The Intensive English Language Program's

Academic Reading and Writing Curriculum

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Introduction

Here at XY University, we receive a large number of international students wishing to apply for admissions every year. The minimum score requirement on the TOEFL iBT for international student admission is set at 79 iBT (550 PBT), which is a rather high bar to set for many international students. This is why the Intensive English Language Program (IELP) was created at XY University; offering students with TOEFL iBT scores between 52 and 78 to be conditionally admitted to XY University on the grounds that they successfully complete at least one term of the IELP's upper-level (see "Section B" below) academic reading and writing course with a GPA of at least 3.5. A term in the IELP lasts 16 weeks, or one semester, and there are two sections in which students may be placed, based on their TOEFL iBT scores within the reading and writing skill areas of the test. Section A contains students with reading and writing skill area scores between 13 and 16, and Section B between 17 and 20. Each section contains an academic reading class and academic writing class which each meet once per week. This paper will be detailing the IELP's academic reading and writing curriculum for Section A.

The IELP's reasoning behind having this curriculum include both the reading and writing courses in tandem is informed by the idea that reading material can inform one's writing in the sense that if they are able to read, understand, and respond to a text of a given type, then they are already well on their way to being able to replicate features of that text type within their own writings. In this sense, the IELP's academic reading and writing curriculum represents a horizontally-planned curriculum, which focuses on what is studied across skill area courses within a given level (Eilam & Ben-Peretz, as cited in Graves 2014).

Reading and Writing Connections

Teaching reading and writing skills in tandem enhanced students' skills in spelling, composition, organization, decoding, and critical reading, which thus encouraged their success in

both skill areas. In this curriculum, one of the main purposes for reading was to inform and guide students in their future writing projects. The assignment of readings from a variety of genres allowed students to gain exposure to the text structures and language that they would be utilizing within their own writing. Since the written texts did not exist in isolation, and the texts that writers produced were shaped by other preexisting texts, it was important to consider the role of reading in the writing classroom. The IELP's academic reading and writing courses provided a useful framework which helped learners engage in the process of developing their own writing skills and language proficiency.

Approaches

First and foremost, an approach or guiding principle should be articulated in order to provide a theoretical foundation upon which the courses may be built. The IELP's approach to language teaching is comprised of various aspects found in a couple of approaches, which may be referred to as an integrated approach. The IELP values the personalized aspects of the communicative approach, believing that language learning should be catered to the immediate needs of the students within their learning context. We also appreciate the repetitive nature of language learning promoted by the audiolingual approach—although a chiefly listening and speaking-focused approach—which acknowledges the fact that students must receive multiple exposures to language features in order to internalize them.

Needs Analysis

It was suggested by Brown (1995) that curriculum development be approached in a systematic way, with needs analysis being the first step in the process once the guiding principles of the course had been defined. He describes needs analysis as the gathering and assessment of information needed to meet the language learning requisites of the students within a given context. A simple questionnaire designed to elicit students' personal and academic background

information was distributed to students on the first week of class. This questionnaire also included a 12-item Likert-like survey requiring students to report on the relative degree of difficulty they experienced in a given set of reading- and writing-related situations, such as reading comprehension, academic vocabulary development, critical thinking, and the ability to identify the differences between personal and academic writing. A timed reading exercise was also carried out on the first day, in which students were asked to track how long it took them to read a short passage, note down the time, and then answer four multiple-choice comprehension-check questions on the back of the reading passage to ensure that they had read and understood the passage in the time they noted.

The responses to the questionnaire and reading rate scores were collected and reviewed by the instructors, and then were used to negotiate and adapt the course syllabi with the students on the second week of class. From the questionnaires, reading rate scores, and class discussion, it was found that the main difficulties students faced in academic reading and writing situations were related to their inability to correctly use certain reading and writing strategies which would effectively enhance their reading and writing skills. Drawing upon Brown's (1995) suggestion that curriculum goals be made with students' needs in mind, the IELP's academic reading and writing curriculum's goals and objectives were created to aid students in coping with the difficulties reported from the needs analysis.

Curriculum Goals and Objectives

The next step in the curriculum planning process involved the identification of the language learning goals and objectives that must be met by the end of the course. Brown (1995) defines goals as outcomes which are informed by the requirements of the language and the situations in which it occurs. In the following list, the goals will be used as a basis for developing the more specific objectives underlying them. Brown (1995) explains that objectives are different

from goals in that they outline the "knowledge, behaviors, and/or skills that the learner will be expected to know or perform at the end of a course" (p. 73).

Academic Reading A was intended to help students begin to deal with the high demands of academic reading by focusing on becoming efficient and autonomous readers. This goal was achieved through activities that treated efficient reading strategy use in relation to text type and the purpose of reading, academic vocabulary development, and the development of critical reading strategies. *Academic Writing A* was designed to explore the differences between personal and academic writing, develop written fluency, and improve command over textual, rhetorical, and discursive conventions common in academic writing. Students also applied the different tasks associated with the writing process to various writing situations. The following list of goals and objectives combine both the reading and the writing course's objectives.

By the end of this term, students will be able to:

1. Further develop their reading skills and strategies for comprehending academic texts.

    a. Utilize pre-reading strategies such as defining a purpose for reading a given text, previewing a text and making predictions about its content, forming questions before reading a text, and relating a text's topic to what they already know.

    b. Utilize during-reading strategies such as skimming a text for main ideas, scanning a text for supporting details, annotating the text with questions about and reactions to the text's content while reading, and highlighting to keep track of key information within a text.

2. Recognize and utilize appropriate organizational structure within a paragraph.

    a. Identify the topic sentence or main idea of a paragraph.

    b. Recognize supporting details and understand their relationship to the main idea.

c. Locate transition words or discourse markers to identify the connections between ideas within different written functions.

3. Increase their reading speed by reading in lexical clusters surrounding key words rather than fixating on every single word in a text.

4. Develop learning strategies for building their academic vocabulary.

a. Utilize contextual clues within an unfamiliar word's context in order to guess its meaning.

b. Use word parts (prefix, root, and suffix) to determine the meaning of new words.

c. Select and use a variety of vocabulary reference sources both in print and online.

d. Understand vocabulary on a deeper level, examining words in terms of meaning, part of speech, and synonyms.

5. Assess the author's techniques in light of their own purposes.

a. Recognize the author's use of connotative and figurative language and use it to make inferences about the author's tone or attitude towards the topic.

b. Identify the author's biases.

c. Recognize and evaluate generalizations.

6. Evaluate the author's arguments.

a. Recognize the parts of an argument (claim, reason, support, warrant [inferred])

b. Identify and evaluate the different types of supporting statements (reasons, evidence, emotional appeals)

c. Identify the author's purpose and his or her intended audience.

7. Become autonomous learners in their academic English reading and writing, and continue to improve after completing the course.

    a. Recognize their strengths and areas in need of improvement in their own academic reading and writing skills.

    b. Locate available reading, writing, and vocabulary reference resources both on campus and on the internet.

    c. Apply what they learned in this course to their future academic experiences by formulating a plan for continuing to improve their academic reading and writing skills.

8. Develop general and academic English writing abilities.

    a. Identify the difference between personal and academic writing in terms of register, style and voice.

    b. Identify the writing situation in terms of topic, audience, and purpose.

    c. Engage in the writing process (brainstorming, drafting, revision, editing, proofreading) and apply it to a variety of different writing situations.

    d. Collaborate with peers in order to generate ideas and receive peer feedback on drafts of their writing.

    e. Develop criteria for what constitutes good or effective academic writing.

    f. Utilize formal conventions of academic writing (i.e. double-spacing, 12-point Times New Roman font, etc.)

    g. Reflect upon and assess the decisions they made in the drafting and revision stages of writing.

    h. Write a research paper that incorporates secondary sources.

9. Identify the features of plagiarism, what the consequences of it are, and how to avoid it in their writing.

    a. Understand why plagiarism is an unacceptable practice in U.S. universities.

      b. Practice avoiding plagiarism by using direct quotes, paraphrasing, and summarizing with appropriate referencing.

      c. Become familiar with the MLA citation style (acknowledge Chicago and APA).

10. Use some of the research resources available at XY University.

      a. Locate resources available among the collections at the university's libraries.

      b. Use the internet to find source material.

      c. Evaluate the quality and trustworthiness of certain internet-based source material.

Syllabus Types

As the goals and objectives were being formed, the structuring of the course material was also being considered. The IELP's academic reading and writing curriculum utilized mixed syllabi which drew upon features of project-oriented, skills- and text-based, negotiated syllabi. The program's decision to make the overall course plan a negotiated process between the students and the instructor based on the results of the needs analysis brings out the negotiated nature of the course syllabi. Breen and Littlejohn (as cited in Graves, 2014) describe the negotiated syllabus as a product of interactive processes where both the teachers and learners share decision making in the classroom. The syllabi also represented skills-based approaches, which according to Omaggio Hadley (as cited in Graves, 2014) focuses on the contextualization of skills such as reading and writing, much like how this curriculum focused on how reading and writing is used in academic English contexts. Students were introduced to these genres of text using an analytical approach which allowed them to break down the structure of different types of texts in order to gain access to the written conventions of that genre. This technique mirrored the concepts underlying a text-based syllabus, which is organized around developing students' knowledge of different text types (Graves, 2014). As students gained awareness of and command over different text types, they were also expected to engage in producing those different text

types in a series of four writing projects where they wrote four papers corresponding to the four text types which were explored throughout the term. In many ways, this corresponded to a project-based syllabus, which is organized around the completion of projects (Graves, 2014).

Materials and Sequencing of Content

The reading material for the academic reading component of the curriculum was selected from *Q: Skills for Success, Reading and Writing Level 5*, which provides readings from authentic sources such as the *New York Times*, *Time Magazine*, and excerpts from English-medium textbooks and autobiographies. The selection of readings from this textbook was based on the types of texts being covered in the academic writing course.

The writing course required students to write four papers utilizing the structural and discourse components used within four different text types: a descriptive essay, a position or stance essay, a summary-and-response essay, and a mini-research paper which integrated secondary sources (see Appendix for full curriculum matrix).

The reading course supplemented the writing course in many ways by giving the students access to multiple examples of these text types in their reading assignments. In the reading course they were introduced to the written genre of the reading passage and are given the opportunity to analyze the structure of the text type in order to aid their comprehension of the text. At the same time, this allows the students to carry this structural knowledge of the given text type into their writing course, where they are concurrently being introduced to the genre in order to write a paper in which they use that text type. This corresponds to the first drafting stage of a given paper assignment. In the second drafting stage, the reading course taught students how to identify the author's purpose and target audience. The course also had students focus on more critical aspects of the text, such as making inferences about the author's message based on the author's use of figurative or connotative language. This allowed the students to then reflect upon

their own purpose and target audience in their first draft of their papers in their writing course, which then brought about a more focused product in the second draft. The reading course then went on to teach students how to identify bias in the author's writing, which then led students to revise their statements in their own writing to create a more sound argument in the third and final draft of their papers.

As was mentioned previously, the courses also included the instruction and practice of reading and writing strategies which guide students through the reading and writing processes in an efficient way. Central to the strategy-oriented goals in the reading course is the idea that students become autonomous in their development as academic readers. Throughout the course, students are given opportunities to reflect on their reading strategy use, and evaluate the efficacy of the reading strategies they are introduced to in order to have them to reflect upon the strategies that worked best for them and their learning style. The purpose of the "expert interview" project at the end of the reading course was to give students the opportunity to gain additional insight into effective strategy use from sources outside of the reading classroom. The assignment required students to contact another teacher or mentor or someone they know who is a successful academic reader. They then composed a set of interview questions which elicited the ways in which their interviewee approached reading and studying in their mainstream university courses. The students then summarized the strategies their interviewee used, which then acted as a springboard into a final discussion on the last day of class on how students planned on continuing to improve their reading and writing skills after the course had ended.

Conclusion

The IELP's academic reading and writing curriculum offers courses which allow students to learn in a purposeful, systematic, and holistic way. It is based on a mixed syllabus which is influenced by features of project-oriented, skills-based, text-based, and negotiated syllabi. As

students progress through the curriculum, they are given frequent opportunities to engage in the reading and writing processes and reflect on the connections between the two skills, ultimately leading up to the autonomous use of strategies and resources outside of the classroom in order to further develop their skills in academic reading and writing even after successful completion of the curriculum.

References

Brown, J. D. (1995). *The elements of language curriculum: A systematic approach to program development.* Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

 Graves, K. (2014). Syllabus and curriculum design for second language teaching. In M. Celce-Murcia, M. A. Snow, & D. Brinton (Eds.), *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (pp. 46-62). Boston, MA: Heinle Cengage.

APPENDIX: Academic Reading & Writing Curriculum Matrix

HW: *Homework* **TRE**: *Timed Reading Exercise* **RL**: *Reading/Vocabulary Log* **R**: *Reading (material)*
WJ: *Writing Journal* **D**: *Draft* **P**: *Paper*

Week	Academic Reading (Monday 9:00-12:45)		Academic Writing (Wednesday 9:00-12:45)		Goals
	Topics	**Activities**	**Topics**	**Activities**	
1	Course/student introduction(s) Reading log	Ice-breaker Syllabus overview: <u>TRE(0)</u> Student background survey Reading log instructions	Course introduction Personal writing experiences Writing journal	Syllabus overview: Scavenger hunt Mind-map: thoughts/feelings about academic writing Writing journal instructions	**3** **8a** **9c,f**
	HW: RL – What makes a good reader?			*HW: WJ – What I love/like/hate about academic writing*	
2	Attitudes about reading Active reading Identifying collocations	What makes a good reader? Reading strategy inventory Becoming a faster reader using noun collocations <u>TRE(1)</u>	About academic writing The writing process	Defining academic writing Rules we've learned about writing Comparing drafts of a sample paper	**1a,b,c** **3** **8a** **9c,d,e**
	HW: RL – R1 vocabulary word-meaning match-up exercise			*HW: WJ – List ideas of possible topics for Paper 1*	
3	Dictionary swap Anticipating a text's content Locating the main ideas	R1: "What makes someone a hero?" Using a dictionary to expand vocabulary knowledge Using title & subheadings to anticipate a text's content Strategy: Skimming for main ideas <u>TRE(2)</u>	Academic vs. personal writing Brainstorming	Differences between academic & personal writing Mind-mapping exercise Freewrite on possible topic for P(1); why it's interesting to you	**1b,c** **2a** **3** **4c** **8b** **9a,c**
	HW: R2 vocabulary words – dictionary exercise			*HW: WJ – Are brainstorming strategies useful to me?*	
4	Previewing and predicting Audience and Purpose Locating supporting details	R2: "Everyday people changing the world" Developing and confirming predictions about a text Identifying the author's purpose Strategy: Scanning for supporting details <u>TRE(3)</u>	Audience & purpose Drafting strategies Avoiding ambiguity	What it means to sound "less like yourself" Outlining main ideas & supporting details for P(1), D(1) Demonstrating ambiguity & how to avoid it with clear antecedents to "it/them"	**1a,b,c** **2a,b** **3** **6c** **9a,b,c**
	HW: Use a graphic organizer to identify the details in R2			*HW: WJ – How do audience and purpose change how/what I write?*	

5	Types of supporting details Prefixes, suffixes, and roots	Identifying reasons, evidence, and emotional appeals Using prefixes, suffixes, and root words to recognize the meaning of new words TRE(4)	Audience & purpose	***P(1), D(1) Due*** Self-analysis of audience and purpose for P(1), D(1) Revising for inconsistencies in audience and purpose	**1b 2c 3 4b 6c 9b,c,e,f,g**
		HW: Email instructor a difficult word from R3 and its sentence		*HW: WJ – Plan possible revisions for P(1), D (1)*	
6	Organizing a paragraph's info. Using context clues with new words Identifying parts of an argument	Paragraph analysis: Ordering jumbled sentences to create a well-structured paragraph Match HW words and sentences with definitions R3: "The case for no helmets" Identify R3's issue, claim, and supporting statements	Organization & Evidence Prep for P(2): Personal position/stance	***P(1), D(2) Due*** Self-analysis of organization and evidence for P(1), D(2) Conceptualizing position/ stance writing and sample topics Review R3, brainstorm topics for P(2)	**2a,b,c 4a 6a 9b,c,e,f,g**
		HW: RL – R4 vocabulary word-meaning cloze exercise		*HW: Peer feedback practice worksheet for sample essay*	
7	Activating schema Making inferences Identifying author's intent	TRE(5) R4: "Set in our ways: Why change is so hard" Inferring reading exercise Determining author's intent to evaluate trustworthiness	Proofreading & editing How to respond to classmates' writing Peer response	***P(2), D(1) Due*** Distinguishing between proofreading, editing, and revising Learning how to give constructive feedback (sample essay) Peer response session for P(2), D(1)	**1b 3 5a 9c,d,f**
		HW: RL – Answer questions about author's intent for R4		*HW: WJ – Plan possible revisions for P(2), D (1)*	
8	Using context clues with new words Annotation strategies	Vocabulary words in context & meaning matching R5: "Kids want to tan" Annotating activity with R5	Portfolio conferencing Summarizing strategies & criteria	***P(1), D(3) Due*** Student-instructor conferences on progress Summary evaluation exercise	**1b 4a 9d,e,f,g 10b**
		HW: RL - Which annotation strategies work best for me?		*HW: WJ – Summary-writing practice on sample essay*	
9	Questioning & reacting Counterarguments & refutations	TRE(6) R6: "A tribe is discovered" Double-entry journal for R6: Asking & answering questions while reading Counterarguments & refutations matching exercise	Intro to P(3): Summary & response essays	***P(2), D(2) Due*** Introduction to summary & response essays Analyzing a past student's summary & response essay	**1b 3 6a 9b,c,e,f**
		HW: Summarize the sections you questioned in double-entry journal		*HW: WJ – Brainstorm possible sources for summary & response*	

10	**Mid-term course evaluation** Building vocabulary: Word forms Analyzing structure & style: Research papers	**Mid-term evaluation survey** TRE(7) R7: "Does school prepare you for work?" Breakdown of a research article Analysis of research abstracts *HW: Choose a topic you'd like to research for P(4) in writing class*	**Mid-term course evaluation** Proofread & peer response Appropriate referencing strategies	***P(3), D(1) Due*** **Mid-term evaluation survey** Peer feedback session for P(3), D(1) Analyzing differences between drafts of past student's summary & response essay *HW: WJ – What is plagiarism? (look it up and summarize)*	**3** **4d** **9c,d,e,f,g** **10a,b**
11	Common patterns of text organization Sharing of topics for P(4) Research resources at XYU	TRE(8) R8: "Can climate change make us sicker?" Library/internet activity: Finding research resources at the library *HW: Identify the topic and purpose of 4 sample papers*	Proofread & peer response Plagiarism in U.S. Avoiding plagiarism	***P(3), D(2) Due*** Peer feedback session for P(3), D(2) Consequences of plagiarism Quoting, paraphrasing, & summarizing activity *HW: Self-analysis of revisions and peer feedback for P(3), D(2)*	**9b,c,d,f** **10a,b** **11a,b**
12	Recognizing text organization Research resources online	R9: "The Kipunji" Outlining texts to clarify organization of information Library/internet activity: Finding & evaluating resources online *HW: Finish evaluating internet sources activity*	Using citations Intro to P(4): Arguing from written material	***P(2), D(3) Due*** Citation styles (MLA) Referencing exercises Considering issues of plagiarism when writing P(4), D(1) *HW: Self-analysis of revisions and peer feedback for P(2), D(3)*	**1b** **9e,f,h** **10a,b** **11b,c**
13	Forming questions before reading Evaluating author's tone & biases Intro to expert interview assignment	TRE(9) R10: "Eating well: Less science, more common sense" Identifying exaggerations, over-simplification, logical fallacies Review guidelines for expert interview assignment *HW: Decide who to interview & when for interview assignment*	Issues in academic writing Portfolio conferencing	***P(4), D(1) Due*** Avoiding exaggerations, over-simplification, logical fallacies Student-instructor conferences on progress *HW: Categorize essay examples of poorly-developed arguments*	**1b** **5a,b,c** **9c,d,e,f,g,h**
14	Episodic note-taking Questions to ask your interviewee	***Confirm Interviewee and Date*** R11: "Survival School" Expert reader presentation (guest speaker) *HW: Finish writing interview questions for interview assignment*	Issues in academic writing Proofread & peer response	***P(3), D(3) Due*** Inappropriate authorities, bandwagon, charged words, out-of-date facts Peer feedback session for P(3), D(3) *HW: Self-analysis of referencing strategies for P(4), D(1)*	**1b** **6b** **9c,d,e,f,g,h**

15	Creating your own graphic organizers Interview rehearsal & peer response	***Interview Questions Due*** <u>TRE(10)</u> R12: "The promise of play" Organizing notes and annotations in a chart Expert interview practice session with peer feedback *HW: Conduct expert interview and summarize responses*	Proofread & peer response Quiet writing time	***P(4), D(2) Due*** Peer feedback session for P(4), D(2) Buffer time to allow for any final questions & work on final paper *HW: Categorize essay examples of poorly-developed arguments*	**1a,b 8c 9c,d,f,g,h**
16	Course review <u>**End-term course evaluations**</u>	***Expert Interview Summary Due*** Reading Improvement Plan <u>**End-term course evaluation survey**</u>	Course review <u>**End-term course evaluations**</u>	***P(4), D(3) Due*** ***Writing Portfolio Due*** Writing Improvement Plan <u>**End-term course evaluation survey**</u>	**8a,b,c 9f,g,h**