

ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE (ESL) STUDENT PROGRESS AND COURSE-TAKING PATTERNS

OFFICE OF PLANNING, RESEARCH AND INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS
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BACKGROUND

Larger and larger numbers of students are entering colleges and universities underprepared for college-level coursework, and many of these students require English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction. Although more and more students are participating in ESL programs, few are actually progressing to higher-level courses. Research conducted by the California Community College Chancellor's Office has shown that just 50% of ESL students statewide take higher-level ESL or English courses within three years of completing their initial ESL course (ARCC Report, 2009).

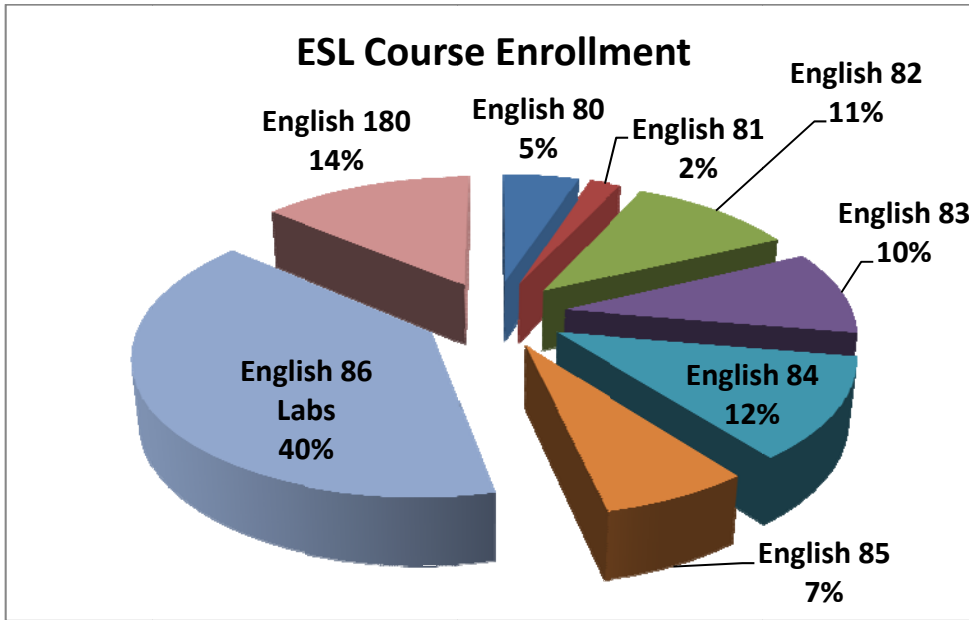
San Joaquin Delta College is no exception to this trend; in fact, the College's ESL improvement rate is somewhat lower than the statewide average: 44% for the most recent ARCC cohort. Although Delta College's ESL improvement rate increased by 4% between 2007 and 2009, it still lags behind the College's peer group ESL improvement rate of 58% in 2009. With this statewide and College-level data in mind, it is of particular importance to investigate the long-term outcomes of the College's ESL program.

Delta College students who are placed in one of six ESL courses based on their assessment scores on the Combined English Language Skill Assessment (CELSA) test. Students may be placed into the following courses (listed in order of progression):

- English 80 (Survival English)
- English 81 (Advanced Survival English)
- English 82 (Basic English as a Second Language)
- English 83 (Low-Intermediate English as a Second Language)
- English 84 (Intermediate English as a Second Language)
- English 85 (Advanced English as a Second Language)

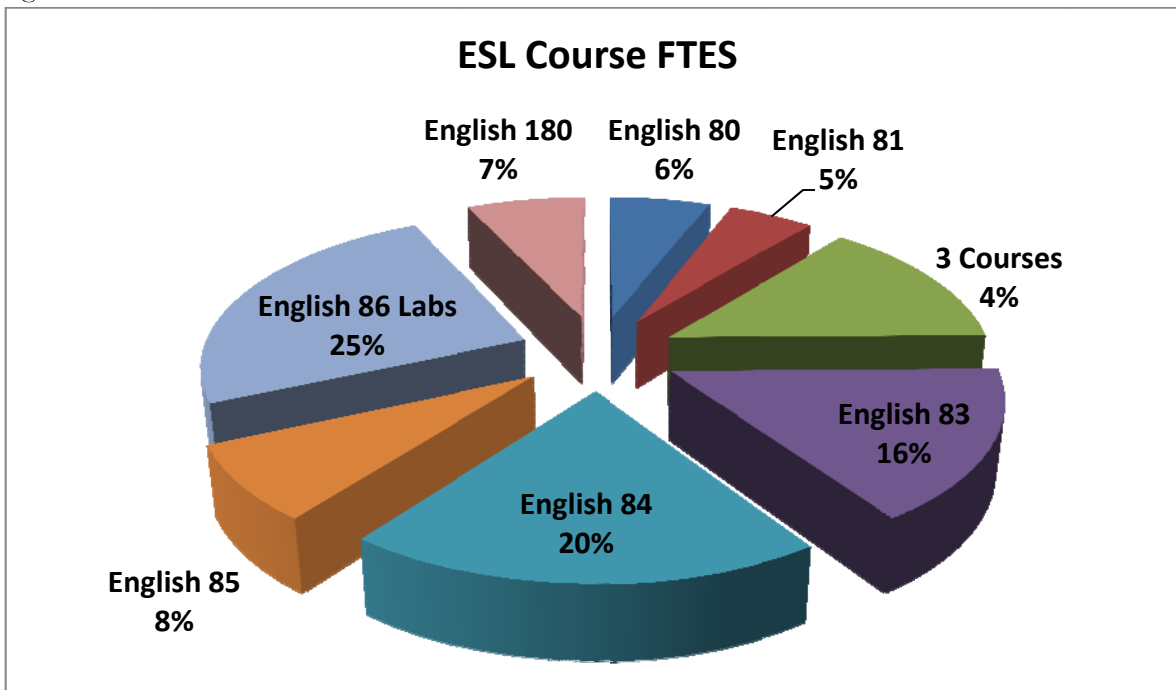
In addition to the above options, students may also take multiple English 86 lab courses for additional practice and skill building. Upon completion of English 85, students may enroll in English 87 (Basic Writing Skills II), which is the precursor to English 79 (Preparatory English), the gateway English course. In 2007-2008, all ESL courses and labs at the College had a combined annual enrollment of 1,989. Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of enrollment in key ESL courses and labs.

Figure 1. Distribution of ESL Course Enrollment, 2007-2008



As the figure shows, the English 86 labs have the highest percentage of student enrollment (40%), followed by English 84 (12%), English 82 (11%) and English 83 (10%). In terms of FTES, however, the largest proportion of students were in English 84 (20%; a 14-unit course) and English 83 (16%; a 12-unit course).

Figure 2. Distribution of ESL Course FTES, 2007-2008



To determine the proportion of students that progress from ESL courses to higher-level English courses, a study was conducted examining student course-taking patterns, completion and progression to subsequent ESL and English courses. The goals of the study were to (1) examine ESL student course-taking patterns, and (2) determine the proportion of students on the ESL pathway that complete English 79.

METHODOLOGY

Student course-taking and completion data were obtained from the College's System 2000 database for students who enrolled in Basic English as a Second Language (English 82) between summer 2003 and spring 2008. Course enrollment, FTES and instructional cost data were obtained from the College's faculty load reports. Budget data for instructional support were derived from the College's financial database system.

Because enrollment was generally low in both Survival English courses (English 80 and English 81), Basic English as a Second Language (English 82) was used as the starting point for student course progression. Completion of Preparatory English (English 79) served as the outcome of interest. The ESL pathway examined in this study is provided in

Figure 3. Pathway from Basic English as a Second Language (English 82) to Preparatory English (English 79)

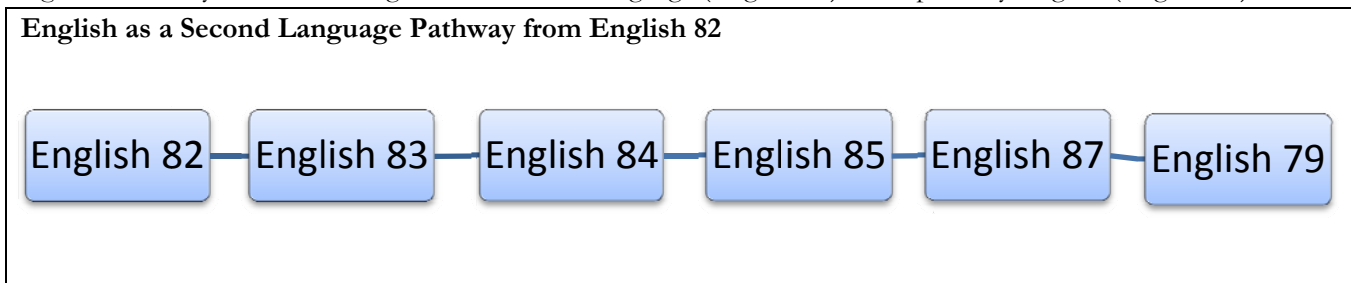


Figure 3. Course repeat data were obtained for students in each course along the ESL pathway in order to determine the average number of times required for a student to complete a given reading or English course. Student enrollment, course attempts and success data were obtained for students in the ESL pathway, and costs were calculated for each course along the pathway to English 79. Student outcomes and total costs for each pathway were then examined to determine how much it cost for the average student to complete all six courses along the pathway. Cost figures are provided for the ESL pathway for “Model Student” costs and “Average Student” costs. A description of cost calculations is provided below.

Cost Calculation: Model Student

The “Model Student” figures provide costs per course for each pathway assuming each student passes the course on his or her first attempt. Cost per enrollment figures were calculated by summing the costs of faculty, staff, materials, supplies and tutoring for the ESL courses (English 82 through English 85 and English 86 labs). Shared costs were divided proportional to annual course FTES in 2007-2008. Instructional costs were also calculated for English 79 and English 1A.

Cost per enrollment was calculated by dividing annual costs by total annual (duplicated) enrollment for each course in 2007-2008 (the most recent year for which English 82 enrollment data were examined). Cost per FTES figures were calculated by summing the annual costs of each course and dividing it by the annual FTES total for each course. Note that English 86A, B, C, D, E, F and G lab course costs were aggregated across all English 86 courses and divided by combined FTES and enrollment in 2007-2008.

Cost Calculation: Average Student

The “Average Student” calculation is similar to the “Model Student” calculation but also factors in the number of attempts required for an average student to pass a course. The same calculation employed for the Model Student cost estimates was used for the Average Student cost estimates, however, average attempts required to succeed in each course was added as a multiplier for each course’s cost per enrollment and cost per FTES figures.

RESULTS

The results of the analysis are provided on the following pages in the form of student progression/flow charts for the ESL pathway to English 79. Figure 5 illustrates completion rates and average number of repeats required to complete each course among English 82 students who progressed to higher-level ESL and English courses.

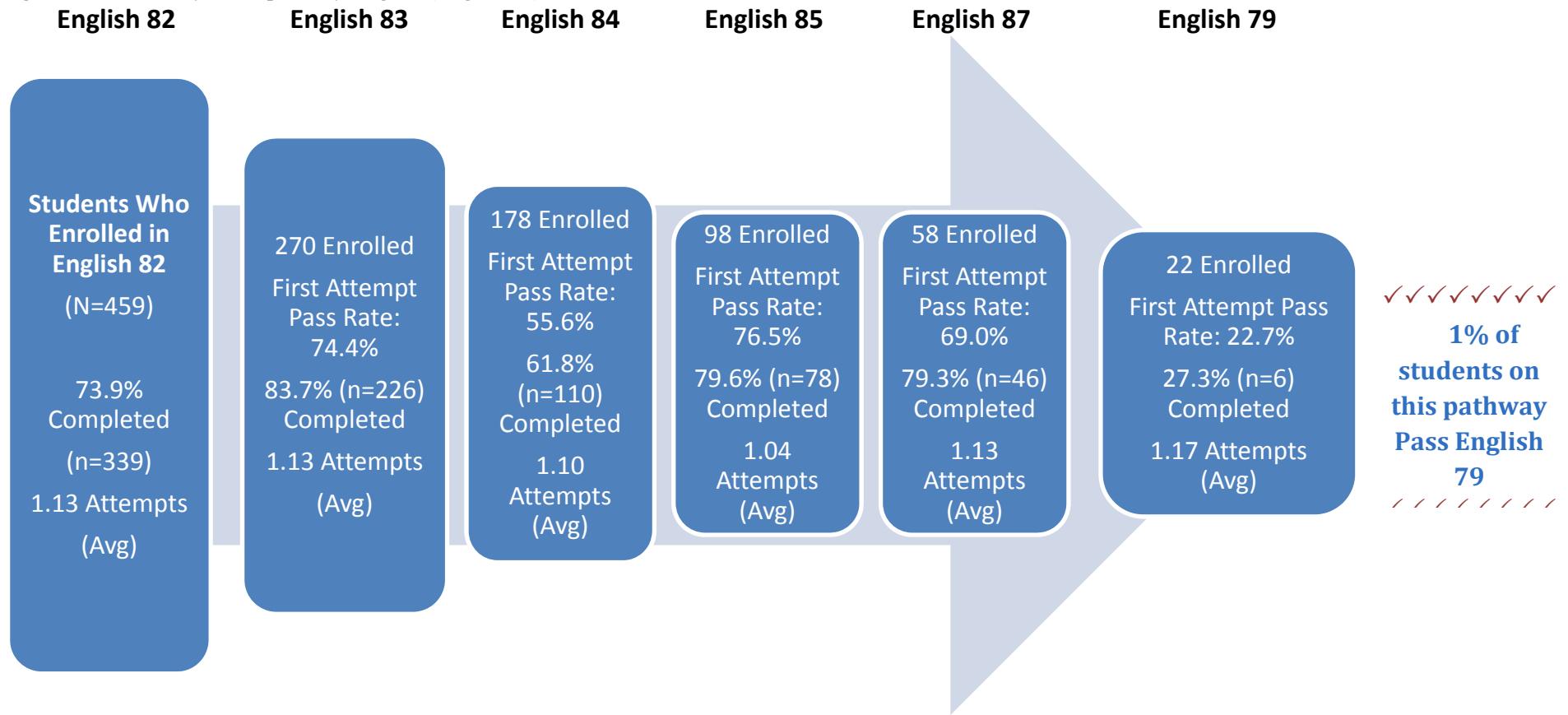
A total of 459 students enrolled in English 82 between summer 2003 and spring 2008. About three in four (74%) passed the course, and those that passed took an average of 1.13 attempts to do so. Of those who passed English 82, nearly four in five went on to enroll in English 83. Over 80% of these students passed English 83 and did so in an average of 1.13 attempts. The vast majority of the students who passed English 83 (79%) enrolled in English 84, and just under two in three (61%) passed. Most students (89%) who passed English 84 enrolled in the capstone ESL course, English 85, and about four in five passed in an average of 1.04 attempts. About three in four (74%) of those students went on to enroll in English 87, and four in five passed in an average of 1.13 attempts. Less than half (48%) of the students who completed English 87 went on to enroll in English 79, and only about one in four (27%) passed the course, equaling just 1% of the entire starting cohort.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The present study investigated the course-taking patterns, costs and ESL-English course progression of students enrolled in Basic English as Second Language (English 82) between summer 2003 and spring 2008. Successful completion of English 79 served as the outcome of interest, and students were tracked from ESL courses to English 87 and 79. Cost per FTES or enrollment were also calculated for students in the ESL pathway. The results of the present study show that very few students who enroll in Basic English as a Second Language (English 82) go on to enroll in and complete Preparatory English, the gateway course for transfer-level English.

In addition, for the few students who do complete the pathway, it comes at a rather high cost of nearly \$30,000 per FTES and about \$4,900 per enrollment for the average student. Considering the high costs and low number of students that complete English 79, it seems appropriate for the College to investigate additional alternatives for ESL students, perhaps by combining courses or further examining the connection between ESL curricula and other English courses. There appears to be a large drop-off of ESL students between English 87 and English 79; only about one in eight students who complete English 87 go on to complete English 79. Additional studies should be conducted to identify the causes of this break in the pathway. In sum, given the scarcity of funding in tight budget times, it seems appropriate to look at more cost-effective and efficient means of transitioning students from ESL to Preparatory English.

Figure 4.ESL Pathway to Preparatory English (English 79)



	English 82	English 83	English 84	English 85	English 87	English 79	Total Cost
Model Student (Assumes student passes on his/her first attempt)							
Cost per FTES	\$7,016.47	\$4,866.48	\$5,116.36	\$6,227.82	\$1,330.80	\$1,708.14	\$26,266.07
Cost per Enrollment	\$1,193.32	\$855.23	\$957.23	\$898.66	\$227.37	\$286.69	\$4,418.50
Average Student (Costs multiplied by average attempts required to pass course)							
Cost per FTES	\$7,928.61	\$5,499.12	\$5,628.00	\$6,476.93	\$1,503.80	\$1,998.52	\$29,034.99
Cost per Enrollment	\$1,348.45	\$966.40	\$1,052.95	\$934.61	\$256.93	\$335.42	\$4,894.77

Note: Model assumes students enroll in one English 86 lab course for each ESL course (English 82 through English 85)