

Summary of Proposed Research:

Because most universities in Canada are engaged in aggressive programs of internationalization, and Canadian immigration has increasingly drawn from language groups other than English, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of students using English as a second language (L2) in undergraduate university programs. This increase has resulted in: 1) changes in policies regarding language admission requirements; 2) heightened concern over the use of language proficiency testing in the selection of students for university admission and; 3) a proliferation of support programs that are either available to or required of L2 students as part of the undergraduate admission process. What these support programs share, according to guidelines provided by their accrediting body in Canada, the Council of Second Language Programs, (CSLP) is their overall intent: to prepare L2 students to use EAP at the university level and to help with the students' transition to both general academic and disciplinary-specific culture. However, a survey of EAP programs across Canada (Berman, 2002) reveals little consensus on fundamental approaches, designs or procedures within these programs and an absence of research to document their effectiveness. Within Canada (and elsewhere) there is little research regarding specific EAP program outcomes at the university level (Berman, 2002; Cheng & Myles, 2002; Fox, 2002) or how much time is required to support L2 students with such programs while they adjust to the demands of academic study (Stansfield, L-TEST L, July 12, 2002; Tonkyn, L-TEST L, July 12, 2002). There is clearly a need to: 1) define pedagogical approaches that are of greatest benefit for the least cost, and 2) address the lack of research regarding the interaction between language development and pedagogical interventions over time.

The objectives of this study are to: 1) clarify the costs and benefits of EAP instruction in L2 undergraduate students' academic performance in Canadian universities; 2) identify other key factors that contribute to (or impede) their performance; and, 3) identify stages of the academic acculturation process of L2 students as they adjust to the demands of university for the purpose of identifying the pedagogical approaches that exact the least cost for the greatest benefit. In order to investigate these issues, the proposed three-year study will include all of the 23 English-medium universities with EAP programs that are accredited by the CSLP (2002).

The proposed study is of critical importance at this time (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002; Jordan, 1999; 2002) given the increasing number of L2 students in undergraduate programs, the varying nature of EAP approaches, and the lack of large-scale or comprehensive studies, regarding the key causal factors that support the successful transition of L2 students to the demands of undergraduate study in Canada. In sum, there is an urgent need identified in the literature to research this transition -- the factors that affect it and the role of EAP support (Atkinson, 1999; Byram, 1999; Kramsch, 1991; Kramsch & Sullivan, 1996). A better understanding of both the factors that contribute to success (or failure) and the stages of interculturality proposed in this study will allow program developers and teachers to develop more appropriate and effective pedagogical strategies, increase benefits and reduce costs.