EXPECTED OUTCOMES: ESL Obj 1

“Students will acquire English language skills through a curriculum that provides instruction at graduated levels of English proficiency and that is based on observable performance objectives.”

ASSESSMENT METHODS:

a. Students are evaluated for proficiency when they enter the program, and then at the end of each term with in-house proficiency tests and with standardized testing in the form of an authentic, paper-based TOEFL (provided through ETS’s Institutional Testing Program). With this information, student progress in the program is tracked.

b. At the end of each term, students complete anonymous evaluations of the instructors, teaching material, and other aspects of the program.

FINDINGS:

a. The Intensive English Program (IEP) is divided into five levels of English proficiency. It is expected that a student needs two 8-week sessions to acquire the skills at a given level. In January 2013, we examined the academic progress/history of the 71 students enrolled in the IEP. This included their level placements (from the time they entered to the present) and their Institutional TOEFL scores. As for the former, we wanted to know the percentage of students who spent more than two terms in one or more skill area (the skill areas being listening and speaking, reading and vocabulary, and writing and grammar). Twenty-eight of the students had not been in the program more than two terms. Of the remainder, only 5 students spent more than two terms at the same level for any skill area.

It has been estimated that students in a university-based IEP improve their pBT (paper-based TOEFL) scores on average by 8-13 points per month, or 16-26 points per 8-week session. In Auburn’s IEP, students are not required to take the Institutional TOEFL. Of the 71 students in the program in Spring 2013, 25 had scores for which session-to-session comparative data were available. Sixteen of these, or 64%, met the target rate of score improvement noted above.

b. Program evaluations completed by students have reported satisfaction with the IEP. Copies of the forms used are attached. Two items in the Program Evaluation are instructive. One question asks, “Would you recommend this program to other students?” For the October 8 – December 7, 2012 session, the results were as follows for those who responded:

Yes: 88%
No: 0%
Mixed: 12%
For the previous session (August 6 – September 28, 2012), the results were as follows:

Yes: 90%
No: 5%
Mixed: 5%

The reasons given for “No” were that the program is expensive and that the university’s TOEFL requirement is too high.

Another question asks students to respond to the prompt, “Overall, this program is good for me.” Students are to respond according to the following scale:

5 – Strongly agree
4 – Agree
3 - Neither agree nor disagree
2 – Disagree
1 – Strongly disagree

For the October 8 – December 7, 2012 session, 84% responded “strongly agree” or “agree” (equally divided); 12.5% responded “neither agree nor disagree”; 3.5% responded “disagree.” No one responded “strongly disagree.”

For the August 6 – September 28, 2012 session, 89.3% responded “strongly agree” or “agree” (equally divided); 10.7% responded “neither agree nor disagree”). No one responded “disagree” or “strongly disagree.”

HOW FINDINGS WERE USED FOR IMPROVEMENT:

a. The program staff met to discuss the 5 students who required more than two terms to complete a skill area. Weaknesses were identified and corrective measures were recommended in each case. Students were counseled in improvement techniques, and tutors were provided (at no charge to the student; we operate a tutoring center for international students and scholars) for two hours per week.

Students who attended the IEP’s optional TOEFL Preparation class, which meets five hours per week, performed better on the TOEFL than those who did not. However, TOEFL progress was variable even among those attending the class. We have made changes to the TOEFL Preparation curriculum, and have included more TOEFL-skill exercises in the classroom lessons taught at the upper proficiency levels.

b. We are unable to reduce the cost of the program or the university’s TOEFL requirement for admission to degree programs. Sometimes evaluations reveal dissatisfaction with a particular course, which can include the materials used, instructional delivery, or building
facilities. It should be mentioned that all classes are observed once every eight weeks. Nevertheless, in response to negative findings and to uncover difficulties early, we now conduct evaluations in the middle of the term rather than only at the end.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES: ESL Obj 2
“Students will have sufficient oral and cultural skills to effectively teach American students and those of other nationalities.”

ASSESSMENT METHODS:
Non-native-English-speaking graduate students who are being considered for a Teaching Assistantship are assessed in oral ability with the Educational Testing Service’s SPEAK Test. Diagnostic measures are provided for pronunciation, grammar, fluency, and overall comprehensibility. Those with inadequate SPEAK scores are enrolled in a semester-long GTA course (INTL 1820). Assessment procedures used in the course are explained in the syllabus (attached).

FINDINGS:
The number of students who pass the SPEAK test and do not require the GTA course is 5% – 7%. In 2012, the percentage was 6.25. Students have difficulties in one or more of the following areas:

- Language (subdivided into pronunciation skills and strategies for conveying information, both of which affect SPEAK Test scores)
- Teaching strategies/methodologies
- Cultural understanding involving the American classroom

HOW FINDINGS WERE USED FOR IMPROVEMENT:
We constantly update and refine INTL 1820 in regard to speaking skills and teaching methods as new materials and technologies become available. We have also introduced a cultural component in collaboration with the Psychology Department, which has been involved in developing approaches for assisting international students with cross-cultural interactions and expectations. In addition, we have established meetings in which INTL 1820 students and students in the graduate ESOL program exchange ideas on cross-cultural teaching strategies and language issues.

EXPECTED OUTCOMES: ESL Obj 3
“Students and scholars will develop their English skills to accomplish tasks needed in the specific program.”

ASSESSMENT METHODS:

a. We operate a tutoring center for non-native-English-speaking undergraduate students, graduate students, and visiting scholars who need improvement in writing. Writing
samples are elicited and evaluated on a six-point analytic scale for organization, syntax, rhetoric, word choice (including prepositions), and word forms. Spelling and punctuation, unless they interfere with comprehensibility, are of secondary importance.

b. We organize special, short-term programs for groups of visiting students or scholars. Upon arrival, they are assessed with instruments appropriate to the purpose of the program. To date, the interest has been in speaking skills. We administer oral interviews, which are evaluated according to FSI and ACTFL scales for accent, pronunciation, grammar, fluency, vocabulary, and overall comprehensibility. Students complete program evaluations at the end.

FINDINGS:

a. The most common errors involve prepositions, articles, and verb endings. The most serious errors involve subordinate clauses, verbals (gerunds, participles, and infinities), missing verbs, and inadequate use of supporting detail.

b. Students from East Asia (all of our groups to date have been from Japan, Korea, and Taiwan) are focused on accuracy at the expense of fluency. Error production is reduced by the student saying very little. Because these languages have different sound inventories from English, pronunciation errors are frequent. English intonation patterns are also challenging. However, intonation improvement increases comprehensibility much more rapidly, and overall, than pronunciation.

HOW FINDINGS WERE USED FOR IMPROVEMENT:

a. We have adopted Iowa State University’s “Error-Gravity” paradigm for classifying and prioritizing student errors for improvement.

b. Because of the short program duration (3-4 weeks), the most improvement has been achieved through intonation instruction and emphasis on fluency over accuracy.