning gains in CCSF's non-credit ESL program. In addition, Table 8.5 shows how stop-outs differed from other students in terms of two of the key factors that Chapter 5 showed were associated with advancing levels in CCSF's non-credit ESL program: terms taken and hours of attendance over the seven-year period studied. These factors will be examined first.



**Terms taken.** Table 8.5 shows how these fairly long absences were related to the number of terms in which students who stopped out were enrolled (terms taken). Judging from the *median* number of terms taken, over the seven-year period, students who stopped out once were enrolled for one more term, and students who stopped out twice were enrolled for three more terms than continuously-enrolled students. These are significant differences. Students who stopped out once were enrolled for 30% more terms than were continuously-enrolled students, and those who stopped out twice were enrolled for twice as many terms.

To some extent, the magnitude of these differences in median terms taken is a statistical artifact. Judging from the *mean* number of terms taken, students who stopped out once enrolled in only .6 more terms than did students who were continuously enrolled (a 13% difference). But the number of terms taken by students who stopped out twice was two terms longer than the number of terms taken by students who were continuously enrolled, whether this difference is calculated in terms of mean or median numbers of terms.

Nevertheless, these differences in measurement should not obscure the major finding in Table 8.5 about terms taken. No matter whether measurements by medians or means are used, it appears that stop-outs were likely to take somewhat more terms over the seven-year period than students who were continuously enrolled.

Of course, representing terms taken by averages (whether medians or means) does not do full justice to the attendance patterns of either stop-outs or students who were continuously enrolled. An examination of the enrollment patterns of both categories of students (not presented here) indicates that a non-trivial number of students in both categories enrolled for six, eight or even 12 terms. In other words, the distribution of both stop-outs and continuously-enrolled students was remarkably flat – no number of terms taken (including the mean and median numbers) accounted for a very large percentage of either category of students, or of students who stopped out various numbers of times. The mean and median numbers just discussed are, therefore, probabilities that summarize an extremely broad range of enrollment patterns by all students.

**Hours of attendance.** In Table 8.5, the total mean number of hours attended differs considerably from the total median number of hours. This is due to differences in how each type of measure is calculated.<sup>77</sup> For purposes of this discussion, the important consideration is the difference between stop-outs and continuously-enrolled students by either measure.

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<sup>77</sup> The differences in total numbers of hours taken are due to the fact (explained in Chapter 3) that some Non-credit students attend ESL classes for very long periods of time (1500 hours or more). This effect is partly captured by the finding that many of those students who enrolled for more than one term take large numbers of terms, whether they stop out or not. If students attend a significant number of hours in each term, the number of terms taken has a multiplier effect, resulting in large numbers of total hours. This effect is more likely to be captured by the number of mean hours taken (which divides the total number of hours each group of students took by the number of students in each group) than by median hours taken (which represents a number of hours that is equal to, or greater than, the number of hours attended by half of each group of students, and equal to, or greater than, the number attended by the other half) – although neither metric captures it very well.

Table 8.5 shows that stop-outs and students who were continuously enrolled attended about the same number of hours over the seven-year time period. Whether measured by mean or median hours, students who stopped out once attended about 20-30 *fewer* hours than did students who were continuously enrolled. Students who stopped out twice attended between 20 and 70 *more* hours than students who were continuously enrolled. Considering that total hours of enrollment by either measure is fairly large, these differences in hours of attendance probably do not have much effect on learning gains.

A more interesting comparison is between hours of attendance and terms taken. Chapter 5 showed that these two variables were closely related for students in the cohort as a whole. For the 30% of the cohort who were stop-outs, this relationship is not strong. For example, comparing students in terms of median terms and hours taken, Table 8.5 shows that although students who stopped out once attended one *more* term than students continuously enrolled, they attended 35 *fewer* hours. Although the difference in hours taken is not by itself significant, when combined with differences in the number of terms taken, it is. Based on the findings of Chapter 5, it might be expected that, because stop-outs enrolled in more terms, they would also have attended more hours of instruction. But, on average, this was not the case. It appears that stop-outs attended fewer hours than did continuously-enrolled students in one or more of the terms during which they were enrolled.

Although some categories of stop-outs (those who stopped out twice or three times) attended both a larger number of terms and hours than did continuously-enrolled students, the number of hours attended by any category of stop-outs did not increase very much as the number of terms in which they were enrolled increased. In sum, there was not a strong relationship between terms taken and hours of attendance for stop-outs, as there was for members of the cohort as a whole. In fact, there was practically no relationship between these two factors at all.

**Levels taken.** Chapter 5 showed that terms taken and hours of attendance both affect levels taken (and hence learning gains) for the cohort as a whole. As a result, if the number of terms taken by stop-outs was greater and the number of hours of attendance was about the same as the comparable values for students continuously enrolled, it is hard to predict whether the number of levels taken by stop-outs would be greater or about the same.

Table 8.5 shows that the median number of levels taken was about the same for students who stopped out once or twice as it was for students who were continuously enrolled. All three groups of students took a median number of two levels, and hence advanced one level (on average) over the seven-year time period. Measured by mean levels taken, students who stopped out once and twice took an average of slightly more than two levels, but the difference between the groups was very small. Students who stopped out once enrolled in .06 *fewer* levels than those who were continuously enrolled, and students who stopped out twice enrolled in .20 *more* levels.

These differences are well within the margin of error of these calculations. The most reasonable conclusion that can be drawn from Table 8.5 is that, on average, students who stopped out took and advanced about the same number of levels as did students who were continuously enrolled.

As a result, on average, the number of levels stop-outs took was much more strongly related to the number of hours they attended than to the number of terms in which they enrolled. This is because they took about the same number of levels as continuously-enrolled students who attended the same number of hours, but the number of terms in which they enrolled was greater than the number of terms taken by these continuously-enrolled students.

## 6. Portrait of a Stop-Out

Based on the findings presented in Table 8.5, stopping out is *not* associated with poor performance by students in terms of learning gains – at least compared to continuously-enrolled students. On average, stop-outs took and advanced about the same number of levels as other students who enrolled for more than one term. The long absences of stop-outs from CCSF’s ESL program apparently did not have a significant effect on their learning gains. This may be due in part to the fact that they took somewhat more terms to make up for those absences, although they did not attend significantly more hours of instruction. As mentioned above, this suggests that stop-outs attended very few hours during some of the terms in which they enrolled. But whatever their attendance patterns may have been, students who stopped out and students who were continuously enrolled got to the same goal in terms of learning gains. It simply took students who stopped out more years, and slightly more terms to attain that goal.

**Table 8.5 Stop-Outs by Levels Taken, Hours of Attendance, Terms of Enrollment, and Length Of Stopping Out**

Stop-Outs	Mean Levels Taken	Median Levels Taken	Mean Hours ESLNF	Median Hours ESLNF	Mean Terms ESLNF	Median Terms ESLNF	Mean Length of Stop Out in Years	Median Length of Stop Out in Years	Number of Students
0	2.43	2	439.01	253.80	4.43	3.00			12142
1	2.37	2	413.19	218.13	5.03	4.00	2.31	2.00	8378
2	2.63	2	459.32	330.03	6.34	6.00	1.78	1.75	2408
3	2.87	3	456.80	383.32	7.04	7.00	1.48	1.50	508
4	2.69	2	402.91	332.50	7.49	7.00	1.27	1.25	49
5	3.25	4	428.16	372.30	8.25	8.00	1.09	1.08	4
Grand Total	2.44	2	432.19	254.00	4.90	4.00	2.16	1.75	23489

-Missing from this table are 14,606 students in the cohort who only enrolled for one term.

## 7. Transition to Credit

Table 8.6 shows the percentage of stop-outs and continuously-enrolled students (“0” stop-outs) who made the transition to enrollment in credit courses over the seven years studied. The Table shows that students who stopped out were considerably less likely to make this transition than were continuously-enrolled students. This is by far the greatest difference between stop-outs and other students who were enrolled for more than one term identified by this study.

Table 8.6 shows that 13% of students who were continuously enrolled (1,578 students) made the transition to credit. In contrast, only 8% of students who stopped out once or twice (670 and 192 students, respectively) enrolled in credit courses within seven years of the time they were first enrolled in CCSF’s ESL program.

Chapter 6 showed that about 8% of the total cohort studied made the transition to credit courses. As a result, the transition rates of students who stopped out were about the same as the rates of all students in the cohort. The transition rates of students who were continuously enrolled were higher than the rates for the cohort as a whole.

This is a surprising finding. Chapter 5 showed that the number of levels taken is strongly related to the likelihood that students will transition to credit.<sup>78</sup> Because both stop-outs and students who were continuously enrolled took about the same number of levels (two levels) on average, it might be expected that they would have the same transition rates. The possible reasons for these differences are discussed below.

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<sup>78</sup> Observant readers may notice that the percentage of both stop-outs and continuously-enrolled students who made transitions to credit was higher than the percentage of students who took the same number of levels and transitioned to credit reported in Chapter 5. That is, both stop-outs and continuously-enrolled students took two levels on average, and 8% and 13% of them, respectively, made transitions. Chapter 4 reports that only 5% of students who took only two levels made transitions to credit. The apparent difference is partly due to the fact that the number of levels taken discussed in this chapter are averages, whereas the numbers discussed in Chapter 5 are calculations of the total number of students enrolled in various levels who made transitions. Also, the students discussed in this chapter were only those who took more than one level, and as Chapter 5 shows, a significant number of non-credit students (particularly those first enrolled at higher levels) made transitions after enrolling in only one level.

**Table 8.6 Transition to Credit for Stop-Outs**

Stop-Outs	Enrolled More Than One Term	Percent Transitioning to Credit
0	12142	13%
1	8378	8%
2	2408	8%
3	508	7%
4	49	6%
5	4	0%
Grand Total	23489	11%

## **D. DISCUSSION**

### **1. Is Stopping Out a Problem?**

Stopping out was a fairly common practice for the cohort of CCSF’s non-credit ESL students examined by this study. Thirty percent of students in the cohort stopped out, and on average their breaks in enrollment were quite long – two years or more. Most people in the ESL field would probably like to see as many students as possible continuously enrolled, because they believe that persistence, in the form of continuous enrollment, increases learning gains. From this perspective, stopping out is a problem – almost by definition. Stop-out students do not persist in ESL programs in the same way that other students enrolled for multiple terms persist.

But persistence is a relative matter. By virtue of the fact that they enrolled for two or more terms, stop-outs persisted for longer than almost half of CCSF’s non-credit ESL students. About 74% of students who stopped out did so only once. And compared to students who were continuously enrolled, students who stopped out enrolled for more terms and about the same number of hours. From this perspective, stop-outs were a remarkably persistent group. Their persistence simply took a different form than the persistence of students who were continuously enrolled.

Did stop-outs pay a price for their form of persistence? In terms of learning gains, they apparently did not. On average, they took and advanced about the same number of ESL levels as students who were continuously enrolled took and advanced. As a result, *the findings of this study contradict the notion that continuous enrollment leads to both greater persistence and greater learning gains.*

The price stop-outs paid for their form of persistence was that it took them more years and somewhat more terms of enrollment to complete the same number of levels

continuously-enrolled students completed. But this was apparently a price they were willing and able to pay.

Of course, the learning gains of most stop-outs were fairly small. On average, they advanced only about one level. But, on average, their performance in this respect was no worse (although no better) than that of students who were continuously enrolled. As a result, the concerns that too many of CCSF's non-credit students had limited learning gains, and the prescriptions for what might be done to improve their persistence and advancement (discussed in 5), are the same for stop-outs as they are for other non-credit students.

In short, stopping out was in many ways no more, and no less, of a problem than any other pattern of limited persistence and limited learning gains at CCSF. Stop-outs arrived at the same goal as many of the College's highest performing ESL students. It just took them longer to get there. In fact, if a willingness to "keep trying" is an indicator of motivation, then stop-outs might be viewed as more motivated than many other ESL students. In this sense, they might be viewed as among the College's most promising students – students whose potential should be more fully realized. If so, CCSF and other institutions that manage ESL programs should take a special interest in encouraging stop-outs who return after prolonged absences and enroll for multiple terms to continue their progress up the ESL ladder. Stopping out might be regarded as a "flag" that indicates students who would benefit from the types of college services aimed at increasing persistence and learning gains discussed in Chapter 5.

In fact, the major reason that stopping out might be considered a special problem is that stop-outs appear to be promising students who have not achieved their full potential. Because stop-outs took more terms than students who were continuously enrolled, it might be expected that they would advance more levels. Moreover, stop-outs were more likely to begin their ESL studies at very low levels, and Chapter 5 showed that students who began at very low levels were more likely to advance multiple levels. But stop-outs did not advance more levels than did students who were continuously enrolled. Was stopping out, at least in part, the reason why these students did not advance further? Was it the cause of their limited learning gains? Or were both stopping out and limited learning gains effects of some other variables? Ultimately, conclusions about whether stopping out was, by itself, a special problem depend on conclusions about why students stopped out.

## **2. Why Did Students Stop Out?**

Unfortunately, observational research of the sort conducted by this study is almost always inconclusive when it comes to distinguishing cause and effect. The best this study can offer is some informed speculation about why students stopped out.

The study's most telling findings about this subject are that most students who stopped out did so only once and that they were absent from the College's ESL program for fairly

long periods of time. That is, on average, stop-outs did not seem to fit the pattern of “intermittent students” – students who enroll in classes and then leave the program repeatedly over many years – that is familiar to most educators. On average, stop-outs enrolled, left the program for long periods, and then persisted until they terminated their studies.

There are quite a number of reasons why students might have followed this pattern of attendance. One might be that the stop-outs examined by this study were students who were unsure about their commitment to taking English classes when they first enrolled. They were students who were “trying out” ESL, and they discovered that they were not ready to devote the time and energy required to persist and advance on their first try. On their second try, they were both more willing and able to persist in their studies and advance levels.

Alternatively, stop-outs may have been students who tried very hard to attend classes and advance when they first enrolled, and found it difficult to make progress. They may have become discouraged and taken a “leave” before trying ESL again.

Moreover, stop-outs may have been students who enrolled for two terms, advanced a level, left the program, and lacked the commitment or ability to persist very long when they re-enrolled.

This study did not generate data that would distinguish between these different scenarios because it did not determine when stop-outs took most of their hours, terms, and levels. Was it during their first, second, or (in the case of the small number of students who stopped out several times) subsequent enrollments? As a result, based on the findings of this study, it is possible that some students could have stopped out for any or all of these reasons.

But none of these scenarios suggest that stopping out was, by itself, a reason why students did not advance more levels. Rather, they point to the goals and motivations of students, as well as possibly to challenges posed by CCSF’s ESL program design and curriculum, as the reasons why students both stopped out and did not advance more levels.

The same scenarios suggest that personal problems may have been a major reason why students stopped out and did not advance further. One of the most striking findings of this chapter is that students who stopped out were absent from the program for such long periods of time. Student goals, motivation, and program design may explain why students stopped out, but why did it take them so long to return to the College’s ESL program? These long absences suggest that, for some students at least, events in their personal lives may have caused them to interrupt their studies. For example, students might have stopped out because of the arrival of a new child in the family, increased demands in their work life (such as the need to take a second job), or because they left the San Francisco area for a year or more.

ESL programs may be able to increase the persistence and learning gains of students who stop-out during either their first or subsequent enrollments due to limited commitment or difficulties with their studies. The means for doing so are probably the types of student services and curricular adjustments suggested in Chapter 5. But programs will have to make a special effort to help students who stopped out due to major challenges posed by their life circumstances. They should undoubtedly enhance their efforts to encourage and assist students who face these types of difficulties. But, in many situations, there may be very little that educational institutions can do in this regard. The most they may be able to do is to recognize that stop-outs who face difficulties with life circumstances may be strongly motivated students – students who are willing to try ESL classes after prolonged absences – and to help these students persist and achieve more on their second try.

### **3. Stop-Outs and Transitions**

***Difference between stop-outs and continuously-enrolled students.*** Among the most significant findings of this chapter was that students who stopped out were less likely than students who were continuously enrolled to make the transition to credit studies. This finding should not be overstated. That is, it was not the case that stop-outs did not make transitions at all, or that their transition rates were trivial. In fact, their transition rates were the same as the rates for the cohort as a whole. The significant finding was that those rates were considerably lower than the rates of continuously-enrolled students. Other findings of this study suggest three possible reasons for this.

First, the study showed that students who stopped out began their ESL studies at lower levels of English proficiency than did continuously-enrolled students<sup>79</sup>. Eighty percent of stop-outs were first enrolled at the Literacy Level or the Beginning Low levels (Levels 1-2), compared to 70% of students who were continuously enrolled. Therefore, one reason that students who stopped out were less likely to make transitions to credit may have been that they started at lower levels than did continuously-enrolled students. That means they had to advance farther up the ESL ladder before they could reach the levels of proficiency (the Intermediate Levels 5-8) from which most students make transitions.

As a result, even though both stop-outs and continuously-enrolled students advanced about one level on average, students who stopped out were less likely to make transitions. This is because, after advancing that one level, they were less likely to have attained the level of proficiency required to make transitions than continuously-enrolled students.

Second, continuously-enrolled students may have been more likely to have the personal goal of making the transition to credit studies. In fact, one of the reasons that at least some students enrolled continuously may have been that they wanted to advance as many levels as possible as quickly as possible so that they could gain the level of English proficiency required for credit classes. In contrast, stop-outs may have been more likely to be students whose goal was primarily to improve their English to meet the challenges of everyday life in a nation where English is the dominant language.

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<sup>79</sup> See Table 8.4 above.



Moreover, because continuously-enrolled students began at higher ESL levels than stop-outs did, the goal of making transitions to credit may have seemed more realistic to them. For these non-credit students, continuous enrollment may have been a “sprint to credit,” and it should not be surprising that more of them attained this goal than did non-credit students who may not have had aspired to credit studies.

Third, another possible reason why stop-outs may have been less likely to make transitions is that they were absent from the program for so many years between enrollments. If this pattern of attendance continued, it may be that some of these students returned, continued to advance, and eventually transitioned to credit after the end of seven year time period during which they were studied. This is most likely to have been the case for students who stopped out more than once. As noted, students who stopped out twice were absent from the program for about half of the seven years studied, and those who stopped out more than twice were absent for even longer.

This study could not determine whether, taken together, these reasons explain all of the difference in transition rates between stop-outs and students who were continuously enrolled. But they suggest that the levels at which stop-outs were initially enrolled and how long they interrupted their studies probably had as much or more of an effect on whether they made the transition to credit as did the fact that they stopped out.

***Difference between continuously-enrolled students and the cohort as a whole.*** These same reasons can explain the other major finding about transitions in this chapter: that a greater percentage of continuously-enrolled students than of students in the cohort as a whole made the transition to credit classes.

The cohort as a whole contained students who enrolled for differing lengths of time – including many who were enrolled for only one term. Both the continuously-enrolled students and the stop-outs examined in this study were enrolled for at least two terms. Chapter 6 showed that students enrolled for multiple terms were more likely to make the transition to credit. For the reasons mentioned above, stop-outs did not exceed the transition rate of the cohort as a whole, but because they attended more terms than most members of the cohort, continuously-enrolled students exceeded that rate.

Chapter 6 also showed that the last level in which students were enrolled affected the chances that they would make transitions to credit. The higher their last level of enrollment, the more likely students were to make transitions. Because continuously-enrolled students not only enrolled for more terms but also began at higher levels, they were among the students in the cohort most likely to make transitions. As a result, it should not be surprising that their transition rates were higher than the rates of the cohort as a whole.

## CHAPTER 9

### EFFECT OF MATRICULATION SERVICES

The previous chapters of this report have examined various aspects of student performance in CCSF's ESL program – enrollment, persistence, level advancement, transitions, achievement in credit programs, and stopping out. Chapters 9 and 10 examine some important components of CCSF's program that are designed to improve student performance and their effects. The focus of Chapter 9 is on the College's matriculation services for non-credit students.

#### A. BACKGROUND

In California, community colleges are required to provide matriculation services to entering students: placement testing, orientation, and counseling. While these services are provided to most credit students, they are less frequently provided to non-credit students. The five steps in the matriculation process for non-credit ESL students at CCSF are: application, ESL placement testing, orientation, counseling and registration. This chapter focuses on the effects of three of these services: placement testing, orientation, and counseling.

The non-credit ESL placement test is administered at most major campuses on a weekly basis throughout most of the year. The placement test has two components, both developed by the College's ESL Department: a 30-minute listening test and a 40-minute reading and writing test. Students are given the listening test first. Based on the results of that test, students are given a lower or higher level reading and writing test. The ESL level at which students are placed is determined by the combined results of the two tests.

The non-credit placement test is not designed to assess Literacy and Level 1 language abilities. The ESL Department believes that the testing process would be a frustrating experience for most Literacy and Level 1 students. As a result, the Department has decided that these students should be enrolled in classes as soon as possible. Admissions and Enrollment staff make a quick initial assessment of the English abilities of students who wish to enroll in non-credit ESL. If they determine that students have limited literacy skills (sometimes using a quick literacy assessment developed by the Department) or practically no English skills, the students are immediately placed in a Literacy or Level 1 class and usually are not directed to a counselor during the initial matriculation process. At one campus, however, Literacy and Level 1 students meet with counselors.

If students meet with a counselor, the counselor has the right to adjust their placement levels up or down using multiple measures. Among the measures counselors use are the oral skills, educational backgrounds, educational goals, and personal issues of students – in addition to the results of placement tests. Counselors also advise students on which ESL programs may be best for them – for example, general ESL or vocational ESL.

Interviews with counselors may last a few minutes (especially when a large number of students are to be seen) or up to 20 minutes, if personal issues or other questions are raised.

The Assessment Resource Instructor for the ESL Department has developed a non-credit ESL Placement Test Procedure Manual<sup>80</sup> that outlines the recommended sequence of matriculation services. The recommended procedure is to offer an orientation and counseling session immediately after the placement test is administered. This makes matriculation a “one stop” service. However, when this is not possible (because of limits on the number of counselors available, or for other reasons), the recommended “express” procedure is to send students who test at Level 3 or lower directly to Admissions and Enrollment, where they are registered in classes. Students who are registered in this way are given appointments to see counselors later.

Bilingual counselors are available to offer services in Chinese to lower level students at Chinatown/North Beach Campus, where most students are Chinese speakers, and in Spanish at the Mission Campus, where most students are Spanish speakers. Orientation books in English, Chinese, and Spanish have been developed and are distributed at the orientation sessions.

Although the placement test is usually administered on a weekly basis, some students apply to enroll in non-credit ESL on days, or at times of the day, when they cannot immediately take the test. As a result, it has been an informal practice for some administrators and ESL coordinators to place students into classes based on a quick assessment. This usually occurs when a large numbers of students are interested in classes and many of them must wait for a considerable amount of time before the placement test is next administered. This practice is based on the belief that it is best to enroll students in a class as soon as possible, because they may not return for a later testing date. Behind the practice is also a fear that classes with low enrollment could be canceled.

This chapter will describe the effect on non-credit student performance of placement testing, orientation, and counselor interviews before or during the first term in which students are enrolled.

## **B. MAJOR FINDINGS**

- The percent of non-credit students who received matriculation services increased greatly between 1998-2006.
- A majority of students received either no services or three services: placement testing, orientation, and counseling.

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<sup>80</sup> [http://www.ccsf.edu/Resources/Teacher\\_Resource\\_Center/handbook.pdf](http://www.ccsf.edu/Resources/Teacher_Resource_Center/handbook.pdf)

- Intermediate Level 5-8 students were more likely to receive services than were Literacy and Beginning Level 1-4 students.
- Students who received matriculation services attended somewhat more hours of non-credit ESL instruction and persisted for somewhat more terms than students who did not receive services, but the relationship between matriculation services and both hours of instruction and persistence was not strong.
- Receiving matriculation services is strongly related to transition to credit studies. Most categories of students who received all three services were about 50% more likely to make transitions than students who did not, regardless of the numbers of hours they attended.
- Overall, the matriculation services examined in this chapter are fairly modest and are probably the minimum level of guidance and counseling any ESL program should provide. *The fact that this modest level of service has a positive relationship to student performance (and particularly to transitions) suggests that investing in enhanced student services would be even more beneficial.*
- In addition, the findings of this chapter suggest that ESL programs should provide the full range of matriculation services to all of their students – including those who begin at the lowest levels of proficiency. In particular, programs should consider finding ways to formally assess the English language and literacy skills of students who begin at the Literacy and Beginning Low levels, as well as to provide them with high quality orientation and counseling services.

## C. ANALYSIS

### 1. Availability of Matriculation Services

Table 9.1 describes how many students received matriculation services at CCSF each year from 1998-2006. The percent of students receiving matriculation services has steadily increased over this nine-year period. Seventy percent (19,498 of 27,876) of students received no matriculation services in 1998 compared to only 21% (5,372 of 25,361) in 2006. The number and percent of students who received one or two services also increased over the nine-year period. The percent of students who received all three services – placement testing, orientation, and counseling – rose from 21% in 1998 (5,974 of 27,876) to 48% in 2001 and 2002, but dropped to 41% (10,285 of 25,361) in 2006.

This increase in the percent of students who received matriculation services is probably due to a reorganization of the way those services are provided at CCSF. Formerly, a limited counseling staff handled all matriculation services for non-credit students. When non-credit matriculation funds from the state became available in 1998, separate offices for admissions and enrollment were established at the non-credit campuses. This provided more staff for the matriculation process as a whole, and it gave counselors more time to provide orientations and individual interviews with students. It took a few years

for the admissions and enrollment offices to become fully staffed and for new procedures to be established, but the results of this study indicate that some of the anticipated benefits of the reorganization have been realized.

**Table 9.1 Availability of Matriculation Services by Year**

Academic Year	Matriculation Services								Total Number
	Percent				Number				
	0	1	2	3	0	1	2	3	
1998	70%	5%	3%	21%	19498	1460	944	5974	27876
1999	51%	8%	7%	33%	14630	2362	1937	9529	28458
2000	40%	12%	8%	41%	11614	3389	2348	11886	29237
2001	34%	12%	10%	44%	10499	3631	3117	13792	31039
2002	32%	9%	10%	48%	9743	2665	3148	14574	30130
2003	30%	10%	12%	48%	8501	2867	3248	13424	28040
2004	26%	15%	13%	46%	7027	4140	3448	12255	26870
2005	24%	18%	14%	44%	6251	4823	3634	11498	26206
2006	21%	23%	15%	41%	5372	5840	3864	10285	25361
Grand Total	37%	12%	10%	41%	93135	31177	25688	103217	253217

## **2. Receipt of Matriculation Services by First Non-Credit ESL Level**

Table 9.2 describes matriculation services by the first level of enrollment for students in the cohort studied – students who first enrolled in non-credit ESL in 1998, 1999, or 2000. The Table shows that students were more likely to receive either no services or all three services rather than one or two. This seems to be an indication that the recommended matriculation process – offering all three services at the same time – was the most commonly used procedure.

The percent of students who received no matriculation services at all was somewhat higher for Literacy or Beginning Level students than for Intermediate Level students. The percent of Literacy and Beginning Level students who received no services ranged from 62% (987) for Level 4 students to 40% (2,055) for Literacy Level students. The percent of Intermediate level students who received no services ranged from 37% (114) for Level 8 students to 52% (525) for Level 6 students.

In part, the finding that Literacy and Beginning Level students were less likely to receive services is probably due to the ESL Department’s policy to exempt Literacy and Level 1 students from placement testing. However, apparently some of these students did receive at least some matriculation services, probably some form of orientation or counseling. But they were less likely than Intermediate Level students to receive even these services.

This is probably due to the fact that orientation and counseling interviews are sometimes postponed for students who are placed at Level 3 or below if there are not enough counselors available. Students who were directed to return at a later date may have been less likely to keep their appointments with a counselor.

Table 9.2 also shows that 36% of students (13,638) received three matriculation services, 15% received one or two services and 44% (18,729) received no services. The percent of students who received three services was higher for those whose first level was in the Intermediate range (Levels 5-8). The percent of Intermediate students who received all three services ranged from 43% (588) of Level 5 students to 53% (165) of Level 8 students. In contrast, the percent of Literacy and Beginning Level (Levels 1-4) students who received all three services ranged from 29% (1,528) of Literacy Level students to 33% (495) of Level 4 students.

Information is unavailable about which matriculation services students received if they received only one or two services. If students received only one service during the period covered by this study it was probably the placement test, because counseling and orientation services were available to fewer students than was the test during that period. But the fact that 29% of Literacy Level students and 37% of Level 1 students received all three services indicates that the Department’s policy of exempting them from testing of some type was not universally followed. It may suggest that at least some of these students were reported as “tested,” although they did not take the standard non-credit placement test.

**Table 9.2 Receipt of Matriculation Services by First ESL Non-Credit Level**

First Level ESLN/ESLF	Matriculation Services								Total Number
	Percent				Number				
	0	1	2	3	0	1	2	3	
0	40%	4%	27%	29%	2055	200	1397	1528	5180
1	46%	14%	4%	37%	7629	2311	624	6147	16711
2	58%	7%	2%	33%	2214	260	91	1285	3850
3	54%	6%	2%	38%	1948	217	72	1394	3631
4	62%	4%	2%	33%	937	61	24	495	1517
5	49%	6%	2%	43%	674	78	23	588	1363
6	52%	5%	2%	41%	525	55	16	413	1009
7	37%	6%	2%	55%	391	68	22	579	1060
8	37%	5%	5%	53%	114	15	16	165	310
9	20%	10%	0%	70%	6	3		21	30
No Level	65%	4%	1%	30%	2236	144	31	1023	3434
Grand Total	49%	9%	6%	36%	18729	3412	2316	13638	38095

### 3. Relationship Between Matriculation Services and Attendance/Persistence

Table 9.3 presents the enrollment hours and terms taken by students who received either zero or three matriculation services by their first non-credit ESL level. Because the majority of students either received zero or three services, receipt of one or two services is not shown.

Both overall and at any given level, those students who received three services enrolled for more hours and persisted for more terms than students who received no services. However, the differences are not very great and in a few cases the relationships are reversed (i.e. students who received services attended or persisted for fewer hours). The differences also vary by whether mean or median numbers are examined. However, in general there is a regular pattern: students who receive three services attended for more hours and enrolled for more terms than students who did not.

In short, there was a positive relationship between receiving matriculation services and both hours of attendance and terms taken. This relationship was statistically significant, but it was not very strong.

**Table 9.3 The Effect of Matriculation Services on Enrollment Hours and Terms by First Non-Credit ESL Level**

First ESLN/ESLF Level	No Services					Three Services				
	Student Number	Mean Hours	Median Hours	Mean Terms	Median Terms	Student Number	Mean Hours	Median Hours	Mean Terms	Median Terms
0	2055	441.10	204	4.76	3	1528	464.49	252.75	4.92	4
1	7629	261.76	92.5	3.27	2	6147	293.08	134.9	3.76	3
2	2214	253.47	80	3.15	2	1285	321.27	149	3.68	3
3	1948	229.83	87	2.83	2	1394	304.24	156	3.21	2
4	937	178.86	69.5	2.50	1	495	209.28	90	2.70	2
5	674	183.39	71	2.53	2	588	218.56	98.9	2.45	2
6	525	149.35	58	2.18	1	413	202.95	110.5	2.39	2
7	391	156.41	64	2.17	2	579	176.09	92	2.08	1
8	114	107.44	44	1.93	1	165	140.51	82	2.01	1
9	6	259.67	136.25	4.50	3	21	383.40	240	4.38	3
Total	16493	264.16	93	3.25	2	12615	301.02	139	3.58	2

-Missing are 3,434 members of the non-credit cohort with no first level.

### 4. Relationship Between Receiving Matriculation Services and Transition to Credit – Controlling for Hours and Terms Taken

Table 9.4 presents the effects of receipt of matriculation services on transition to credit studies by number of hours taken in non-credit ESL. Those students who received three

services transitioned to credit at higher rates than did those who received no services regardless of how many hours of non-credit ESL they attended.

For example, in the case of students who attended 8-49 (represented as “0”) hours, 6% (230 of 3,833) of those who received three services transitioned to credit compared to only 3% (220) of those who received no services. In the case of students who attended for 250-349 hours (represented as “300”), 15% (165) of those who received three services transitioned to credit compared to only 10% (115) of those who received no services. Overall, most students who received matriculation services were about 50% more likely to make transitions than were students who attended comparable numbers of hours and did not receive services. In short, *the relationship between receiving matriculation services and transition to credit is fairly strong*. It is much stronger than the relationship between receiving these services and hours of attendance or terms taken, and it is not significantly affected by either of these two variables.

**Table 9.4 Non-Credit ESL Transition to Credit by Matriculation Services and ESL Non-Credit Hours Taken**

ESL Non-Credit Hours	Percent Transitioning to Credit		Total Number	
	No Services	Three Services	No Services	Three Services
0	3%	6%	7324	3833
100	6%	8%	4615	3582
200	8%	12%	1915	1756
300	10%	15%	1135	1098
400	13%	17%	754	703
500	15%	18%	561	520
600	11%	18%	425	419
700	9%	20%	348	322
800	14%	23%	306	254
900	12%	20%	222	196
1000	14%	17%	177	179
1100	12%	22%	151	143
1200	14%	26%	115	119
1300	8%	22%	112	91
1400	12%	24%	90	71
1500	12%	21%	78	68
1600	11%	19%	401	284
Grand Total	7%	11%	18729	13638

- The numbers of hours in this Table represent hour ranges. Students enrolled for fewer than 8 hours were excluded from the analysis. In the table “0” represents 8-49 hours. All other numbers represent 100-hour ranges. Thus, “100” represents 50-149 hours, and so forth.



## **5. Effect of Matriculation Services on Transition to Credit – Controlling for First Non-Credit Level**

Table 9.5 shows the effect of receiving matriculation services on transition to credit studies by the number of non-credit ESL hours students attended and the first non-credit ESL level in which they enrolled. Those whose first level was higher and who received matriculation services transitioned to credit at higher rates than did those who did not receive matriculation services, regardless of how many hours of non-credit ESL they attended.

For example, in the case of students who began at Level 5, 37% of students who attended for 300 hours and received three matriculation services transitioned to credit, compared to 32% of those who received no matriculation services. In the case of students who began at Level 3, 22% students who attended for 300 hours and received three matriculation services transitioned to credit, compared to 12% of those who received who received no matriculation services.

Although there are some irregularities in this pattern, and the size of the difference varied between the transition rates of students who received matriculation services and those who did not in each hour/level combination, the overall pattern is strong. For the most part, students who began at all levels and received services were more likely to make transitions to credit than were students who received no services.

Not surprisingly, Table 9.5 reflects the finding of Chapter 6 that students who began at higher levels and attended more hours were more likely to make transitions than were other students. This was the case, whether or not students received matriculation services.

As a result, there is no difference in transition rates between students who received three services and those who did not for most Level 1 students, except for those who attended large numbers of hours. This is because, except for those who attended for large numbers of hours, Level 1 students were not likely to make transitions under any circumstances. What Table 9.5 shows is that receiving matriculation services was associated with a greater probability that those Level 1 students who were most likely to make transitions would do so. And it shows that matriculation services were associated with a greater probability that other students who were likely to make transitions – those who began at high levels and attended large numbers of hours – would do so.

In short, Table 9.5 indicates that matriculation services were only one of many factors that affected transition rates. But they appear to have had a multiplier effect on the other factors that led students to make transitions.

**Table 9.5 Transition to Credit by Hours of Non-Credit ESL, Matriculation Services and First Non-Credit Level**

ESL Non-Credit Hours	Level 1		Level 3		Level 5	
	No Services	Three Services	No Services	Three Services	No Services	Three Services
0	1%	1%	4%	8%	9%	20%
100	2%	2%	7%	10%	13%	18%
200	4%	3%	12%	17%	16%	31%
300	4%	6%	12%	22%	32%	37%
400	8%	7%	19%	33%	42%	53%
500	10%	9%	35%	43%	40%	33%
600	7%	8%	17%	38%	50%	50%
700	7%	16%	20%	37%	40%	56%
800	14%	21%	16%	38%	42%	50%
900	11%	18%	21%	35%	40%	57%
1100	11%	17%	23%	39%	50%	0%
1200	9%	16%	25%	47%	100%	100%
1300	19%	23%	0%	47%	25%	
1400	7%	27%	18%	25%	0%	100%
1500	14%	26%	29%	36%	0%	50%
1600	16%	24%	0%	0%	0%	0%
1700	10%	23%	18%	22%	14%	17%
Total	4%	5%	10%	19%	16%	27%

**Number**

ESL Non-Credit Hours	Level 1		Level 3		Level 5	
	No Services	Three Services	No Services	Three Services	No Services	Three Services
0	2754	1675	708	305	262	177
100	1844	1563	508	376	208	177
200	834	777	223	203	77	81
300	526	489	136	139	38	35
400	313	353	85	73	19	34
500	245	262	54	63	20	21
600	218	223	46	47	6	18
700	165	152	35	38	5	18
800	148	119	31	34	12	4
900	92	88	19	23	5	7
1000	70	90	22	18	2	1
1100	58	73	20	15	2	4
1200	53	62	12	15	4	
1300	55	37	11	4	4	1
1400	37	31	7	11	2	2
1500	43	38	3	3	1	2
1600	174	115	28	27	7	6
Grand Total	7629	6147	1948	1394	674	588

- The numbers of hours in this table represent hour ranges. Students enrolled for fewer than eight hours were excluded from the analysis. In the table “0” represents 8-49 hours. All other numbers represent 100-hour ranges. Thus, “100” represents 50-149 hours, and so forth.

## D. DISCUSSION

The important finding in this chapter is that the three non-credit matriculation services examined had modest relationships to persistence and hours of study, and a fairly strong relationship to transitions to credit studies. This study cannot explain why these services had a stronger relationship with transitions than with other factors that (in previous chapters) showed increase transitions. That finding merits further research. However, *the fact that matriculation services had a fairly strong relationship to any measure of student performance testifies to the value of those services and the importance of providing them.*

One reason this study cannot explain why matriculation services had a stronger relationship with transitions is that it did not investigate the reasons that they had a positive relationship with *any* measures of student performance. However, findings of the study, together with the authors' professional experiences, provide the basis for some informed speculation about why each service may have been related to at least some aspects of student performance. They also provide a basis for some observations about the implications of the findings in this chapter for ESL policy and practice.

**Placement.** The finding that students who receive all three matriculation services persist for more terms suggests that it is important for all students to take a valid and reliable placement test. As noted, taking the non-credit ESL placement test was the matriculation service students were most likely to receive. As a result, placing students on the basis of the test was most likely to account for the greater persistence of students who received matriculation services.

This makes sense, because if students take a valid and reliable placement test, they are more likely to be placed in a level where they can succeed. An inaccurate placement may cause students to become frustrated and stop attending classes. ESL instructors have found that non-credit ESL students are often reluctant to ask questions, make requests, or express dissatisfaction when they are having problems. This is particularly true of students who are new to the program, are unclear on how the American educational system works, and have limited English skills. Many instructors say that students “vote with their feet” – i.e., they leave when they become frustrated because of incorrect placement or for other reasons, rather than try other ways to deal with their concerns. One way to reduce student frustration and to increase persistence is to make sure that as many non-credit ESL students as possible take a valid placement test, and that the results of the test are used to direct students to classes that best meet their needs.

**Orientation.** Orientation to ESL programs and to the institutions that provide them, however brief, may increase persistence by providing students with a better understanding of what to expect and making them feel more comfortable as they begin their studies. It can be intimidating to take ESL classes in an educational system that is new to the students' experience or for the students to suddenly find themselves in a class that is large and ongoing. Effective orientation services should help overcome these problems. And they should help students understand the opportunities and options

available to them. This may help to expand their goals and increase the chances that they will pursue pathways through ESL that will meet their needs and optimize the benefits they receive.

Colleges and other institutions that provide ESL services have tried different ways to extend orientation beyond the short sessions students usually attend when they first enroll. As mentioned in Chapter 4 of this report, CCSF has developed orientation booklets that instructors can use to help students better understand the ESL program and their campus. Other adult education programs have experimented with offering special orientation classes that students attend (for a day or two to a week) before they are placed into a regular class. This provides a greater opportunity to prepare them for their future studies, as well as to further assess their language ability and make adjustments to their placement if necessary.

***Counseling.*** It may be that the individual attention students receive by having a brief interview with a counselor at the beginning of their college career is a tipping point. The chance to ask questions on a one-to-one basis is much less intimidating than it is in a large orientation session. This brief interview may also give students an introduction to the counseling office and a contact they can use in the future. The finding that a package of matriculation services that includes brief counseling sessions is associated with improved student performance may suggest that these brief sessions should be the foundation for enhanced counseling services after the matriculation period.

***Availability.*** This study found that Literacy and Beginning Level students were less likely to receive matriculation services than were Intermediate and Advanced Level students at CCSF. This may be one reason for the low persistence rates of students at lower levels discussed in Chapter 4. Because the vast majority of the College's non-credit ESL students place in the Literacy and Beginning Levels, CCSF and other programs with similar student populations would do well to consider the possible benefits of providing the full range of matriculation services to all of their students.

***Enhancing services.*** This chapter did not analyze the effects of other student services that CCSF and other ESL programs offer, or might offer. Nevertheless, the matriculation services examined in this chapter are fairly modest in scope. In fact, they might be considered the minimum level of student services that any well-managed ESL program should offer. If these fairly modest services have a positive effect on student performance, it seems likely that enhanced student services would have an even greater effect.

As a result, ESL programs should examine how they can enhance and expand their efforts in assessment, orientation, and counseling. In part, they should look to the approaches other programs have adopted to accomplish this. For example, CCSF counselors provide "Steps to Credit Workshops" and regularly schedule other workshops of interest to students on topics such as where to find community resources. Limited services for disabled students are provided at the non-credit campuses.

But ESL programs should also be innovators. In considering how they should enhance student services, they should examine the barriers to success in ESL that students face and seek to provide services that will help to overcome those barriers. Chapters 5 and 6 of this report adopt this perspective. They discuss a wide range of enhanced student services that programs may wish to consider.

Of course, matriculation and other student services come at a price, and non-credit ESL programs frequently do not have the funds to provide students with the level of support they need. Providing sufficient counselors, and even finding the space to offer testing and orientations, are often challenges. Bilingual counselors and support staff are enormously helpful in assessing, orienting, and counseling students with very low levels of English ability, but funds to hire them often are not available.

*The findings in this report should encourage colleges, other ESL providers, and policymakers to increase their investments in student services for non-credit ESL students.* Too often discussions of the financial needs of adult education focus primarily (or exclusively) on the need for more investment in instructional services. But in examining the factors that make for success in ESL, this report has repeatedly emphasized that improved instructional services by themselves will have limited benefits unless students also receive enhanced supportive services that help them overcome the barriers to taking advantage of instruction. This chapter showed that fairly modest matriculation services have a multiplier effect on the performance rates of students who are well positioned to succeed in non-credit ESL. Enhanced students services may have an even stronger multiplier effect, and they may also increase the number of students well positioned to succeed. If so, they will repay any investment by improved student outcomes.

## CHAPTER 10

### PROGRAM ENHANCEMENTS

#### A. BACKGROUND

##### 1. Chapter Focus

Chapter 1 of this report explained that CCSF’s non-credit ESL program has several components. Members of the cohort examined in previous chapters were all enrolled in the largest of these components: the College’s General ESL classes (ESLN). But, as noted in the definition of the cohort (Chapter 3), about one-third was also enrolled in another component: ESL Focus courses (ESLF). And some were also enrolled in various non-credit courses outside the ESL field during the time they took ESLN classes.

The College’s ESL Department developed ESLF and other special ESL course options to help non-credit students increase their learning gains, and it has allowed ESL students to enroll in Non-Credit courses outside ESL so that they can use their English language abilities to further their personal and career goals while they are attending ESLN classes. Because ESLN is the primary means by which the College helps students improve their English proficiency, these different options can be seen as enhancements of its mainstream non-credit ESL program. As a result, in this chapter they will be referred to collectively as “Program Enhancements.”

Previous chapters of this report did not distinguish between students who took advantage of these enhancements and those who enrolled only in ESLN. As a result, those chapters combined students who had somewhat different learning experiences. This approach was adopted to reduce the analysis of non-credit ESL to manageable proportions and to avoid the innumerable digressions in each chapter that would have been required to explain the effects of different enhancements.

##### 2. Enhancements Discussed

This chapter examines the effects of three of the Program Enhancements available to CCSF’s ESLN students. It shows what difference they made in the persistence, learning gains, and transitions to credit programs of students who selected them. The three Enhancements examined are:

- ESL Focus courses (ESLF)
- Two-level “Accelerated” ESLN courses
- Enrollment of ESLN students in non-credit courses outside ESL

CCSF also offers other Program Enhancements. These three options were selected because previous analysis showed that they were fairly effective, and because they could

most easily be studied.<sup>81</sup> To understand their effects, however, it is necessary to understand the nature of each enhancement. Although these are described in various levels of detail in previous chapters, a synopsis of each enhancement follows.

***ESLF.*** These courses were described in the Chapter 1 and 3. Briefly, ESLF courses allow students to focus on improving their abilities in only one of the four core ESL skill areas (speaking, listening, reading, and writing). Most ESLF courses are two-level. That is, they enroll students whose ability in a single skill places them in courses at either of two instructional levels and attempt to improve abilities in that skill to the meet the course requirements of the higher of the two levels. As a result, they have titles such as “Beginning Low 1-2 Speaking” or “Beginning High 3-4 Listening.” ESLF courses meet five hours per week for the length of each term, but are not offered during the summer term.

Courses in each of the four skills are available to students at every level of non-credit Beginning and Intermediate courses. The ESLF courses most commonly offered are speaking and listening courses at the Beginning levels. Although a small number of non-credit students enroll only in ESLF courses, almost all ESLF students are concurrently enrolled in ESLN. Courses in ESLF offer students the opportunity to bring all of their skills up to the level of proficiency required to complete the level of ESLN in which they are enrolled (and possibly higher), and many non-credit students take advantage of this opportunity. One-third of the students in the cohort enrolled in ESLF at some time.

***Accelerated courses.*** These special courses combine two levels of ESLN into one course. Like regular ESLN courses, they meet for 10 hours per week for a full term. As a result, Accelerated courses allow ESLN students to complete two levels of instruction in the same amount of time that regular courses would allow them to complete only one level. A few sections of these courses are offered each term (except the summer term) at the Downtown and Ocean Campuses. These are Beginning Low 1-2 Intensive, Beginning High 3-4 Intensive, Intermediate Low 5-6 Intensive, and Intermediate High 7-8 Intensive.

Accelerated courses were developed to serve students identified as having potential to advance quickly and/or were interested in accelerating their learning so that they could make the transition to credit programs. At the Downtown campus, students may be referred to these classes by counselors and/or instructors. In addition, any student who takes the credit ESL placement test and scores below the lowest level of credit ESL is referred to sections of Accelerated courses at the Ocean Campus, where most credit courses are offered.

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<sup>81</sup> Another Program Enhancement of special interest is CCSF’s VESL Immersion Program (VIP). This is a high-intensity Non-credit program offered to welfare recipients in conjunction with the San Francisco Department of Human Services. Although the program is highly effective, it is not discussed in this chapter, because participants in VIP were not members of the cohort studied by this report. Also a full analysis of VIP has been published elsewhere. See: Forrest P. Chisman and JoAnn Crandall, *Passing the Torch: Strategies for Innovation in Community College ESL*. (New York: Council for the Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2007) pp. 148-153. Available at: [www.ccalusa.org](http://www.ccalusa.org).

***Taking courses outside ESL.*** As discussed in Chapter 1, CCSF places no restrictions on whether non-credit ESL students can take non-credit courses offered by the College in fields other than ESL. A large percentage of the students in the cohort (27%) took advantage of this option. The most popular courses for non-credit ESL students were courses offered by the Business Department. The second most popular were courses offered through the Transitional Studies Department, which is the department that offers ABE, GED, and High School Diploma instruction.<sup>82</sup> Although, strictly speaking, the purpose of CCSF’s policy with regard to enrolling outside ESL is not to enhance the learning gains or transitions of ESL students, this study revealed that the policy has that effect in some cases.

Students are most likely to take Other Non-Credit courses when these courses are offered at the same campus where they are studying ESL. Moreover, this study found that 81% of students in the cohort examined who took Other Non-Credit courses did so during the same period of time they were enrolled in ESLN. Only 3% took Other Non-Credit courses before they first enrolled in ESLN, and 16% took those courses after they were no longer enrolled in ESLN.

***Terminology.*** It is important to bear in mind that the analysis of Program Enhancements in this chapter is restricted to members of the non-credit cohort examined by this study. Because all members of that cohort were enrolled in CCSF’s General ESL program (ESLN), the only students discussed are those enrolled in that program who took advantage of Program Enhancements. That is, this chapter discusses only those students who took ESLF, Accelerated Courses, and Other Non-Credit courses *who were also enrolled in ESLN*. For convenience, these students will sometimes be referred to as “ESLF,” “Accelerated,” or “Other Non-Credit” students, but this is with the understanding that they should more precisely be referred to as “ESLF plus ESLN,” “Accelerated ESLN,” and “ESLN and Other Non-Credit” students.

## **B. MAJOR FINDINGS**

- A large percentage (49%) of students in the cohort took advantage of one or more of these Program Enhancement options at some time during the seven-year period during which they were studied.
- Most students who took advantage of these Enhancements selected only one Enhancement option, but 25% of ESLN students who enrolled in Enhancement courses took both ESLF and Other Non-Credit courses.
- The most popular options were ESLF (selected by 33% of students in the cohort) and enrollment in Other Non-Credit courses (selected by 27%). Only 720 students (2% of the cohort) enrolled in Accelerated Courses – perhaps due in part to the limited availability of those courses.

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<sup>82</sup> Approximately 12% of students in the Transitional Studies Department in 2004-2005 took courses to prepare for the GED exam or to meet the requirements for a high school diploma.



- Students who began their ESLN studies at higher levels were more likely to take advantage of all the Program Enhancements than were students who began at lower levels.
- On average, students who took advantage of any of the Enhancements enrolled in non-credit ESL for significantly more terms than did members of the cohort as a whole.
- On average, students who took advantage of any of the Enhancements advanced more levels than did members of the cohort as a whole regardless of the level at which they first enrolled. On average, the number of additional levels taken by ESLN students enrolled in ESLF and in Other Programs was fairly modest, but ESLN students who enrolled in Accelerated Courses took twice as many levels as members of the cohort as a whole.
- Program Enhancements were strongly related to transition to credit studies. In total, 81% of all students in the cohort who made transitions (2,609 students) took advantage of one or more Program Enhancements. These Enhancements were, therefore, part of the pathway to credit for most students in the cohort who made transitions.
- The three Program Enhancements had a cumulative effect. On average, students who selected two of the options had even higher retention rates, took more levels of ESLN, and were far more likely to transition to credit studies than were students who selected only one of the options. Students who selected all three options outperformed students who selected two options, although their number was fairly small due to the small enrollment in Accelerated courses. For example, although only 25% of students in the cohort who enrolled in enhanced courses (and 12% of the cohort as a whole) took both ESLF and Other Non-Credit courses, they accounted for 34% of all students in the cohort who made transitions to credit.
- The three Program Enhancements examined were, therefore, strongly associated with high levels of performance by ESLN students – in terms of retention, levels taken, and especially transitions to credit. This study could not determine whether the educational experiences provided by these options created this relationship, or whether students who selected them were highly motivated and would have performed at higher levels than members of the cohort as a whole even if the Program Enhancements had not been available. Clearly students who selected these options were highly motivated, because they were willing to devote the time required to take extra classes beyond ESLN.
- Given the uncertainty about causality, it is reasonable to assume that most students selected Program Enhancements because they believed these options would increase their chances of success in ESLN. And the strong association between all of the Enhancement options and high levels of student performance suggests that the students were right. As a result, CCSF appears to be providing an extremely valuable

service by offering these options and should continue to do so. Also, it appears that Accelerated courses greatly increase the rate at which students made transitions to credit ESL, and the College may wish to consider offering more of these courses and referring more students to them.

- Finally, other ESL programs should carefully examine the Program Enhancements offered by CCSF and their relationship to improved student performance. Due to the apparent success of the Enhancements in greatly improving virtually all aspects of student performance, and in particular their success in facilitating transitions, other programs should consider adopting them in some form.

### C. ENROLLMENT

Table 10.1 shows that a large percentage of students in the cohort examined by this study took advantage of one or more of the Program Enhancement options at some time during the seven-year period during which they were studied. The Table indicates that 51% of members of the cohort (19,556 students) enrolled in ESLN only – without any Program Enhancements. This means that 49% of members of the cohort (18,535 students) selected ESLN plus one or more enhancement options. Most of these students selected only one option, but some selected multiple options. For example, Table 10.6 (p. 190) indicates that 25% of ESLN students who enrolled in Program Enhancements (4,703 students, 12% of the cohort as a whole) took both ESLF and Other Non-Credit courses.

Table 10.1 also shows the number and percentage of students in the cohort who took advantage of each of the Program Enhancement options at some time over the seven years during which they were examined. The Table shows that ESLF and Other Non-Credit enrollment were the options most frequently selected, and that significant percentages of ESLN students selected each of them. In total, 32% of ESLN students (12,289) also enrolled in ESLF at some time over the seven years, and 27% of the cohort (10,210) enrolled in Other Non-Credit courses.<sup>83</sup> In contrast, only 720 students (2% of the cohort) enrolled in Accelerated courses over the seven-year time period. In the years since members of the cohort first entered the College's ESL program, enrollment in Accelerated courses has gradually increased, but it has remained fairly small. For example, only 179 students enrolled in these courses in 1998, and 234 enrolled in 1999, but 522 students enrolled in Accelerated courses in 2006.

In addition, Table 10.1 also gives some indication of the types of students who selected each option. It shows the *level of first enrollment in ESLN* of students who took ESLF, Accelerated, and Other Non-Credit courses. It is important to note that the Table does *not* show the level in which they were enrolled at the time they took these Enhancement courses.

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<sup>83</sup> The percent of members of the cohort who took ESLF in Table 10.1 differs slightly from the percent given in Chapter 3, because 883 students who enrolled in ESLF only were eliminated from the calculations in Chapter 3. In this chapter, these students are included in calculations of the total cohort, but not in calculations of the number of students who took ESLN+ESLF.

The “Total Cohort” column of Table 10.1 shows the number of students in the cohort as a whole who first enrolled at various levels. The columns for each option show the number of students first enrolled at each level who took advantage of that option and the percent of the cohort first enrolled at each level that this number represents. For example, of the 5,180 students whose first level was the Literacy Level (represented by “0”), 57% took ESLN only, 34% took ESLN and ESLF, 1% took Accelerated ESLN courses, and 20% took ESLN and Other Non-Credit courses outside of ESL. Note that these percents do not add up to 100% because of overlap between the categories. A student may have enrolled in more than one Program Enhancement.

From these columns in Table 10.1, it is apparent that significant numbers and percentages of students who initially enrolled at all levels took advantage of Program Enhancement options. However, it is also apparent that students who initially enrolled at higher levels were more likely to take advantage of all of the options than students initially enrolled at lower levels. For example, 34% of students in the cohort who began at the Literacy Level and Level 1 enrolled in ESLF at some time, but more than half (53%) of students in the cohort who began at Level 5 and a larger percent of those who began at Level 7 (55%) enrolled in ESLF. Likewise, 20% of students who began at the Literacy Level and 23% who began at Level 1 enrolled in Other Non-Credit courses, but 39% who began at Level 5, and 51% who began at Level 7 took advantage of this option.<sup>84</sup>

Enrollment in Accelerated courses shows a similar pattern, but it has some peculiar features. Only 1-2% of ESLN students who began at the Literacy Level or at Levels 1-3 took Accelerated courses at some point in time, but 9% of students who began at the highest “Beginning” level (Level 4) did so. Only 2% of students who began at Level 5 and 4% who began at Level 6 took Accelerated courses, and only one student who began at Levels 7-9 took these courses. In percentage terms, therefore, Accelerated courses were primarily used by students who began at the highest Beginning Level.

This study cannot explain the clustering of Accelerated students around Level 4. However, as noted above, some of the students enrolled in Accelerated courses attempted to enroll in credit ESL, but were referred to these courses because they could not pass the

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<sup>84</sup> It will be noted that the number (and percent) of students who took ESLF is lower at Levels 2, 4, and 6 than at 1, 3, 5, and 7. As explained in Chapter 3, this is probably due to the opportunities students had to enroll in multi-level courses. For example, those who began at Level 1 might have enrolled in a Level 1-2 ESLF course either when they first enrolled or after they advanced to Level 2. Those who began at Level 2 could only have enrolled in that course at the time of their first enrollment. Hence, students who began at odd numbers of levels had twice the chance of enrolling in a multi-level course (if they advanced a level) as did those who began at even number levels.

credit placement test. As a result, the clustering effect may to some extent be a result of the pattern of referrals.<sup>85</sup>

In short, Table 10.1 shows that substantial numbers of students who began at almost all levels selected one or more of the Program Enhancement options offered by CCSF. However, students who began at higher levels were significantly more likely to select each of the Enhancement options.

**Table 10.1 Enrollment**

First Level	Cohort	ESLN Only		ESLN and ESLF		Accelerated ESLN		ESLN and Other Non-Credit	
	Number	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
0	5180	2967	57%	1748	34%	48	1%	1024	20%
1	16711	8916	53%	5739	34%	302	2%	3795	23%
2	3850	2199	57%	1022	27%	95	2%	1053	27%
3	3631	1349	37%	1678	46%	85	2%	1208	33%
4	1517	764	50%	301	20%	132	9%	549	36%
5	1363	399	29%	718	53%	21	2%	536	39%
6	1009	469	46%	250	25%	36	4%	417	41%
7	1060	230	22%	580	55%	1	0%	545	51%
8	310	104	34%	36	12%		0%	196	63%
9	30	4	13%	9	30%		0%	25	83%
No Level	3434	2155	63%	208	6%		0%	862	25%
Grand Total	38095	19556	51%	12289	32%	720	2%	10210	27%

#### D. PERSISTENCE

Table 10.2 compares the persistence of ESLN students who enrolled in each of the Program Enhancement options with the persistence of members of the cohort as a whole. Persistence is indicated by terms taken over the seven-year period.

<sup>85</sup> If the numbers of ESLN students who took ESLF, Accelerated, and Other Non-credit courses are examined, Table 10.1 may appear to tell a different story than just discussed (the percentage of the total cohort who selected each option at each level). By far the largest number and percentage of students who selected each option first enrolled in Level 1. Forty-seven percent of those who took ESLF, 42% of those who took Accelerated courses, and 37% of those who took Other Non-Credit courses first enrolled in Level 1. This is because the largest number of CCSF's ESLN students (44%) first enrolled in Level 1. As a result, the chances that students who began at Level 1 would enroll in Program Enhancement (or any other) courses are higher than the chances that students who began at other levels would do so. Also students who began at that level had the opportunity to advance through eight more levels during the seven-year period, and they might have enrolled in Program Enhancement courses at any of these levels. Thus, students who began at Level 1 had a greater opportunity than students who began at higher levels to enroll in other courses during the period examined by this study.

As Chapter 2 indicates, members of the cohort who began at higher levels enrolled for fewer terms than did those who began at lower levels. This is a strong and systematic relationship for the cohort as a whole. The number of terms taken by members of the cohort decreases with each higher level at which they were first enrolled (with the exception of the small number of students enrolled at Level 9). This same relationship is seen in the terms taken by students who selected each of the Program Enhancement options (again, with the exception of levels at which very few students who selected each option were enrolled). For example, the mean number of terms taken by ESLN + ESLF students who began at Level 1 was 5.57, but the mean number taken by students who began at Level 6 was 3.80.

More importantly, Table 10.2 shows that the persistence of students who selected each of the options was significantly higher than the persistence of students in the cohort as a whole, regardless of the level at which they first enrolled in ESLN. These differences are summarized by the “weighted average mean” numbers in the “Total” row at the bottom of the Table. These numbers represent the average of the mean numbers of terms taken by students at the various levels weighted by the number of students enrolled at each level.<sup>86</sup> For convenience, this will be referred to as the “mean average.”

The mean average of terms taken by members of the cohort as a whole was 3.60 terms. But the mean average of terms taken by students who enrolled in ESLN + ESLF was 5.38 terms. The mean averages of terms taken by students who took Accelerated and ESLN + Other Non-Credit courses were 5.01 and 4.98 terms, respectively. As a result, students who selected any of the Program Enhancements enrolled for between 1.4 and 1.7 more terms, on average, than did members of the cohort as a whole – a difference of between 39% and 47%.

The differences in persistence for students who began at some levels were even greater. For example, the mean number of terms taken by members of the cohort as a whole who began at Level 1 was 3.64, but the mean number of terms taken by ESLF, Accelerated, and Other Non-Credit students who began at Level 1 were 5.57, 5.60, and 5.71 terms, respectively – a difference of between 1.9 and 2 terms.

Overall, the differences in terms taken between students who selected any of the program options and members of the cohort as a whole diminished as the level at which students were initially enrolled increased. This may reflect the fact that all students who began at higher levels had fewer levels to which they could advance than did students who began at lower levels. However, the differences at most levels are still substantial. The number of levels taken by students who first enrolled in the Literacy and Low Beginning levels (Levels 1-2) *and* who selected any of the Program Enhancements is especially impressive. If these students advanced a level for each term taken, they would have been able to advance from the Literacy or Low Beginning level to the Intermediate

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<sup>86</sup> More precisely, the “weighted average mean” of terms taken was calculated by multiplying the mean number of terms taken at each level by the number of students at that level, adding the totals, and dividing by the total number of students.

levels of ESL and, in some cases, beyond. This was not the case for students in the cohort as a whole.

For example, if ESLN +ESLF students who began at Level 1 advanced one level for each of the 5.57 average number of terms in which they were enrolled, they would have advanced to the Intermediate Levels 5 or 6. But if members of the cohort as a whole who began at Level 1 advanced a level for each of the 3.64 terms in which they were enrolled, they would have advanced only to the High Beginning Levels 3 or 4.

There do not appear to be any systematic differences in the numbers of ESL terms taken by ESLN students who selected ESLF and those who selected Other Non-Credit courses, when they are compared by the level at which they first enrolled. This is somewhat surprising, because it might be expected that some students who enrolled in ESLF would take more terms, due to the fact that they can enroll in only ESLF or only ESLN in different terms. On average, it appears that they did not do so. As mentioned above, most students who took ESLF and ESLN enrolled in both courses during the same term.

The pattern of terms taken by students who enrolled in Accelerated courses is somewhat erratic when they are compared by the level at which they began. It might be expected that students in Accelerated courses would take fewer terms, because they can advance more quickly toward their goals. If the two levels at which most Accelerated students began (Level 1 and Level 4) are compared, a mixed picture emerges. Accelerated students who began at Level 1 took about the same number of ESL terms as ESLF and Other Non-Credit students. But Accelerated students who began at Level 4 took significantly fewer terms (2.49 terms) on average than did ESLF students (4.90 terms) and Other Non-Credit students (3.39 terms).

These distinctions among terms taken should not obscure the major finding that can be drawn from Table 10.2. *If terms taken reflect the motivation of students to advance in ESLN, the students who selected each of the Program Enhancement options were, on average, significantly more motivated than other students in the cohort.* Not only did they take many more terms, but they also took enough terms to allow them to advance fairly far up the ladder of English language proficiency.

**Table 10.2 Terms Taken**

First Level	All		ESLN and ESLF		Accelerated ESLN		ESLN and Other Non-Credit	
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
0	5.2	4	7.95	8	9.27	9.5	7.87	8
1	3.64	2	5.57	5	5.6	5	5.71	5
2	3.45	2	5.84	5	5.76	5	4.89	4
3	3.05	2	4.03	3	4.98	4	4.06	3
4	2.61	2	4.9	4	2.49	2	3.39	2
5	2.52	2	3.13	2	4.38	3	3.24	3
6	2.29	2	3.8	3	2.11	2	2.97	2
7	2.13	2	2.6	2	6	6	2.52	2
8	2	1	3.56	2			2.18	2
9	4.37	3	6.11	4			4.56	3
Total	3.6	2	5.38	4	5.01	4	4.98	4

-Totals are the weighted (by the number of students at each level) average mean and median for each group. It is consequently not simply the average of the first level averages but each average weighted by the number of students at that level.

**E. LEVELS TAKEN**

Table 10.3 shows how students who selected each of the Program Enhancements translated their additional terms of enrollment into the numbers of levels in which they were enrolled (levels taken), and hence into the number of levels they advanced.

**1. Increase In Levels Taken**

Table 10.3, like the preceding Table, shows that students who selected any of the Program Enhancements outperformed members of the cohort as a whole, but the differences are less striking. The average mean number of levels taken by members of the cohort as a whole was 1.94 levels, about a one level advance. For ESLN students who enrolled in ESLF, the average mean number of levels taken was 2.66, and for students who enrolled in Other Non-Credit courses, it was 2.57 levels. These averages exceed the number of levels taken by members of the cohort as a whole by *less than one level*. They suggest that while ESLN students who enrolled in ESLF and Other Non-Credit courses took more levels than did members of the cohort as a whole – and some of them may have advanced multiple levels – on average *they advanced less than two levels*.

In contrast, the average mean number of levels taken by students who enrolled in Accelerated courses was 3.22 levels. This exceeded the number of levels taken by ESLN plus ESLF or Other Non-Credit students, and it exceeded the number of levels taken by members of the cohort as a whole by *more than one level*. Moreover, Accelerated

students *advanced farther than ESLF or Other Non-Credit students*. On average, they *advanced more than two levels*. This greater level advancement by Accelerated students makes sense, because Accelerated courses combine two levels of ESLN. Thus, if students completed even one of these courses they could have advanced two levels – more than members of the cohort as a whole.

The only way to determine from this Table whether Accelerated students completed an Accelerated course would be if they enrolled in more than two levels. This would show that they completed the two levels of the Accelerated course and were promoted to the next level. Apparently, on average they did so, because on average they enrolled in 3.22 levels.

Hence, although the average mean number of terms taken by Accelerated students is about the same as the number taken by ESLF and Other Non-Credit students, Accelerated students translated these terms into somewhat more levels taken and levels advanced than students who select other Program Enhancements.

## **2. A Modest Effect**

These differences in levels taken must be placed in perspective. Advancing one additional level or less over a seven-year period is a welcome but fairly modest improvement in student performance. This is especially true because students who selected each of the three Program Enhancements took five terms or more, on average, and CCSF's curriculum is designed to provide the instruction students need to advance a level in each term. But, on average, students who selected Program Enhancements did not translate their high rates of persistence into equally high rates of level advancement. They took between 2.57 and 3.22 levels (and advanced between one and two levels). On average, it took students who selected Program Enhancements more than one term to advance each level. Although this was a greater rate of level advancement than members of the cohort as a whole (who took 1.82 levels and advanced slightly less than one level, on average), the difference is not dramatic.

In addition, most of the difference in levels taken between students who selected Program Enhancements and members of the cohort as a whole occurred among students who began at the Literacy or Beginning levels. Although ESLF, Accelerated, and Other Non-Credit students who began at higher levels often took slightly more levels than members of the cohort as a whole, the differences were fairly small or non-existent.

For example, members of the cohort as a whole who began at Level 1 (the level with the greatest enrollment) took 2.11 levels, on average, whereas ESLF students took 3.00 levels, Accelerated students took 3.87 levels, and Other Non-Credit students took 3.18 – a difference of between .89 and 1.76 levels, depending on which Program Enhancement is examined. But members of the cohort who began at Level 6 took 1.08 levels on average, compared to 1.22 levels taken by ESLF students, 1.17 taken by Accelerated students, and 1.54 levels by Other Non-Credit students– a much smaller difference of



between .09 levels and .46 levels. These small differences probably exceed the limits of a table that presents statistical averages to fairly represent any difference at all.

Equally important, even though Program Enhancement students (those who selected any of the program enhancements) who began at the Literacy and Beginning levels advanced the most levels, only those who began at Level 4 advanced enough levels to move to the Intermediate Levels of ESLN. The example of Level 1 students just given illustrates this point. Students who began at Level 1 took between 3.0 and 3.87 levels on average, and hence advanced between two and three levels. But this average level of advancement would, at best, have placed them at Level 4, one level short of the lowest Intermediate level (Level 5). Comparisons of the average numbers of levels advanced by Enhancement students who first enrolled at all Beginning levels, except Level 4 lead to the same conclusion: on average, students at the Beginning levels who selected Program Enhancements did not reach the Intermediate level.

Of course, averages can be deceptive. Because the average number of levels taken by students who selected Program Enhancements was greater than the average for the cohort as a whole, it is likely that more Enhancement students than members of the cohort as a whole advanced to the Intermediate level or beyond. But, on average, those students who appeared to benefit most from Program Enhancements (Literacy and Beginning Level students) did not advance enough additional levels to reach the Intermediate Level.

**Table 10.3 Levels Taken**

First Level	Cohort		ESLN and ESLF		Accelerated		ESLN and Other Non-Credit	
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
0	2.18	2	3.03	3	4.96	5	3.15	3
1	2.11	1	3	3	3.87	4	3.18	3
2	1.99	1	2.98	3	3.74	3	2.69	2
3	1.9	1	2.45	2	3.29	4	2.51	2
4	1.4	1	2	2	1.41	1	1.7	1
5	1.27	1	1.43	1	2.29	3	1.52	1
6	1.08	1	1.22	1	1.17	1	1.24	1
7	0.87	1	0.85	1	-2	-2	0.88	1
8	0.69	1	-0.08	1			0.6	1
9	0.93	1	0.78	1			1	1
Total	1.94	1	2.66	2	3.22	3	2.57	2

-Totals are the weighted (by the number of students at each level) average mean and median for each group. It is consequently not simply the average of the first-level averages but each average weighted by the number of students at that level.

## **F. TRANSITIONS**

### **1. Summary Relationship of Program Enhancements to Transitions**

The three Program Enhancements were strongly associated with transitions to credit studies. Table 10.4 shows this relationship in a summary form. It shows that only 623 ESLN students who did not select any of the Enhancement options made the transition to credit. This means that only 3% of these students made transitions. In contrast, 2,609 students who selected one or more Program Enhancements made the transition to credit. For these students, this was a transition rate of 14%. More importantly, the Table shows that 81% of members of the cohort who made transitions selected one or more Program Enhancements. This is an exceptionally strong relationship.

In short, the overwhelming majority of members of the cohort who made transitions selected one or more Program Enhancement options. These options were, therefore, part of the pathway to credit for most non-credit students who enrolled in CCSF's credit programs.

In addition, Table 10.4 indicates the first level of enrollment of students who made transitions. For students who did not select Program Enhancements and for those who did, the rate of transition increased as the level of first enrollment increased. However, the differential between these two groups of students is striking.

For example, of those students who first enrolled at Level 1, only 1% of students (104) who did not select Program Enhancements made transitions, but 9% of students (689) who selected at least one Enhancement did so. This is a particularly striking number, because Chapter 6 showed that only 8% of the total cohort advanced to credit. Thus, taking at least one Enhancement apparently helped students who started at the lowest Beginning Level to achieve a transition rate that matched the rate of students in the cohort as a whole. Students who first enrolled at Level 2 who took at least one Enhancement had a transition rate almost twice as great as members of the cohort as a whole (15%). Those who started at the highest Beginning Level (Level 4) had a transition rate (21%) nearly three times as great as the cohort as a whole.

Another important finding that can be gleaned from Table 10.4 is the very low levels at which Enhancement students who made transitions first enrolled in ESL. The above discussion of enrollment indicated that Enhancement students were most likely to begin at higher levels rather than lower levels. But Table 10.4 shows that a large number and percent of even those who began at fairly low levels made transitions. In fact, 62% of Enhancement students who made transitions began at the Literacy or Beginning Levels (1-4). This suggests that higher beginning levels were not responsible for the greater transition rates of Enhancement students.

**Table 10.4 Transition to Credit by First Non-Credit Level**

First Level	No Enhancements			At Least One Enhancement		
	Total	Number	Percent	Total	Number	Percent
0	2967	30	1%	2213	123	6%
1	8916	104	1%	7795	689	9%
2	2199	59	3%	1651	240	15%
3	1349	80	6%	2282	428	19%
4	764	52	7%	753	160	21%
5	399	55	14%	964	243	25%
6	469	46	10%	540	151	28%
7	230	31	13%	830	251	30%
8	104	12	12%	206	67	33%
9	4		0%	26	10	38%
No Level	2155	154	7%	1279	247	19%
Grand Total	19556	623	3%	18539	2609	14%

## **2. Relationship Between Each Enhancement and Transitions**

Table 10.5 shows rates at which ESLN students who selected each of the Program Enhancements made the transition to credit studies, compared to the transition rates of members of the cohort as a whole. Each column presents the number of students initially enrolled at each level who made the transition to credit courses and the percentage of students in each category (Total Cohort, ESLF + ESLN, Accelerated, and ESLN + Other Non-Credit Courses) that number represents. As noted above, some students selected more than one Enhancement option. The numbers and percentages in Table 10.5 represent the numbers and percentages of *both* students who enrolled only in each Enhancement option *and* those who enrolled in each option as well as other options.<sup>87</sup>

The Table indicates that Accelerated students were the most likely to make transitions. Although their number was fairly small, 31% of these students made transitions. This makes sense because (as discussed above) many Accelerated students were referred to Accelerated courses because teachers and counselors believed they had the potential to advance rapidly and/or expressed the desire to enroll in credit courses.

More than half of all members of the cohort who made transitions were enrolled in either ESLF+ESLN or ESLN + Other Non-Credit courses. Students who enrolled in Other Non-Credit courses and those who took ESLF made transitions at about the same rate (17%

<sup>87</sup> The number of students who selected certain combinations of Enhancement options is discussed in the section on “Multiple Enhancements” below.

and 15% respectively). This is approximately twice the rate at which members of the cohort as a whole made transitions.

One striking aspect of these rates is that enrollment in Other Non-Credit courses is, of course, not enrollment in ESL. Yet Enhancement students who took Other Non-Credit courses made transitions at a rate that was not only higher than members of the cohort as a whole, but also slightly higher than the rate of students who selected ESLF.

Table 10.5 is consistent with Table 10.4 in showing that the transition rates for students who selected each Program Enhancement increased as the level at which they were first enrolled increased. But Table 10.5 also shows that those rates were higher than the transition rates of the cohort as a whole at every level of first enrollment. The only exceptions were the highest levels at which Enhancement students began. But so few Enhancement students began at these levels that the numbers can be discounted.

Table 10.5 is also consistent with the summary transition rates in Table 10.4 in that it shows that remarkably large numbers of Enhancement students who began at very low levels made transitions. Ninety-two percent of Accelerated students, 71% of ESLF students, and 58% of Other Non-Credit students who made transitions began at the Literacy Level or the Beginning Levels (Levels 1-4).

**Table 10.5 Transition to Credit by First Non-Credit Level and Type of Enhancement**

First Level	Cohort Total	Total Cohort Transitioning to Credit		ESLN and ESLF Transitioning to Credit		Accelerated Transitioning to Credit		ESLN and Other Non-Credit Transitioning to Credit	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
0	5180	153	3%	102	6%	14	29%	85	8%
1	16711	793	5%	581	10%	88	29%	437	12%
2	3850	299	8%	184	18%	36	38%	165	16%
3	3631	508	14%	359	21%	36	42%	304	25%
4	1517	212	14%	64	21%	30	23%	134	24%
5	1363	298	22%	195	27%	11	52%	182	34%
6	1009	197	20%	82	33%	7	19%	126	30%
7	1060	282	27%	180	31%			209	38%
8	310	79	25%	14	39%			64	33%
9	30	10	33%	3	33%			10	40%
No Level	3434	401	12%	45	22%			217	25%
Grand Total	38095	3232	8%	1809	15%	222	31%	1933	19%

## G. MULTIPLE ENHANCEMENTS

As noted above, some students selected more than one Program Enhancement. This created a number of possible combinations. The most common combination was between students who selected the two Enhancements with the largest total enrollment – ESLF and Other Non-Credit courses. As noted above, 25% of students who enrolled in Program Enhancement courses (and 12% of the cohort as a whole) selected this combination. Only a small number of students selected all three Enhancements, as evidenced by the fact that enrollment in Accelerated courses was relatively small.

This study reviewed many of these combinations and their relationship to the major student outcomes discussed above – persistence, level advancement, and transitions. In all cases, students who selected two Enhancements outperformed students who selected only one Enhancement with regard to each of these variables, and students who selected three Enhancements performed even better. That is, students who selected two enhancements had higher rates of persistence (measured by terms taken), level advancement (measured by levels taken), and transitions (measured by the percent who made transitions) than did students who selected only one option. And the small number of students who selected three options had even higher rates.

For the sake of brevity, only one example of the relationship between multiple Enhancements and student outcomes will be presented here, the effect on transition rates that taking additional Enhancements had for students who enrolled in ESLN + ESLF. This is shown in Table 10.6.

The far left set of columns in Table 10.6 show the total number of students in the cohort who did not select any Program Enhancements (who enrolled in ESLN only), the number of these students who made transitions, and the percent of the total number who made transitions. The next set of columns presents the same information for students who took *only* ESLF and ESLN. Following is the same information for students who took ESLF and ESLN *plus* Other Non-Credit Courses. The last set of columns presents this information for students who took ESLN and all three Program Enhancements (ESLF, Other Non-Credit, and Accelerated courses).<sup>88</sup>

The “Grand Total” at the bottom of the Table summarizes the results of these combinations. It shows that only 3% of the students who took ESLN without any Program Enhancements (623 students) made transitions to credit during the seven-year time period. In contrast, 8% of the students who combined ESLN with ESLF (556 students) made transitions – a smaller number, but a higher transition rate. Further, 23%

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<sup>88</sup> This table shows the differences in transition rates between ESLN only students and students who took only ESLN+ESLF. It then proceeds to show the additional difference in those rates of ESLN+ESLF students who took other Program Enhancements. A table that began by showing the difference in rates of students who took only Other Non-Credit or Accelerated courses and proceeded in the same way would show different numbers and percentages in each cell, but it would show the same cumulative result in terms of the percentage of students who took multiple options. It would also show that students who took both ESLN+ESLF and Other Non-Credit courses were far more likely to make transitions than were other students.

of students (1,104) who combined ESLN and ESLF with Other Non-Credit courses made transitions. These students were 34% of all students in the cohort who made transitions, although they were only 6% of students who enrolled in Program Enhancement courses and 3% of the cohort as a whole.

In short, the small number of students who enrolled in both ESLN+ESLF and Other Non-Credit courses accounted for a large portion of the transitions made by the cohort as a whole.

Because only 217 students represented in Table 10.6 selected all three Enhancement options, they did not comprise a very large number or percentage of either Enhancement students or members of the cohort who made the transition to credit. However, their transition rate was very high. Forty-five percent of these students made the transition to credit.

Table 10.6 also shows that there were major differences in the transition rates between students who took only ESLN and students who selected each incremental Program Enhancement *regardless of the first level* in which the students were enrolled. The only exceptions were students who first enrolled at very high levels, where the small number of students makes these calculations unreliable.

In sum, Table 10.6 shows that the likelihood that students would make transitions increased greatly depending on whether they selected Enhancement options, and it also increased greatly depending on how many options they selected. Judging from the percentages of students who made transitions, students who took ESLF in addition to ESLN were almost three times as likely as those who selected ESLN only to make the transition to credit, and those who also selected Other Non-Credit courses were almost eight times as likely to make the transition. The small numbers of students who also selected Accelerated courses were 15 times more likely than students who took ESLN only to make transitions to credit.

**Table 10.6 Transition to Credit by First Level and Multiple Enhancements**

First Level	ESLN Only			ESLN + ESLF			ESLN + ESLF+ Other Non-Credit			All Three Enhancements		
	Total	#	%	Total	#	%	Total	#	%	Total	#	%
0	2967	30	1%	1163	33	3%	552	59	11%	18	7	39%
1	8916	104	1%	3648	209	6%	1930	308	16%	88	39	44%
2	2199	59	3%	550	59	11%	414	99	24%	36	16	44%
3	1349	80	6%	898	103	11%	712	224	31%	38	19	50%
4	764	52	7%	117	16	14%	152	42	28%	20	6	30%
5	399	55	14%	366	55	15%	339	131	39%	11	8	73%
6	469	46	10%	99	22	22%	143	58	41%	6	2	33%
7	230	31	13%	244	39	16%	335	141	42%			
8	104	12	12%	10	3	30%	26	11	42%			
9	4		0%	1		0%	8	3	38%			
No Level	2155	154	7%	116	17	15%	92	28	30%			
Grand Total	19556	623	3%	7212	556	8%	4703	1104	23%	217	97	45%

## H. DISCUSSION

### 1. A Success Story

The Program Enhancements discussed in this chapter (enrollment in ESLF, Other Non-Credit courses, and Accelerated courses) are clearly a success story at CCSF in two senses.

*First*, they are a success because so many ESL students make use of them (with the exception of Accelerated courses). ESL students at CCSF are not required to enroll in any of these courses. They choose to do so, and in choosing they voluntarily take either more courses (in the case of ESLF and Other-Non Credit) or take more demanding courses (in the case of Accelerated students) than they would otherwise. As a result, students who select these options choose to pay a substantial price in terms of time and effort – a price that is not required by the College.

In these circumstances, the fact that 48% of the cohort studied chose one or more enhancements during the seven-year time period suggests that a large portion of ESLN students value these offerings and see them as a means to improve their English proficiency and/or to attaining their other personal goals. Thus, Program Enhancements are a “success story” in that they give so many students options they want, and are willing to pay for with additional time and effort.

*Second*, Program Enhancements are a success story because they are associated with success on the part of the students who use them. On average, students who select *any* of these options have significantly higher retention rates, modestly higher levels of advancement, and far greater rates of transition to credit programs than do other ESL students. The fact that 81% of the members of the cohort who made transitions to credit selected one or more Enhancement options indicates how strong the relationship is between these options and success.

Moreover, Enhancement students were more successful than other students in retention, level advancement, and transitions regardless of the level at which they first enrolled in non-credit ESL. In fact, in most cases they are more successful if they initially enrolled at lower levels. And students who enrolled in more than one program option were more likely to be successful by all measures than those who selected only one option. Students who combined ESLN+ESLF with Other Non-Credit courses constituted only 3% of the cohort, but they constituted 34% of all the members of the cohort who made transitions. This is a stunning relationship to success. And students who also enrolled in the option least often selected (Accelerated courses) were the most successful of all.

In short, whether viewed from the perspective of what students valued or from the perspective of what students achieved, the Program Enhancements examined in this chapter were a success story for CCSF because they gave students services they wanted, and because the students who wanted these services were the most successful of CCSF's ESL students. By itself, this is a compelling reason for the College to continue to offer these options and for other colleges to examine the possibility of implementing them.

Finally, from a parochial point of view, these Program Enhancements are “good business” for CCSF. Enhancement students enroll for more terms than other students – thereby generating more state FTE reimbursement funds. And Enhancement students are more likely than other students to make transitions to credit – thereby generating even more funding from both state reimbursements and tuition.

## **2. Cause and Effect**

Given the strength of the relationship between Program Enhancements and student success it is tempting to conclude that the Enhancement courses were the cause of higher rates of student success. That is, it is tempting to conclude that if students had not taken these courses they would have performed at about the same lower rate as the 52% of ESL students who did not do so.

However, as noted in other chapters, observational research of the sort conducted by this study cannot conclusively determine causality. While it seems likely that the learning experiences provided by Enhancement courses caused higher rates of success, there are other hypotheses that would explain the relationship between these courses and better student outcomes.



For example, it is possible that only the most motivated ESL students – or those who encountered the fewest personal barriers to attending courses – selected Program Enhancements. Arguably, these students would have performed better than other ESL students regardless of whether they took Enhancement options. There is undoubtedly some truth to this idea, because taking Enhancement courses clearly demonstrates substantial motivation and the ability to overcome personal barriers, simply because students who took the courses were willing and able to devote more time to their studies.

It is hard to know how large a role self-selection due to motivation played in the higher success rates of Enhancement students. Previous chapters showed that 38% of CCSF’s ESL students enrolled for only one term, 56% did not advance even one level, and half of those who did not advance even one level enrolled for 50 hours or less. It seems unlikely that any of these students enrolled in Program Enhancements. As a result, the 48% of students who enrolled in Program Enhancements performed much better than the cohort as a whole because they were primarily members of that portion of the cohort who made a substantial commitment to ESL.

But this still does not answer the question of whether Enhancement students would have performed less well if enhancement options had not been available to them. Nor does it answer another question: if the students who had very low rates of retention and level advancement had enrolled in Enhancement courses, would their retention, level advancement, and transition rates have improved?

Another alternative hypothesis, is that the higher performance of Enhancement students – particularly with regard to transitions – resulted from greater “attachment to the College,” rather than from special features of Enhancement courses. That is, it is possible that because Enhancement students attended so many more terms than other students, they may have come to think of themselves as college students and to adopt the value that the College places on success in terms of moving up the ESL ladder. Increased exposure to and participation in learning activities rather than course content and design may have had an acculturation effect. This is quite possible because other chapters have shown that students who took more terms performed better in ESL by most measures.

But this hypothesis does not explain *why* these students took so many additional terms and courses. After a certain point, increased attendance may have reinforced their motivation to succeed. But why did they begin to take Enhancement courses? This study did not examine data that would answer that question.

### **3. Disproving “The Null Hypothesis”**

The most that this study can contribute with certainty to a discussion of cause and effect in the case of Program Enhancements is to “disprove the null hypothesis.” That is, if Program Enhancements had no effect on student performance, Enhancement students would not have performed better than other students. Because they did perform better, the possibility exists that the Enhancements by themselves caused all or some of their greater

performance. Beyond this contribution, the study can only offer informed speculation about how these courses, by themselves, may have led to increased learning gains.

***ESLF.*** In the case of ESLF, the most likely explanation is that ESLF courses performed precisely the function they were designed to perform: they helped students at any level bring all of their core ESL skills up to the degree of English proficiency required to complete that level. Because most students who took ESLF did so concurrently with ESLN, this would have resulted in a greater likelihood that ESLF students would advance levels, and that they would do so more quickly than would students who took only ESLN. Moreover, their higher rates of advancement may have increased the likelihood that they would attain levels of English proficiency that allowed them to make transitions. In addition, their success in advancing levels may have had a motivational effect: it may have convinced them that they could succeed and thus resulted in greater efforts to increase their success.

***Other non-credit.*** The increased performance in ESL courses of students who took Other Non-Credit courses was an accidental finding of this study. It can be explained in a number of ways. Possibly students who took Other Non-Credit courses were in a hurry to obtain some real-world benefits from education – particularly economic benefits. Studying ESL alone may have seemed too long a road for them to take before they could improve their employment prospects. The opportunity to take Other Non-Credit courses may have allowed them to gain near-term benefits at the same time they were improving their English. And this combination may have encouraged them to persist in both ESL and Other Non-Credit courses. In short, they may have been students who found a way to “have their cake and eat it, too.”

In addition, taking Other Non-Credit courses may have led students to consider making transitions to credit courses by showing them the benefits of further education. Finally, enrollment in these courses may have increased the English language proficiency of students by allowing them to practice their English in challenging, authentic settings with native language speakers.

All of these explanations are plausible, and all of them are probably correct to some degree. Certainly, all of the explanations are consistent with widely-held beliefs about factors that increase English learning gains. ESL professionals have long believed that increasing the near-term benefits of language study, demonstrating its importance, and encouraging ESL students to practice more with native speakers increase student outcomes. Regrettably, this study could not determine whether any of these factors contributed to the increased performance of Other Non-Credit students. Nevertheless, based on their professional experience and judgment, the authors and other ESL professionals who have reviewed these findings are inclined to believe that all of these factors made a contribution. Clearly this is a subject on which further research would be of great value.

***Accelerated.*** The strongest case that Program Enhancements by themselves caused improved performance can be made for Accelerated students. Many of these students

were referred to Accelerated courses because they wanted to enroll in credit ESL and/or were identified by teachers and counselors as students who had the potential to advance rapidly (possibly in part because they had high levels of prior education). It is more than likely that students who wanted to enroll in credit studies used Accelerated courses as an efficient means to achieve their goal. It is not surprising, therefore, that these self-selected students achieved exceptionally high rates of transition.

And even if all Accelerated students did not have credit enrollment as an initial goal, their ability to advance rapidly using Accelerated courses probably made this a more realistic goal for many of them. In short, there is strong “face validity” to the notion that Accelerated programs were, by themselves, a major reason that the students who enrolled in them were so successful – especially in making transitions.

***Fast tracks.*** This tentative conclusion about Accelerated courses has two important implications for CCSF and other institutions that manage ESL programs. First, it suggests that these programs can, in fact, identify some students who will benefit from being on a “fast track” to credit studies or other major educational gains. Second, it suggests that ESL Programs should try to identify more students who could be placed on fast tracks and provide the tracks that will allow them to progress rapidly. The most surprising thing about Accelerated students is that there are so few of them. Perhaps CCSF has guided all of the students who are willing and able to pursue this option into Accelerated studies, but CCSF and other ESL providers should undoubtedly investigate whether more students can benefit from Accelerated courses, both by offering more of these courses and by encouraging more students to consider taking them.

***Multiple enhancements.*** Finally, if any of these explanations of the benefits of Program Enhancements are valid, the multiplier effect of taking multiple options needs little explanation. Students who take multiple options obtain the benefits of all options they take. The surprising finding of this study is that the multiplier effect is very large – seemingly greater than the simple sum of the effects of the options combined. This study cannot explain this magnitude. Perhaps students who take multiple options are very highly motivated – particularly to make transitions to credit. They may be “college bound” students who use every option the College provides to achieve their goal. Perhaps, too, the personal and educational experiences of various combinations of Program Enhancements have an interaction effect in terms of motivation and/or in terms of how learning different skills in different ways reinforce each other. Because of the magnitude of the effect, this is another area where further research would be highly beneficial.

#### **4. Pathways to Success**

In some respects, it does not matter that this study cannot fully explain why students who select Program Enhancement outperform other ESL students. It is sufficient to know that they do. The Program Enhancements are part of the pathways to success (and, importantly, the pathways to credit) for the College’s highest performing students. They

are part of those pathways because high performing students select them, not because they are required.

Thus, even if causality is in doubt, CCSF and other ESL providers would be well advised to assume that their students are right to believe they gain value-added from these options. CCSF should continue and strengthen these Program Enhancements, and other ESL programs should consider adopting them. They appear to have a stronger relationship to student success than any other aspect of program design examined by this study. Although the specific form they take at CCSF can certainly be modified in many ways, the basic logic behind each Enhancement and behind combining them seems compelling. As a result, *augmenting standard ESL instruction with these Enhancements in some form should be high on the priority list of any ESL program that wants to improve student outcomes.*

Finally, the fact that 30% of the cohort studied were willing and able to enroll in additional or more demanding courses than General ESL suggests that a significant portion of ESL students are prepared to make a larger commitment to improving their English and vocational skills than most programs require. This, in turn, suggests that the proposals for offering accelerated, high intensity tracks discussed in Chapter 5 and 6 are both feasible in terms of student demand and would greatly accelerate learning gains, transition rates, and the achievement of tangible economic benefits for many students.