

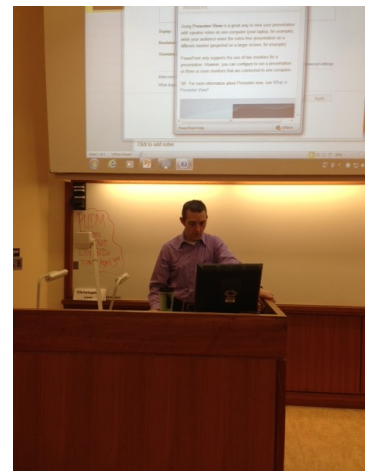


- Second Language Studies/ESL Graduate Symposium
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Second Language Studies/ESL Graduate Symposium

On Saturday, March 30th, Purdue University hosted the fifth Symposium on Second Language Studies/ESL. ESL GO! successfully hosted the symposium. Presenters hailed from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Ohio University, Purdue University, Indiana University, Ohio State University, and DePaul University. It was also an honor to host two featured speakers from Brazil, Douglas Altamiro Consolo from State University of Sao Paulo (UNESP/IBILCE) and Paulo José Andreino from State University of Maring (UEM/CAPES). Their presentation was entitled

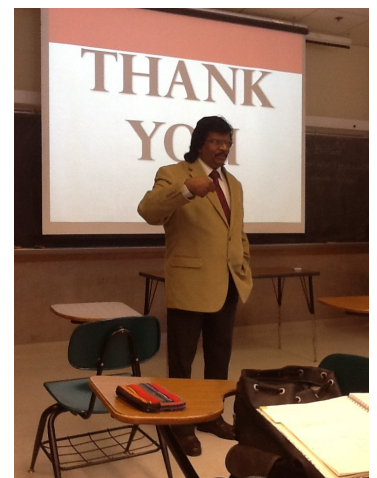
Test of oral performance for English teachers: a look at giving instructions in the foreign language teaching domain. Gigi Taylor was the keynote speaker. Coming from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, she gave a wonderful presentation entitled One professional landscape, many professional pathways. Thanks to everyone who contributed to the success of the symposium. We look forward to a more successful one in 2014.



Scott Partridge, Purdue University presenter at the SLS Symposium. He presented with Dan Kenzie.

Speaker Series

On Wednesday, March 27, Dr. Jebanesan gave a presentation describing the situation of English language teaching in his institution, Madras Christian College. He focused on the curriculum of the ESL program, among other elements. He also addressed attitudes towards English in India and the roles English plays in the larger educational context of India. Then, the presenter answered some questions by the audience.



Professor Stephen Jebanesan during Q&A following his presentation.

Professor April Ginther: The Use and Interpretation of English Proficiency Test Scores in the Graduate Admissions Process

Last semester I was happy to wrap up a two-year research project that I conducted with my friend and colleague Cathie Elder at Melbourne University. The project was funded by ETS. Funding included the cost associated with a visit down under during my sabbatical last year and will cover a trip to Istanbul in May to present at the annual EALTA (European Association of Language Testers) conference. (Such fun!)

Findings from the study have, much to my surprise, generated a great deal of interest here at Purdue. So far this semester, I have presented at the Linguistics Lunch Speaker Series, to the LING faculty, to the Graduate School Dean, to the director of ISS, to the Graduate Education Association (all graduate deans), to the ECE faculty, and to the Faculty Senate Steering Committee. Presentations are scheduled for the Provost's Office Direct Reports, CLA Deans, and the Graduate Council. Surely, interest in the project is, in part, the result of faculty perception of the increasing international enrollment at Purdue.

Did you know, for example, that next year the international graduate enrollment will increase above 50%? For the first time, there will be more international graduate students than domestic students enrolled at Purdue in the Graduate School. At the undergraduate level, increases in international enrollment are more dramatic. In the past ten years, international undergrad enrollment has increased by 136% from 2,101 to 4,974. I have been told that undergraduate international enrollment is expected to stabilize at 16%, but I'm not so sure.

One of the reasons that a comparison between Purdue and Melbourne is interesting is because international enrollment in Australia tops out at about 40% (Monash University). If enrollment trends at Purdue continue, the student body will look, overall,

very much like many universities in Australia or like our own SLS/ESL graduate program today. With the anticipated expansion of the College of Engineering by 100 new faculty positions, 800 additional graduate students will be admitted, and 500 of these are expected to be international. These shifts in the population heighten interest in admission standards and procedures, available and appropriate support for "student success", and the identity of the university. We live in interesting times. Below you will find a summary of the study. Feel free to email me if you have any questions.

Current theoretical discussions of test impact and the consequential aspects of test validity have led to increased interest in how test scores are used and understood by stakeholders within particular domains. Adopting an instrumental case study approach, this study examines levels of knowledge about the English language tests (TOEFL, IELTS, and PTE) used for selection in two academic contexts and the uses of test scores in local decision-making by graduate faculty. Data for the study were gathered via an online survey and follow-up interviews examining the basis for participants' beliefs, understandings, and practices. This presentation will focus on the results of the 50-item survey completed by 232 respondents at Purdue, a large Research 1 U.S. university, and 246 respondents at the University of Melbourne, a large Research 1 Australian university, and 30 follow-up interviews at both institutions.

Responses reveal that English test scores, once entry-level requirements are met, tend to have very limited impact on admissions decisions as compared to evaluations based on other kinds of available evidence. In both contexts, respondents em-

phasized (1) the importance of English for academic success; (2) dissatisfaction with current levels of English among graduate students; (3) limited knowledge about or understanding of the major English tests used for selection; (4) lack of knowledge about how and why English language proficiency scores were set; and (5) misunderstanding of what cut scores represent.

Purdue's Graduate School cut scores for English language proficiency tests were set on the basis of the following considerations: results of a standard setting study (for the TOEFL IBT), comparability data provided by the test developers, and alignment with the cut scores set by our peers in the Big Ten. However, faculty should be advised that the cut scores (lowest acceptable scores) were intended as minimums and can actually be understood as minimal. At Purdue, 52% of the respondents indicated they understood that the Graduate School Cut scores represent *minimal* proficiency, 38% indicated they understood that the cut scores represent *adequate* proficiency, while 8% indicated they understood that the cut scores represent *advanced* proficiency.

In terms of actual use, respondents often indicated that they typically only checked whether an applicant had met the required cut score and then actually selected on other aspects of the candidate's admission file; however, this practice is being recognized as problematic. One informant at Purdue commented (Please see the next page):

"For the first time, there will be more international graduate students than domestic students enrolled at Purdue in the Graduate School."

The Use and Interpretation of English Proficiency Test Scores in the Graduate Admissions Process (Continued)

The [admissions] committee only looks to see if the applicant has the minimal TOEFL scores needed by the University and has instead relied more on previous institutions, GRE/GMAT score, and letters of recommendation. Of course, we are finding that this is inadequate, and many of our students struggle once in the program and in the job market due to written and oral communication skills. We just don't have enough information about proficiency tests at this point to make a statement about them but really need to educate ourselves much better on this issue.

Many informants shared surprise and dismay at students' actual levels of language proficiency despite their having satisfied Graduate School requirements; e.g., "I have too many students who have "passed" the TOEFL but simply cannot communicate in English." Score users should note that with a cut score that represents a minimum proficiency, students will enter with a wide range of abilities, and given this variability, some users assume that the tests "don't work" or that students are cheating.

However, it is possible to use the information that English proficiency test scores provide more effectively by (1) considering the scale interpretations provided by the test developers and (2) by examining the characteristics of the score distributions here at Purdue. This is just common sense and requires only basic assessment literacy. The mean TOEFL IBT score of currently enrolled international graduate students from East Asia is 99, well above the grad school cut off. However a mean score of 99 means that 50% of the currently enrolled students were admitted with a total score between

the cut score of 77 and the mean score of 99. Students with this language proficiency score profile are likely to require English language support services. However, English language support courses for graduate students are, pretty much, limited to those offered by the OEPP – better than nothing but really not enough. If faculty members wish to be more confident about their admissions decisions with respect to English language proficiency, I recommend the following higher cuts (both conditions should be met): a TOEFL IBT total score of 100 with no single subscale score lower than 22, or an IELTS overall band score of 7.5 with no single band score lower than 7.0. These cut scores are associated with students who test into the OEPP with a score of 45 which allows them to teach while being concurrently enrolled in a section of English 621.

Most agree that entry level skills can vary substantially if and when English language support for students is available. Most of our Big Ten peers with large international populations require post-entry testing and support for students at targeted levels of proficiency, typically between 80-100 on the TOEFL. We need more research on the development of skills by students over time and whether students who enter with relatively low levels of proficiency experience greater difficulty with their courses. A comment by one faculty informant suggests that this might be the case:

The thing that we see time and again is if students are struggling with English, they're likely to be struggling with everything. They might be struggling to make friends, they might be struggling to find employment. I mean [English] has such an extended effect to every other area of

their lives ... we often to see students who are in a real state of crisis or distress -- and I mean obviously it could be for so many reasons -- but you often wonder: if they had come better equipped language-wise to deal with the subject from day one, would they have got themselves into this situation?

I am enthusiastic and optimistic about being an applied linguist and a member SLS/ESL faculty at Purdue in these times. We have excellent opportunities to conduct research that highlights internationalization and globalization at Purdue, and perhaps we will also be able to help develop and improve contexts of learning for all students at our university.

Professor April Ginther
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Letter from Elena Lawrick

Dear Friends,
I graduated from our Program in 2011. After staying at Purdue for another year as lecturer, I was fortunate to land a tenure-track position of the ESL Program Coordinator at a 2-year community college in Pennsylvania. Because I have been at my new job for less than a year, I'll talk about the things I've come to realize after stepping out of the comfort zone of Purdue's SL Studies/ESL Graduate Program.

First, both Purdue and our Program are widely known and respected. In fact, being a Purdue graduate provides some sort of "high quality seal": People think that you are smarter and know more than other job candidates or faculty members because you studied at Purdue - which, FYI, tends to be true (I'm telling you as language program administrator who hires English teachers). So, do not be shy to use this "seal of approval" to your advantage while going through the job search process! What I mean is that the job search process tends to be an intimidating experience and if you keep my little advice in mind, it might be easier for you to stay confident during job interviews.

My special, huge THANK-YOU goes to OWL. I'd never imagine that I would be treated as a celebrity by both teachers and students because I happened to develop a few PPT presentations for OWL. Can you believe it? Last October, somebody noticed my name on the APA presentation and sent an e-mail to the Humanities Division mailing list saying, "Our Elena is famous! Did you know it?" Having said that, if you have

a chance to develop materials for OWL, do not miss this opportunity. You will not only get experience in materials development, but also make a deposit into the bank of your future job possibilities.

My second revelation regards ESL GO and how much professional experience I gained from being a part of it. My friends and I founded this organization while taking the coolest course ever - ESL Professional Development—with the most inspiring professor ever - Prof. Berns. In that course, Margie exposed the trade secrets (getting published and tenured, etc.) without sugar-coating. Importantly, she did it by inviting expert professionals who shared their experiences and knowledge of the field. This inspired us to want to learn the ropes of being an academic: *to found our own Research Symposium; to develop our own website; to start our own Speaker Series*. And we did it. All of it: the symposium, the website, and the speaker series. We were so caught up in making all those things happen that we did not realize that all that work was a valuable professional service which would pay off on the job search. When I went on the job market, my service to ESL GO did make my CV stand out. I know for a fact that it won me at least three votes over the other candidate when I was competing for my current position. More importantly, my service to ESL GO helped me build skills and confidence to maintain demanding job responsibilities. I can't say about my friends, but what I hadn't realized until I took a job of a language program administrator was that being the ESL GO vice-president, symposium chair & organizer, and webmaster prepared me to multitask, collaborate, supervise, and attend to a

dozen of things which I now do on a daily basis. So friends, get involved in ESL GO to make yourself competitive on the job market! The last but not least discovery I've made since transitioning to being a faculty is that my perception of life of a graduate student was, to say the least, inaccurate. When in graduate school, I felt that there was no "life" but only readings, research, and writing, along with an unhealthy (self-imposed) amount of teaching jobs. I was looking forward to getting a "real" job and becoming a "real" (that is, not a graduate assistant or part-time) faculty member. Little did I realize how naïve those hopes of mine were. If you choose to stay in academia, you will have to teach AND do research AND publish AND do service to the institution. Regardless of differences among institutions (some emphasize research more than teaching and vice versa, but all institutions expect service), you will be expected to attend to all of the above responsibilities. And, as it turns out, writing institutional reports takes a lot of time! In other words, being a faculty keeps you much busier than being a graduate student. I, for example, feel nostalgic for those wonderful days when I could afford to sit and read and even (it feels like a crime even to think about it now!) to take time to write down my thoughts or indulge myself with two hours of uninterrupted writing. Learn from my experience - treasure your time at the graduate school. Think. Brainstorm. Share ideas. Treat your mind to the intellectual luxury of teasing apart issues being guided by the mentors we are so fortunate to have: Margie, Tony, Dwight, April, and Luciana. In my experience, our Program is the most stimulating and inspiring in the country. Take the fullest advantage of these opportunities!

With warmest wishes from Pennsylvania,

Elena Lawrick, a graduate of SL Studies/ ESL Program @ Purdue University, Class of 2011

ESL GO! Website:

<http://web.ics.purdue.edu/~eslgo/index.html>

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