

The English Academic Preparation Program at the University of Prince Edward Island

An Exploratory Case Study

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## Abstract

The University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI) English Academic Preparation (EAP) program is designed to assist non-native English speakers (NNES) upgrade their English proficiency levels through language intensive classes. Successful completion of the UPEI EAP program gives students unconditional admission to pursue an undergraduate degree at UPEI. This program has enabled UPEI to admit more students than traditional admission standards that required applicants to have a designated language proficiency score.

This M.Ed thesis set out to explore whether the UPEI EAP program is adequately preparing students for academic study at UPEI and contributing to students' overall experience at the university. Qualitative and quantitative research methods were employed in this exploratory case study. Qualitative data collection and analysis methods were used to review the program's original business proposal, conduct a one-on-one interview with the EAP Program Coordinator, and complete student focus groups. Quantitative methods were used to review and analyze EAP end-of-term course evaluations completed between 2004 and 2008. Findings revealed four themes that focused on the EAP environment, level of difficulty of EAP courses, student satisfaction, and program policies. The mixed methods analysis found that the UPEI EAP program appeared to be successful at creating an environment that fostered linguistic, social, cultural, and personal growth and providing a foundation for EAP students to grow as learners. However, the UPEI EAP program could likely benefit from re-assessing the level of difficulty of its courses to ensure that they are at par with first year credit-based courses and meeting students' learning needs. Furthermore, reviewing program policies and the current admissions policy may further enhance program accountability.

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Between July 2009 and June 2010, 1791 individuals immigrated to Prince Edward Island (PEI), representing a growth in overall population of less than 1% (Prince Edward Island Statistics Bureau, 2010). Less than 1% of growth appears small; however this influx of immigrants was the largest in PEI since 1971. It was also the largest percentage of growth in Canada between 2009 and 2010. Growth in international immigration to PEI is not a new phenomenon. In fact, the international community of PEI has been growing steadily since October, 2003 (Prince Edward Island Provincial Treasury, 2009). The growth in PEI has been attributed to the provincial government's initiative to increase the international community. The purpose of this initiative was to maintain a strong skilled labour force and to address the marginal growth in birthrate among PEI families (Government of Prince Edward Island, 2005). In 2005, population projections for PEI indicated that between 2003 and 2030, the number of island-born citizens aged 0-14 years would decrease from approximately 26,000 to less than 20,000. Statistics from July, 2010 revealed that the population for citizens aged 0-14 had decreased by 16.5% from 2005 to 2010 (Prince Edward Island Statistics Bureau, 2010). As a result of a decrease in population, school enrolment was also projected to decrease by 40%. It was forecasted that this would likely result in a decline in the enrolment of domestic students at PEI's post-secondary institutions: the University of Prince Edward Island and Holland College (Government of Prince Edward Island, 2005). Cognizant of these projections, the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI) developed strategies to prevent a decline in future enrolment and ultimately tuition revenues by revamping the international student recruitment plan which would subsequently increase student enrolment.

In 2005, UPEI developed an internationalization initiative aimed at increasing international student enrolment to 10% of the student body by 2010. Since this strategy was implemented, international student enrolment at UPEI steadily increased. In 2008 at UPEI, international students represented 8% of the student body. In 2010, international students represented 11.6% of the student body (Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission, 2009; UPEI University Update 2010/2011, 2010). A program that may have influenced international student recruitment is the English Academic Preparation (EAP) program offered at UPEI.

The English Academic Preparation (EAP) program is an English as a Second Language program designed to assist international students who do not meet the university language proficiency requirements at UPEI. The goal of the program is to improve international students' English speaking, listening, and writing skills to a university standard. This program has enabled UPEI to admit more non-English speaking students than traditional admission requirements would have allowed. The UPEI EAP program has been in operation for eight years and since its inception no research has been formally conducted to examine the impact of the program. The purpose of this thesis is to explore through students' perceptions whether the program has been meeting their learning needs in EAP courses and in credit-based courses. This thesis could inform policy related to the EAP program at UPEI, and potentially EAP programs at other universities.

### **Research Questions and Goals**

From the perspective of students, this thesis investigated the extent to which the goals and objectives of the UPEI EAP program have been meeting the learning needs of its students and how the program is contributing to students' university experience. An

increase of 11.6% in international student enrolment in the span of eight years raises questions related to the extent to which UPEI and more specifically, the UPEI EAP program, is adequately preparing this group of students for academic study. Initial questions that inspired this thesis included: Are students satisfied with their EAP courses? To what degree do students completing this program believe to have the tools to be successful in their academic pursuits? The following formal research questions were established: According to program documents, the Program Coordinator, and part-time EAP students, to what degree do the goals and objectives of the EAP program at the University of Prince Edward Island: 1. adequately prepare its students for academic study in their chosen discipline; and 2. contribute to students' overall experience at university? To examine these research questions an exploratory case study utilizing qualitative and quantitative research methods was employed.

### **The UPEI EAP Program**

#### **How the UPEI EAP program originated.**

Historically, UPEI has required international students to provide an official language proficiency score from a recognized language exam such as the Test of English Language as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), International English Language Testing System (IELTS), and CanTEST before being accepted into an undergraduate or graduate program (for more information see [http://www.upei.ca/registrar/3\\_english\\_proficiency](http://www.upei.ca/registrar/3_english_proficiency)). This policy is consistent with practices at most other Canadian post-secondary institutions which require students whose first language is not English to demonstrate language proficiency from one of these recognized exams (TESL Canada Federation, 2008). Between 1990 and 1996, international enrolment at Canadian post-secondary institutions declined from 30,000 to 25,500. This decrease was attributed to the use of

such traditional admission standards (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 2007). In the 1990s, universities across Canada, including UPEI, became aware of the importance of developing programs that would increase international enrolment to set them apart from other institutions (UPEI Internationalization Committee, 2008). In 1999, the UPEI administration hired an external reviewer to assess internationalization and to provide marketing strategies for future growth (Gillan, 2001). In response to a recommendation from this external review, a business plan was proposed to establish an academic English immersion program for prospective UPEI international students based on the theoretical and structural framework of English for Academic Purposes programs. English for Academic Purposes programs at the university level incorporate learning generic and specific academic skills related to university study and increasing students' English language proficiency into their curricula (Hyland, 2006). Students take English for Academic Purposes courses as a condition of their admission in order to reach the university's language proficiency standard before having permission to pursue an undergraduate or graduate program without language support. An English for Academic Purposes program was considered a recruitment tool to attract more international students to UPEI. This academic English immersion program did not require students to have the traditional prescribed language proficiency before admission. It became known as the English Academic Preparation (EAP) program and was launched in 2002. The UPEI EAP program follows an English for general academic purposes (EGAP) model (Jordan, 1997). It offers courses that focus on generic academic English skills such as oral communication, writing, listening, and reading required for studying at an English speaking university (Gillan, 2001).

Non-native English speakers (NNES) who meet the required UPEI admission standards except in the area of language proficiency are admitted to UPEI with the condition that they complete an on-site language proficiency exam – the CanTEST (University of Ottawa, 2010). Students are enrolled in either the full-time program or the part-time program based on their language proficiency scores on the CanTEST. Students in the full-time program take EAP courses 25 hours/week (Monday to Friday) and do not yet have the language proficiency required to take credit-based courses. Students in the part-time program take between one and four EAP courses and have the required language proficiency to take one to two credit-based courses. The CanTEST exam is used by UPEI Registrar's Office and the UPEI EAP program to assess incoming students' language proficiency and to make placement decisions for EAP courses.

### **How international students are placed in the UPEI EAP program.**

CanTEST results are given as three separate scores ranging between 1.0 and 4.5 (English Academic Preparation Program, 2010). Scores 3.0 and below indicate that the UPEI EAP full-time program is required for at least one semester before permission is given to take credit-based courses. Scores between 3.5 and 4.0 indicate that the UPEI EAP part-time program is required. Students in the part-time program may also take one or two credit-based courses. A score of 4.5 indicates that EAP courses are not required. Students receive scores for reading and listening based on a series of multiple choice questions, scores for writing based on a written essay, and scores for speaking based on an oral interview. Reading and listening scores determine which level of the oral communications course is required. Writing scores determine the writing course level, and speaking scores determine whether students require a phonetics course. Each student receives a unique combination of proficiency scores. For example, a student may receive

3.5 on the reading and listening section of the CanTEST and a 4.0 on the written section of the exam. Based on these results, this student would be placed in level 1 of the oral communications course and level 3 of the academic writing course. See Appendix A for a detailed description of the UPEI EAP full-time and part-time programs.

### **University Enrolment**

Enrolment at UPEI, as shown in Table 1, has increased for the most part since the 2002/2003 academic year (Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission, 2008a, 2010a). Paralleling the overall increase in UPEI's enrolment pattern is the enrolment of international students, which shows an increase of 4.5% from 2002/2003 to the 2009/2010 academic year.

Table 1

*Student Enrolment: University of Prince Edward Island 2002 to 2010<sup>a</sup>*

University of Prince Edward Island	Total enrolment	International student enrolment	International % of total enrolment
2002/2003	3557	155	4.4
2003/2004	3843	176	4.6
2004/2005	3992	211	5.3
2005/2006	3888	225	5.8
2006/2007	4008	255	6.4
2007/2008	3921	269	6.9
2008/2009	4131	330	8.0
2009/2010	4232	378	8.9

<sup>a</sup> Table 1 has been adapted from [http://www.mphec.ca/resources/Enr\\_Table1\\_2006\\_2007E.pdf](http://www.mphec.ca/resources/Enr_Table1_2006_2007E.pdf), [http://www.mphec.ca/en/Resources/Enr\\_Table5\\_2007\\_2008E.pdf](http://www.mphec.ca/en/Resources/Enr_Table5_2007_2008E.pdf), [http://www.mphec.ca/resources/Enr\\_Table1\\_2009\\_2010E.pdf](http://www.mphec.ca/resources/Enr_Table1_2009_2010E.pdf), [http://www.mphec.ca/resources/Enr\\_Table5\\_2009\\_2010E.pdf](http://www.mphec.ca/resources/Enr_Table5_2009_2010E.pdf)

Focusing on international students, Table 2 shows the number of students who have been enrolled in the UPEI EAP program between 2002 and 2010 (Gillan, 2010). Comparing the enrolment numbers of Table 1 and Table 2, in 2008/2009, EAP students accounted for 40% (132 EAP students/330 international students) of the total international enrolment, and in 2009/2010, EAP students accounted for 47.6% (180 EAP students/338 international students) of the total international enrolment. These students would not have been accepted to UPEI with a traditional admissions policy in place.

Table 2

*EAP Student Enrolment at UPEI from 2002 to 2010*

Academic semester	January enrolment	September enrolment
2002	-	10
2003	11	11
2004	23	35
2005	27	18
2006	18	42
2007	47	72
2008	63	132
2009	132	172
2010	180	187

The national average for international student enrolment at Canadian universities for the 2005/2006 academic year was 7.7% of the total student university population (*The Daily*, 2008). For this same year, the enrolment of international students at the

UPEI was 5.8% (Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission, 2008a) which was 1.9% lower than the national average when comparing international student enrolment at the UPEI with other maritime universities. The UPEI is one of the few universities to have experienced a steady growth among the international student population. Between 2005 and 2010, international student enrolment fluctuated at many maritime universities. For example, Mount Allison University's international enrolment statistics rose from 6.6% in 2005/2006 to 7.2% in 2007/2008, and then fell to 5.0% in 2008/2009 (Maritime Provinces Higher Education Commission, 2010b). Comparing the enrolment at UPEI with other maritime universities shows that UPEI is doing well to recruit international students to its main campus. Although it is important to acknowledge that other factors may have contributed to the increase in international student enrolment (e.g., PEI government initiatives), this thesis is concerned with the role that the UPEI EAP program has played to increase international student enrolment at UPEI. A contributing factor to the growth of international students at UPEI is the university's admissions policy that admits non-native English speakers (NNES) into an undergraduate program before meeting the language proficiency admission standards.

Other universities within the maritime provinces offer English for academic purposes programs either at their individual institutions or provide these services to international students through partnerships with external language institutes. The admissions policies for some maritime universities require that students first enrol at a language program and then upon completion of the program apply for admission to the university (e.g. Acadia University, 2009; Dalhousie University, 2009; Mount Allison University, 2009.). Saint Mary's University and the University of New Brunswick are the only two other universities in the maritime provinces that offer an academic English

program that is similar to the one at UPEI (Saint Mary's University, 2009; University of New Brunswick, 2009).

Saint Mary's University has one of the oldest TESL learning centres in Atlantic Canada. It offers four separate programs: English for Academic Purposes, a University Bridging Program, English for Personal and Professional- Practical Communication, and a One-Month ESL Immersion (Saint Mary's University, 2011). The University Bridging Program is the only program that permits students to take credit-based courses while taking English classes and requires students to have conditional admissions into an undergraduate or graduate program at Saint Mary's University. To receive conditional admissions to Saint Mary's, students must provide documentation of having a minimal language proficiency score. This language proficiency score determines whether the applicant is permitted to take one or two credit-based course (Saint Mary's University, 2011). Students who do not have this minimum language proficiency but intend on studying at an English-speaking university may apply to the English for Academic Purposes program. These students take an on-site language proficiency exam upon arrival to the TESL Centre and are placed into an appropriate learning level based on these scores. They take English classes only and do not have acceptance to take credit-based courses. Once students have successfully completed the highest level of the English for Academic Purposes program they are eligible to receive unconditional admissions to Saint Mary's. The English for Academic Purposes program is intended for individuals who have high-beginner language proficiencies and above. If a student's test scores indicate a low-beginner language proficiency level, then he/she is accepted into the English for Personal and Professional/Practical Communication program. The One Month Immersion program is designed for individuals who are looking to improve their

English communication skills while learning about Canadian culture. This is a 4 week course offered each January and July. The UPEI EAP program differs from its counterparts because it offers students who have an advanced language proficiency level more opportunities to take courses that count towards their chosen degrees than the programs at Saint Mary's and UNB allow.

It is believed that English for Academic Purposes programs benefit Canadian universities. These programs provide opportunities for international students, who do not meet university language proficiency standards, more opportunities to travel abroad to Canada and study at an English speaking university. Traditional admission requirements would not have afforded these individuals this opportunity. In turn, increasing international representation at Canadian universities has diversified our campuses. Increasing international enrolment introduces local students and international students alike to different cultures, ways of thinking, behaviours, and belief systems. Having a diverse study body may therefore promote tolerance of an individual's differences. It may also promote an innovation of ideas during class discussions and assignments. English for Academic Purposes programs also have a global impact. International students bring their experiences of studying abroad back to their home countries. This may have a positive influence on the people and work environment of this student.

The UPEI EAP program also has the potential to play a role at UPEI to increase international enrolment. However, it sits in a difficult position of balancing the role of helping students meet their admissions requirement, increasing international enrolment, and generating revenue. If its policies are too strict, students who are not serious about completing an undergraduate degree may not continue to apply to UPEI knowing that they may not successfully meet the English language proficiency admission standard. If

fewer students apply, then fewer students are admitted, which could put the EAP program in jeopardy of being discontinued. The program has the challenging task of being accountable to the students and accountable to the university at the same time. The primary focus of this thesis has been to seek student input to explore the extent to which the program prepares students for academic study and contributes to their experiences at UPEI.

This thesis is organized into five chapters. The second chapter provides a review of the relevant literature related to university programs that focus specifically on English for Academic Purposes<sup>1</sup> and the role of these programs at post-secondary institutions. An overview of the historical origins and design models for English for Academic Purposes programs are highlighted to better understand the specific design of the UPEI EAP program. This chapter also examines various individual and cultural factors that influence Second Language Acquisition (SLA)<sup>2</sup>. The third chapter outlines the data collection and analysis methods used along with background information of participants. The fourth chapter presents the results of the three data sources: document review, one-on-one interview, and focus groups. The fifth chapter presents a discussion comparing the results from the three data sources, and the implications, along with recommendations for future program growth. The concluding section includes the limitations of the study. Within this section, there is a discussion of the possible implications of being the principal researcher and also an employee of the UPEI EAP program. Furthermore, included are ideas for future research, and concluding thoughts.

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<sup>1</sup> English for Academic Purposes is commonly known as EAP. Considering that the English Academic Preparation program uses the same alliteration, English for Academic Purposes will be written in full unless otherwise stated.

<sup>2</sup> SLA will be used to describe language learning for individuals whose native language is not English. It is recognized that for some individuals English may be a third, fourth, or fifth, etc., language.

## **Literature Review**

The EAP program at UPEI is based on the theories and practices of programs that emphasize English for Academic Purposes at the tertiary level. In this chapter, the relevant theories and research regarding English for Academic Purposes programming and SLA are presented. This literature provides a basis to understand the history and organizational structure of the UPEI EAP program. It also offers insight into what constitutes learning another language in preparation to study at an English-speaking university.

This literature review is divided into three sections. The first section reviews the origins and theories of English for Academic Purposes, along with language proficiency and program methodology. The second section examines relevant research regarding English for Academic Purposes programming. The third section discusses how individual learner characteristics, motivation, culture, and learning conditions influence language acquisition generally and in academic contexts.

### **English for Academic Purposes Programming**

#### **Origins and focus.**

English for Academic Purposes programming began more than 30 years ago emerging from English for Specific Purposes programs (Hyland, 2006; Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002; Jordan, 1997). English for Specific Purposes programs were designed to assist English-language learners studying for occupational purposes in areas such as business, professional development, or technology. In contrast, English for Academic Purposes programs have been designed to assist learners acquire academic skills to study at post-secondary institutions. These programs have been set up in English speaking contexts with the individual traveling to an English speaking country

to study, and in non-English speaking contexts in which the individual studies at an English speaking university within his or her home country (Jordan, 1997). English for Academic Purposes programs are divided into English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) and English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP). ESAP programs are subject specific focusing on a particular academic discipline such as economics, business, or medicine. EGAP programs, on the other hand, aim to develop reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills that are common to all academic disciplines (Jordan, 1997), with a particular emphasis on the communicative requirements in the social contexts in which these skills would be utilized (Hyland, 2006; Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002). EGAP programs have also been called Study Skills (Jordan, 1997). Course content may focus on how to plan and give individual and group oral presentations. The process of acquiring academic skills is emphasized and considered to be as equally important as reaching the end goal of successfully speaking, reading, and writing using academic English skills (Todd, 2003).

Programs that have an ESAP and EGAP focus have grown steadily over the years as a result of an increase in the number of interested non-native English speakers looking to study at an English speaking university, often in North America, the United Kingdom, or Australia. Furthermore, an ever increasing interest to create citizens with strong English skills has contributed to the growth of these programs (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002). For instance, developing countries promote studying abroad (in an English-speaking country) to foster the development of knowledgeable and linguistically diverse citizens. After graduating from an English speaking university, students would be expected to return to their native country to boost the global economic status of their home country. In turn, universities in English-speaking countries have provided more

opportunities for students, who have low English-language proficiency, to be admitted on the condition they upgrade their academic English proficiency before admission to complete a degree (Fox, Cheng, Berman, Song, & Myles, 2006; Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002). Offering a conditional admissions policy has also allowed universities to admit a higher number of students into undergraduate and graduate programs and has increased revenue at these universities substantially (Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002). University classrooms in countries such as Canada, the United States, Australia, and England are therefore becoming more socially, culturally, and linguistically diverse. An increased diversity in university classrooms has required university administration and professors to carefully consider the learning needs of a culturally diverse student body. University faculty and administration are re-assessing assumptions and expectations that all students enter university with the same foundation of knowledge and skill sets (Hyland, 2006).

ESAP and EGAP programs play a key role at many universities by helping students prepare for the social and linguistic demands of studying in English-speaking classrooms. Courses are designed to prepare students for admission to the academic discipline of their choice and are an integral component of the university's admission policy. These programs have taken on different forms throughout the years but have ultimately been designed according to the skills required for academic success (Fox et al., 2006; Hyland & Hamp-Lyons, 2002). Students, for example, become proficient at listening to academic lectures as well as practice skills such as note-taking. They participate in seminars and tutorials, read textbooks to analyze the meaning of the text, write essays, and complete multiple-choice examinations (Hyland, 2006).

Most ESAP and EGAP programs use standardized language assessment exams to place students in courses. Language proficiency standards are measured by scores on tests such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) before and after taking courses. Universities have designated language proficiency levels that students must demonstrate before unrestricted admission (University of Ottawa, 2010). ESAP and EGAP programs assist students in achieving these designated proficiency levels. The time it takes a student to achieve the required level of English language proficiency can vary. Language proficiency determines the organizational structure of courses and is an important consideration when discussing English for Academic Purposes programming and curricula. Students who have basic conversational English will presumably require extensive language support and take longer to achieve university level language proficiency compared to students who are able to read and write in English using higher order level thinking skills (Cummins, 2000) connected to the Cognitive Domain Taxonomy (Krathwohl, Bloom, & Masia, 1964).

### **Language proficiency.**

The level of language proficiency required to successfully communicate in everyday conversation is different than that required in a university course. The amount of comprehensible input in everyday conversation is higher than in academic situations (Krashen, 1982, 1984). A high degree of comprehensible input enables someone whose native language is not English to understand and converse in English using contextual cues. Through research conducted in the 1980s, Cummins (1981b, 1984, as cited in Cummins, 2000) argued that teachers and psychologists were making the incorrect assumptions that students were proficient in English based on their ability to converse in English about every day and familiar topics. These same students were not able to

successfully complete academic tasks in English. Subsequently, Cummins (2000) conducted a re-analysis of language assessment data. He found a gap in the results that aimed to predict how long it takes an individual to function in English using peer-appropriate fluency in conversational situations compared to the time it takes an individual to achieve grade-specific norms in academic English. Cummins (1979b, as cited in Cummins, 2000) coined these two levels of language proficiency as Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP).

BICS is comprised of general conversational skills and is described as a “surface level of fluency in English” (Cummins, 2000, p. 58). BICS contains a high degree of comprehensible input because speakers are able to speak slowly, use gestures, and negotiate for meaning in a context-embedded environment through bi-directional communication. Individuals at a BICS proficiency level have limited knowledge of the language; however, they are able function adequately within interpersonal communicative situations. During these situations, learners are aided by interpersonal cues such as eye contact and facial expressions. Furthermore, conversational situations do not have a high degree of complexity, and often contain high frequency vocabulary and grammatical structures. CALP is normally developed in context-reduced environments that have less comprehensible language, which is often unidirectional. These environments normally offer learners fewer opportunities to understand or negotiate meaning through body language, facial expressions, or by asking for clarification. Individuals must rely on linguistic cues rather than context cues.

BICS can be acquired in two years; whereas, it normally takes an individual five to seven years to acquire CALP. Cummins (2000) has argued that it takes longer to

acquire CALP because individuals are required to utilize higher order level thinking skills that focus on the English lexicon specific to academic contexts.

The Cognitive Domain Taxonomy (Krathwohl et al., 1964) focuses on building knowledge, comprehension, and application skills, along with an individual's ability to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate discourse. It is believed that ESAP and EGAP programs should focus on these cognitive domains with particular emphasis placed on analysis and synthesis. Cummins (2000) has further argued that academic situations require students to have strong knowledge of CALP to cope. CALP contains low vocabulary frequency, complex grammatical structures and puts more demands on memory, along with a focus on analysis and the use of other cognitive processes. Students' language proficiency affects a program's methodological approach and curricula focus. For example, a program that builds BICS may emphasize life skills by having students' complete activities that focus on everyday activities. Whereas, a program that builds CALP may focus on students' abilities to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate text.

The results of the on-site language proficiency exam at the UPEI have indicated that an increasing number of students were scoring at BICS level and entering the UPEI EAP program in the full-time stream (Gillan, 2010). Since more students have been entering the UPEI EAP program with BICS proficiency, it is believed, based on Cummins research, that they will require an extended period of English study in order to reach the language proficiency required for academic study. This has changed the curriculum of the full-time EAP program. EAP instructors are required to focus on BICS more than CALP, or what the UPEI refers to as academic English.

## **Program and curriculum approaches.**

### ***Program approaches.***

To meet the learning needs of potential university students, an English for Academic Purposes program has the flexibility to design its courses and its curriculum (Hyland, 2006). As mentioned, there are English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) and English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) programs (Jordan, 1997). Todd (2003) calls course design the *what* and the methods, approaches, and techniques the *how* of ESAP and EGAP programming. In addition to having a specific or general academic focus, courses may be designed to stand alone, bridge, and/or shadow another course (Fox et al., 2006). Stand-alone courses are designed for students who are studying English full-time and not ready to take credit-based courses that count towards a degree. The curriculum for these courses can be divided into thematic units that focus on reading, listening, writing, and speaking using subject specific content that is different in each unit. Bridging courses can either be designed to allow a group of students from the same discipline to take ESAP and shadow a university course or enrol in EGAP while also taking credit-based courses. Shadowing a university course entails that students take a credit-based course alongside an ESAP course that follows the same curriculum. The goal is to provide academic support regarding vocabulary, reading and writing assignments. Students focus on the applicable academic skills of that particular discipline. In courses that focus on EGAP, students are exposed to content from a variety of subjects. Students are encouraged to apply what they learn in their English classes to their other university courses (Fox et al., 2006; Jordan, 1997).

The UPEI EAP program has EGAP programming. It offers a stand-alone full-time program for students who are assessed as having BICS and a part-time bridging

program for students who are assessed as having a beginning level of CALP. Students in the full-time program focus on thematic units that incorporate reading, listening, speaking, and writing. The curriculum emphasizes life and basic academic skills to build students' knowledge and comprehension of academic subjects. The part-time program offers specific reading, listening, speaking, and writing courses. The curriculum uses content from subjects such as biology, psychology, economics, and business to practice comprehension in academic subject matter, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation skills and strategies. Students in the part-time program also enrol in one to four university courses in their discipline of choice. One of the goals of the part-time EAP program is to have students apply the skills and academic strategies they are learning in EAP to their other UPEI courses.

### ***Curriculum approaches.***

There are several approaches English for Academic Purposes programs can take regarding curriculum decisions. Finding the best approach to suit the goals of an ESAP or EGAP program requires that program administration: 1. conduct a needs analysis of the learners enrolled in the program; 2. establish a detailed description of the teaching and learning process for each course offered and; 3. remember that not all ESL methodology and approaches work in English for Academic Purposes programming. Conducting a needs analysis of learners is considered the most important aspect of curriculum design (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001) and requires that program administration ask questions such as: In what academic situations does the learner require English? What skills does the learner need? What areas of English does the learner lack? What does the learner want to learn? Questions should also focus on what motivates learners, how much English is used outside of the English classroom and what

the students' language learning strategies are. Once this is established, the next step is to link curriculum goals with course activities. Furthermore, course activities and curriculum decisions should emphasize developing learner independence since most English for Academic Purposes programs are preparing students to take university level courses (Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001).

Three common curriculum approaches used by English for Academic Purposes programs are study skills, disciplinary socialization, and academic literacies (Hyland, 2006). Each approach can work independently or be integrated. Furthermore, these approaches may be content-based, skills-based, or methods/task-based (Jordan, 1997). The UPEI EAP program uses the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994) which is a combination of the study skills and disciplinary socialization approaches.

The study skills approach was the dominant paradigm of the 1980s (Hyland, 2006). This is a skills-based approach and emphasizes techniques and strategies to help students interpret academic discourse and text. The premise is that achieving academic success involves developing more than knowledge of language; it includes analyzing and exploring text through note-taking, lecture comprehension, library search skills, referencing, exam-taking strategies, study skills, and effective time-management. The curriculum focuses on micro-level skills associated with reading, listening, speaking, and writing (Jordan, 1997). One limitation of the study skills approach was that it is not learner-centred (Hyland, 2006). Rather, it is content-centred focusing on a particular set of skills and strategies that are deemed important for successful academic study. The instructor can work through these skills and strategies without fully taking into

consideration the impact of a learner's prior knowledge, current level of proficiency, or academic experience.

The disciplinary socialization approach (Hyland, 2006) emphasizes the understanding of how language forms and strategies work to construct and represent knowledge within a particular context. This methods/task-based approach focuses less on skill development than the study skills approach; students learn how to function using specific learning styles and oral communication techniques common in different situations and academic subjects. Course activities emphasize the process of completing specific tasks (Jordan, 1997). Students learn how to interact with each other using subject-specific vocabulary to build oral communication and written skills regarding a given topic. In this approach, students interact in different social and institutional contexts where language, the user, and the context are intertwined with a particular disciplinary group and practice. Students also learn how to discuss, write, and think critically to explore how meaning is represented and conveyed by different texts. A limitation of this approach is that success is achieved by students who are able to replicate the actions that are sought by the discipline and/or by the professor. Students may not be encouraged to think or act beyond the parameters of the given subject and therefore are often limited to subject-specific vocabulary and analysis techniques (Hyland, 2006).

The academic literacies approach (Hyland, 2006) is content-based and investigates the type of language and terminology used in specific academic disciplines. For example, students may have an entire course related to a discipline such as business, biology, or literature. The curriculum is constructed around the language of a particular discipline (Jordan, 1997). Students learn about the values, beliefs, and identities

represented in the different contexts they are studying. They then complete activities to demonstrate their ability using these forms of language successfully. The limitations of this approach are that learners are asked to adopt the values and beliefs of a specific discipline. Furthermore, the language among disciplines can be complex and specific to the genre. If a student is unable to effectively use the terminology from his/her discipline, he/she will have great difficulty communicating ideas successfully. The inability to use genre specific terminology automatically excludes individuals who do not have the necessary language proficiency (Hyland, 2006).

CALLA (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994) integrates the three approaches - content, skills and task-based approaches into its curriculum. Content is the vehicle to build students' prior knowledge, collaborative learning, meta-cognitive awareness and self-reflection. Courses include reading, listening comprehension, academic writing, and oral communication activities that focus on specific academic tasks. Students learn how to effectively use academic skills and strategies to communicate concepts and processes in specific disciplines. Instructors incorporate the use of critical thinking skills into their lessons to encourage students to broaden their ability to read, speak, listen, and write analytically across disciplines by focusing on the content of one discipline at a time. Students investigate how language is represented and used in different forms across each discipline.

In addition to basing program design on CALLA, in the proposal stages of developing the UPEI EAP program, Gillan (2001) referenced Krashen (1982, 1984) and his Input Hypothesis Theory to provide a foundational framework for curriculum development and classroom teaching. Krashen's Input Hypothesis states that for learners to acquire a language they must be exposed to comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982,

1984). Input becomes comprehensible when it is contextualized and one level beyond an individual's current level of proficiency ( $i + 1$ ). Contextualizing input entails that the learner focuses on the meaning of the message rather than its form, which enables this person to acquire new language. According to Krashen's theory, when the input is understood and when there is enough of it to work with, learners will automatically be exposed to language that extends beyond their current proficiency level. The UPEI EAP program aims to provide learners with rich language, which will challenge and push them beyond their abilities to think critically within a variety of academic situations.

Regardless of the approach chosen by programs that focus on ESAP and EGAP, administrators are encouraged to be cognizant of course curriculum and assessment practices (Hyland, 2006). It is best for program and curriculum related decisions to centre on understanding students' learning needs so that lessons follow a logical sequence of learning and establish procedures for reporting and monitoring student progress to include constructive feedback. Hyland (2006) emphasized that establishing goals and objectives for the program as a whole and for individual courses is an important aspect of program design. Goals include what individual courses and the program hope to accomplish. Objectives are smaller, achievable actions that are carried out by program staff and students. Having clear objectives facilitates the planning process by sequencing content and activities (Hyland, 2006).

### **English for Academic Purposes Research**

Within the Canadian context, much of the research examining English for Academic Purposes at the tertiary level has been conducted by instructors and program administrators who have investigated: the role of teaching and using technology (Ramachandran, 2004); vocabulary retention (Borer, 2007); graduate level programming

(Cheng, Myles, & Curtis, 2004; Raymond & Des Brisay, 2000); the effectiveness of placement exams and assessment (James & Templeman, 2009; Fox, 2009); peer help in credit-based courses (Mendelson, 2002); perceived academic difficulties of undergraduate and graduate NNES (Berman & Cheng, 2001); and acculturation (Cheng & Fox, 2008; Fox et al., 2006). These studies examined English for Academic Purposes programs of varying size, purpose, and focus from specific course related activities to placement tests and programs as a whole. Relatively little research has been conducted at Canadian universities in the past decade regarding the effectiveness of ESAP and ESAP programming. Better understanding of the goals and objectives of the UPEI EAP program from the perspective of EAP students will provide insight into the learning needs of the students enrolled and fill a gap in existing EAP research in Canada.

### **The role of teaching and use of technology.**

The goal of a study conducted by Ramachandran (2004) was to emphasize that incorporating technology into class activities is not only useful to reinforce skill development in EGAP programming, but it can also enhance instruction and develop literacy skills. To demonstrate how technology can enhance instruction and literacy skills Ramachandran had students from his EGAP class complete two assignments: a research paper and a web-quest. For these assignments students used a variety of technological mediums to access and analyze information. For the research paper, students were required to write a 400-500 word paper using a minimum of three references on any topic approved by Ramachandran. Students were also required to present to their classmates and defend their arguments. Students were asked to use a variety of information sources: journals, textbooks, and the Internet. The web-quest activity was designed to use five hours of classroom time and focused on the cultural

influences of advertisements. Students completed a series of activities that involved in-class group activities designed to build their background knowledge of advertising techniques and related vocabulary. The final goal of this web-quest was to create a video advertisement using specific advertising techniques. These assignments allowed students to navigate through on-line information in search of specific information pertaining to their topics.

Ramachandran evaluated the effectiveness of the research assignment by comparing students' previous writing with the writing produced in this assignment. It was believed that the essay written for this assignment reflected better critical thinking skills and measured conclusions. Through observations, Ramachandran stated that using a computer and the internet as a writing and research tool promoted collaborative writing. Students worked in small groups during scheduled weekly labs to review and discuss each other's writing, and make suggestions for improvement. Ramachandran evaluated students' web-quest assignments using a grid that outlined a series of characteristics students had to demonstrate (i.e., accuracy, webpage objectivity, current information, etc.). She cited improvement in students' reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills. Furthermore, through observation Ramachandran believed that this activity increased students' motivation to work on their literacy skills.

Although Ramachandran found success with technology in the EGAP program he conducted his research, the curriculum used in the UPEI EAP program does not require instructors to use technology in their teaching practices. Other than within the Oral Communications class in which students are required to use Power Point Presentations or Corel Presentations to give a formal presentation, instructors are not required to have their students use technology during class activities. Considering that

many students are comfortable using technology it may be a useful tool for developing students' academic skills within the UPEI EAP program.

### **Vocabulary retention.**

Borer (2007) conducted a study with eight adult learners enrolled in a pre-university EGAP program to research vocabulary retention. The goal of Borer's study was to investigate whether completing a series of activities that involved manipulating and vocalizing vocabulary would increase retention rates, and if participants had better success working alone or with a partner. Participants completed a series of vocabulary activities using words from the Academic Word List. Participants first worked with five unknown vocabulary alone and then with five new vocabulary with a partner. First, participants completed a series of repetition activities such as studying vocabulary in a text and using a dictionary. Participants then completed activities that required them to manipulate the vocabulary through puzzle activities and question-answer tasks. The last set of tasks had participants generate connections between the vocabulary and their personal experience through stimulated recall activities.

Borer assessed students' retention of the vocabulary meanings by testing participants one week after completing the activities and then again a month later. Test scores indicated that participants had more success retaining vocabulary that required deeper processing activities (i.e., the generation activities). It was also found that there were benefits to working alone and working with a partner when learning new vocabulary. Working alone and/or working with a partner did not have an impact on test scores. Through interviews, it was found that participants preferred to work alone to initially process and understand unknown vocabulary and afterwards to work with a partner to discuss the meanings and identify mistakes.

The findings of Borer's (2007) study reinforce that students have more success retaining new vocabulary when it has personal meaning and is connected with students' native language and culture. The UPEI EAP program could implement these findings by providing opportunities for students to work with unknown vocabulary in their first language and discussing cultural connections. Furthermore, these findings emphasize the importance of acknowledging that students have different preferences for working with new vocabulary – some prefer to work alone before discussing new vocabulary with another person. Vocabulary development is an important component of the UPEI EAP program.

### **Graduate programming.**

Raymond and Des Brisay (2000) designed an eight week English for Academic Purposes program specifically for thirty-four students from China entering a fifteen month Master of Business Administration (MBA) program at an English speaking university. Students had academic and professional backgrounds in areas such as accounting, computer science, commerce, and engineering; however, none of the participating students had a background in business. An initial needs assessment was conducted to identify the language proficiency of each student and to determine course specific content and skill areas to focus on during the program. Course content pertained mostly to business theory and practice. Also incorporated into the program were discussions of acculturation. Based on the needs assessment, students were separated into different learning levels. Each level was sub-divided into two streams. Stream 1 focused on reading and writing and stream 2 focused on oral communication, listening, oral presentations, and pronunciation. Students who passed the program were accepted unconditionally into the MBA program. Anecdotal reports from participants claimed that

the program helped them to become more confident and motivated in their studies; however, they still felt less prepared than English-speaking students who entered the MBA program with a business background (Raymond & Des Brisay, 2000). Some participants commented that the program gave them a head-start to develop effective learning strategies useful in the MBA program.

Confidence and motivation are two areas discussed during this thesis and elements of the UPEI EAP program. The above study (Raymond & Des Brisay, 2000) emphasized that confidence and motivation are not the only aspects of being prepared for academic courses at the tertiary level. It was also found that developing students' knowledge of specific academic content is an important element to a successful program. Students in the UPEI EAP program may be better prepared for their academic pursuits if they spend time in their EAP classes building their knowledge and understanding of the subjects they plan to pursue as a degree. Another finding from the above study was that the learning strategies students' acquired in their graduate EGAP program were useful during their MBA courses. This finding emphasizes that utilizing a strategies-based curriculum could be an effective approach for preparing students for academic study.

In a similar study, Cheng et al. (2004) surveyed 59 graduate students studying at a Canadian university and whose native language was not English. The objective of this study was to determine what participants believed to be the most important and the most difficult language skills required for academic study at the graduate level. Participants were asked to rank, from most important to least important, 31 English language based study skills. Participants were then asked to rank these same skills from most difficult to least difficult. After surveys were compiled and analyzed, twelve follow-up interviews were conducted to ask participants to reflect and elaborate on their answers. The results

of this study indicated that participants perceived skills related to leading class discussions, understanding instructions, and understanding the main points of a reading to be most important. Similarly, the most difficult skills cited were speaking activities such as leading and participating in class discussions, and giving presentations. Some of the least important skills identified had less to do with academics and more to do with understanding media such as television programs, movies, magazines and newspapers. Other skills cited as being least important related to participants' understanding of the university calendar, public notices, written instructions, and course outlines (Cheng et al., 2004). As these findings have indicated, oral communication and reading comprehension skills are an important component of university study and also difficult skills for non-native English speakers; therefore it would be good for ESAP and EGAP programs to incorporate these skills into the curricula and programming. Based in the findings by Cheng, Myles, and Curtis (2004) students in the UPEI EAP program are likely to also emphasize academic communication activities and reading comprehension as important. Consequently the UPEI EAP program may need to give special focus to these areas.

### **Placement and assessment.**

James and Templeman (2009) conducted a placement validity study to investigate the impact of having English as a Second Language (ESL) faculty involved in making placement decisions regarding English language assessments versus using a computer-based assessment program as the only tool for assessment and placement decisions. The computer-based assessment program used multiple-choice questions to test students' reading skills, language use, sentence meaning, listening comprehension, and writing ability. ESL faculty conducted group interviews, assessed writing samples,

and interpreted placement scores. An initial comparison was made between the computer-based assessment scores and faculty conducted test scores. Results indicated that 39.5% of the scores given by the computer-based program compared with faculty scores were an exact match, 88.1% of computer-based scores were one point higher or lower than faculty scores, and 11.9% of computer-based scores were two points higher or lower than faculty scores (James and Templeman, 2009). A second comparison looked at the accuracy rates of decisions made by the computer-based program and faculty in regard to placing students into appropriate learning levels. Placements made only by the computer-based program were compared with placement decisions made using both the program and faculty input. Students were accurately placed in their reading classes 84.1% of the time when faculty were involved, and only 66.5% of the time when the computer-based program was used on its own (James and Templeman, 2009). The accuracy of student placement decisions had decreased by half for writing courses when only the computer program was used. These researchers concluded that faculty input was a valuable component of language assessment scoring and student placements. Furthermore, computer-based assessment scores and placement tools were reported to be inaccurate when used independent of human input.

The UPEI EAP program places its students into their EAP courses through the use of an on-site language assessment. EAP instructors at UPEI are used during the assessment and placement process to varying degrees. The findings of this thesis may provide insight into whether the current assessment and placement procedures utilized by the UPEI EAP program are accurately assessing students learning needs and placing students into the most appropriate courses.

Fox (2009) conducted a study that also looked at student placement procedures at a Canadian university. This study was designed to determine whether there were opportunities to utilize on-going diagnostic assessments to moderate the impact of the new top-down policy changes and support curricular renewal in an EGAP program. A mixed-methods design was used to investigate the impact that the top-down policy changes had on language teaching and academic performance. Through a policy change, students were able to provide a language proficiency score acquired through an external language exam and used to make placement decisions in EGAP courses. Concordance tables were used to make judgements of students' test scores and identify class placements. Test data were also used to create individual learning profiles of students and used to inform teaching practices. Four language teachers participated in interviews and nine teachers along with the Program Coordinator and Program Director participated in regular meetings. Qualitative data were the primary data source. Information was collected during meetings, through email correspondence, and in semi-structured interviews to assess the impact of using these placement procedures. Quantitative data regarding the academic performance of 261 students were collected from diagnostic tests, self-assessment tools, and background profiles.

The quantitative data indicated that participants were often placed in the wrong learning level. While teachers' statements made during interviews and meetings indicated that having mixed-abilities in the same class had a negative impact on teaching practices and students' learning. Teachers stated that having a mixed-ability class created a situation that undermined the effectiveness of their teaching and evaluation practices. The knowledge that classes had varying learning levels also became apparent to teachers when reading their students' learning profiles. Teachers stated that they had

difficulty targeting everyone's learning needs and this impacted how they approached instruction. Students also began to separate into cliques which were reported to contribute to tension among students.

An important outcome of this study was that teachers began to use the individual student learning profiles to make changes to their teaching approaches and curriculum (Fox, 2009). Most of the participating teachers found the profiles to be effective at targeting students' learning needs; whereas, some other teachers did not use the information in the profiles when organizing their daily lessons. Placing students in the wrong learning level negatively impacted students' learning experiences and dynamics as a class. These findings emphasized that it was important to accurately place students in an appropriate learning level. Furthermore, programs such as the UPEI EAP program would benefit from providing opportunities for students placed in the wrong learning level to be either re-assessed and/or re-placed in a more appropriate course. The findings of this thesis may show that group dynamics and group cohesion have played a role in student preparedness for academic study and student satisfaction.

#### **Peer help in credit-based courses.**

Mendelson (2002) conducted a study that investigated the listening comprehension skills of non-native English speaking (NNES) students in a university economics course. Mendelson believed that NNES students had great difficulty keeping up with the demands of note-taking during their economics class. Mendelson associated students' poor note-taking ability with getting poor grades. Twelve NNES students were recruited to participate. Each participant was paired with an English speaking buddy to review course notes and discuss the lectures. Buddies and participants met once a week. Interviews were conducted with the buddies and each participant met with the researcher

to discuss the project. The interviews revealed the types of difficulties participants encountered in their economics classes. Participants believed that the professor spoke too fast and did not use the board enough. Participants also found it particularly difficult when professors did not base their lectures on the content of the textbook because students found it more challenging to prepare for the lecture ahead of time (Mendelson, 2002). Vocabulary was cited as a difficult aspect in following lecture content. Participants reported spending too much time trying to understand new words and therefore they lost the purpose of the lecture. Other issues were related to poor self-esteem, poor attendance, the quantity of required reading, and seeking help when it was needed. These findings contribute to ESAP and EGAP programs by finding a need to emphasize vocabulary, reading comprehension, and listening comprehension regarding university related content. Other important skills included students' familiarity with subject matter and building their confidence as learners. These areas can potentially impact students' experiences at university and prepare students for academic study. Is the EAP program at UPEI putting an appropriate amount of emphasis on building note-taking skills, strategies for dealing with fast speaking professors, and vocabulary development? Does having good notes equate academic achievement? Answers to these questions may be answered through this thesis.

#### **Perceived academic difficulties of undergraduate and graduate NNES.**

Berman and Cheng (2001) conducted a study with undergraduate and graduate native speakers of English and non-native speakers of English to research university students' perceptions of which academic skills are difficult and whether language difficulties affect academic achievement. Participants completed a self-assessment questionnaire answering questions regarding specific academic language skills. The

results of the questionnaire were compared to participants' grade point averages. (Participants volunteered their grade point information.) The results indicated that there was relatively little difference in how undergraduate and graduate native speakers of English rated the difficulty levels of reading, speaking, listening, and writing. However, listening skills were rated as being slightly easier than the other skills. Non-native speakers rated speaking and writing skills as more difficult than reading and listening skills. Comparisons of these results with students' grade point averages showed that self-assessments completed by graduate students, who were non-native speakers of English, produced a negative correlation with their corresponding grade point averages. This meant that students who had low grade point averages in their native language had more difficulty achieving good grades in their graduate program. Furthermore, the perceptions that non-native speakers of English had of their difficulties, regarding speaking and writing, highly correlated with their academic success. Questionnaire ratings by undergraduate non-native English speaking students produced a lower negative correlation compared to graduate non-native English speaking students. This indicated that undergraduate non-native English speaking students' perceptions did not impact students' academic performance to the same degree as graduate non-native English speaking students. .

Conclusions were made that the writing and oral communication demands of graduate programs were higher than undergraduate programs. These findings indicated that programs focusing on ESAP and EGAP would benefit graduate students' academic learning if they emphasized speaking and writing skills. Students' prior grade point averages should also be taken into consideration when designing the curriculum as the findings have also indicated that they could impact students' academic achievement.

Instructors could use this information to target specific areas of speaking and writing to focus on during class activities. The UPEI EAP program primarily targets undergraduate students, speaking and writing skills may be important to target in programs such as the EAP however students' prior grade point averages may not impact students' success as directly.

### **Acculturation.**

Fox et al. (2006) conducted a study at three Canadian universities to better understand the acculturation process and to assess the role EGAP played in acculturation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 56 students, whose native language was not English, enrolled in either an EGAP program and undergraduate courses concurrently or an ESL program without undergraduate courses. The findings from student interviews produced three themes: students' academic characteristics, socio-cognitive approaches to learning, and EAP characteristics. Participants cited learning and coping strategies they developed while taking classes and skills they believed they needed to improve. Examples of academic strategies that participants developed in credit-based courses were: choosing classes that drew upon personal strengths and avoiding classes that focused on perceived weaknesses in areas such as academic discussions, presentations, reading, and writing. Other academic strategies cited were: reading extensively outside of class to prepare for lectures, seeking support for writing assignments and essays, and asking for academic advice from individuals on campus that students have a prior relationship with. Some participants sought advice from professors and teaching assistants whereas other participants looked to their classmates and peers. Participants had varying opinions of integrating with the target culture and of how to be successful studying at a Canadian university. Opinions related to ideal living

arrangements, study groups, friends, and social activities. These preferences were influenced by culture. Participants expressed apprehension to make friends outside of their cultural group because they believed that it was easier to speak their native language. They experienced difficulties adjusting to cultural differences and also experienced culture shock. Other participants recognized that socializing and studying with individuals outside of their culture was an overall benefit to their long-term language development. Many of these opinions were affected by positive and negative experiences with the target culture. Participants' opinions of their language courses depended on whether they were enrolled in the EGAP program or the ESL program. Participants from the EGAP program expressed more satisfaction with their experiences whereas participants from the ESL program saw their English classes as a barrier to taking undergraduate courses. Participants emphasized the importance of the writing courses in the EGAP program and some believed the language support they received assisted them in acquiring the skills and confidence to express themselves better. This, in turn, reduced their stress levels in their undergraduate courses and assisted in developing better reading and testing skills. Overall, participants' positive experiences enhanced the acculturation process while negative experiences impeded the acculturation process.

The results of the above study could inform the results of this thesis. What are UPEI EAP students' perceptions of the UPEI EAP program? Are UPEI EAP courses perceived as a barrier or as a benefit? This thesis did not look at specific academic skills utilized in credit courses; however, it did ask participants to express their opinions of the helpful and unhelpful aspects of EAP courses. Findings from this thesis may contribute to this body of research by confirming or disagreeing with students' opinions from the above study regarding which academic skills they perceived as difficult (i.e.,

presentations, writing, reading) and the importance of having someone to go to for help. Furthermore, this thesis may confirm or disagree with students' beliefs regarding the importance of integrating with native speakers of English and the university context in general. This information provides insight into how to better prepare students for academic study and contribute positively to their university experience.

### **Individual and Social Influences of Language Acquisition**

In addition to reviewing other research completed on English for Academic Purposes programs, it has been helpful to consider the various individual and social characteristics that influence Second Language Acquisition. In January 2009, students enrolled in the UPEI EAP program represented ten countries (Gillan, 2010). Considering that UPEI EAP courses consist of students with varying native languages, the potential influences of one's native language cannot be discounted. Moreover, while there are many other individual factors to consider, it has been most relevant to research the influences of a learner's personality, learner preferences and beliefs, prior learning experiences, and motivational levels, along with an individual's cultural background and the experience of learning in formal and informal settings. Each of these factors were taken into consideration when creating the focus group questions since they impact participants' perceptions of what is needed for academic achievement at the tertiary level and may positively or negatively contribute to their overall experience at UPEI. This section elaborates on the influences of the individual learner characteristics: personality, learner preferences, beliefs, and prior learning experiences. How learners' motivation and culture influence their learning is also explored.

## **Learner characteristics.**

### ***Personality.***

Lightbown and Spada (2000) highlight how individuals influence the learning process through their level of knowledge of the target language, cognitive maturity, meta-linguistic awareness, general knowledge of the world, and how nervous they are to make mistakes. In addition to these traits, an individual's emotions and personality can influence second language acquisition. These affective influences shape how people receive and respond to language and their experiences with the language community (Brown, 2000). Affective characteristics, such as personality, have been studied to determine what inhibits or contributes to learning a language.

It has been hypothesized that an individual's personality affects his/her acquisition of a second language. However, it has been difficult to clearly define through empirical studies to what degree (Lightbown and Spada, 2006). For example, research has studied specific personality traits, such as extroversion showing that some extroverted individuals have success learning a new language whereas other extroverted individuals may not have the same success. Studies also define personality traits differently and have different research goals (Brown, 2000). It is therefore difficult to determine the impact of certain personality traits because some studies aim to measure communicative ability, while others focus on grammatical accuracy. It becomes difficult to draw comparisons between studies. Moreover, defining personality is complex; it is composed of varying degrees of self-esteem, motivation, aptitude and intelligence, talkativeness, empathy, and inhibitions, all of which affect learning. This makes it difficult to determine which traits have greater influence. Regardless of the complexity of researching the relationship between personality and second language acquisition

many researchers have made claims of the important role that personality plays when learning another language (Brown, 2000; Dörnyei, 2009; Gardner, 1985; Lightbown and Spada, 2000).

Self-esteem and confidence are two personality traits that have been studied extensively. Brown (2000) has argued that individuals will not successfully learn another language if they have low self-esteem. High self-esteem and confidence entail knowing oneself and having a belief in one's own ability; whereas, low self-esteem impairs cognitive ability and affective perceptions. Brown's research (2000) looked for a connection between a learner's willingness to communicate with self-confidence. However, this research was unclear as to whether the willingness to communicate was a result of having high self-confidence or if the confidence was the result of successful experience and practice talking with others. One component of this thesis has been to explore, through qualitative research techniques, how the UPEI EAP program can be more effective and learner-centred.

#### *Learner preferences, beliefs, and prior learning experiences.*

Learner preferences, beliefs, and the influence of an individual's native language have also been studied extensively in the field of second language acquisition (Lightbown & Spada, 2000). Learner preferences include whether learners are field independent or field dependent. Field independent learners understand new information better when detail is separated from general information; these learners would rather study the parts before putting the pieces together. However, field dependent learners tend to look through a holistic lens and prefer studying the whole picture to form their understanding rather than beginning with the individual parts. Learners also have specific beliefs and opinions regarding which instructional methods best suit their

learning preferences. These beliefs can positively or negatively influence their learning experience and may contribute to a perceived success or failure learning their target language (Lightbown & Spada, 2000). Furthermore, the influences of prior experiences, knowledge, and learning can create instances of language transfer, interference, and over-generalization (Brown, 2000; Cummins, 2000; Ellis, 2003). Language transfer occurs when learners draw on their knowledge of their native language when learning a new language. Interference happens when learners attempt to apply the rules of their native language with the new language; however, these rules do not work with the target language. Over-generalization is using a particular linguistic structure too often without noticing or having a full understanding of the limits of linguistic rules and therefore using certain rules incorrectly (Brown, 2000; Lightbown & Spada, 2000).

### **Motivation.**

When learning a new language, teaching methodologies and the curriculum are not the only contributing factors to having success; motivation is an important component to achieving language learning goals (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008). Motivation has been defined as any human behaviour that necessitates making a choice or having a desire to perform an action in addition to having the persistence and effort to maintain this action to achieve personal goals (Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003; Gardner, 1985). Motivational levels have been described by social cognitive models as being situation specific and changing from one context to the next (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). Having a positive attitude and learning experience are important elements of establishing high motivational levels (Gardner, 1985).

Motivation is a complex issue involving several aspects of human behaviour and is affected by many variables. This makes it difficult to determine whether motivation

enhances language learning or experiencing success learning a language fosters motivation (Skehan, 1989, as cited in Lightbown & Spada, 2000). Gardner and Lambert (1972) labelled two types of motivation: instrumental and integrative. Instrumental motivation is fostered by focusing on practical, extrinsic value associated with learning a certain language, and the advantages that are gained through knowledge of this language. Integrative motivation comes from personal interest in language learning and having a positive attitude toward the language community. Gardner and Lambert hypothesized that integrative motivation is the key to establishing long-term motivation and successfully learning a language. However, through research conducted in the United States they discovered that the source of individual motivation can come from instrumental and integrative places and that both positively effects language learning. In three separate locations, they studied the source of participants' motivation to learn French. In Louisiana, participant motivation came from parental support and encouragement. In Maine, it was how participants identified with their teachers and how teachers empathized with participants that were the motivating factors to learn French. While in Connecticut, it was the usefulness of having a second language that was the motivating factor for students. Research conducted at three Canadian universities of academic motivational levels and acculturation of non-native English speakers (Fox et al., 2006) confirmed the findings of Gardner and Lambert (1972) illustrating that learners have different sources of motivation. Understanding what shapes EAP students' motivation while they are taking the UPEI EAP program, whether it is instrumental or integrative, could help EAP instructors and program administration understand what influences students' actions and goals. This information could provide the focus of class activities, program structure, and policy.

Better understanding motivational factors, an individual's ability to balance internal and external influences, along with societal perspectives, need to be addressed (Dörnyei, 2001, 2009a; Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003). Furthermore, motivation is temporal and motivational levels change over time. Individuals have natural fluctuations in enthusiasm and commitment. Within an academic context, social cognitive models regarding motivation have emphasized that it is important to understand why students are motivated to succeed academically. This entails analyzing students' self-efficacy, what students' attribute to success and failure, and how students are intrinsically motivated (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). Self-efficacy refers to students' beliefs in their capabilities to complete a specific task. Students who display high self-efficacy will work harder during academic tasks and have more success. Furthermore, these students will more likely choose learning opportunities that challenge them cognitively.

Motivational levels have also been tied to what students attribute the cause of their success and failure to be. These causes have been separated into three categories: 1. how stable the perceived cause is; 2. the locus of the perceived cause, internal or external; and 3. how controllable the perceived cause is. Teachers' reactions to students' attributions can enhance or diminish their motivational levels by either changing students' negative attributions and promoting positive attributions or reinforcing negative attributions. Intrinsic motivation is connected with academic success in regard to the level of personal and situational interest a student has (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002). Personal and situational interest increases students' level of engagement during academic tasks, persistence to successfully complete a task and strategy use (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). When students incorporate these elements into their learning, it increases the likelihood of having academic success.

Learner autonomy has also been connected to enhanced motivational levels and academic success (Little, 2005). Learner autonomy is characterized by individuals who take responsibility of their learning and become active agents in the learning process. Autonomous learners become intrinsically motivated through personal reflection and evaluation of their learning. Learners get involved in all stages of the learning process – planning, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating. Little (2000) stated that effective autonomous learners learn the target language through the target language and by integrating the language into their daily lives. Autonomy grows with the learner's experiences and expands as the learner becomes more proficient. To promote learner autonomy in a language classroom, Little (2005) has suggested for teachers to use the target language as much as possible in the classroom, encourage learners to discuss, analyse, and evaluate the activities completed throughout the course and help learners set language goals and to pursue their goals through collaborative class discussion. One way to incorporate these strategies into the language classroom is to have learners create a learning portfolio. The European Language Portfolio (Vandergrift, 2006) is one portfolio example of that instructors and students can use. The European Language portfolio includes a series of "I can" statements taken from the Common European Framework (CEFR) Common Reference Levels: Self-assessment Grid which learners use to self-assess their language proficiencies related to speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Promoting learner autonomy within the UPEI EAP program would better prepare students for academic study by helping them develop and achieve their learning goals.

Cultural background is another influential factor to a learner's motivational level. What a culture values in education, learning, and as career aspirations are influential

motivating forces in language learning (Dörnyei, 2001). The UPEI EAP program has students of varying cultural backgrounds enrolled. Cultural background and the prior learning experience of students were taken into consideration to develop research questions that asked how students' culture impacted their English learning needs and overall learning experience in the EAP program at UPEI.

### **Culture.**

Culture influences people biologically and psychologically; it is the primary context in which an individual's affective dimensions are formed. At the core of every culture are ethnocentric ideals, which create societal perceptions of right and wrong. Learning a new language goes beyond the learning of vocabulary and grammatical structures because it is also a process within which an individual is learning a new culture (Brown, 2000; Dörnyei, 2009a, 2009b; Kramsch, 1991). When a learner integrates his or her native culture with the target culture, a new identity normally emerges. This is known as acculturation (Brown, 2000; Ellis, 2003). Acculturation is influenced by a variety of characteristics: the perception an individual has of whether or not the two cultures are equal, the degree of cohesion among the language learners within the group, the size of the group of learners, the attitudes of the learners, and how long the language learner intends to study or live in the target culture (Ellis, 2003). Hofstede (1986) investigated how cultural values (e.g., individualism, collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity) affected the ways people interact and learn. When learning a second language, individuals bring into the learning process their morals, beliefs, and expectations of appropriate and inappropriate ways of behaving. Individuals inadvertently integrate these characteristics into their learning, which can result in creating stereotypes and generalizations about the target culture and

target language. It can also create challenges learning specific grammatical structures, oral communication techniques, and classroom etiquette because the organizational structures of educational systems and methods of learning might be drastically different within the target language learning environment. Moreover, there can be differing expectations of student behaviour within the classroom (Brown, 2000; Chang, 2001; Swan & Smith, 2001). The UPEI EAP program has students from different cultures learning together. Knowing that students bring their cultural values into the learning environment it would be important to acknowledge how these values impact students' interactions with each other and with English speaking students. Another consideration would be how culture affects students' learning in EAP and in credit-based courses along with how it impacts their preparedness to study at UPEI.

### **Formal and Informal Learning Environments**

Another influential factor in second language acquisition is the learning environment. Language acquisition is considered a social psychological phenomenon and therefore the context in which individuals learn is an important consideration (Gardner, 1985). Learning more about effective and ineffective aspects of the learning environment of the UPEI EAP program was an integral part of this thesis.

Individuals learn languages in formal and informal environments and varying contexts. Each environment affects the amount of language learned and the type of language the learner is exposed to (Lightbown & Spada, 2000, 2006). In the university context, language learners utilize language in both formal and informal situations and learners are expected to successfully function in both. Each context has its benefits and drawbacks for language learners. Some informal contexts provide the flexibility to allow learners to behave in a way that is most comfortable for them. For example, in a group

setting, the learner may be able to sit silently and listen or choose to actively participate in conversation. However, in other informal contexts, individuals are required to display certain actions and behaviours and are encouraged to take risks speaking in English without feeling embarrassed. For example, in a natural environment at a university bookstore learners are required to interact with a cashier to purchase items. In these environments, language is directed at native speakers, which means that speakers may not adjust their speaking speed with individuals whose first language is not English. Moreover, language is not presented in a step-by-step manner, mistakes made by non-native speakers are rarely corrected, and learners are exposed to a variety of vocabulary and grammatical structures. In a natural environment, language learners are surrounded by language and encounter many different people using the target language (Lightbown & Spada, 2000, 2006). Dörnyei (2009a) has stated that natural learning environments may not be the most effective contexts for adult learners to become proficient in a new language.

In formal learning environments, such as a classroom, learners are generally exposed to the target language for limited periods of time, especially if the target language is not widely spoken outside of the classroom. Formal learning environments also generally have established rules of what is adequate and inadequate participation and clear expectations of appropriate classroom conduct. Some classrooms have the goal of passing a language proficiency exam and do not focus on language for daily use. Other instructional classrooms may be communicative, content-based, or task-oriented. Observation and participation within these diverse contexts require different oral and written proficiencies (Dörnyei, 2009a; Lightbown & Spada, 2006).

One learning environment is not necessarily better than another - each offers different opportunities to speak, listen, read, and write in the target language. Learners choose the best learning environment to reach their learning goals and one that best suits their learning style. General English courses focus on contextualized everyday language, whereas, English for Academic Purposes courses are less contextualized. Individuals learn English at the same time as they are learning about an academic context. For individuals who have the goal of acquiring academic English proficiency to study at an English-speaking university, they should be functioning within context-reduced situations (Cummins, 2000). The UPEI EAP program provides opportunities for students to build academic competence alongside the oral communication skills required to successfully interact with professors, register for courses, seek academic advice from the Student Services department, etc. However, much of this instruction is done in a formal classroom. Students learn oral communication strategies in class and are then on their own in real life situations outside class. Considering that natural and instructional learning environments have advantages and drawbacks the UPEI EAP program could create learning opportunities for its students in both environments in order to draw upon the strengths of each environment. This thesis could provide support to this curricular change.

## **Summary**

The goal of this literature review has been to highlight the origins of English for Academic Purposes programming to outline common methodologies, techniques, and approaches. It has explored the distinction between BICS and CALP to emphasize that there are many dimensions to language proficiency. The UPEI EAP program has students in its full-time program who are working at a BICS and introductory CALP

level and students in the part-time program who are focusing on improving their CALP skills. This thesis has asked questions related to what classroom activities have been helpful and unhelpful for academic study. Participants' responses may provide more insight into which specific CALP skills are helpful in credit-based courses. A review was conducted of the studies completed at Canadian universities over the past decade to demonstrate that there are few studies in the Canadian context that focus on the effectiveness of English for Academic Purposes programming. This thesis offers additional research into this field of study. Finally, the discussion focused on the individual and social influences that affect second language acquisition along with the influence of learning environment. This thesis has asked questions regarding how program structure, teaching methods, learning styles, and culture have played a role in students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the UPEI EAP program. The next chapter outlines the methodology and analysis techniques utilized.

## **Methodology and Research Methods**

This chapter outlines the methodology and research methods used to assess whether or not students perceive the goals and objectives of the UPEI EAP program as adequately preparing them for academic study and contributing to their overall experience at university. Participants' background information is included in each section that involved human participants (i.e., interviews and focus groups).

### **Methodology**

An exploratory qualitative case study was chosen as the most appropriate approach for this thesis. Qualitative methods allow participants to express and elaborate on their opinions and experiences, especially when the issues examined are complex and interrelated (Patton, 2002). Presented in this chapter are the research methods employed beginning with a document review of the UPEI EAP business proposal, followed by a one-on-one interview, and focus groups. While carrying out the one-on-one interview and focus groups a review was conducted of end-of-term course evaluations completed by EAP students between 2004 and 2008. The data collection and analysis techniques used for the course evaluations are presented within the document review section. These methods were exploratory in nature because they did not seek to test a hypothesis or theory. Rather, they were designed to explore if the part-time stream of the UPEI EAP program adequately prepared students for academic study in their chosen discipline and contributed to their university experience. The intention of this thesis was to gather in-depth data focusing on specific areas of interest. Purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) was used to target students: a. who were enrolled in the part-time program at the time of the research; b. who completed their EAP admissions requirement and pursuing an

undergraduate diploma; and c. UPEI graduates who took EAP courses while studying at UPEI. Collecting data using several methods allows for the data to be cross-referenced, producing a higher level of credibility and enhancing the trustworthiness of the findings (Patton, 2002). Although this research has been primarily qualitative, quantitative analysis techniques were used to analyze data retrieved during the review of end-of-term course evaluations.

Qualitative analysis is an interpretive process with no single approach accepted by all researchers. However, there are guidelines that researchers can follow (Creswell, 2008). One guideline followed by qualitative researchers is to begin the analysis process at the onset of the study by simultaneously collecting and analyzing data while recording personal comments and interpretations (Creswell, 2008; Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2006; Patton, 2002). Data is usually analyzed by hand or using a computer-based program. Hand analysis entails that the researcher reads, marks and divides data by hand. Small amounts of data are generally analyzed using hand analysis. Computer-based analysis means that computer software is used to store, analyze and sort data. This works well when dealing with a large amount of data (Creswell, 2008). Hand analysis was used to analyze the data collected from the document review, one-on-one interview, and focus groups because of the small data set. Computer-based analysis techniques were used as an additional tool to produce and analyze the descriptive statistics retrieved from the end-of-term course evaluations. The data collection methods and analysis techniques are described in detail in the following sections.

## **Data Collection and Analysis Methods**

### **Document review.**

Documents pertaining to organizations, programs, and people being studied provide rich, informative data that can be used to supplement data collected through interviews (Patton, 2002). They also provide insight into the foundational framework of programs and aid the researcher in better understanding daily operations and processes (Patton, 2002). Prior to conducting a one-on-one interview and focus groups the UPEI EAP business proposal was reviewed. The end-of-term course evaluations were reviewed at the same time as completing the one-on-one interview and focus groups.

### ***Original business proposal.***

Reviewing the original business proposal offered insight into how the program had been proposed and a framework to compare current program operations. Detailed field notes were taken of the proposed program structure and foundational theories that informed curriculum related decisions. This was conducted to develop an understanding of explicit and implicit goals and objectives of the program since its inception in 2002. A hand analysis was conducted of the proposal to identify and code how the program had changed in structure, class organization, and curriculum. From these notes, goals and objectives were summarized and referenced during the focus groups and comparisons were made with the information retrieved from the one-on-one interview.

### ***End-of-term course evaluations.***

UPEI EAP students were asked to complete a course evaluation at the end of each EAP course. Evaluations used by the UPEI EAP program were designed by program administration (See Appendix B for an evaluation example.) They include questions that asked students to rate their level of attendance and participation while

taking EAP courses, the course content, and instructors. From 2004 and 2008 students who completed course evaluations in the full-time and part-time EAP program represented from five to eleven countries. Over the years, a high percentage of students who completed evaluations were Asian (43% to 75% of the EAP student body) representing China, Korea, and Japan. Students also came from Africa, Germany, Iran, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Mexico, Central America, and Quebec, Canada (Gillan, 2010).

Evaluation summaries from 2004 to 2008 were retrieved from the UPEI EAP program for use in this analysis. The end-of-term course evaluations for the part-time oral communications and writing courses were reviewed. Collecting students' opinions regarding course content and the instructors was an additional measure (i.e., focus groups) to gauge how the UPEI EAP program has been contributing to academic preparedness and students' university experiences.

The evaluation summaries retrieved were organized in two ways: by instructor and by course. This thesis summarized and presented the evaluation data for each academic semester by course. The evaluation forms included three sections. Section I asked students to rate their effort and participation in each of their EAP courses using a 5-point scale: 1 (*exerting less than 50% of personal effort*); 2 (*exerting 60-70% of personal effort*); 3 (*exerting 70-80% of personal effort*); 4 (*exerting 80-90% of personal effort*); 5 (*exerting 90-100% of personal effort*). Section II asked students to rate the value of the content of their EAP courses using a 5-point scale; 1 (*poor*); 2 (*fair*); 3 (*good*); 4 (*very good*) and; 5 (*excellent*). One question in this section was exceptional, using a 3-point scale. This question asked students to rate the level of difficulty of their EAP courses as: 1 (*too difficult*); 2 (*just right*) and; 3 (*too easy*). Section III used a 5-point scale to ask students to rate their instructors using a scale with two anchors: 1

(*poor*) to 5 (*excellent*). Questions pertaining to the research question were chosen from each section for review. These questions only highlight some of the possible evaluation questions a course evaluation can have. From section I, one question was reviewed regarding the student: overall rating of how hard he/she worked. From section II, five questions were reviewed regarding the course: 1. value of texts and readings: 2. value of activities: 3. reaching goals: 4. how much learned in the course: 5. level of difficulty. From section III, three questions were reviewed regarding the instructor: 1. giving assignments suitably related to course material: 2. teaching at an appropriate level: 3. stimulating interest.

As mentioned, end-of-course evaluations were designed by EAP program administration. The question format and organizational structure have been reviewed periodically however further work could be put into revising these areas to improve the administrations' ability to get reliable feedback from students. For example, perhaps asking students to rate their level of effort using percentages limits students' abilities to accurately state how much effort they exerted. The percentage breakdown the scale uses overlaps (i.e., 60-70% and 70-80%). Students may have difficulty selecting the answer that best describes their opinions. If students believe they exerted 70% of effort which column do they select considering that there are two options? Moreover, what does 70% of effort mean? A lack of clarity within the scale could cause students to less accurately state their opinions which may put the trustworthiness of students' responses in jeopardy. Regardless, it is believed that the course evaluation data was worthwhile information to take into consideration.

A Table was created to summarize the results for each of the selected evaluation questions. The results were displayed by academic year indicating the percentage of

students who rated their courses and instructors from 1 (*poor*) to 5 (*excellent*). The end-of-term course evaluation data were analyzed by calculating the mean scores and standard deviations for each academic semester within each evaluation question. An overall mean and standard deviation score was also calculated for each evaluation question. This was to compare the evaluation questions reviewed and to identify which semesters had higher or lower ratings regarding specific areas of course content and instructional practices. These scores were then defined further to interpret whether students rated their courses and instructors as poor, fair, good, very good, or excellent. Once this was determined, a by-hand analysis was conducted to compare the data collected from the course evaluations with the one-on-one interview and the focus group data focusing on areas of academic preparedness and students' experiences to highlight similarities and differences among the themes revealed.

### **One-on-one interview.**

Qualitative interviews provide rich information regarding programs, projects, and organizations (Patton, 2002). This detail may not be attained using data collection methods such as questionnaires or observation. Conducting a one-on-one interview with a key informant (Patton, 2002) or expert (Rossman & Rallis, 2003) who works in the area being researched provides valuable information relevant to the research questions. A ninety-minute one-on-one interview with the UPEI EAP Program Coordinator was conducted to gather additional information regarding program goals, objectives, and operations that were not explicit or clearly stated in the program's business proposal. The interview used a standardized open-ended format (Patton, 2002) and covered topics regarding changes made to the program's goals and objectives from its beginning to the present, the structure of the program, perceptions of whether or not students are satisfied

with the program, and how it prepared students for academic study. A complete list of interview questions is found in Appendix C. The interview provided insight into the Program Coordinator's perspective regarding program operations, along with her opinion of successful and unsuccessful aspects of the program. Detailed notes were taken of the Coordinator's responses and the interview was recorded. The written notes from the interview were compared with the audio recording of the interview to create a detailed transcript that outlined the Program Coordinator's responses. After the transcript was verified by the Program Coordinator, the data regarding program goals and objectives were compared with those collected from the business proposal to create an official list of program goals and objectives. This list was incorporated into focus group questions pertaining to the goals and objectives of the program. Other data collected regarding the Program Coordinator's perceptions of how courses and program organization have been successful and unsuccessful were highlighted and compared with data collected during the focus groups and end-of-course evaluations to identify similarities and contrary information across the three data sources regarding preparedness for academic study and students' experiences.

### **Focus groups.**

Focus groups provide a great deal of insight into the attitudes, perceptions, and opinions of participants and work well for collecting several perspectives at one time (Creswell, 2008; Krueger, 1994; Krueger & Casey, 2000). Effective focus groups have a specific focus with participants who have had similar experiences. Having a homogeneous group allows the interviewer to categorize interview questions into themes. Moreover, all members of the group are capable of contributing to the discussion and the interviewer has a better chance of meeting his or her desired objectives more efficiently

compared to conducting several one-on-one interviews (Creswell, 2008; Krueger, 1994). There are various opinions regarding the ideal size of a focus group. Creswell (2008) recommends four to six participants whereas, Patton (2002) and Krueger (1994) suggest six to ten participants. Krueger and Casey (2000) propose that researchers start by conducting three or four focus groups. Upon completion, researchers should review the data collected to decide if additional interviews are needed. If participants are starting to provide the same information and no new information is presented then saturation has been reached and interviews can cease (Krueger & Casey, 2000).

For this thesis, over one hundred students were invited to participate through advertisements posted in EAP classes, personal contacts and through an electronic message sent to part-time EAP students and EAP alumni. As Krueger (1994) advised, to increase the likelihood of having participants attend a focus group, a reminder email message of upcoming focus group times and locations was sent the day before scheduled meetings. Focus groups were also scheduled on the weekend, at a time that held the least amount of conflict with existing academic activities or functions. As an additional incentive for participating, participants had the opportunity to win a prize from the UPEI Bookstore. Prizes included a UPEI sweatshirt, backpack and stationary. Each participant's name was entered into a draw, and four participant names were drawn at the completion of all the focus groups.

Each focus group was approximately ninety minutes in length and eleven individuals participated in total. The first focus group had four participants, while the second and third focus group each had three participants. One additional individual emailed her responses to the interview questions because she was not able to attend in person. Approximately two to three confirmed participants decided at the last minute

that they would not be able to attend their scheduled focus group. The second and third focus group did not have the ideal number of individuals (between four and ten) participate (Creswell, 2008; Krueger, 1994; Patton, 2002).

An experienced ESL instructor and graduate student of the Master of Education program attended as an observer and to write detailed notes of student responses for the first focus group. Retaining the assistance of individuals not involved in research studies provided objective input and advice (Patton, 2002). This assistant provided opportunities to freely facilitate the interview process and to focus attention on the participants' answers and the interview itself. For the second and third focus groups the graduate student did not participate<sup>3</sup>. For these focus groups, notes were taken at the same time as facilitating the process.

The focus groups employed two questioning techniques: a standardized open-ended approach with regard to question structure and an informal conversational approach for the questioning process (Patton, 2002). Questions were carefully structured to provide a clear framework of priorities and a process to follow. However, flexibility was given throughout the interview process to explore ideas that did not directly pertain to the question being asked, when they did relate to the research questions. The questioning process did not have the participants interact strictly with the researcher; participants were encouraged to discuss the questions with one another. Questions were asked regarding the articulated program goals and objectives deemed most and least important by students and aspects of the program that were helpful and unhelpful for university study and as UPEI students. Appendix D has the complete list of the questions used during the student focus groups.

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<sup>3</sup> A decision was made in consultation with Dr. Miles Turnbull that it was unnecessary for the student volunteer to assist in taking notes during the second and third focus groups due to the small group size.

At the beginning of each focus group participants completed a written consent form and provided background information regarding their native language, country of citizenship, length of study in English, where they had studied English prior to coming to UPEI, how many semesters of the UPEI EAP program they had taken. An optional question asked participants to provide the result of their initial CanTEST exam. Having information regarding each participant's initial CanTEST result provided insight into the language proficiency of the participants when they first arrived. It also provided background information regarding their journeys through the UPEI EAP program; for example, what courses they had taken and if they were enrolled in the full-time program in addition to the part-time program. This information would be useful in understanding participants' statements regarding their preparedness for academic study and impact the EAP program had on their experiences at UPEI.

Three types of individuals were recruited for the focus groups: students who were part-time students in the UPEI EAP program (at the time of this study) and taking other university courses concurrently, students who had previously taken the UPEI EAP program and were pursuing their degrees without EAP support, and UPEI graduates who had taken EAP courses. All of the focus group participants had, at one time or another, been enrolled concurrently in the UPEI EAP program and other university courses. Therefore, they were all able to discuss and compare their experiences of taking EAP courses along-side other UPEI courses.

The eleven focus group participants originated from Taiwan, Japan, Iran, Korea, China, and Vietnam. Six males and five females participated. Ten participants attended the focus groups in person and one participant responded to the same interview questions through email. Three participants were graduates of UPEI, seven had

completed their EAP admission requirements and were studying within their major of choice, and one was enrolled in EAP courses alongside other university courses. Participants' subject majors included Psychology, Biology, Engineering, English, Business Administration, Sociology, Women's Studies, Family Studies, and Computer Science. Each participant first began his or her studies at UPEI by taking the EAP onsite language assessment exam, the CanTEST. Initial CanTEST language assessment scores (out of 4.5) for participants ranged from 2.5 in the reading and listening and 1.5 in writing to a score of 4.0 in each of the reading and listening and writing sections. See Appendix E for a complete list of assessment descriptors of the CanTEST language proficiency exam. Having diverse entrance scores among the participants suggests that each participant entered the program with unique language requirements and was therefore able to provide differing perspectives of what they believed the UPEI EAP program should emphasize. The starting dates in which participants began the UPEI EAP program spanned from January 2003 to September 2008, as shown in Table 3. Participants were enrolled in the UPEI EAP program from between one to three academic semesters. Among the eleven participants, participants were enrolled in all of the part-time EAP courses offered at UPEI between 2003 and 2008.

Table 3

*Participant Start Dates - UPEI EAP Program*

Month	Year	Number of participants
September	2003	1
January	2004	1
January	2005	1
September	2005	2
September	2006	3
June	2007	1
September	2008	2

After conducting the three focus groups, an initial analysis was conducted to determine if the data was becoming saturated. It was determined that the data was indeed starting to become saturated<sup>4</sup> and so it was decided not to re-advertise for more focus group participants. Moreover, this decision was made because of the belief that it would be difficult to recruit new participants. Focus groups took place during the summer months when many international students leave UPEI for summer vacation. To increase the number of participants, in hindsight it would have been better to wait until the fall to conduct additional focus groups. To compensate for having a small focus group sample, the data collected from the focus groups were cross-referenced with the end-of-term

<sup>4</sup> Having homogenous focus groups of 3-4 participants may have contributed to early signs of saturation because it is possible that participants were able to reach an agreement sooner than a focus group of 6 or more participants who had differing opinions.

course evaluations data to provide additional insight into how the UPEI EAP program has been doing to prepare its students for academic study.

A series of steps were taken to hand analyze the focus group data. First, the written notes from the focus groups were cross-referenced with the audio recordings to transcribe the data and to ensure that the data were accurate. Second, after completing the transcripts, personal thoughts, initial impressions and interpretations, and possible themes were recorded through written memos taken in the side margin of the transcription page (Creswell, 2008; Gay et al., 2006). Participants were also given an opportunity to review the transcripts. Third, a content analysis (Patton, 2002) was conducted with the data for each question to highlight and code patterns and themes. This was done first for each focus group and then across focus groups. Fourth, a deductive analysis was conducted of the data to compare the identified themes with the research questions: students' preparation for academic study and overall experience at UPEI to identify participants' opinions of whether the EAP program was thought of as being helpful or unhelpful.

### **Cross-Referencing Data**

After collecting data through a document review, a one-on-one interview with the EAP Program Coordinator and student focus groups, the three data sources were cross-referenced. Comparisons were made with the theoretical foundations of the EAP program as was presented in the business proposal and stated by the Program Coordinator. This was to identify whether or not program organization and curriculum design changed over time. Notes were taken regarding participants' responses as stated in the course evaluations, one-on-one interview, and focus groups regarding course content and instructional practices regarding CALP (Cummins, 2000) and the level of

difficulty of EAP courses. This was to determine whether they were one level higher than students' language proficiencies (Krashen, 1982, 1984) and adequately preparing students for studying in credit-based courses. Comparisons were also made across the three data sources to explore what participants stated as the helpful and unhelpful elements of the EAP program to identify similarities and differences among the responses regarding how the program has impacted their experiences at UPEI.

## **Results**

This chapter presents the data collected from the review of program documents: the original business proposal and the end-of-term course evaluations completed between 2004 and 2008 for part-time EAP writing and oral communication courses. Data retrieved from the one-on-one interview with the UPEI EAP Program Coordinator and the themes that arose out of the student focus groups are also presented.

### **Document Review**

The EAP original business proposal and end-of-term course evaluations (designed in-house) were reviewed. Presented here is a summary of the specific components of these documents that pertained to the research questions. Included in the summary of the original business proposal for the UPEI EAP program is information regarding the program's articulated goals, objectives and organizational structure. For the end-of-term course evaluations, questions that related to students' level of effort, the value of course content and instructors' teaching practices were selected, summarized into tables according to category, and analyzed against the information collected from the Program Coordinator interview and focus groups.

#### **EAP original business proposal.**

Firstly, a review of the original business proposal for the UPEI EAP program was conducted to better understand the rationale behind the development of the program, its organization, and articulated program goals and objectives. The business proposal recommended that the program follow the guiding principles and theories outlined in the Canadian Language Benchmarks (Gillan, 2001) to ensure a high quality program that is consistent with national standards. The program was designed to emphasize a learner-centred approach with content-based language instruction focusing on generic academic

skills in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. One goal of the program was to assist students in achieving the required language proficiency for unconditional admission to the UPEI as fast as possible. All class sizes were to remain small referencing a ratio of 15:1 and students would receive 15 to 25 hours of language instruction per week. This instruction would focus on academic language and university preparation activities. Students with lower language proficiencies would take the program full time and students with higher language proficiencies would take the program in conjunction with other university courses. It was also recommended that select EAP courses shadow credit-based courses in areas such as math, computer science, and business. These courses were to be available to EAP students who had 4.0 on the CanTEST. A six week summer program was recommended for students who had a language proficiency score of 4.0 on the CanTEST. This summer program would have twelve weeks of material condensed into six weeks, and was designed for advanced learners who wanted to work towards meeting the UPEI's language proficiency requirement before the beginning of the academic year. Enrolment projections for the UPEI EAP program included 30 students the first year, growing to 250 students by year seven (Gillan, 2001).

Reviewing the Program's original business proposal provided additional insight into program methodology and goals. In the proposal, Gillan (2001) referenced Krashen's input hypothesis (1982, 1984) as a foundational language acquisition theory. Krashen emphasized that students need to be in a learning environment in which they receive comprehensible input just beyond their current proficiency level. Within the UPEI EAP business proposal, the Cognitive Academic Language Learning Approach (CALLA) was referenced when making theoretical and curriculum decisions. The CALLA states that learning should be centred on the individual learner and that lessons

focus on developing academic reading, listening, writing, and speaking skills (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994).

Upon completing a review of the original business proposal, the end-of-term course evaluations for part-time oral communication and writing courses from 2004 to 2008 were examined to further explore whether or not students were satisfied with program goals, objectives, and course content and delivery. Specific questions related to student effort and motivation, the value of course work, and how well instructors met students' learning needs were analyzed.

#### **End-of-term course evaluations.**

In-house designed course evaluations were completed by all students enrolled in the full-time and part-time UPEI EAP program at the end of each semester. Evaluations have been used by the Program Coordinator to monitor students' level of satisfaction with course content and instruction. Evaluations completed by students in the part-time oral communications and writing courses were reviewed. The data from evaluations completed by students in the full-time courses were not used given the focus of this thesis was on part time student. Students who study English full time rarely take other university courses and since a large part of this research has been to explore whether or not the UPEI EAP program is adequately preparing students for academic study, students in the full-time stream would not have been able to provide answers to this question. Over three hundred part-time end-of-term course evaluations were completed between 2004 and 2008. Specific questions from these evaluations that pertained to the value of course content and the instructor's ability to meet the learning needs of students were chosen. These questions provided an additional window into students' experiences taking EAP courses at UPEI and the degree to which the program prepares students for

academic study. Having an additional data source has also contributed to the trustworthiness of the findings. Presented here are students' ratings regarding nine evaluation questions. This information has been summarized into tables showing a mean and standard deviation score for each academic semester. An overall mean and standard deviation score is also given for each table. In text comments highlight the overall mean score (with standard deviation in parenthesis) along with interpretations of how this information pertains to students' experiences and academic preparation.

***Section I: Rating personal effort.***

Section I of the end-of-course evaluations asked UPEI EAP students to rate how much personal effort they exerted during each of their EAP courses (See Table 4). An overall mean score of 3.90 (.26) indicates that, overall, students reported they exerted between 70% and 90% of personal effort in their UPEI EAP courses. It is interesting to note the dispersion of ratings across all years; few students rated their efforts in the bottom two categories, which is somewhat surprising given that students indicated that motivation was quite variable across classes. Were there not students whose efforts were minimal? Does this clumping of results at the high end of the continuum suggest that some students were did not want to admit when they exert little effort? It is also possible that the scale was poorly designed and descriptors such as small scenarios could be used. Given that dispersion seems similar whether the sample size is small or somewhat larger, it is probably that the clumping relates to the nature of the students.

*Table 4*  
*Summary of End-of-Term Course Evaluations*  
*Rate Yourself – How Much Effort I Put into this Course<sup>5</sup>*

Academic year	N	1 <50%	2 60-70%	3 70-80%	4 80-90%	5 90-100%	M	SD
2004 (Fall)	34	0	22.7	31.8	25.0	20.5	3.47	1.1
2005 (Winter)	29	0	0	20.7	48.3	31.3	4.10	.72
2005 (Fall)	20	0	5.0	35.0	30.0	30.0	3.85	.93
2006 (Winter)	20	0	0	35.0	65.0	0	3.65	.49
2006 (Fall)	35	0	5.7	14.3	45.7	34.3	4.09	.85
2007 (Winter)	53	1.9	3.8	24.5	56.6	11.3	3.74	.76
2007 (Fall)	73	0	1.4	16.4	42.5	39.7	4.17	.81
2008 (Winter)	63	0	1.6	11.1	61.9	25.4	4.11	.65
Overall	327						3.90	.26

***Section II: Rating UPEI EAP courses.***

Section II of the end-of-term evaluations asked UPEI EAP students to rate their EAP courses from 1 (*poor*) to 5 (*excellent*). The questions reviewed focused on the value of the texts and readings, the value of activities, whether or not it helped students reach their goals, and how much they learned during the course (See Table 5 to Table 9).

Table 5 asked students to rate the value of the texts and readings. Scores ranged from fair to very good. The overall mean score 3.77 (.20) indicated that, overall, students believed that the texts and readings they utilized in their EAP classes were good. This implied that students were satisfied with the focus of the class and found it helpful and yet there was room for improvement. For this question, class size may be having an effect on dispersion of results. In the two smallest classes (2005, fall: 2006, winter),

<sup>5</sup> This question on the evaluation form was worded as “*Overall Rating of How Hard I Worked.*” The title for Table 4 was worded slightly different to provide a more accurate description of the data presented.

almost two thirds of the students rated the texts and readings as very good. It is possible that the quality of the teaching was a factor or that smaller classes lead to more cohesion amongst students and therefore more agreement than in larger classes.

**Table 5**  
*Summary of End-of-Term Course Evaluations*  
*Rate the Course - Value of Texts and Readings*

Academic year	<i>n</i>	1 Poor %	2 Fair %	3 Good %	4 Very good %	5 Excellent %	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
2004 (Fall)	34	0	15.9	18.2	29.6	29.6	3.41	1.28
2005 (Winter)	35	0	2.9	34.3	42.9	20	3.73	.80
2005 (Fall)	16	0	0	37.5	62.5	0	3.63	.50
2006 (Winter)	19	0	0	21.0	57.9	21.1	4.00	.67
2006 (Fall)	31	0	0	32.3	51.6	16.1	3.73	.80
2007 (Winter)	55	0	9.0	30.9	40.0	18.2	3.69	.89
2007 (Fall)	73	0	8.2	21.9	34.2	34.2	3.99	.93
2008 (Winter)	63	0	0	4.8	17.5	54.0	3.95	.79
Overall	326						3.77	.20

Table 6 summarizes students' ratings regarding the value of their EAP activities. Mean scores were dispersed from fair to excellent. The overall mean score 3.98 (.26) indicated that overall, students rated the values of EAP activities as good and very good. Again this implied that students were generally happy with the activities they complete in their EAP classes, however, class activities could be improved to better meet students' academic and linguistic needs.

**Table 6**  
*Summary of End-of-Term Course Evaluations*  
*Rate the Course – Value of Activities*

Academic year	<i>n</i>	1 Poor %	2 Fair %	3 Good %	4 Very good %	5 Excellent %	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
2004 (Fall)	34	5.9	14.7	20.6	26.5	32.4	3.65	1.25
2005 (Winter)	30	0	3.3	13.3	60.0	20.6	4.03	.72
2005 (Fall)	16	0	0	12.5	43.8	43.8	4.31	.70
2006 (Winter)	19	0	0	21.1	63.2	15.8	3.95	.62
2006 (Fall)	<sup>a</sup> -	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2007 (Winter)	54	0	7.4	33.3	42.6	18.5	3.61	.88
2007 (Fall)	73	0	2.7	19.2	41.1	35.6	4.10	.81
2008 (Winter)	63	0	0	11.1	57.1	33.3	4.19	.69
Overall	289						3.98	.26

<sup>a</sup>A dash (-) indicates that there is no data for this section.

Table 7 summarizes how students rated how EAP helped them reach their goals. The mean scores ranged from fair to excellent indicated that some students did not achieve the goals they set. This could imply that students were not satisfied with particular EAP courses or that they required more time to reach their designated goals. The overall mean score 3.93 (.30) indicates that, overall, students stated that the EAP program was good and very good at helping them reach their goals.

**Table 7**  
*Summary of End-of-Term Course Evaluations*  
*Rate the Course – Helped You Reach Your Goals*

Academic year	<i>n</i>	1 Poor %	2 Fair %	3 Good %	4 Very good %	5 Excellent %	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
2004 (Fall)	34	11.8	11.8	14.7	32.4	29.4	3.56	1.35
2005 (Winter)	30	0	0	16.7	46.7	36.7	4.20	.71
2005 (Fall)	16	0	0	6.3	37.5	50.0	4.38	.72
2006 (Winter)	18	0	0	38.9	50.0	11.1	3.72	.67
2006 (Fall)	34	0	8.9	20.1	50.0	29.4	3.89	.95
2007 (Winter)	54	1.9	14.8	25.9	42.6	14.8	3.54	.99
2007 (Fall)	73	1.4	4.1	16.4	39.7	37.0	4.08	.92
2008 (Winter)	63	0	4.8	19.0	37.4	33.3	4.04	.85
Overall	322						3.93	.30

Table 8 summarizes students' ratings regarding how much they learned in their EAP courses. The overall mean score 3.85 (.33) showed that students gave an overall rating of good and very good regarding how much they learned in their EAP courses. Again, though there is a clumping of results in the upper end of the scale leading to questions about the instrument itself and additional reasons for such strong agreement amongst students.

Table 8

*Summary of End-of-Term Course Evaluations**Rate the Course – How Much You Learned in the Course*

Academic year	<i>n</i>	1 Poor %	2 Fair %	3 Good %	4 Very good %	5 Excellent %	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
2004 (Fall)	34	11.8	14.7	14.7	29.4	29.4	3.44	1.4
2005 (Winter)	30	0	0	23.3	43.3	33.3	4.10	.76
2005 (Fall)	16	0	0	6.3	43.8	50.0	4.44	.63
2006 (Winter)	19	0	5.3	26.3	63.2	5.3	3.65	.67
2006 (Fall)	34	2.9	5.9	29.4	44.1	17.6	3.68	.94
2007 (Winter)	55	0	14.5	27.3	47.3	10.9	3.55	.88
2007 (Fall)	73	1.4	6.8	19.2	43.8	27.4	3.90	.95
2008 (Winter)	63	0	4.8	14.3	52.4	28.6	4.04	.79
Overall	324						3.85	.33

Table 9 summarizes students' ratings regarding how they rated the level of difficulty of their EAP courses. The overall mean score 2.57 (.34) indicated that ratings ranged from 2.23 to 2.91 (*just right*). As can be seen, the scope of scores is chunked within the two columns: just right and too easy. It is clear that students perceived the EAP courses to tend towards the easy, rather than difficult side of the scale. This theme also emerged in the interview data.

Table 9  
*Summary of End-of-Term Course Evaluations*  
*Rate the Course – Level of Difficulty*

Academic year	<i>n</i>	1 Too difficult %	2 Just right %	3 Too easy %	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
2004 (Fall)	23	0	73.9	26.1	2.26	.45
2005 (Winter)	16	0	87.5	12.5	2.13	.34
2005 (Fall)	11	9.0	0	91.0	2.82	.60
2006 (Winter)	12	0	8.3	91.7	2.92	.29
2006 (Fall)	30	0	90.0	10.0	2.10	.31
2007 (Winter)	45	2.2	82.2	15.6	2.80	.46
2007 (Fall)	34	2.9	70.6	26.5	2.68	.53
2008 (Winter)	37	2.7	83.8	13.5	2.81	.46
Overall	208				2.57	.34

***Section III: Rating UPEI EAP instructors.***

Section III of the UPEI EAP end-of-term course evaluations asked EAP students to rate their EAP instructors at giving assignments related to class material, teaching at an appropriate level, and stimulating student interest (See Tables 10 to 12). Collecting students' opinions regarding their EAP instructors was another way to explore students' experiences taking EAP course and instructors' teaching methods. The three questions chosen to review only highlight the possible categories in which an instructor can be evaluated. The first question chosen regarding EAP instructors asked UPEI EAP student to rate their EAP instructors at giving assignments relating to class material (See Table 10). As shown in Table 10, between the winter of 2005 and the winter of 2008, EAP student ratings were dispersed across the rankings fair, good, very good and excellent.

However, responses also tended to be clumped more at the upper and more positive end of the scale. The overall mean score 4.24 (.29) showed that overall students assessed the suitability of assignments as very good. This implied that students were generally happy with their instructors' abilities to connect class activities with the material chosen or textbooks however, there was still room for improvement.

Table 10

*Summary of End-of-Term Course Evaluations*

*Rate the Instructor – Giving Assignments Suitably Related to Class Material*

Academic year	N	1 Poor %	2 Fair %	3 Good %	4 Very good %	5 Excellent %	M	SD
2004 (Fall)	33	9.1	12.1	9.1	33.3	36.4	3.76	1.32
2005 (Winter)	30	0	0	3.3	30.0	66.7	4.63	.56
2005 (Fall)	16	0	0	6.3	31.3	62.5	4.56	.63
2006 (Winter)	19	0	0	21.1	52.3	47.4	4.05	.71
2006 (Fall)	35	0	5.7	14.3	42.9	37.1	4.12	.88
2007 (Winter)	56	0	1.8	21.4	41.1	35.7	4.12	.80
2007 (Fall)	73	0	1.4	15.1	27.4	54.8	4.41	.79
2008 (Winter)	62	0	0	16.1	38.7	45.2	4.29	.73
Overall	324						4.24	.29

Table 11 summarizes how students rated their instructors at teaching at an appropriate level. Mean scores ranged from fair to excellent. The overall mean score was 4.16 (.30) ranging from good to very good. An assessment of the dispersion of the responses showed that a majority of the students scored their instructors as good, very good, and excellent on this evaluation question. Few students rated their instructors as

fair or poor. This either points to a flaw in the instrument itself, to students' fears to rate their instructors poorly, or else UPEI EAP instructors are all uniformly high quality and well perceived by most students.

Table 11  
*Summary of End-of-Term Course Evaluations*  
*Rate the Instructor – Teaching at a Level Appropriate to Students*

Academic year	<i>n</i>	1 Poor %	2 Fair %	3 Good %	4 Very good %	5 Excellent %	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
2004 (Fall)	31	9.7	12.9	9.7	29.0	38.7	3.64	1.39
2005 (Winter)	30	0	3.3	3.3	30.0	63.3	4.53	.73
2005 (Fall)	16	0	0	12.5	25.2	62.5	4.50	.73
2006 (Winter)	19	0	5.3	15.8	36.8	36.8	4.16	.90
2006 (Fall)	35	5.7	2.9	11.4	37.1	31.4	3.89	1.08
2007 (Winter)	55	1.8	1.8	14.5	47.3	30.9	4.04	.86
2007 (Fall)	73	0	4.1	13.7	28.8	52.1	4.32	.86
2008 (Winter)	62	0	1.6	16.1	41.9	40.3	4.21	.77
Overall	321						4.16	.30

Table 12 shows how students rated their EAP instructors at stimulating their interest. For this question, the mean scores were dispersed from fair to excellent. The overall mean score 3.98 (.25) demonstrated that a majority of the students believed that their instructors were good and very good at stimulating their interest. The highest percentage (57.9%) was seen in the category very good during the 2006 winter semester. This was also one of the smallest classes wherein it may be easier to stimulate a larger percentage of students.

Table 12  
*Summary of End-of-Term Course Evaluations*  
*Rate the Instructor – Stimulating Your Interest*

Academic year	n	1 Poor %	2 Fair %	3 Good %	4 Very good %	5 Excellent %	M	SD
2004 (Fall)	33	9.1	24.2	9.1	24.2	33.3	3.48	1.42
2005 (Winter)	30	0	3.3	13.3	43.3	43.3	4.20	.81
2005 (Fall)	16	0	6.3	12.5	31.3	50.0	4.25	.93
2006 (Winter)	19	0	5.3	15.8	57.9	21.1	3.95	.78
2006 (Fall)	35	2.9	5.7	22.9	51.4	28.6	3.85	1.0
2007 (Winter)	56	1.8	7.1	25.0	33.9	32.1	3.88	1.0
2007 (Fall)	73	1.4	5.5	30.1	20.5	46.6	4.06	1.0
2008 (Winter)	62	0	0	17.7	46.8	35.5	4.18	.71
Overall	324						3.98	.25

This review revealed that overall students believed that EAP courses and instructors were good, very good, or excellent at meeting their learning needs. However, clumping was often apparent at the higher end of the scale. Class size may have affected this dispersion of the results. In smaller classes, instructors may have been better able to target students' learning needs. There may also be flaws in the instrument used to evaluate courses and instructors. Regardless, this information has offered additional insight into students' perspectives regarding EAP courses and instructors. As was seen, the program has had some success at satisfying students' academic needs however, the program could also revisit each area explored to look for ways to improve course content and instruction. Following the document review of the original business

proposal and the end-of-term evaluations an interview was conducted with the UPEI EAP Program Coordinator.

### **Program Coordinator Interview**

The aim of the one-on-one interview conducted with the UPEI EAP Program Coordinator was to learn about the goals and objectives of the program and to gain insight into her opinions of whether the program has been effective. She stated that there were three main program goals: 1. to enable UPEI to open its target market to recruit students who do not have English as their native language nor the minimal language requirements for unrestricted admission to UPEI; 2. to provide a program for students to meet the minimal English proficiency requirement; and 3. to assist in creating a global educational climate at UPEI. She described three program objectives: 1. for students to achieve the English proficiency requirements set by the UPEI as fast as possible; 2. to implement a curriculum that pushed students to succeed by having the level of each course one level higher than the students' current proficiency level; and 3. to motivate students to work hard in their EAP classes by enabling those who have achieved 3.5 to 4.0 on the CanTEST to take EAP classes and credit-based courses concurrently. She stated that these goals and objectives will not likely change unless the administration of the UPEI changes the direction of the program to have an English as a second language department<sup>6</sup>. She believes that these goals and objectives are for the most part being reflected within the organization of the program and its daily operations. She referred to two examples of additional support for EAP students: 1. the writing courses provide

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<sup>6</sup> An ESL department would mean that the current course offerings at the EAP program would be expanded. The department would offer two distinct programs that have different admissions policies. One program would focus on ESL for individuals who want to learn life-skills and English for the work place. The other program would focus on academic English and be designed for individuals who want to study at an English-speaking University.

one-on-one tutoring for students through office hours held by their instructors; and 2. extending the length of the oral communications classes. Classes have a ratio of 18 students to 1 instructor, which is slightly higher than the proposed 15:1 ratio recommended in the original business proposal. Nonetheless, the Program Coordinator stated that she considered this to be a small class size as it allowed instructors opportunities to sit with students one-on-one during class activities to provide students with feedback and answer their questions. When program enrolment increased, courses were divided into better defined learning levels. The Program Coordinator also said that she asks for “[instructors to make sure that] clear course objectives are stated throughout the semester to be explicit and so students know how classroom activities are related to other courses and ways of learning.” When asked her opinion regarding how she perceived these goals and objectives as not being reflected in the program organization and implementation, she stated: “I’m not sure if or how they are not being reflected because [the program’s goals and objectives] are not measured efficiently to know.” She believed that the goals are clear but not always communicated effectively to the teaching staff. The program does not have a confirmation of enrolment numbers until the beginning of each semester. This leads to hiring sessional instructors at the last minute, which does not provide an adequate amount of time at the beginning of each semester to offer professional development to sessional instructors. She stated: “we have gone over materials with instructors but the process has not been systemized.” The Program Coordinator stated that she recognized that work needs to be put into communicating more efficiently with instructors and has plans of offering structured teacher orientation sessions at the beginning of each semester along with scheduled staff meetings throughout the semester.

During the interview, the Program Coordinator was also asked her opinions regarding whether or not she perceived the UPEI EAP program to be effectively preparing students for academic study. Despite the shortcomings of the program mentioned above, the Program Coordinator stated that she believed the program has been effective for those students who are serious about studying. She said that from her experience she believed students will do well in their credit-based courses if they have the motivation and work ethic to be successful. She commented that “some end up on the Dean’s list and this is a proud moment.” However, she also stated that she recognized that the majority of the students in the UPEI EAP program are eighteen years of age and believed that it is natural that they want to have fun. She commented that based on statistics retrieved from the Registrar’s Office in 2010, EAP students have been doing relatively well in their credit-based courses compared to non-EAP students. In 2009, there was a 3% differential in the overall average marks of EAP and non-EAP students. EAP students were achieving an overall average of 69.5% in their credit-based courses compared to non-EAP students who were achieving an overall average of 72.5% (UPEI English Academic Preparation Program, 2011).

The UPEI EAP Program Coordinator believed that the program has been positively contributing to students’ university experience. She referenced the Buddy Program as an example of how the UPEI EAP program worked to enhance students’ experience. The Buddy Program, offered through the UPEI Student Services department, provided opportunities for international students to meet and socialize with other students on campus. The Program Coordinator also discussed how EAP courses helped students with more than language. Courses have incorporated strategies into class activities regarding learning styles and Canadian culture. In less measurable terms, the

Program Coordinator stated that she believed the program has developed student confidence and personal competence. She said that the UPEI EAP program has assisted students through the linguistic and cultural transition of studying at an English-speaking university using class activities that emphasized ‘westernized’ teaching and learning styles. Students also have the opportunity to take EAP classes and credit-based courses concurrently. Furthermore, she stated students looked to their EAP instructors to answer their questions, once they enrolled in non-EAP courses, and to guide them through the larger university system.

When asked her opinions of whether or not she believed students are satisfied with the program, the Program Coordinator referred to the end-of-term course evaluations and commented that students have stated that they were generally happy with the program, but at the same time, they were also happy to finish EAP. She stated that she believed the program has been perceived by some students as a barrier and something that they need to complete before they can begin to study for their degree. Once students have completed the program, she believed they developed a better appreciation for the work they have completed and for the program as a whole. The Program Coordinator commented, “...there are many issues that EAP students face and factors involved in studying at an English-speaking university and English is only one of them. Other factors included loneliness, being away from home for the first time, the distance from home, culture, personality, prejudice and racism.” She stated that she has seen the linguistic and personal growth of students when comparing their first year to their third year and was hopeful that students could also see this growth and the usefulness of the UPEI EAP program.

Following the interview with the UPEI EAP Program Coordinator, a transcript was written using the detailed notes taken during the interview and verified with the audio recording. A by-hand analysis was conducted to highlight and code similarities and differences with the business proposal data. This information was used to establish a set of program goals and objectives which were incorporated into the focus group questions.

### **Student Focus Groups**

Three focus groups were conducted. These focus groups allowed participants an opportunity to articulate how they believed the UPEI EAP program was meeting its goals and objectives, how the program prepared them for academic study, and how it had contributed to their experiences as UPEI students. See Appendix F for a summary of the program's goals and objectives.

While participants spoke about all of the program's goals and objectives, the first objective: 'to get English proficiency requirements, to study in academic courses, as fast as possible,' and the third objective: 'to provide a bridging program between learning English and taking courses towards a degree...' were most frequently mentioned (by four participants). The fifth objective: 'to have students practice the academic and language activities that they will encounter in university classrooms, including research, computer skills, and study strategies' was mentioned the least often (only once).

When participants were asked what aspects of their English they believed they needed to work on the most when they first arrived at UPEI, speaking and communication were the most frequent answers. All of the participants mentioned listening and writing as areas they needed to work on; however, reading was not mentioned.

Participants were asked to describe motivating and un-motivating aspects of their EAP courses and in their credit-based courses. Most of the motivating aspects that participants spoke of were extrinsic and instrumental forms of motivation, such as feedback from instructors, achieving good grades to graduate, receiving scholarships, and wanting to transfer to another university. Four participants were motivated the most in their EAP courses because they wanted to finish their EAP requirement as quickly as possible. Two participants did not feel motivated to do the assignments or attend class for one or more of their EAP courses because they believed that the courses were too easy and that they were not learning. Three other participants stated that they perceived the program as a barrier to starting their credit-based courses and therefore found it difficult to be motivated in their EAP classes. Two other participants indicated that since they did not receive a credit for completing their EAP courses they were less motivated to work hard. Negative and positive opinions of participants' motivational levels surfaced throughout the focus group discussions.

When asked questions regarding the helpful and unhelpful aspects of the UPEI EAP program, participants in all three focus groups made comments that referred to building confidence, the EAP environment, the EAP courses and their level of difficulty, program policies, their own personal growth, and their prior learning. In the following sections, these themes are discussed in detail to describe opinions of focus group participants.

### **Focus group themes.**

#### *Confidence.*

[having the] self-confidence to speak up was the biggest challenge and is still challenging. [I] felt [that] when someone asked for me to repeat myself... I was

making mistakes [using the] wrong vocabulary and grammar but it was because I was speaking too softly, my self-esteem became lower and I stopped speaking.

Focus Group Participant 1

Having the confidence to speak in front of other people in social situations and in the classroom was difficult for six participants. These participants spoke of the fear of making mistakes and feeling frustrated because they believed that they could not speak well. In the above quotation, Focus Group Participant 1 assumed that when she was asked to repeat herself it was because she was making mistakes, whereas this was not the case; she only needed to speak louder. Participants also felt uncomfortable speaking in front of others because they needed to translate their thoughts before speaking, which required more time to process their ideas. Participants believed that because they were slower than others to formulate their ideas they did not have the skills to speak fluently.

[The EAP program was] a period to feel comfortable about school; it helps you to find confidence; many new students need this time to feel comfortable with everything because you can also take courses together for credit. This motivates students. Students can't jump that high so it's like a stage from which to climb the tree.

Focus Group Participant 4

Ten participants believed that the UPEI EAP program offered different opportunities to build confidence. Academic activities such as group discussions and presentations, along with being confident interacting with professors, were cited frequently. Group discussions and activities completed during EAP classes encouraged participants to speak more often in front of other people during their non-EAP courses. These comments demonstrate that the UPEI EAP program helps students prepare for

credit-based courses, which has been one of the goals of the research questions. Some participants had not given an oral presentation before coming to UPEI, and conducting a presentation in their EAP class was a first experience. “I was scared because I don’t like to speak in front of others, it was a good experience and taught me that it wasn’t that scary and I became more comfortable and it didn’t matter who the audience was” (Focus Participant 5). This confidence was also exhibited through more self-assured presentations in other university courses.

Having the practice of speaking openly with EAP instructors at UPEI provided participants with opportunities to become more comfortable speaking with non-EAP professors. Participants believed that it was very important to speak with their professors because, as one participant commented: “classes are short and there are assignments that you are on your own completing so sometimes it is necessary to speak with the professor to get additional information… the earlier I solved this problem of not having the confidence to talk with my professors the better off I would be in the future completing longer reports” (Focus Group Participant 4). Another participant commented that “EAP made me more confident; when I passed the CanTEST, I felt more confident and that I was ready to take credit courses” (Focus Group Participant 2). Even though most of the participant comments related to how the UPEI EAP program helped to build their confidence, two participants expressed that they did not feel any more confident to take academic courses after completing the EAP program. As one participant stated, “I didn’t feel ready at all; credit courses are very challenging, even for Canadian students” (Focus Group Participant 6). Participants also talked about the environment of the EAP program as having contributed to a positive student experience at UPEI.

***Safe environment.***

[What I could not have gotten without EAP was the] atmosphere. [It] creates an environment that is close to credit-based courses but not exactly like that so it can give you the first feeling of what the courses will be like; it can offer you help to decrease your stress because you will meet other students who have the same level as you. In credit courses, there are fewer students who have the same language difficulties as you.

Focus Group Participant 4

When participants were asked what experiences they would have had difficulty getting if they did not take EAP, eight participants mentioned the safe environment created by the UPEI EAP program. Being in classes that had other students with similar linguistic difficulties helped participants understand that they were not alone. As one participant stated, it created that “special feeling that I wasn’t the only person who had problems with language” (Focus Group Participant 1). For many participants, it was important to be in classes with other students to whom they could relate. Furthermore, participants talked of having patient instructors who created an environment in their courses in which students could talk to each other about their challenges and also ask questions regarding their credit courses. Another participant stated, “EAP builds an environment to meet people... [and] offers the chance to settle in and find contact with others in a new environment... opportunities to practice English without too much pressure” (Focus Group Participant 6).

There were three participants who believed that the environment of the university itself was more beneficial to their language learning as opposed to the EAP environment. One participant stated, “I’m not sure how EAP contributed to improving these areas. I

think that most of the improvement came from being integrated into an English environment and speaking English all day" (Focus Group Participant 7). Another participant believed that the key to improving was to find a friend with very good English who can provide feedback on his/her communication skills (Focus Group Participant 10). Yet another participant referred to the importance of the real-life experiences of talking and interacting with Canadians and individuals from other cultures that offered opportunities to improve speaking and listening skills (Focus Group Participant 8).

These comments demonstrated that environment includes language, culture, and how people act within the environment. The UPEI EAP program and the general UPEI context each provided different opportunities to build confidence and practice interacting in English, and both environments were contributing factors in international students' success. The UPEI EAP program is not solely responsible for its students' success. Participants spoke of improving their abilities in English through their credit-based courses. For example, participants believed that they were exposed to more challenging listening demands, interacted more with their English-speaking peers, and had more demanding course work. Each of these examples challenged their English skills.

***Level of difficulty.***

"[In EAP Writing] and English 101<sup>7</sup> there is a lot of repetition and this helped me be successful; If I took English 101 in the first place, I would have found it challenging."

Focus Group Participant 3

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<sup>7</sup> English 101 is an introductory writing course offered through the English department. It "offers an introduction to university writing and rhetoric, aimed at the development of clear, critical thinking and an effective prose style."

When discussing the UPEI EAP program, there was a lot of discussion concerning the part-time writing courses. Participants had varying opinions of these courses. There were four participants who had positive opinions of regarding the content of the courses they took. These participants believed to have benefited from the over-lap of the course content taught in EAP Writing, Levels 2 and 3 and the English 101 course. They also expressed satisfaction with the content learned in their other part-time courses. However, there were three participants who expressed some dissatisfaction with the EAP writing courses that they took. These participants believed that EAP writing courses should be more challenging and could better prepare students for English 101. For example, one participant commented “Level 1 writing wasn’t challenging enough, a lot of [the] assignments were writing paragraphs and I was doing this in high school in China; at that time I wanted to go to [Writing] Level 2 and at the end of the semester I discovered I didn’t need Level 2. Eng 101 was a challenge for me because I only [learned] paragraphs [in Level 1]” (Focus Participant 7). Other participants expressed that the content of the Writing Level 1 and Level 2 courses was repetitive and that there was not a large enough difference between the course content and lesson delivery among these two courses. For example, one participant stated that the two writing levels he had taken could have been combined into one course and taught over one semester (Focus Participant 8). These comments relate directly to the research question exploring the extent to which EAP is preparing its students for academic study. Participants had different opinions regarding this question. With regard to the writing classes offered by the UPEI EAP program, four participants believed that they were helpful, three participants believed that more work needs to be put into making the content taught at

every level relevant for English 101, and that there needs to be a greater distinction in the content taught in the different levels.

Other comments regarding the EAP program related to the perceived gap between the difficulty of EAP courses and other university courses, and the placement of students in their EAP courses. Three participants commented that they did not feel prepared to take courses in their major after completing EAP. One of these participants commented: “I didn’t feel ready at all; credit courses are very challenging even for Canadian students. I am starting to feel really good now” (Focus Group Participant 6). Participants stated that there needs to be a higher degree of difficulty in the EAP classes to better represent what credit-based courses will be like. Six participants also commented that the levels in the writing courses and the oral communications courses need to be more defined. The following quotation summarizes the general feeling of having students with varying language proficiencies in the same class:

Separate the levels better; there is the feeling that when you are in a class with people who seem to have lower language skills it is difficult to communicate with them during class discussion and assignments; you ask yourself why is he in this class; the activities are too easy for me but are really challenging for him; he may learn something but I won’t; the teacher needs to be concerned about the whole class and therefore makes the level lower to meet the middle.

Focus Group Participant 2

These participants perceived classes with students of varying language proficiencies as being easy and therefore did not exert as much effort compared to the EAP courses that they perceived to be at their proficiency level. These opinions also affected participants’ opinions of how helpful they perceived the UPEI EAP program to

be. Participants believed the program was not helpful when course content was not at the same level of difficulty as their credit-based courses.

The placement test (i.e., CanTEST) was the final area in which participants' comments related to level of difficulty. Participants thought that the CanTEST they took was too easy and should be more like other language proficiency exams such as the TOEFL and IELTS. Participants also commented that they had difficulty making a connection between the EAP curriculum and the language skills they were tested on during the CanTEST. A majority of the participants believed that the EAP courses should better prepare students for writing the CanTEST.

### ***Program policies.***

EAP is the first class and gives the first impression for studying at UPEI; EAP is a requirement to enter university and needs to have more rules and a higher standard and not let students do anything they want.

Focus Group Participant 2

Eight focus group participants believed that the UPEI EAP program needs to be better at enforcing program policies and expecting more of its students. Participant comments included: "we didn't get pushed enough... put more pressure on students" (Focus Group Participant 6); "sometimes when you study, you need pressure" (Focus Group Participant 2); "[it was] slack in terms of enforcing assignments" (Focus Group Participant 8) "if we didn't do an assignment, there was no consequence... consequences would help to motivate us" (Focus Group Participant 2). It was clear from participant comments that the UPEI EAP program would benefit from having expectations of students in class to adequately prepare students for academic study. It was stated by four participants that if the courses are too lenient, students will think that they are not

learning anything and consequently will be less motivated to put forth an effort to complete class assignments. One participant commented: “during my semester in EAP, it was the best time that I’ve had so far because I was relaxed and was able to do whatever I wanted, but now I am very busy. At first, I wasn’t prepared for the amount of work” (Focus Group Participant 2). This comment emphasizes that while taking the UPEI EAP program, Focus Group Participant 2 enjoyed the fact that he did not have a heavy work load however reflecting on his experience in EAP, he realized that this freedom was an inaccurate indication of what to expect in future courses. He realized, after he started credit-based courses, that the EAP courses he took had not adequately prepared him for credit-based courses. He expressed he would have been better prepared if his EAP courses had higher expectations and enforced the importance of completing class assignments, class participation, and doing well on exams.

All participants thought that the use of an English-only policy is a good decision; however, they also stated that it is ineffective because the policy is inconsistently enforced. For example, participants recommended creating fines or docking marks for those speaking a language other than English. This is interesting because the use of students’ first language in second language learning environments versus strictly using the target language is a controversial issue, and there are proponents on both sides of the issue (Turnbull & Dailey-O’Cain, 2009). Participants commented that some instructors had clear consequences for students who spoke a language other than English in class; whereas other instructors only provided consequences some of the time. Participant comments included: “English only is good... other languages in English class can be demoralizing” (Focus Group Participant 9). “Remind students of the importance of English and why they are here” (Focus Group Participant 10). “Some people always

speak in their first language and I didn't like that" (Focus Group Participant 8). "Not strict enough [and it is] not going to work out [because] 3 or 4 [students are] standing in hallway [talking in their first language] and nobody cares in the class" (Focus Group Participant 3). "[It's] awkward in the class when students are speaking in Chinese" (Focus Group Participant 6).

Having program policies that are implemented consistently with consequences for students who do not follow the rules is one way to establish a higher work ethic among students, which could be helpful to prepare students for academic study. In addition to participant comments regarding program policy and language assessment, focus groups discussed their achievements learning English in and outside of the EAP program.

***Personal growth.***

Yes, I was happy with [my] achievements in EAP, it meant that my English had improved a lot, and I can continue to take academic classes in the future, [I] surprised to myself.

Focus Group Participant 4

Participants cited having greater insight into their own development and personal growth after completing the EAP program compared to when they were immersed in their courses. They recognized that their speaking and writing skills improved and that they had become more confident individuals compared to when they first began university. The quotations below describe participants' insights into their learning.

After taking the courses, I realized that I did learn a lot from my classes and about [my] writing. [I have] become better and better with practice. Three years

ago I couldn't write a 300 word essay, but now I can write long essays and I just finished seven papers, 2500 words each, in my final semester. These are things a person overcomes with the understanding that you have to do it. The pressure of not wanting to fail pushes you to just do it and practice what you need to improve upon.

Focus Group Participant 4

I felt stressed in EAP class at the beginning. I think because of [my] English level. Later, I was interested in English, and the class was interesting, so I can learn what I wanted.

Focus Group Participant 1

Three participants believed that their improvement had more to do with their own personal growth as a student at university rather than through their experience taking the UPEI EAP program. “I’m not sure if EAP contributed to being ready or if I just was ready because of my own personal growth; I had a positive attitude after EAP but because of the gap [between EAP and other university courses] I needed to keep working hard” (Focus Group Participant 2). This quotation represents an awareness that was portrayed by three participants. Participants recognized that they have needed to continue to improve their abilities in English after finishing EAP. They recognized that learning English is an ongoing journey. “Language is like any skill... it’s all about practice... the more you do it... the stronger you become” (Focus Group Participant 4).

Expressing insight into their learning while taking EAP and after finishing EAP also had participants reflecting of their prior learning and how it had influenced learning English in the UPEI EAP program.

### ***Prior learning.***

Most [students] can read and write because that is what the focus was when studying in Japan, with almost no focus on speaking and listening.

Focus Group Participant 1

The final theme that arose from the focus groups was a reference made by participants to their prior learning of English and how it had impacted their experiences at UPEI and during the UPEI EAP program. All of the participants recognized that the experience that they had learning English in their native culture was influenced by their culture. When learning a new language, individuals often compare their native language with the target language looking for ways to connect the rules of the two languages. This can lead to over-generalizing and incorrectly transferring grammatical rules from one language to another.

Participants originated from countries such as China, Korea, Japan, Iran, and Vietnam. The cultural influences for each person differed. For seven of the participants, the most noticeable differences had to do with the structure of language itself and cultural values related to language learning. There are few similarities between English and Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Farsi, and Vietnamese. For example, there are several differences in the phonological systems, spelling patterns, how letters are represented, the intonation, and grammar (Chang, 2001; Lee, 2001; Wilson & Wilson, 2001). Participants from Asian countries are accustomed to a learning environment that values memorization, hard work, long study hours, classroom etiquette, and an emphasis on listening rather than expressing an opinion (Chang, 2001, Lee, 2001). Students from Farsi speaking countries are also accustomed to rote learning and specific formalities regarding the relationship between students and teachers. Moreover, in some Middle

Eastern cultures, emphasis is placed on the art of conversation and therefore students are taught communicative strategies at a young age (Wilson & Wilson, 2001). During the focus groups, participants provided examples of how specific linguistic structures were emphasized more than others. Participants also explained how these learning experiences impacted their learning in the UPEI EAP program. One participant referred to having English teachers at her home high school that customized lessons to reinforce specific ways of speaking and thinking that are common in her culture. She believed that learning English this way did not adequately prepare her to interact with people in cultures who had a different communication style. She expressed having developed a false sense of her ability in English because of her experience learning English. Reflecting on her prior learning of English, she realized that she needed to further develop her oral communication skills to be a more successful English speaker. Two other participants talked of how their English language teachers emphasized some learning styles and specific elements of English more than others. For example, value was placed on memorization more than understanding. Furthermore, students were exposed to reading and writing more than speaking. These individuals would have had fewer opportunities to practice their oral communication skills before arriving on PEI. Observations such as these allowed for participants to better understand what aspects of English they needed to develop in their UPEI EAP courses. The theme personal growth relates to the research question asking students to consider how their EAP courses have been helpful and unhelpful by focusing on whether it has met their learning needs. Participants' prior learning experiences affected their perceptions of what English skills they believed they needed to develop and what skills they did need to emphasize. It would be worthwhile for EAP courses to take the cultural background and prior learning

experiences of its students into consideration when developing the curriculum and teaching practices.

## **Summary**

The objective of conducting a review of the end-of-term course evaluations was to gain further insight, from the perspective of EAP students how EAP courses and instructors at UPEI were meeting students' learning needs. This review revealed that between the fall of 2004 and the winter of 2008 the program's choice of textbooks/readings and activities were considered good and very good by a majority of students. The overall mean scores (with the standard deviation in parentheses) for each of these questions were 3.77 (.20) and 3.98 (.26) respectively. The overall mean score regarding how well EAP courses did at helping students reach their goals was 3.93 (.30) indicated that students believed that EAP courses did a good and very good job. This review also showed that students believed their EAP courses were either just right or too easy. The overall mean score for this question was 2.57 (.34). Regarding students' ratings of their EAP instructors' ability to give assignments suitably related to class material, teaching at an appropriate level, and stimulating their interest, the overall mean scores for each question were 4.24 (.29), 4.16 (.30), and 3.98 (.25) respectively. This indicated that a majority of students believed their instructors were good or very good in these areas. These ratings demonstrated that students stated that they were generally happy with their experiences taking EAP courses. However, they also showed that there was room for improvement regarding course content, level of difficulty, and instructional practices.

The focus group themes *Confidence, Safe Environment, Level of Difficulty, Program Policies, Personal Growth* and *Prior Learning* had participants talk of their

experiences in the UPEI EAP program. Participants expressed that the UPEI EAP program provided the opportunity for them to build their confidence using English in and outside of EAP courses, which was in part because of the safe environment that the EAP program created. Participants also talked of completing academic activities that they utilized in their credit-based courses. Participants discussed their opinions of the level of difficulty of EAP courses and the implementation of program policies. Many participants believed that the program could do a better job at ensuring that EAP courses are meeting the learning needs of its students. This entails making a better effort to place students in an appropriate course level and having higher expectations for completing assignments, homework, and exams. Participants commented that the UPEI EAP program could do better at articulating and enforcing program policies. Finally, participants stated that it was after completing EAP courses and began to take credit-based course that they realized how their English skills had improved. Once participants began to take credit-based courses full time they recognized that the UPEI EAP program had been helpful in developing their oral communication and writing skills. Participants discussed how their prior learning influenced their perceptions of their English abilities and the specific aspects of their English proficiency that they needed to work on.

## **Discussion**

This thesis research sought to answer the following questions: According to program documents, the Program Coordinator, and part-time EAP students, to what degree do the goals and objectives of the UPEI EAP program: 1. prepare its students for academic study in their chosen discipline; and 2. contribute to students overall experience at UPEI? During the data collection process, the goals and objectives of the UPEI EAP program were identified through a review of the business proposal, and a one-on-one interview with the Program Coordinator. Select questions were examined from the end-of-term course evaluations for the part-time writing and oral communications courses from 2004 to 2008 to investigate students' ratings of EAP courses and their instructors' abilities to meet their learning needs. Focus groups discussed the goals and objectives of the UPEI EAP program, EAP courses and how the program is organized, students' level of preparedness for academic study after taking program courses, and students' beliefs of whether the UPEI EAP program contributed to their overall experiences at UPEI.

This chapter presents a discussion of the successful and unsuccessful components of the UPEI EAP program. The extent the UPEI EAP program adequately prepares its students for academic study and contributes to their overall experience at UPEI is presented in the following themes: EAP environment, level of difficulty of EAP courses, student satisfaction, and program policies. It appears that the EAP learning environment has positively contributed to participants' experiences by fostering personal growth, linguistic development, and contributed to building relationships among students and with EAP instructors. However, participants did not always believe that EAP courses adequately prepared them for credit-based courses. Discrepancies arose

between the perceptions that the Program Coordinator and the focus group participants had regarding student preparedness. There was discussion of course expectations, course placement, and program policies. Participants confirmed the Program Coordinator's belief that specific areas within the organization and implementation of the program needed to be addressed. Throughout participants' discussions of the EAP learning environment focusing on the level of difficulty of the UPEI EAP program, and program policies, the conversation always touched on motivation. Discussions of participants' motivational levels will be woven throughout the themes and also discussed separately to elaborate on how to create a motivating learning environment. Following this analysis is a set of recommendations, a discussion of the potential limitations of this thesis, future research opportunities, and concluding thoughts.

## **Learning Environment**

### **Contributing to students' overall university experience.**

The Program Coordinator held the belief that EAP students acknowledged that the UPEI EAP program played a role in their linguistic development and positively contributed to students' experiences at UPEI. The focus group data revealed that participants saw improvement in their English skills. However, there were different beliefs as to what facilitated this growth. The general learning environment of the university context and the learning environment created by the UPEI EAP program were both cited as positively contributing to participants' overall experience at UPEI. Three participants believed that being immersed in the English environment of the university was the major contributing factor for their positive experiences and success, while eight participants believed that it was the EAP learning environment and the courses themselves that were the main contributing factors to their positive experiences and success. Each

environment helped participants grow in different ways. Students are exposed to different types of language in natural environments and instructional settings (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). Both learning environments offered participants' different opportunities to interact using English. As participants stated, they were exposed to more English speakers and more real life experiences outside of the UPEI EAP program in natural settings. The general university context also required these participants to use English more often and in different ways. It was stated by these participants that exposure to English in the general university context enhanced their English abilities more than their EAP classes. Eight other participants argued that the instructional setting of the UPEI EAP environment contributed to building their confidence through controlled classroom activities. In EAP classes, participants stated they could relate and learn from one another because they were all working to improve their English skills. The confidence gained through EAP activities translated into having more confidence outside of the program which these participants believed contributed to enhancing their abilities in English. Participants emphasized how the program offered the time and the means for them to become more confident speakers and writers of English. The Program Coordinator also stated in her interview that she believed the program helped to develop students' confidence. Likely, both learning environments are at play and have contributed to participants' learning while in Canada. What seems clear is that students and UPEI EAP personnel would benefit from discussing and better understanding what is entailed in learning a second language at this level. It would be important for all to recognize the important interplay of inside and outside class experiences as a whole experience. The UPEI EAP program could enhance students' overall experience at UPEI by integrating authentic learning opportunities into its curriculum whereby students are

immersed into the general university context during class activities and interacting with English speakers.

With regard to its courses, the UPEI EAP program was stated as being successful at establishing activities that allowed participants to practice academic related skills (i.e., oral presentations) and promoting the development of relationships among students and with EAP instructors. Learners are motivated both positively and negatively by the people in their environment (Dörnyei, 2007). It is important for instructors to be role models in the classroom to foster the development of positive motivational levels within students. This is done by demonstrating confidence as an instructor, encouraging students to be more confident and to take risks, showing empathy towards students, respecting students, and recognizing individual effort (Dörnyei, 2007). The relationships that participants created with their EAP instructors nurtured the development of strategies that helped participants succeed in the larger university system. For example, participants reported developing the confidence and strategies to interact comfortably with EAP and non-EAP professors.

As stated by the Program Coordinator, the program was considered a place for students to learn how to become more competent at navigating through the university system beyond language issues. For example, she stated that students have learned about registering for courses and how to look for help from other departments including Student Services and the Accounting Office.

Findings regarding the role of the learning environment confirm the findings of a study conducted at three Canadian universities where it was found that participants believed that their English for Academic Purposes programs positively contributed to their overall experience at university (Fox et al., 2006). The findings from Fox et al. and

of this thesis emphasize that international students' benefit from learning in their EAP courses how the university system works and where to access resources on university campuses. Developing this knowledge should be a part of any English for Academic Purposes program as it positively contributes to the university experience of international students.

### **Course Level of Difficulty and Student Satisfaction**

#### **Preparing students for academic study.**

Four focus group participants expressed satisfaction with the skills they learned while taking UPEI EAP classes and recognized their usefulness in preparing them for their credit-based courses. However, three participants stated that some of the class activities were repetitive and the level of difficulty did not challenge them or sustain their interest. These participants believed that EAP courses should have more diverse activities, especially in skill areas that have more than one course level. For example, there are three levels of academic writing. Level 1 focuses on the three-paragraph essay, level 2 focuses on the five-paragraph essay, and level 3 focuses on the detail of writing such as supporting ideas, developing a topic, and grammar within a 5-paragraph essay. Participants stated that they completed some of the same activities when they took the level 1 writing and then the level 2 writing from the same instructor. Participants commented that completing the same activities from one semester to the next was not motivating because they did not feel that they were being challenged to improve their language skills.

Whether UEPI EAP courses are adequately preparing students for credit-based courses was elaborated further by looking at two of the end-of-term course evaluation questions: 1. rate the level of difficulty of the course as too difficult, just right, or too

easy; and 2. rate the instructor in terms of teaching at a level appropriate to students as poor, fair, good, very good, or excellent. Between 2004 and 2008, 62% of students believed that their courses were at the right learning level. Student ratings were dispersed from poor to excellent regarding their opinions of whether their EAP instructors taught at an appropriate learning level. Overall, students rated their instructors as good and very good at teaching at a level that was appropriate.

Questions have been raised regarding the scales used in the course evaluations. Ratings were often clumped at the upper end of the scale. This may be an indication that the scales used require further refining to ensure that students' are able to provide accurate ratings or those students who completed evaluations between 2004 and 2008 had relatively positive opinions of their experiences in EAP experiences. If a more defined scale was used, would this have produced different results?

The overall student ratings of the level of difficulty of EAP courses support the Program Coordinator's opinions. During the one-on-one interview held with the Program Coordinator, she expressed an overall satisfaction with the curriculum taught in the writing and oral communications courses.

However, evaluation statistics contradict focus group participants' opinions regarding instructors teaching at an appropriate learning level. Focus group participants believed that their instructors did not always succeed at challenging students linguistically. There were several instances during the focus group discussions when participants identified a gap between the level of difficulty of the content in EAP courses and credit-based courses, and the evaluations had 13% of students' rate the level of difficulty as poor or fair. Taking this into account, it would be worthwhile to have a closer look at the content of EAP courses to ensure that students are being challenged

linguistically at each course level, and that course activities do not an overlap across the levels.

The EAP Program Coordinator and the original business proposal both emphasized that courses should be at a learning level that is one level higher ( $i + 1$ ) than students' current proficiency (Krashen, 1982, 1984). It is possible that the Program Coordinator is not aware of the instructors' specific activities and the overlap of activities experienced by EAP students. Bridging the gap in the level of difficulty of EAP courses and credit-based courses will better prepare EAP students for the academic demands of their undergraduate courses.

#### **Contributing to students' overall university experience.**

Participant comments regarding the level of difficulty of EAP courses also surfaced through discussions of student placement and language proficiency. Some participants believed that they were placed in the wrong learning level. These participants stated that the course in which they were placed included students with lower language proficiencies than their own. Participants believed that they did not fit in with the other members of the class and indicated that they were therefore less motivated to participate during classroom activities. They considered the activities useless because they were directed at the students with lower language proficiencies and believed that the instructor did not meet the learning needs of all students. These EAP classes were perceived as having individual students working towards separate goals rather than a cohesive group working towards the same goal. Establishing cohesion among a group of students in a language learning classroom is an important element of establishing an environment that promotes learning (Dörnyei, 2007). When students perceive themselves as a cohesive group, the individual differences within the group will have

little impact on the group as a whole. A cohesive learning group will be more committed to their learning and students will have pride in their accomplishments. On the other hand, hostility can form in a learning environment if students form into cliques and subgroups in which the students of one group believe to be different or against the other groups in the class (Dörnyei, 2007). This situation creates a stressful learning environment for the teacher and the students and disrupts learning. As was previously mentioned, some participants of this thesis perceived they had higher language proficiencies compared to the other members of their EAP classes. EAP instructors also directed their lessons at the average language ability of the class. Participants, therefore, did not see themselves as members of a cohesive learning group because the instructor taught to the abilities of the students below them. According to Dörnyei, these perceptions could affect their success learning English. Participants argued that they would have learned more if placed in a class that only had students within their learning proficiency range, allowing the instructor to more easily challenge everyone. Cummins (2000) would agree with these students. He stated that successful SLA takes place when the learning material is cognitively challenging, it is put in context, and has linguistic support. This means that if the learning material is not cognitively challenging for EAP students, it is unlikely that students' time and learning in the UPEI EAP program will be maximized. In this case, it may be feasible to create a system that allows students to be re-tested when they feel they are in the wrong level.

Participants' dissatisfaction with mixed ability classes confirms findings from a previous study in which courses with varying language proficiencies negatively impacted students' attitude and performance (Fox, 2009), and highlights Dörnyei's (2007) research regarding the importance of having a cohesive language learning group.

Fox (2009) found that student learning profiles had proven to be effective at providing instructors with key information regarding students' learning needs, proficiencies, and attitudes towards their courses. She used the data from student learning profiles to better understand students' beliefs regarding mixed ability classes. She found that when students of mixed abilities were in the same class they ran the risk of forming cliques, creating tension among each other in class, and ultimately having their learning affected, which was just as Dörnyei (2007) predicts will happen. After instructors began to use student learning profiles in the Fox study, they were more informed and better able to target the learning needs of their students. The findings from Fox (2009) provided insight into participants' statements that they were less motivated in their UPEI EAP classes that had students they perceived to have had lower language proficiencies than their own. Participants saw their instructors planning lessons to meet the linguistic needs of the students who were among the average language proficiencies of the class and not meeting the needs of students who had higher or lower proficiencies. This seemed to have heightened the stress and tension among the students who believed their learning needs were not met and this may have affected their learning. It is believed that two key findings of the research conducted by Fox (2009) are: 1. having language instructors who take into consideration their students' diverse language proficiencies when planning lessons; and 2. the importance of establishing a climate that promotes cohesion among students. These findings support the findings of this thesis and can be directly applied to the UPEI EAP program. EAP instructors that teach in the UPEI EAP program could take a holistic approach in their teaching practices and provide opportunities throughout the semester to build better group dynamics among their students. These changes would likely enhance students' learning experiences in the UPEI EAP program.

The original business proposal for the UPEI EAP program recommended that the curriculum emphasize a communicative, interactive four-skilled approach (Gillan, 2001). Presently, the UPEI EAP program structures its classes to focus on one or two academic skills, for example there are writing classes and oral communication classes. With this organizational structure, EAP instructors generally target one set of academic skills more than another in their courses. This may lead instructors to only factor into their lesson planning the language proficiencies that their courses emphasize. Instructors may not be differentiating between students' high and low language proficiencies for the skill areas in which their courses do not emphasize. It is also possible that instructors do not fully understand what their students' abilities are in the areas that their course does not emphasize. Not having a holistic understanding of students' language proficiencies is an issue that may originate in how students' language proficiencies are tested and how students are placed in their EAP classes. This issue needs to be examined further.

Cummins (2000) argued that it is important to critically question the goal of the language assessments used by programs like the UPEI EAP program. It is important to make the distinction between testing language proficiency and testing communicative competence. Formal language exams such as IELTS and TOEFL are context-reduced exams that test students' memorization and test-taking skills. The Canadian Language Benchmarks assessment (Canadian Language Benchmarks Placement Test, 2010), on the other hand, is a context-embedded exam whereby students' performance skills related to real-life and instructional contexts are tested. The CanTEST assessment that the UPEI EAP program uses for student placements is similar to the context-reduced exams (i.e., IELTS and TOEFL).

EAP students at UPEI are given three scores: a score for reading and listening based on a series of multiple choice questions, a score for writing based on a written essay, and a score for speaking based on an oral interview. They are placed in courses such as Oral Communications and Integrated Skills, Academic Writing, and Phonetics based on these scores. These placement procedures could explain why some students believed they were in EAP courses with other students who have lower proficiencies. In the academic writing class, some students may have lower reading and listening proficiencies than their classmates and in the oral communications course some students may have better writing skills than some of their classmates. Having students with varying language proficiencies in the same class has been an issue for some students. It appears that it has also led to having courses that do not meet the linguistic needs of its students. Because the size of the program is small, it would be difficult to place students with the exact combination of proficiency scores in the same classes. However, effectively targeting students' learning needs entails taking into consideration students' language proficiencies as a whole whether the course focuses primarily on academic writing or oral communication. EAP courses may better meet the learning needs of its students and prepare them for academic study if EAP instructors were made aware of their students' language proficiencies in all areas of English.

James and Templeman (2009) found in their study of placement validity that when ESL faculty were involved in correcting and interpreting the results of the language proficiency exam at their institution, and assisted in making student placement decisions, the accuracy of placement decisions jumped from 66.5% to 84.1%. EAP instructors at UPEI are involved in assessing students' language proficiencies at the end of each semester; however, these findings indicate that it would be beneficial for

instructors to be more involved in the placement decisions of students. Placement decisions require that individual course outcomes be taken into consideration to determine which courses would best suit students' reading, listening, and writing skills. Therefore, having instructors involved would have them think beyond the specific skills their course emphasizes. Through the placement process, instructors could gain a holistic understanding of students' language proficiencies. Furthermore, instructors could be better equipped to factor into their lesson planning students' language abilities for the areas outside of what their courses emphasize, and ultimately meet the learning needs of more students in their classes. Fox (2009) found that it was successful using student learning profiles to target students' learning needs. The UPEI EAP program could provide each instructor with a profile containing the background information of each of their students' language proficiency levels. If instructors are better able to target the learning needs of their students, students may be more satisfied with what they are learning and better prepared for academic study at UPEI.

Establishing positive group dynamics in EAP classes at UPEI may also enable instructors to better target students' academic language needs. Classes may be more cohesive and students may communicate more freely with each other and with the instructor. Furthermore, positive group norms can increase academic achievement and student morale (Dörnyei, 2007), and thus better prepare students for academic study and positively contribute to their learning experiences. Creating a cohesive learning group includes establishing positive relationships among students and a climate of trust. A cohesive learning environment is fostered by instructors who invest both time and effort into modeling positive group norms and negotiating with students explicit course expectations that all students agree upon (Dörnyei, 2007). Dörnyei further emphasizes

that leadership style impacts the achievement of individuals and the group as a whole and that effective leaders set the direction of the learning group establishing group security. It would be valuable for EAP instructors at UPEI to meet as a team to discuss the strategies they have used and/or would like to use in the future to develop a positive learning environment and to encourage group cohesion. These strategies could be helpful to minimize any possible tension among students. A learning environment that promotes group cohesion may enable students to have a greater sense of achievement and a more positive experience.

### **Establishing and Enforcing Program Policies**

#### **Preparing students for academic study.**

When reflecting on how the UPEI EAP program establishes and enforces its policies, the Program Coordinator commented that the program is to have a high degree of accountability to its students and to the university as a whole. Enrolment in the UPEI EAP program is a condition of students' admission to UPEI. It is important that students are adequately prepared to take credit-based courses otherwise she believed that there would be backlash against international students and the program.

Reinforcing the opinion that the program has the task of adequately preparing students for academic study were comments from eight participants who stated that the program needed to have higher expectations of its students. These participants expressed opinions that the program needed to be more strict regarding its: 1. English-only policy during classes; 2. completion of assignments for class; and 3. taking course work more seriously. Taking these opinions into consideration, it may be important to find ways to better implement program policies to meet this goal.

Participants believed that there should be greater consequences and penalties for students who do not follow program and classroom policies. Participants stated that having clear penalties may motivate more students to work harder. Furthermore, establishing higher expectations regarding course outcomes could bridge the gap in the level of difficulty of EAP classes and credit-based courses. As one participant discussed, EAP classes are the first introduction to university courses for many international students, and therefore it is important to establish a level of difficulty that coincides with the difficulty of other first year university courses. Articulated course and program policies would establish course, instructor, and student expectations and promote program accountability. For example, documenting student misconduct and having an established course of action could create consistency regarding how specific behaviour is addressed. This documentation and course of action could originate within the EAP program but it would need to be recognized and utilized by other departments such as the Registrar's Office, otherwise the consequences that students face would not hold merit. Since successful completion of the UPEI EAP program is a condition of students' admission to UPEI, the program has the responsibility to help students succeed through the program as quickly as possible. The program is also responsible to UPEI to ensure that students are adequately prepared for academic study. Having articulated policies and procedures may be one way to enable the program to be accountable to students and to UPEI.

Alternatively, students enrolled in the UPEI EAP program are young adults and therefore it could be considered inappropriate to enforce a set of policies that control student conduct and guide learning. Rather, it may be more effective for EAP students to be brought into the planning process in order to be engaged, collaborative and to make

learning meaningful (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). This includes incorporating students' prior learning experiences and personal goals into the planning process. When adult learners have a sense of control of what they are learning, they may begin to take ownership of their learning, become more self-directed and gain a sense of learner autonomy (Little, 2005). Furthermore, learners may develop personal interest in their learning and become more engaged in language learning in and outside of the classroom. Enhancing personal interest may influence academic achievement (Linnenbrink & Pintrich, 2002) and positively contribute to students' preparedness for academic study and their overall experiences at UPEI.

The above themes, the learning environment, the level of difficulty of EAP courses, and implementing program policy have addressed how the UPEI EAP program impacted students' experiences at UPEI and preparation for academic study. During discussions relating to these themes, participants spoke of their motivation while taking EAP courses. Finding and sustaining motivation seemed to be a common theme throughout participant comments in each of these areas and has contributed to participants' perceptions of whether their experiences at UPEI have been positive or negative. Motivational levels were also seen by participants to have affected their preparedness for academic study. In the next section, the discussion will be devoted to exploring ways to help students become motivated to take responsibility for their learning. The motivational influences of the teacher, class organization, and classroom activities are discussed.

### **Student Motivation**

"Long-term, sustained learning, such as the acquisition of a second language, cannot take place unless the educational context provides, in addition to cognitively

adequate instructional practices, sufficient inspiration and enjoyment to build up continuing motivation in learners" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 1). The findings of the end-of-term evaluations and focus groups indicated there are elements of the UPEI EAP program that have been stated as being successful at preparing students for academic study and contributing to students' overall experience at UPEI. There are also aspects of the program that could be researched further. The Program Coordinator stated that the program is not a successful endeavour for all students. She stated that she believes students who do well in the program are serious about their studies and motivated. Focus group participants supported this opinion by stating that they have had conversations with other students who struggled to attain 4.5 on the CanTEST. While motivation is not the sole factor that determines success, students' motivational levels can contribute significantly to achievement in SLA (Dörnyei, 2007). Motivation is affected by a combination of several factors including, but not limited to: 1. effort; 2. a desire to achieve a specific goal; 3. personal values; 4. the learning environment; 5. a favourable attitude towards learning and the target language community; and 6. teaching practices (Dörnyei, 2001; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2010; Gardner, 1985). To better prepare the students in the UPEI EAP program for the academic demands of credit-based courses and enhance their overall experience at UPEI, it would be worthwhile to investigate what has affected students' motivational attitudes.

Many participants perceived the UPEI EAP program as a gateway to completing their degree and a hurdle to overcome before continuing on with their studies. These perceptions were reinforced when participants were asked which program objective was most important. A majority of the focus group participants stated that having the ability to take EAP courses along-side credit-based courses was the most important program

objective and a significant motivator to finish the UPEI EAP program as soon as possible. The Program Coordinator stated that she understood that some students may see the UPEI EAP program as an obstacle. She stated during her interview that she has received feedback from students expressing resentment towards doing the work required of them in their EAP courses at UPEI. She believed that for some students it was not until after they moved on to take credit-based courses that they developed an appreciation for what they had learned in the program. Participants also stated that they gained an appreciation for the work they completed in the UPEI EAP program after starting credit-based courses full time. Since participants' end goal was to complete an undergraduate degree, many participants chose to focus most of their effort on their credit-based courses; EAP was their second priority. When faced with more than one goal or intention, it is natural to prioritize which goals to focus on and when. Having several overlapping goals creates what is referred to as a challenge of parallel multiplicity (Dörnyei, 2001, p. 13). Knowing how to best deal with multiple goals is a difficult task. Students enrolled in the UPEI EAP program are faced with having to complete non-credit language courses, which are not included in the courses required to complete their degrees. Students must complete their EAP courses in order to obtain unconditional admission to UPEI. At the same time, they want to complete an undergraduate degree as soon as possible, so taking additional language courses costs them extra time and money. Some students put all of their time and energy into their credit-based courses and little time into their EAP courses. As Focus Group Participant 2 stated: "if you do not treat [EAP] as the same as other courses then you won't put much effort into it, it all depends on your attitude." Creating a learning environment that motivates students to get involved in their learning is one step towards encouraging

students to make the UPEI EAP program their first priority. If students' perceive completing the UPEI EAP program as their first priority they may want to put time and energy into their EAP courses which may result in having a more positive learning experience.

One way to successfully create a learning environment that motivates students is to have a teacher who exhibits mutual respect for his/her students, recognizes individual student effort, and demonstrates a commitment to providing the best learning opportunities possible. Leadership style of the language teacher can play a proactive role in creating a motivating learning environment (Dörnyei, 2007). After a teacher has set-up his or her classroom to be safe for students to take risks, has promoted group cohesion, and has developed teacher-student relationships, teachers can enhance student motivation by: 1. creating basic motivational conditions; 2. generating initial motivation; 3. maintaining and protecting motivation; 4. and encouraging positive self-evaluation (Dörnyei, 2007). Taking explicit steps to set up a motivating learning environment could be part of enhancing students' learning experience in the UPEI EAP program and assist in preparing students for credit-based courses.

EAP instructors at UPEI could take create basic motivational conditions by spending a part of the first class each semester discussing the expectations of his/her course, getting to know students' interests, and developing a better understanding of students' language proficiencies. To generate initial motivation among students, classes can arouse students' interest with authentic lessons (Dörnyei, 2007). This means that students learn about real people, places, and content and are shown the connection between what they are learning and the real world (e.g., credit-based courses). To generate initial interest, EAP instructors could conduct a survey at the beginning of each

semester to solicit what subjects students are interested in discussing or writing about throughout the semester. Furthermore, taking into consideration the importance of exposing students to natural and structured settings (Lightbown & Spada, 2006), EAP instructors could brainstorm with students the assignments they would like to complete during the course to immerse them in the university context and promote interaction with other students on campus. As noted by a focus group participant, this type of interaction was thought to be influential in her language acquisition. Throughout this process, instructors could be demonstrating how course assignments and activities will help students reach their academic goals and enable students to understand the value of what and how they are learning. Moreover, it assists in creating a link between EAP courses and credit-based courses. Gaining an awareness of the learning process could better prepare students for the assignments and tasks of credit-based courses.

To maintain motivation, EAP instructors could follow through with the activities that immerse students in the university context. Furthermore, to maintain and protect motivation instructors could meet with students individually mid-way through the semester to answer questions and provide feedback regarding the areas in which they are doing well and need to improve. At this stage, focus is placed on setting attainable short-term goals with students (Dörnyei, 2007), increasing learner autonomy and self-confidence, and emphasizing how to improve the quality of each student's learning experience (Little, 2005). EAP instructors could have students define two to three short-term goals for their courses, revisit these goals mid-semester to discuss which goals have been achieved, and create a plan to keep working towards the goals that have not yet been attained. Furthermore, to help students prepare for their credit-based courses, instructors could encourage students to incorporate goal-setting into every course they

take and to become active agents in the learning process (Little, 2005). These steps may provide more opportunities for EAP instructors to target students' learning needs and also responds to focus group participants' concerns that EAP courses were not completely meeting their learning needs.

A final element incorporated into creating an environment that fosters motivation is to encourage learners to engage in positive self-evaluation (Dörnyei, 2007, Little, 2005). This includes encouraging learners to acknowledge their efforts and their abilities. It is also important for learners to analyze and question the value of rewards and grades compared to instances of authentic learning (Dörnyei, 2007). Having learners keep a written log of their learning process encourages personal reflection and self-evaluation (Little, 2005). Little (2009, 2005) described the European Language Portfolio as a tool used by learners to become autonomous learners. Language teachers help learners become autonomous learners through the use of the portfolio by guiding learners to recognize and assess their learning. Teachers provide learners opportunities to learn how to give themselves feedback. In particular, learners focus on how to organize, personalize, interpret, and integrate feedback into their self-assessments (Little, 2009). Other portfolio exemplars that could be used to develop autonomous learners are the Portfolio Based Language Assessment (Pettis, 2011, April) and the Collaborative Language Portfolio Assessment (Manitoba Labour and Immigration, 2004). More information is provided on these teaching and learning tools within the Recommendations section: Creating autonomous learners.

## **Recommendations**

The themes regarding learning environment, level of difficulty and student satisfaction, program policies, and student motivation developed into several

recommendations. This section presents recommendations related to creating a link between the UPEI EAP program and undergraduate courses, establishing student profiles, the promotion of autonomous learners, and the admissions policies.

### **Linking the UPEI EAP courses with undergraduate courses.**

Participants stated that the UPEI EAP program would benefit from re-examining curriculum content and the assignments completed to ensure that the content and academic skills are in line with the skills required in the credit-based courses studied by most students. Considering that students are studying in various programs at UPEI, it is unlikely and unrealistic to have shadow courses for every university program. However, it might be possible to offer tutorial-based courses in the part-time stream of the program in subjects such as business, economics, and mathematics, since many EAP students are studying in these areas. This tutorial program could help make a direct link between the UPEI EAP program and credit-based courses that emphasize course content in addition to academic skills. Since 2009, the School of Business at UPEI has offered a special topics business course designed to assist international students who hope to pursue an undergraduate degree in business. This course introduces students to Canadian business and helps prepare students to take Business 101 (The Registrar's Office, 2010). Other preparatory courses and tutorials offered in affiliation with faculties on campus could be beneficial for all international students, not only EAP students. Interestingly, the original business proposal for the EAP program proposed an adjunct program model to offer courses that complimented the curriculum of other courses on campus. Perhaps it is time for the EAP Program Coordinator to revisit the idea of an adjunct model.

Linking the EAP curriculum with undergraduate courses may also constitute a review of the level of difficulty of the current curriculum, the activities completed across

courses to determine if there is an overlap in content, and the language proficiencies of the students at each course level. Maximizing the learning opportunities for EAP students involves having a curriculum that is one level higher than students' current language proficiencies (Dörnyei, 2007; Krashen, 1982, 1984).

### **Becoming more learner-centred.**

Participants also stated that the program could put more effort into being learner-centred. Participants argued that they were often in classes with individuals they perceived as having lower language skills than their own. As was discussed, one explanation for this perception was that students are placed in EAP courses based on individual skills rather than an overall assessment score. EAP instructors may not fully understand or take into consideration their students' language abilities in the areas outside of the skills in which their courses emphasize. Recommendations to assist instructors in being able to better target their students' complete learning needs include:

1. having EAP instructors become more knowledgeable of the language assessment scoring grids and proficiency levels and the guidelines used to place students; and 2. creating a student profile for all students. Presently, EAP instructors assist with proctoring and scoring student language assessments while a select few program staff make placement decisions based on the scores. Not all EAP instructors may completely understand how to interpret the language scores and how they are used to place students in EAP classes. A professional development session could be held at the beginning of the academic year, as recommended by the Program Coordinator, to explore the CanTEST rubrics for reading, listening, speaking, and writing proficiencies. Each instructor could also receive a profile for each of their students. This profile could include a transcript of students' previous CanTEST scores, a transcript of the EAP

courses this student had taken, and any comments from previous courses that should be carried forward. If EAP instructors have knowledge of how to interpret the CanTEST's scoring rubric, how students are placed in their classes, and a student profile, this may enable them to incorporate each student's overall language proficiency into the planning process.

### **Creating autonomous learners.**

EAP students are young adults and would benefit from learning how to be autonomous learners to become intrinsically motivated rather than relying on extrinsic motivation such as program policies. When language learners take an active role in the learning process, they will have more focus and more success (Little, 2000). EAP instructors could spend more time in their courses incorporating students into the planning process and helping students to learn how to monitor and assess their learning through proactive and reflective analysis. It may be worthwhile for students to complete a self-assessment at the beginning and end of each semester. An example of a self-assessment tool that could be used is the Common European Framework (CEFR) Common Reference Levels: Self-assessment Grid (Vandergrift, 2006). This self-assessment tool assists students in understand their language proficiency levels and to set short term goals for their EAP courses and language learning opportunities outside of class. The self-assessment grid, created by the CEFR, organizes English into 3 categories: understanding, speaking, and writing, and across six levels of proficiency: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2. A1 and A2 represent basic users of English, B1 and B2 represent independent users of English, and C1 and C2 represent proficient users of English. Throughout the semester, students would re-visit their language proficiency and

goals to explore ways, with the guidance of the instructor and the other members of the class, to achieve their goals.

The European Language Portfolio is one tool that could be used by EAP students to create and track their goals (Little, 2009). A European Language Portfolio is a learning log created by learners used to manage, support, and evaluate their learning journey. Two other portfolio-based learning tools used in Canada are the Portfolio Based Language Assessment (Pettis, 2011, April) and the Collaborative Language Portfolio Assessment (Manitoba Labour and Immigration, 2004). The Portfolio Based Language Assessment (Pettis, 2011, April) has been used as an assessment tool by language instructors. Instructors and students collaborate to set language goals using the Canadian Language Benchmarks as a guiding reference. Students build a portfolio to show examples of how they have worked to reach their goals. Then together instructors and students analyze and reflect on their progress. Similar to the Portfolio Based Language Assessment, the Collaborative Language Portfolio Assessment (Manitoba Labour and Immigration, 2004) is a tool used by language instructors and learners to set learning goals and to reflect on students' learning process. It uses the Canadian Language Benchmarks proficiency descriptors. Students document their learning progress over a specified amount of time using the descriptors to see and compare their progress learning English. Further research would need to be conducted to identify which portfolio-based assessment tool would best suit the UPEI EAP program. However, integrating portfolio-based tasks into the EAP curriculum at UPEI could promote the development of skills that would benefit students in their EAP courses and their credit-based courses. Students could start a portfolio in their first EAP class and use the portfolio as they progress through the program and continue into their undergraduate

degree program. Students would build on their goals from one course to the next and assess how their language proficiency progresses over time.

### **Promoting a motivational learning environment.**

Participants suggested ways to enhance student motivation in the EAP classroom. Much of the feedback received from participants referenced vocabulary development. These activities did not always have a direct relationship with academic-based skills; however, participants believed that building their vocabulary regarding everyday activities on and off campus was an important part of being a successful at an English-speaking university. Other class recommendations related to learning about Canadian culture through guest speakers such as a lawyer to talk about Canadian law and establishing discussion partners with third year students to talk about global issues. Instructors may need to re-think their communication with students about the goals and objectives of class activities. Participants discussed that instructors needed to make explicit the intended objectives of classroom activities to help students understand the reasoning for completing these activities and to help students learn how to apply what is learned in EAP to their credit-based courses. Furthermore, learning how the university system works and how to access resources on campus could be valuable activities to enhance students' experiences at UPEI.

Based on the English for Academic Purposes research and literature reviewed regarding motivation, it would be worthwhile to work with EAP instructors and strategize ways to enhance group dynamics and encourage class cohesion within EAP classes. One direction that the program could take is to have instructors enable their students through establishing, generating, and maintaining motivation in the classroom,

along with providing motivational learning opportunities, and encouraging self-evaluation (see the section Student Motivation presented earlier in this chapter).

### **Establishing clear program policies.**

Becoming an autonomous learner develops over time. As participants stated, it was in hindsight that they saw how the EAP program was of a benefit to their language development and academic preparation. Participants believed that clear expectations implemented consistently may have motivated them to work harder in their EAP courses. Furthermore, it is believed that actions and policies that are enforced on an inconsistent basis may result in treating students' unequally leading students and university personnel to undermine the decisions made by program administrators. This may jeopardize program credibility.

Participants stated that they would have liked their EAP courses to have been more strict regarding expectations for homework, attendance, and completing assignments. A structured program policy for student expectations during courses, one that is outlined for every EAP course and implemented on a consistent basis by all EAP staff, could be a first step to helping students develop good study habits. It may also lead to developing autonomous learners. How this policy is implemented would need careful consideration to ensure that it abides by current UPEI policies and procedures. EAP policies that impact the policies or work of other departments could be established in collaboration with these University personnel (e.g., registration or admissions). This again may promote consistency regarding program decisions.

### **Admissions to the EAP program and UPEI.**

Finally, participants offered advice regarding the admissions policy at UPEI. UPEI does not require individuals to have a language assessment score before being

accepted to an undergraduate degree. Students are able receive a conditional acceptance to the university and wait until after they have arrived to take the on-site language assessment (The Registrar's Office, 2010). Since individuals do not need to provide documentation of their English language proficiency, students who meet UPEI entrance requirements in all areas other than their language proficiency may be accepted with basic English conversational skills. As discussed earlier, it takes an individual approximately five to seven years to acquire the academic language proficiency skills that are on par with native English speakers (Cummins, 2000). This means that an individual entering UPEI with a beginner level English proficiency may struggle significantly to acquire the necessary language skills to successfully complete an undergraduate degree in a reasonable time-frame. Students entering UPEI with beginner level English language proficiencies may be more likely to discontinue their undergraduate studies before completing their degree requirements, especially if it takes someone three or more years to acquire the necessary English proficiency score. A majority of the students enrolled in the EAP program have the goal of completing an undergraduate degree. Are potential UPEI students receiving the message that they can complete an undergraduate degree regardless of their English proficiency level at recruitment fairs or at the time of their admission? Universities are businesses and the UPEI EAP program is a revenue source for UPEI; however, is it accurate, realistic, or responsible/ethical to say that students who have a beginner level English proficiency can successfully complete their studies in approximately five years? These aspects of program admission may need to be revisited.

Participants stated that they have seen other students struggle to achieve the required proficiency level and some have taken EAP courses for two to three years.

Participants remarked that students begin to feel frustrated and think that they will never complete their English language admissions requirement. To resolve this issue, participants argued that it would be a good idea to require all entering students to have a minimum language assessment score to indicate that they have minimal threshold ability in English. For example, UPEI requires students to have the minimum score 4.5 on the CanTEST, or an equivalent score from another accredited exam for unconditional admission to UPEI (The Registrar's Office, 2010). According to participants, it may be reasonable for incoming students to demonstrate a language proficiency score that is equivalent to a 3.0 on the CanTEST and eligible to enter the full-time stream of the EAP program. Having a minimum language proficiency requirement may also benefit the university. There would be more control over who the university accepts and perhaps a higher retention rate among international students. However, requiring incoming students to have a language proficiency score upon admissions to UPEI may discourage potential students, unable to take a language proficiency exam, from applying. It may be better to create a gradual admissions standard that has students admitted to specific programs within the UPEI EAP program depending on students' entering language proficiency scores. Saint Mary's University in Halifax, Nova Scotia has one of the oldest TESL learning centres in Atlantic Canada. Its admissions policy and organizational structure may be one to consider as the EAP program grows at UPEI.

Saint Mary's University offers four separate programs: English for Academic Purposes, a University Bridging Program, English for Personal and Professional/Practical Communication, and a One-Month ESL Immersion (Saint Mary's University, 2011). Each program has its own admission requirement. The University Bridging Program is the only program that permits students to take credit-based courses

while taking English classes and requires students to have conditional admissions into an undergraduate or graduate program at Saint Mary's University. Offering separate programs according to students' language proficiencies and Saint Mary's University admissions standards establishes clear boundaries regarding what is required of students in order to study at the university level. Prospective students are informed through program information that if they do not have a language proficiency score, they can have their English tested upon arrival and be placed into one of the Centre's language programs based on this score; however, individuals must successfully complete the highest course level or demonstrate a designated proficiency level through the on-site exam before receiving admission to Saint Mary's University.

A similar gradual admissions policy could be applied to the UPEI EAP program. For example, if students do not have a minimal language proficiency score, they would only be accepted into a full-time ESL program offered through the Webster Centre for Teaching and Learning department at UPEI. Upon completion of the on-site language proficiency exam, if students have a demonstrated 3.5 to 4.0 on the CanTEST, they would be accepted conditionally into an undergraduate program at UPEI and be permitted to take one to two credit-based courses while also taking EAP courses through the Webster Centre to continue working on their language proficiencies. UPEI applicants, who submit language proficiency scores demonstrating 3.5 or 4.0 on the CanTEST or an equivalent score from another accredited language exam, could be accepted into the UPEI EAP program and also permitted to take between one and two credit-based courses. After EAP students successfully complete their EAP courses and have the designated 4.5 on the CanTEST, they would be able to continue their undergraduate studies unconditionally. This is similar to what the UPEI EAP program is

doing now except that all EAP students now receive conditional admissions into an undergraduate program at UPEI regardless of their entrance English language proficiency scores. Having two separate admissions policies depending on an applicant's language proficiency may be a better way to clearly communicate to prospective students that they are required to have a minimum language proficiency score before being accepted, even conditionally, into an undergraduate program. Furthermore, it would not restrict prospective students who do not have a language proficiency score from applying because these individuals could be admitted into the ESL program. This prospective policy coincides with the University's ongoing strategy to increase enrolment while also establishing a structure regarding the minimal proficiency requirements for admission into an undergraduate program. To more completely understand the business and financial implications of enacting a new admissions policy and breaking the current EAP program into two separate programs, a feasibility study and business plan would be required.

### **Study Limitations**

All research has its limitations; however, when potential limitations are clearly articulated within a study, the reader will have a better understanding of whether or not findings can apply to other educational settings. Acknowledging a study's limitations also helps researchers identify what worked, what did not work, and to determine the focus of future research projects (Creswell, 2008). What one researcher deems as a limitation, another researcher may consider as an advantage. To ensure that research findings are trustworthy and to address potential limitations, the credibility, and reliability of the findings are to be considered. Using a variety of data collection methods strengthens the findings by addressing weaknesses using the strengths of other

methods (Patton, 2002). Retaining the assistance of individuals not involved in the study is another way to seek objective input and advice.

This thesis has used qualitative research methods to explore how well the UPEI EAP program is preparing its students for academic study and how it has been contributing to their experiences as UPEI students. Program documents were reviewed, and interviews were conducted with the Program Coordinator and students. Participants discussed the program's goals and objectives along with the value of EAP courses and prior learning of English. Focus groups were conducted with UPEI students who have taken the UPEI EAP program alongside other university courses. Throughout the process of organizing and conducting this research, measures were implemented to set up ideal research conditions to solicit a large number of participants, ensure that data were collected and analyzed objectively, and to eliminate potential bias and prejudice. However, even with the soundest conditions, limitations will surface. This thesis is not an exception. Below, the following potential limitations are discussed: 1. my role as principal researcher and employee of the UPEI EAP program; 2. having a small sample size; and 3. using students' perceptions as the primary research data.

### **Principal researcher and EAP employee.**

A potential limitation that was first explored during the proposal stages of this thesis and reflected upon throughout the data collection and analysis stages is the dual role that I have played as the principal researcher and as an employee of the UPEI EAP program. I have significant ties with the other individuals who work with the program. I am also an advocate of the program and work to promote it as successful and vibrant within the university community. This could be considered by some as a limitation; some may question whether I prioritized the positive and negative aspects of the

program. However, being an employee of the EAP program also has potential advantages. I have access to program information, can converse with program staff on a daily basis, and have the ability to observe program activities regularly. During my six years as an employee of the UPEI EAP program, I have had the opportunity to develop an in-depth understanding and knowledge of program structure and delivery. Furthermore, my rapport with program personnel and students, along with my experience teaching several of the program courses, has enhanced the depth and breadth of knowledge that I have of the UPEI EAP program. I am also confident in my ability to successfully interact with students linguistically and culturally. I have been able to easily understand student responses regarding specific course detail and organization. Patton (2002) has argued that when the researcher has direct and personal contact with the lives and experiences of the participants, and is in close proximity of the research environment, he or she will have greater insight and understanding of what he or she is researching. This experience has been an asset when analyzing participant comments and disseminating meaning of the research findings. My experience has allowed me to foresee and articulate questions for the Program Coordinator during the one-on-one interview with greater insight compared to someone without this experience.

Having close ties with the UPEI EAP program also entailed that I have been at greater risk for inserting personal bias into the data collection and analysis stages of this thesis. Krueger and Casey (2000) recommend using the guiding principles of exercising neutrality by implemented systematic procedures while collecting and analyzing data. Advice was sought from different individuals to establish a balanced selection of questions for the one-on-one interview and the focus groups. Throughout this thesis, I have been under the direct supervision of my thesis advisor, Dr. Miles Turnbull. This

has limited the influence of potential personal bias while creating the interview questions and during the analysis stage. Moreover, having Dr. Turnbull and Dr. Miller, a committee member, act as second readers and mentors has minimized the possible influence that EAP and Webster Centre staff may have had on the focus of this research and its findings. Finally, the M.Ed. student who acted as a volunteer to take notes during the first focus group provided an additional level of trustworthiness: his written notes reflected participants' body language and behaviour during the first focus group and were used to confirm my understanding of participant responses.

### **Small sample size.**

A second possible limitation of this thesis is the small sample size attained for the focus groups. When setting up the focus groups, over one hundred students were invited to participate in the discussions. Originally, the plan was to have five focus groups with four to six participants in each which would have been between 20 and 30 participants in total. This goal was not achieved. There were a total of 11 students who participated in the focus groups. Some speculation can be given to the reasons for a low response such as the time period for the focus groups may have limited the number of available students on campus during the summer months. Many students were believed to have stayed on campus during the summer given the distance and cost to travel home to foreign countries. It is unknown whether students chose not to participate because they simply did not want to or whether they were unavailable to participate. Regardless, the low response rate in the focus groups is noted as a limitation of this thesis. It would have been better to solicit more participants and to conduct additional focus groups at a time during the academic year when more students were believed to be on campus. This may have increased the response rate.

It would have also been beneficial to interview EAP instructors to investigate further the level of difficulty of courses, curriculum, the organizational structure of the program, and student placement procedures. Gaining the perspective of the instructors would have been valuable data to compare with the focus group findings.

### **Self-reporting by participants.**

A final potential limitation of this thesis is that it used the opinions of students and the Program Coordinator as a main source of research data. This thesis has been exploratory in nature. The findings and recommendations were made based on an analysis conducted of the UPEI EAP program's original business proposal, end-of-term course evaluations, an interview with the Program Coordinator, and student focus groups. Self-reporting through interviews and evaluations may not always produce authentic opinions or results because of participants' personal bias, emotional state, lack of knowledge, or errors recalling information (Patton, 2002). Furthermore, evaluation questions and scales used may not be designed to effectively solicit accurate information. These are possible limitations that could affect the research findings.

### **Future Research**

Data collected from this thesis could be useful for future research examining how the UPEI EAP program impacts students' academic performance and learning experiences in credit-based courses. It provides foundational data regarding the opinions of part-time EAP students and could assist in articulating survey or interview questions exploring organizational structure, curriculum, student motivation, or program policies. Even though this has been a small research project and exploratory in nature, academic preparation has had little focus in the field of English for Academic Purposes programming at Canadian universities in the past century.

Throughout the focus groups, participant comments arose regarding other areas not mentioned by the majority of the participants and therefore did not impact the results of this study; however, they would be useful to explore in other research initiatives. It is suggested that all future research initiatives work to have a large sample size. This will enhance the trustworthiness of the findings. One topic mentioned by focus group participants was a question of whether or not EAP courses should focus more on CanTEST preparation to directly assist students in meeting their admissions requirements, or be specifically designed to prepare students for academic study. Research could be conducted of other English for Academic Purposes programs and how they organize their curricula to address meeting admissions standards in addition to preparing students for academic study at the university level.

There was also discussion regarding the purpose of the CanTEST. Is it used as an assessment tool or as a course placement tool? Moreover, is the CanTEST the best tool for placing students in EAP courses? Research could be conducted to examine the applicability of the skills tested in the CanTEST with the skills required for university study. Another potential research topic related to using the CanTEST as a placement tool is to research how CanTEST scores can be used holistically to place students based on a score that represents speaking, reading, listening, and writing rather than placing students based one skill area. This research could explore the impact of placing students based on an individual score (such as reading or writing) compared to placing students based a total score that combines all of the skill areas.

Conducting a review of the current curriculum would be another step towards bridging the gap between EAP courses and credit-based courses. This review could be a comparative analysis of the typical course assignments and content in EAP courses and a

variety of undergraduate courses to identify links and gaps. Reviewing the curriculum would also be valuable research regarding the effectiveness of having EAP courses organized according to skill. This research may show that the current organizational structure and theoretical framework of EAP courses could be better arranged.

## **Conclusion**

Learning a new language is influenced and motivated by many factors such as personal desire, effort, goals, attitude, culture, learning environment, and teaching practices, to name a few. While completing the UPEI EAP program, the motivating factors for many students have been to finish the program as quickly as possible and to be able to take courses accredited towards an undergraduate degree.

The UPEI EAP program is designed to assist students who have been granted conditional admission to the UPEI and whose native language is not English, to upgrade their English proficiency levels through language classes. Successful completion of the program gives students unconditional admission to begin their undergraduate studies at UPEI. The program has established program goals and objectives to ensure that students are prepared to take credit-based courses. These objectives centre on establishing a bridge between the UPEI EAP program and other university courses, having EAP courses that maximize students' learning opportunities by challenging them to work at a learning level just higher than their current language proficiency, and having a skills-based curriculum that focuses on academic writing, reading, speaking, and listening. Through a review of end-of-term course evaluations and student focus groups, this thesis set out to establish whether the UPEI EAP program was adequately preparing students for academic study at UPEI and contributing to students' overall experience at the university.

The findings have indicated that the UPEI EAP program appears to have contributed to students' experiences at UPEI by creating an environment that has fostered linguistic, social, cultural, and personal growth and provided a foundation from which to grow as learners. However, to better prepare students for academic study in their credit-based courses, findings have also indicated that the program could benefit from reassessing the level of difficulty of EAP courses to ensure that they are at par with first year credit-based courses. Additionally, EAP courses and instructors could re-assess whether their EAP classes are meeting the learning needs of all students. Furthermore, the program could have more strict standards regarding the implementation of program policies. Finally, it may be worthwhile to re-evaluate the organizational structure and admissions policies to include two admissions policies. 1. Admission of students who have beginner level language proficiency into an ESL program; and 2. admission of students who have an intermediate to advanced level proficiency into the EAP program with a conditional admission to an undergraduate program. It is believed that considering some of these recommendations may help the program grow in its efforts to provide positive learning opportunities for international students at UPEI.

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## **Appendix A**

### **The UPEI EAP Full-Time and Part-Time Program Descriptions**

#### **The UPEI EAP Full-Time Program**

Students who acquire between a 1.5 and 3.0 on the language proficiency - CanTEST are placed in the full-time program. The full-time UPEI EAP program has approximately twenty-five class hours each week. Classes are the full-day from Monday to Thursday and a half a day on Friday.

Students have Oral Communications and Integrated Skills on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday morning and Academic Writing on Tuesday and Thursday morning. The afternoons are organized into focus classes. For example students take classes in specific areas such as pronunciation, grammar, note-taking skills, vocabulary development, and reading comprehension. The focus of these classes shift depending on the learning needs of the students enrolled. These decisions are based on students' language proficiency scores on the CanTEST.

#### **The UPEI EAP Part-Time Program**

Students who acquire a 3.5 to 4.0 on the CanTEST are placed in the EAP part-time program. Courses are offered from Monday to Friday at various times during the morning and afternoon. The part-time program offers Oral Communications and Integrated Skills, Level 1 and 2:, Academic Writing, Level 1, 2, and 3:, Critical Reading, Level 1 and 2. Below are detailed descriptions of each part-time course.

##### **EAP 010: Oral Communications and Integrated Skills, Level 1.**

Students will be given an opportunity to read, listen, and respond to a variety of academic disciplines, such as business, psychology, biology, and sociology. This class

focuses on building critical thinking skills, learning how to participate in academic discussions, reading & listening comprehension, and becoming confident giving an oral presentation.

#### **EAP 011 & 014: Academic Writing and Grammar, Level 1.**

This is an integrated course which focuses on effective academic writing and grammar strategies. Students begin with an extensive focus on writing paragraphs and progress into writing a 3-paragraph essay. At the end of the semester, students may be writing a 4-paragraph essay. Essay styles include narrative, cause and effect, and opinion. Emphasis will be on trying to use simple rhetoric - similes, analogy, and expletive. Grammar will also be highlighted in this course within the context of students' individual writing, through strategic seminars focusing on peer editing, one-to-one consultation on individual challenges, and self-study using the Penguin Handbook and website. Grammar priorities will include verb-tense, subject-verb agreement, articles, prepositions, transitions, punctuation, and complex sentences.

#### **EAP 012: Academic Writing, Level 2.**

This course primarily focuses on being able to write a good thesis and a 5-paragraph essay. A review is given of essay structure at the beginning of the semester and the course finishes with an introduction to in-text citation. Grammar will be taught within the context of students' writing and may include parallel structures, pronoun references, and transitional phrases.

#### **EAP 013: Oral Communications and Integrated Skills, Level 2.**

Integrated Skills Level II is an interactive course designed to practice academic listening, reading, and oral communication. Students have an opportunity to read, listen, and discuss topics on a variety of themes to build their critical thinking skills, and their

academic competence to answer questions effectively. Students identify, formulate, support, and present arguments, along with building their study skills to improve reading and listening speed and efficiency.

**EAP 015: Academic Writing, Level 3.**

EAP 015 focuses on reading and writing to elevate students' vocabulary level. Emphasis is on the importance of NOT plagiarizing. Students will use resources in the library to learn how to do research and in-text citations. Students also look at how to do a précis, paraphrasing, and summaries. The focus for this course has been on opinion-based essays.

**EAP 017 and 018: Critical Reading, Level 1 and 2.**

These courses are designed to help students develop their existing reading skills, and allow them to strengthen their comprehension and critical understanding of a variety of texts. Classes introduce a variety of vocabulary, comprehension, skimming and scanning exercises with a focus on vocabulary expansion and critical thinking.

## Appendix B

### End-of-Term Course Evaluation Example

SECTION I: - Please make any suggestions that you feel would help improve EAP 013.

(A) What else do you need in EAP 013 to improve your English and academic skills?

(B) What do you need less of?

(C) Other comments:

SECTION II: Rate **yourself** in relation to the course:

1 <50%	2 60-70%	3 70-80%	4 80-90%	5 90-100%
very little/ low				very much/ high

I needed to work on my English when I arrived...	1 2 3 4 5
I attended class...	1 2 3 4 5
I participated in class...	1 2 3 4 5
I did my homework/assignments...	1 2 3 4 5
I contributed to the class...	1 2 3 4 5
Overall, I worked hard...	1 2 3 4 5
Overall, I rank myself as a student...	1 2 3 4 5

SECTION III - Rate **the course** and its content in terms of:

0 does not apply	1 Poor	2 Fair	3 Good	4 Very Good	5 Excellent
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Course description is accurate	0 1 2 3 4 5
Value of texts and readings	0 1 2 3 4 5
Value of activities such as: discussions, in-class assignments, etc.	0 1 2 3 4 5
Organization of the course	0 1 2 3 4 5
Helped you reach your goals	0 1 2 3 4 5
How much you learned in the course	0 1 2 3 4 5
How interesting and enjoyable the course was	0 1 2 3 4 5

**Level of difficulty:**   **Too difficult;**   **Too Easy;**   **Just about right;**  
**(Circle One)**

**SECTION IV- Rate the Instructor in terms of:**

**Who was your instructor?** \_\_\_\_\_

0 does not apply	1 Poor	2 Fair	3 Good	4 Very Good	5 Excellent
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Speaking clearly and audibly; writing clearly	0 1 2 3 4 5
Sufficient use of the blackboard	0 1 2 3 4 5
Available for help outside of class	0 1 2 3 4 5
Giving helpful answers to questions	0 1 2 3 4 5
Giving assignments suitably related to class material	0 1 2 3 4 5
Teaching at a level appropriate to students	0 1 2 3 4 5
Presenting carefully prepared and organized classes	0 1 2 3 4 5
Showing a serious interest in the subject and teaching of it	0 1 2 3 4 5
Stimulating your interest	0 1 2 3 4 5
Being responsive to students' concerns and opinions	0 1 2 3 4 5
Ability to get your involved in the discussion	0 1 2 3 4 5
Overall rating as a teacher	0 1 2 3 4 5

**SECTION V- Final Comments**

## **Appendix C**

### **Program Coordinator Interview Questions**

Please describe the goals and objectives of EAP as you see them?

How have these goals and objectives changed since EAP started in 2002?

Would you change any of these goals and objectives now? Why or why not?

What are the pros and cons of how the EAP program is organized and implemented?

How are program goals and objectives reflected in the organization and daily operations of the program? Not reflected?

What would you like to see change in the:

- a. structure/organization (why?)
- b. teaching (why?)
- c. curriculum (why?)
- d. assessment of students (why?)
- e. other components (why?)

Do you feel that the program is preparing students for academic study? Why or why not?

Do you feel that EAP is contributing to the student experience for current EAP students and its alumni? Why or why not?

Do you feel that EAP is contributing to students' use of English off-campus? How?

Do you have a sense of whether or not students are satisfied with the program? What is this based upon?

Is it realistic for UPEI to have the strategy of increasing international enrolment to reach 10% by 2010? Why or why not?

What are the pros of recruiting students who do not have adequate academic English skills to function at UPEI?

What are the cons of recruiting students who do not have adequate academic skills to function at UPEI?

How does the UPEI community support and resource EAP? Are these supports and resources adequate?

## **Appendix D**

### **Student Focus Group Questions**

How do you describe the EAP program?

Which of these goals and objectives are most important for you?

Are there any other goals and objectives that EAP should have?

How prepared did you feel to study at UPEI before coming?

How do you feel now that you are taking EAP or now that you have completed the program?

Before studying at UPEI, what did you think you needed to work on in English the most?

Why did you think this?

If UPEI required for you to have had a language score before being accepted, would you have come to study here? Why or why not?

What parts of EAP do you think have helped you as a student in your classes outside of EAP?

What parts of EAP have helped you study for exams?

What parts of EAP were not helpful?

After taking EAP did you feel ready to study in your area of interest (e.g., Business, computer science)? Why or why not?

What else would you have liked to have or do in your EAP classes that would help you in your non-EAP courses?

Is there anything that EAP focuses on that you could have gotten on your own without EAP?

Is there anything that EAP focuses on that you could not have gotten on your own?

Did you feel motivated in EAP to work hard and do well? Why or Why not?

What motivated you in your EAP courses?

What motivates you in your other UPEI courses?

What didn't motivate you in your EAP courses/UPEI courses?

How can EAP do a better job at motivating students to come to class and work hard?

(teacher – student, student – student mentoring)

What advice would you give students who are starting to take EAP now?

What is your opinion of the English-only policy within EAP classes?

Do you think that there are times during EAP when it is appropriate to speak your first language? Why or Why not? Can you give examples of these situations?

EAP uses the CanTEST, which is a nationally recognized language test, to determine your language level and to place you in EAP classes. Do you think that this test is a good way for us to understand what your language needs are? Why or why not?

We don't test your pronunciation with this exam, what do you think about this?

Do you think that you were placed in the right level and challenged in your classes?

How did you feel challenged and/or not challenged? Can you give examples?

Are you happy with your achievements in EAP? Why or why not?

Please describe the supports for students at UPEI (such as the people who work at UPEI and the extra services). Were they helpful? Why or why not?

What is your opinion about social life and student life at UPEI?

How involved are you in social activities at UPEI?

Do you think that being involved in social activities is an important part of being a successful student – in and outside of your courses? Why or why not?

Final 3 questions will be asked depending on the time.

Are you involved in activities outside of UPEI in the Charlottetown community? If yes, what are they? If no, why not?

What other types of activities would you like to do in Charlottetown? Have you looked to see if these activities are available?

If you could tell an English-speaker something about you as an English-learner, what would it be?

## Appendix E

### CanTEST Language Assessment Descriptors

#### Written Section Descriptors

##### **5+ - advanced writer.**

Writes with style, authority and accuracy; fluent expression presented in a clear and logical manner; errors in sentence structure and word usage are infrequent but reveal writer is a non-native; writing skills are clearly adequate for intended purpose; could cope with writing demands of academic program independently and without further instruction.

##### **5.0 - very good writer.**

Consistently communicates intended meaning with no extra effort required on the part of the reader; displays wide range and variety of vocabulary and structures; accurate use of language forms; clear and logical structure of presentation; systematic development of topic; minor grammatical errors; present level of skill clearly adequate for intended purpose; could write independently except for occasional help with editing minor grammatical errors.

##### **4.5 - competent writer.**

Almost always communicates intended meaning with little extra effort required on the part of the reader; well-structured presentation and development of topic; use of language forms reasonably accurate; minor problems in complex sentences; displays a good range of vocabulary and structure; would likely require help editing and occasionally with re-writing; could produce comprehensible text in most academic situations; could cope with the writing demands of most academic programs.

#### **4.0 - modest writer.**

Expresses and organizes simple ideas without meaning becoming obscured; structure of presentation and development of topic is logical but may be choppy and not completely cohesive; effective simple constructions; some problems in complex sentences; displays an adequate range of vocabulary; fails to fulfil description of 4.5 in part because of the number of errors; could handle routine workplace documents independently with help in editing; would require guidance in drafting formal papers; would benefit from a writing course if following an academic program with heavy writing demands.

#### **3.5 - marginal writer.**

Text largely comprehensible; requires some re-writing and thorough editing; expresses and organizes simple ideas with meaning sometimes obscured; several errors in grammar and word usage; structure of presentation is loose; main ideas stand out; competence is doubtful at times; could produce simple documents independently if syntactic accuracy and style were not critical; requires additional instruction before meeting the demands of an academic program.

#### **3.0 - limited writer.**

Problems with language use and vocabulary often interfere with communication of ideas; meaning often confused and obscured; structure of presentation lacks clarity; frequent grammatical errors; level of skill would constitute a very serious handicap in any academic program; would require assistance with anything other than straight forward routine documents.

### **2.5 - very limited writer.**

Errors of syntax, vocabulary and organization interfere with communication of ideas; writer is able to produce few comprehensible phrases and sentences; structure of presentation appears incoherent and/or illogical; non-fluent writer; requires further instruction (possibly two full semesters) to reach level of ability for a non-academic placement.

### **2.0 - extremely limited writer.**

Meaning almost always obscured; dominated by errors; not an essay-type of presentation; skill level such that might require more than two semesters to develop the skills required of non-academic placement.

### **1.5 - virtual non-writer.**

Few recognizable phrases; paper difficult to assess due to the abundance of errors; unclear structure of presentation and/or lack of content; would likely experience difficulty completing a form which requires basic personal information.

### **1.0 - non-writer, prepared text**

Prepared text which is completely off-topic *OR* Candidate copied the question only *OR* Not enough of a sample to evaluate (i.e. one or two phrases).

## **Reading and Listening Descriptors**

### **4.5 - advanced listening and reading skills.**

#### ***Listening.***

Learner can follow a broad variety of general interest and technical topics in own field when discourse has clear organizational structure and clear discourse transition signals, and is delivered in a familiar accent. Learner can identify writer's bias and the

purpose/function of text. Learner sometimes may miss details or transition signals and is temporarily lost.

***Reading.***

Learner reads in English for ideas and opinions to find general information and specific details, to learn content areas, to learn the language, to develop reading skills and for pleasure. Learner can identify writer's bias and the purpose/function of text.

**4.0 - competent listening and reading skills.**

***Listening.***

In moderately demanding contexts that are familiar, the learner can comprehend main points, details, speaker's purpose, attitudes, levels of formality and styles in oral discourse. Learner has difficulty with abstract contexts that are not familiar or within his/her field of study.

***Reading.***

Learner can follow main ideas, key words and familiar details in an authentic two- or three-page text on familiar topic, but within an only partially predictable context. The learner can extract relevant points, but often requires clarification of idioms and of various cultural references.

**3.5 - marginal listening and reading skills.**

***Listening.***

Learner can comprehend main points and most important details in oral discourse in moderately demanding contexts of language. Learner can understand more complex indirect questions about personal experience, familiar topics, and general knowledge. The learner sometimes requires slower speech, repetitions, and rewording and has difficulty following a faster conversation between native speakers.

***Reading.***

In a familiar topic from a predictable, practical, and relevant context, the learner can follow main ideas, key words and important details in an authentic one- or two-page text. Learner can locate and integrate, or compare and contrast, two or three specific pieces of information in visually complex texts (e.g., tables, calendars, course schedules) or across paragraphs or sections of text.

**3.0 - limited listening and reading skills.**

***Listening.***

Within relevant topics and at a slower than normal speed, the learner is able to follow main ideas and identify key words and important details in oral discourse in moderately demanding contexts of language use. The learner is able to follow discourse related to common experiences and general knowledge. He/she may still frequently ask for repetition.

***Reading.***

Learner can follow main ideas, key words and important details in a one page (three to five paragraphs) plain language authentic prose in moderately demanding contexts of language use.

**2.5 - very limited listening and reading skills.**

***Listening.***

The learner can understand simple exchanges; contextualized short sets of common daily instructions and directions; direct questions about personal experience and familiar topics. The learner often requests for repetition.

***Reading.***

Learner can follow main ideas but has difficulty with vocabulary and comprehending details. Learner uses his/her dictionary to understand unknown vocabulary because he/she has limited success using decoding strategies.

**2.0 - extremely limited listening and reading skills.**

***Listening.***

Learner has difficulty processing a normal rate of delivery and ideas need to be repeated on a regular basis because he/she often misses important details. Learner has difficulty with colloquial speech and can only handle a limited variety of texts and speakers. Learner can adjust to clearly marked topic changes however background noise may hamper comprehension in many situations acceptable to native speakers.

***Reading.***

Learner is able to identify most topics and some main ideas. The details of written English are very difficult to comprehend. The learner uses a dictionary frequently and works slow with low “context” skills. The learner can recognize some roots and affixes, can use syllabifications. The learner reads short texts in area of interest.

**1.5 - extremely limited listening and reading skills.**

***Listening.***

Learner is only able to follow a slow rate of speaking about familiar topics. He/she misses some main ideas and many details. Learner has great difficulty understanding colloquial language and has more success with factual, direct language.

***Reading.***

Learner is able to identify topics in area of interest but has limited success identifying main ideas. Learner is dependent on a translator/dictionary to understand

vocabulary and is unable to use context cues. Comprehension is limited to factual, direct language.

**1.0 - virtually no listening and reading skills.**

***Listening.***

Learner is only able to follow factual information from familiar topics and basic greetings.

***Reading.***

Learner recognizes topics in interest area and can only get information from simple general interest texts. Learner uses a bilingual dictionary almost constantly.

## Appendix F

### Program Goals and Objectives as stated by the Program Coordinator and Program Documents

#### Goals

1. To enable recruitment by the University of PEI of English as an Additional Language (EAL) students.
2. To create credibility as a university and to have a global educational climate.
3. To provide language support services in order for students to meet the minimal English proficiency requirement at UPEI.

#### Objectives

1. To get English proficiency requirements, to study in academic courses, as fast as possible.
2. To have courses that challenge students and that meet their learning needs. The level within EAP courses should be one level higher than the current language level of the students.
3. To provide a bridging program between learning English and taking courses towards a degree. It is believed that creating a balance between EAP and credit-based courses will motivate students to work hard within their EAP courses to improve their language proficiency.
4. To offer courses with a highly academic focus and with emphasis on skill development in the four key areas of speaking, listening, reading, and writing.
5. To have students practice the academic and language activities that they will encounter in University classrooms, including research, computer skills, and study strategies.