Chapter 8. Mind the (Linguistic) Gap: On "Flagging" ESL Students at Queensborough Community College

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Abstract: Across City University of New York (CUNY) campuses, less than half of students assigned to developmental courses have finished them by the end of their first year. In response, CUNY began implementing placement reforms in Spring 2020: Instead of a placement test, students are now evaluated based on their Proficiency Index (PI) score, which considers their high school GPA, and SAT and Regents scores. Further, first-year students who have spent at least six months in an institution where English is not the primary language would be "flagged" as potential ESL students. This definition of an "ESL student" excludes those who have only attended school in the U.S., yet may still need supplemental English instruction. Placement reforms strive to close racial gaps; however, the multiple measures used to determine students' placement are still rooted in Standard English ideologies. The stakes for this shortcoming are high at Queensborough Community College (QCC), one of the most diverse two-year campuses in the nation. This chapter argues that amid reforms, we should problematize how we regard "ESL students." QCC students' PI scores and final grades demonstrate the broader efficacy of the reforms, and interviews with the ESL Discipline Council reveal ongoing efforts to reform ESL student placement. Students and English faculty provide first-hand insight on their experiences with the placement process, and in their English classes. With additional guidance from second-language writing literature, this piece demonstrates the need to reconsider the complexities of "ESL student" identities for more equitable writing placement.

To create more equitable educational opportunities, two-year colleges have been increasingly moving away from standardized placement tests as a way to determine an incoming student's "college readiness." Across City University of New York (CUNY)[1] campuses, less than half of students assigned to developmental courses have finished them by the end of their first year (CUNY Task Force on Developmental Education, 2016), and African American and Hispanic students are almost twice as likely as their White and Asian peers to be assigned to developmental education (Office of Academic Affairs [OAA], 2020b).

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1. Unless a specific CUNY campus is specified, "CUNY" will refer to the university system as a whole, and will be used interchangeably with "CUNY Central" and "the university."

CUNY began implementing placement reforms in Spring 2020. Instead of a placement test, students who do not meet benchmark scores on the SATs, ACTs, or New York State Regents exam are now evaluated based on their *Proficiency Index* score, which takes into consideration any relevant and available high school exit scores, such as overall high school GPA and subject-specific SAT and Regents scores. (The Regents are administered to seniors in New York State high schools. They are given in four subjects, including English language arts. Results are used for student high school graduation requirements, school quality reports, and teacher development and evaluation.) Those who do not meet the target score would be enrolled in either corequisite credit-bearing classes or developmental "interventions" (NYC Department of Education, 2021; OAA, 2019).

The stakes for these reforms are high at Queensborough Community College (QCC), one of the most diverse colleges in CUNY, and the nation. The CUNY Office of Institutional Research (OIR) breaks down the ethnic and racial backgrounds of all QCC students:

> Twenty-nine percent of all degree and certificate seeking students—national and international—were Hispanic, 28 percent were Asian or Pacific Islander, 28 percent were Black, and 14 percent were White. . . . Asian or Pacific Islander students make up a larger percentage of the non-degree population, standing at 38 percent for Fall 2019. (OIR, 2020)

QCC students come from 123 countries and speak 79 different languages. Twenty-two percent were born outside the United States and have come from every continent of the world, except Antarctica. Students of color are more likely to experience the negative effects of assessment given rigid institutional requirements (Poe et al., 2014), and what's more, this disparity is even more apparent in community colleges. QCC students demonstrate the need to examine the complexities of student identities in relation to writing placement practices—given that country of birth, being multilingual, or speaking English as a second language in and of themselves do not necessarily signal a particular linguistic proficiency.

The Office of Academic Affairs (OAA) determined that first-year applicants who have spent at least six months in an institution where English is not the primary language would be "flagged" and receive an "ESL indicator." While the Developmental Education Task Force has moved away from standardized testing for all incoming students, the ESL Discipline Council voted to continue using the standardized CUNY Assessment Test in Writing (CAT-W) for "flagged" students, "while it works with OAA (the Office of Academic Affairs) to develop better ESL placement tools" (OAA, 2019).[2]

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2. The term "ESL" can be problematic in referring to students in that it may suggest an inherent deficiency in English, or an inferiority to their English as a first language (EFL) peers. However, for the purposes of this chapter, the term "ESL" will be used in line with

Unfortunately, before these new placement plans could be implemented and their effectiveness measured, the COVID-19 pandemic arrived, and New York City schools moved to remote learning. Incoming Spring 2020 first-year students have not been able to take their in-person Regents exam in high school, so their Proficiency Index would rely solely on their SAT scores and/or high school GPAs. "Flagged" ESL students would have even fewer materials to determine their placement, especially if they also lack a domestic high school GPA. Whereas "flagged" students who don't meet the benchmark scores of these entrance exams would have taken the in-person CAT-W, or the CUNY Assessment Test in Writing, for ESL course placement, the exam was replaced with the last-minute creation of the online ESL Diagnostic assessment, or the ESL-D. Importantly, Linda Evangelou, assistant dean for New Student Enrollment Services at QCC, notes that remotely administering the ESL-D in lieu of the CAT-W posed particular difficulties for students facing a linguistic gap. "Testing the ESL students was the population most impacted by COVID-19," she says (L. Evangelou, personal communication, July 9, 2020).

Despite the sizable percentage of students who speak English as a second language, the multiple measures used to determine their Proficiency Index scores are still rooted in standardized English ideologies. Further, statistics can only tell us so much and omit the very tangible experiences of college personnel and students "on the ground"—besides, as of yet, a "breakdown" of CUNY's student population by the university does not correlate those who speak English as a second language with their race/ethnicities or countries of origin. Instead of being considered in conjunction with each other, these factors are measured separately by CUNY, discounting how these backgrounds can work together to shape a student's level of preparedness for first-year writing.

This chapter will examine CUNY's continual efforts to account for incoming students' backgrounds in ESL placement reform by foregrounding the perspectives of administrators and English faculty. Altogether, these perspectives aim to complicate longstanding conceptualizations of "ESL students"—and shed light on the difficulties of establishing placement methods that holistically account for the language competencies of ESL students. (Given my problematization of the "flagging" process, and the problematic negative connotations that can come from "flagging" something or someone, the term will be used in scare quotes throughout this chapter. Similarly, to delineate the use of "ESL" to refer to students themselves from "ESL" as a concept, the term will be in scare quotes when used as a concept.) The hope is that we as instructors, curriculum developers, and administrators may have richer, more nuanced considerations in mind as we move toward devising more equitable writing classroom placement practices that foster academic advancement.

First, this chapter will explain the multiple *exigencies* motivating CUNY's recent placement updates, and their specific implications at QCC, where multilingualism is the norm. Second, I will discuss *the mechanics* of the key placement

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the language used by CUNY to refer to students who have been "flagged" as "ESL."

routes currently in place by outlining the roadmaps for "non-ESL" students and those "flagged" as "ESL," and providing sample placement exams and sample exit exams from CUNY's developmental programs (see Appendix C). Third, the *efficacy* of these key changes in ESL placement will be examined by analyzing student outcomes data from QCC's Director of Institutional Research and perspectives from administrators and English department faculty. The final section of this chapter will propose *implications of current placement measures* and *potential avenues for improvement* in ESL placement reform going forward.

Exigencies for Placement Reform

For nearly half a century, CUNY has implemented standardized placement exams for all incoming first-year students. These exams would be taken if students did not meet benchmark SAT, Regents, or ACT scores. "This [process] dates back to 1978; we were administering some type of placement/proficiency exam," said CUNY Director of Testing Melissa Uber, referring to the ACCUPLACER reading exam, the CAT-W, and the math proficiency exam. However, she explained that those at the OIR have noted over time that these measures were not necessarily the best predictors of students' "gateway" writing class outcomes. Indeed, misplacement into remediation is much more common than misplacement into college-level courses. The university's Policy Research unit found that a student's high school GPA was often the best indicator of their college success. (M. Uber, personal communication, January 9, 2021; July 9, 2020; OIR, 2019; Scott-Clayton et al., 2014).

After realizing the lack of correlation between placement exams and student outcomes in their first-year composition courses, the university began to research other ways to gauge its incoming students' reading and writing aptitudes. The idea for a *Proficiency Index* (PI) *score* was born: a multiple measures assessment which aims to be a more holistic way of assessing students' readiness for first-year writing classes. The PI score took into consideration high school GPA, English Regents scores, and other relevant student background data for their writing placement. Whereas reading and writing proficiency were separately assessed with the ACCUPLACER and CAT-W exams, respectively, the PI score makes no distinction between the two skills in an incoming student's placement.

In the case of *ESL students*, anticipating outcomes was further complicated given that the CAT-W included culturally specific (American) content that was difficult to grasp for international students, or students who grew up within a different heritage cultural context. To be more considerate of its now-exclusively ESL student test-takers, the CAT-W was slightly revised: The ESL Discipline Council had to approve the readings to assure the content was "ESL sensitive" (not too culturally specific) (D. Rothman, personal communication, January 6, 2021; a sample of the CAT-W and scoring rubric can be found in Appendix C). Pragmatically, ESL placement was difficult because international students and

domestic students who have spent time learning abroad often lacked transferrable high school diplomas and did not take the SAT, Regents, or ACT.

Executive vice chancellor and university provost José Luis Cruz explained that these recent placement changes aimed to improve educational equity for CUNY's student body, which largely comprises first-generation students, immigrants, and under-represented communities. "It is especially important that we embrace evidence-based practices that will allow us to better help them meet their full potential," he writes (OAA, 2019). But how equitable is equitable *enough*? Is there a placement measure, or measures, that could adequately account for the myriad variables that could influence an ESL student's success in a writing course? Is it inevitable that some students will slip through the cracks no matter how inclusive the placement method is—and what are the possible implications for ESL students who do not receive the writing instruction they need?

The factors behind a student's English language proficiency are manifold. For one, there is the consideration of *race and ethnicity*. Historically, the QCC student body has been "majority minority"; in other words, it is predominantly non-White. According to the 2019–2020 QCC Factbook, 3,203 first-time freshmen enrolled in Fall 2019. Of these students, 30 percent were Black and non-Hispanic, 30 percent were Hispanic, 22 percent were Asian or Pacific Islander, 11 percent were White or non-Hispanic, six percent were "Nonresident Alien," and one percent were American Indian or Native American (OIR, 2020). While there is no inherent connection between a student's racial or ethnic background and their English proficiency, language education is rooted in histories of white supremacy and colonial expansion—and, as Von Esch et al. (2020) wrote, "Who gets to define what counts as language ultimately shapes the potential of those learning it" (p. 395). They listed several ways in which the two influence and inform each other: 1) standard language ideology and racial hegemony, 2) the idealized native speaker with racial labeling, 3) racial hierarchies of languages and language speakers, 4) racialization and teacher identity, and 5) race-centered approaches to pedagogies and educational practices (Von Esch et al., 2020, p. 397). Language teaching and race are inextricable, and while our first-year writing pedagogies are moving away from racist epistemologies, it remains that many of our assessment practices still evaluate students' English proficiency in light of its "standardness" (see: proximity to Whiteness).

What's more, a student's *linguistic background* complicates place-based assumptions of English linguistic proficiency. While QCC freshmen came from 62 and 75 different countries in Fall 2018 and Fall 2019, respectively, the vast majority of QCC students were born in the US, are New York City residents, and live in Queens (OIR, 2020; a more thorough breakdown of student demographics starting from Fall 2016 can be found in Appendix A). Indeed, most QCC freshmen are first-generation Americans and children of immigrants from non-White countries, which often means they speak a language other than English at home, and/or speak a language other than English as a first language. The most recent data shows that over 35 percent of Fall 2018 freshmen speak a language other

than English at home; Spanish, Chinese, Bengali, Creole, and Urdu were the most prevalent non-English languages among freshmen.

Whether a student has spent at least six months at a non-English-speaking institution—the "flagging" criterion for a potential ESL student—arguably does not account for the above considerations. This criterion conflates various culturally informed approaches to English instruction abroad and overlooks their potential efficacy. Further, it excludes domestic students who have only attended school in the US yet may still need supplemental English instruction, as well as students who have experienced domestic diaspora across locations in which English is not the primary language.

Roadmaps for Placement

The roadmaps in Figure 8.1 and Figure 8.2 have been constructed based on information in the September 4, 2019, OAA Academic Policy Brief, "Policy for the Use of CUNY's Proficiency Index in Developmental Education Assignments." The first roadmap outlines the placement process for ALL incoming students (ESL or otherwise), and the second displays the trajectory for those "flagged" as potential ESL students. (For explanations of relevant key terms as they pertain to the conversation surrounding student placement in QCC, and CUNY broadly, see Appendix B.)

Note how the writing placement trajectory varies significantly between those who are "flagged" as potential ESL students (Figure 8.2) and those who are not (Figure 8.1). Given that the ESL Discipline Council is still in the process of honing their procedures, Figure 8.2 is more nuanced, allowing students to be placed in credit-bearing courses by multiple measures.

As shown in Figure 8.2, "flagged" ESL students can still be placed into a matriculated first-year writing class: If their English SAT and Regents exams scores meet the appropriate benchmarks, they would be assigned a PI score and conform to the placement process of their non-ESL-"flagged" peers. However, if they do *not* meet the benchmarks, they would be required to take the ESL-D, or the ESL-Diagnostic Assessment, and be placed into an ESL program recommended by the college. (For a list of developmental and interventional coursework open to these students, see Appendix B.) Created to replace the CAT-W in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and a lack of access to in-person testing facilities, the ESL-D was given to incoming students as of Fall 2020 if they were "flagged" as potential ESL students (see Appendix D for a sample ESL-D; Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor and University Provost, 2020).

The timed, online assessment comprises two sections: The first asks students to read a passage and write an essay that explains the passage's "main point," give an explanation for why they believe this is the "main point," and draw connections between the passage and their personal experiences and/or prior knowledge. The second section is a take on directed self-placement: A survey asks students to consider the ease with which they were able to complete the first section;

describe the type of English language instruction they have previously received; assess their level of comfort with reading, writing, listening, and speaking in English; and gauge which skills they believe they need instruction on. Professor David Rothman explains that a few amendments have been made to the ESL-D:

> For Spring 2021 ESL Diagnostic testing, students no longer have a 2–3-day window to complete their writing sample. Once they start the test, they have two hours to complete the task. Also, the student survey, which is included with the writing sample, has been broadened to give the placement team more info about the students' experience with academic English. (personal communication, January 6, 2021).
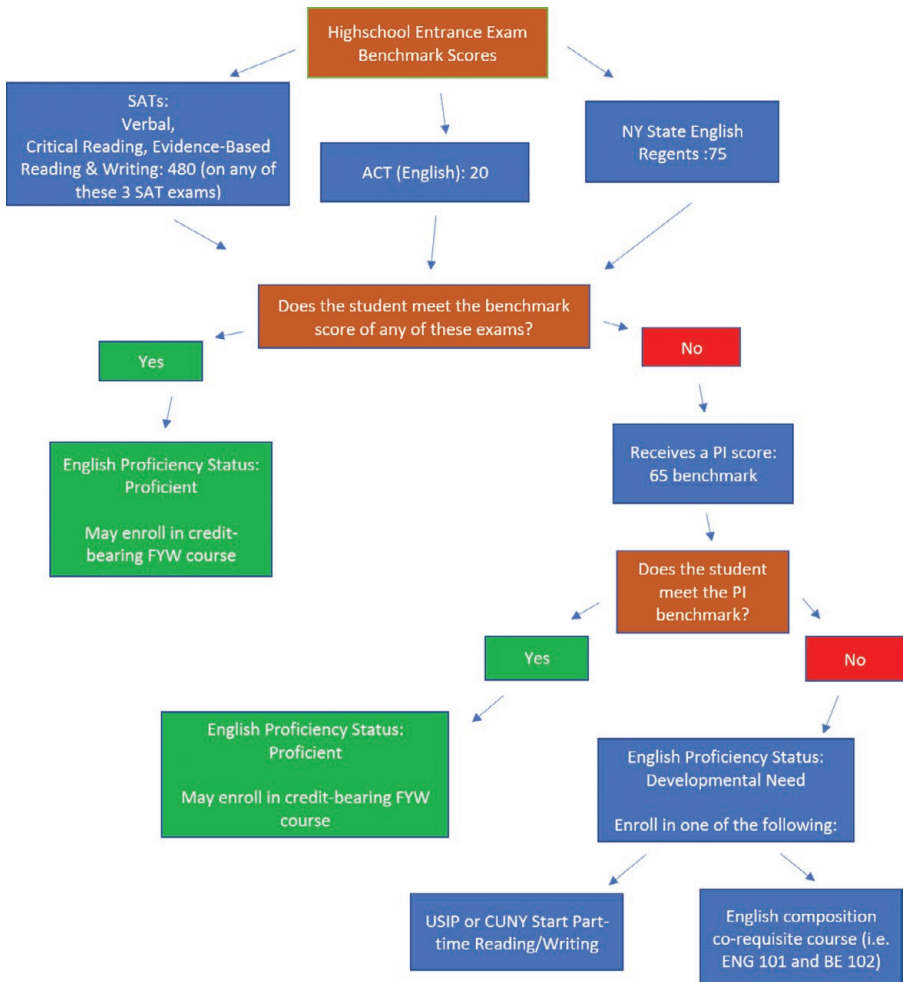

Figure 8.1. Flowchart outlining the placement process for ALL incoming students.
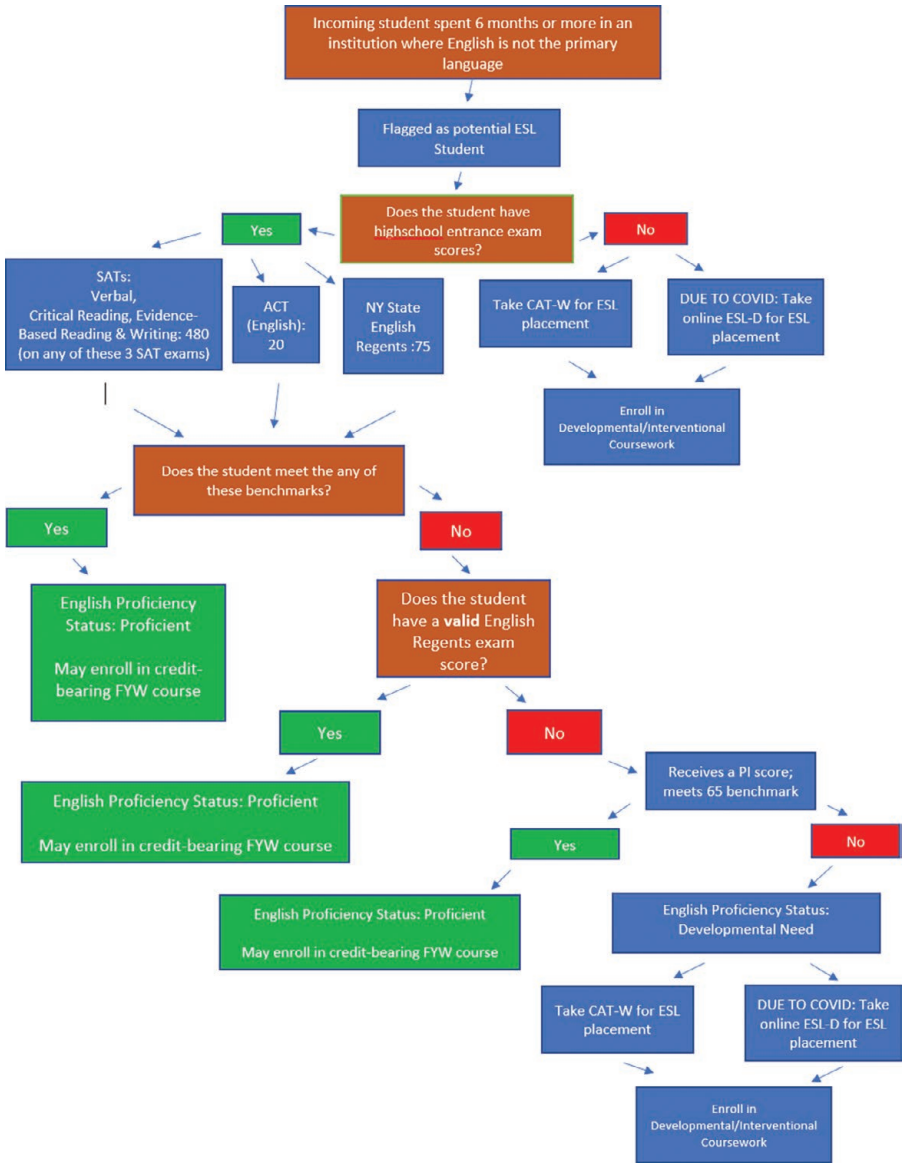
Incoming student spent 6 months or more in an institution where English is not the primary language

Flagged as potential ESL Student

Does the student have highschool entrance exam scores?

Yes

No

SATs: Verbal, Critical Reading, Evidence-Based Reading & Writing: 480 (on any of these 3 SAT exams)

ACT (English): 20

NY State English Regents :75

Take CAT-W for ESL placement

DUE TO COVID: Take online ESL-D for ESL placement

Enroll in Developmental/Interventional Coursework

Does the student meet the any of these benchmarks?

Yes

No

English Proficiency Status: Proficient

May enroll in credit-bearing FYW course

Does the student have a **valid** English Regents exam score?

Yes

No

English Proficiency Status: Proficient

May enroll in credit-bearing FYW course

Receives a PI score; meets 65 benchmark

Yes

No

English Proficiency Status: Proficient

May enroll in credit-bearing FYW course

English Proficiency Status: Developmental Need

Take CAT-W for ESL placement

DUE TO COVID: Take online ESL-D for ESL placement

Enroll in Developmental/Interventional Coursework

Figure 8.2. Flowchart for the students who have been "flagged" as potential ESL students.

Efficacy of New ESL Placement Protocols

Student Outcomes Data: Comparing Pass Rates Between NES and NNES Students

In Table 8.1, Elisabeth Lackner, the Director of Institutional Research and Assessment at QCC's OIR, has provided aggregated data for the ENGL 101 pass/completion rates of "Native English Speakers" (NES) and "Non-Native English Speakers" (NNES) respectively, for the semesters of Spring 2019 through Fall 2020. The outcomes of Spring 2019 and Fall 2019 (pre-PI) are compared with those of Spring 2020 and Fall 2020 (post-PI) to note any differences in outcomes before and after CUNY's new placement changes. Students receiving a grade of A to D- have passed;[3] students may also opt in for No Credit (NC): This option was developed in the wake of the pandemic and is available to passing students whose grade can nonetheless severely damage their overall GPA. The percentages of enrolled NES and NNES students who passed ENGL 101 are provided for each term.

Table 8.1. ENGL 101 Pass/Completion Rates of NES and NNES From Spring 2019–Fall 2020 (Counting all grades of A to D-, including CR* as passing)

	NES Students		NNES Students	
	% Enrolled	**Pass Rates**	**% Enrolled**	**Pass Rates**
Spring 2019	52.0%	64.0%	19.5%	72.4%
Fall 2019	66.8%	67.1%	23.1%	74.2%
Spring 2020	53.7%	55.0%	33.0%	69.9%
Fall 2020	63.1%	52.8%	27.6%	59.5%

* Students receiving a passing grade can elect to receive a CR (Credit). CR allows students to enroll in subsequent classes and is neutral in the student's GPA.

Perhaps due to similar challenges faced from COVID and the new PI, there is a significant drop in pass rates for both student groups since the placement updates were implemented in Spring 2020—for NES, the difference is up to 14.3 percent, and for NNES, it is 14.7 percent. For both groups, pass rates are the lowest they have been in Fall 2020. Not shown, but as expected given QCC's student demographics, most of enrolled NES students were non-White; the percentage of White NES enrolled in Spring 2019 and Fall 2019 was 6.7 percent and 9.4 percent, respectively, and in Spring 2020 and Fall 2020, six percent and 9.2 percent, respectively.

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3.   However, those receiving a C- or below would not be able to transfer their credits to another CUNY college.

However, the data also shows that regardless of semester, NNES students on the whole performed better than their NES peers. While the factors for these differences cannot be drawn from this data alone, the diverse linguistic backgrounds, countries of origin, race, and ethnicities of incoming QCC students beg the question of which students have *not* been "flagged" as ESL via CUNY's six-month criteria yet could have benefitted from supplemental NNES support, given that the pass rates for the latter group are consistently higher.

This disparity demonstrates the need to develop placement methods that go beyond the dichotomy of "native" versus "non-native" English speakers and to think about finer student distinctions; otherwise, we risk perpetuating the inequities our reforms seek to resolve in the first place.

Administrative Standpoints: Comparing the CAT-W with the ESL-D

Although quantitative data can give us a cursory view of the overall success rates of ESL and non-ESL students, first-hand perspectives from QCC administrators and faculty can contextualize this data and help us understand the factors that have possibly influenced student outcomes. For instance, given a rift between CUNY Central and individual CUNY campuses on how to best adjust to the move to online placement, Evangelou recalls facing conflicts of interest. In March 2020, her office crafted a "local business practice" based on directed self-placement for ESL students to address the lack of on-site testing. However, the practice was scrapped when the university decided that all CUNY colleges should wait until a CUNY-wide practice was developed. "It was frustrating because we had over 200 students who had matriculated and were waiting for direction," says Evangelou (L. Evangelou, personal communication, July 9, 2020).

When the university notified ESL students that they had to take the ESL-D in mid-June 2020, there was still not a system in place for how it would be assessed. A lack of communication between CUNY Central and its campuses in turn led to a communicative disconnect between the campuses and their students. "Locally we did not have much information on the process and the launch seemed very hurried. We were inundated with calls from students saying they took the test, 'Now what?' We had no answer," recalls Evangelou, adding that because the onus was on QCC to answer students' questions, students often saw these shortcomings as stemming from the college itself, rather than the university as a whole (L. Evangelou, personal communication, July 9, 2020). An assessment system was ultimately established: Students' ESL-D essays would not be scored; instead, they would be evaluated, and alongside their metacognitive survey responses in the Diagnostic's second section, administrators would assign "placement milestones" on a student's record and provide recommendations for course placement. As the administrator for running this process at QCC, Rothman and a team of four other CAT-W-certified readers work in Microsoft Teams to evaluate the writing samples of incoming ESL QCC students.

Testing setting aside, a fundamental difference between the CAT-W and ESL-D lies in their structure. As an ESL Discipline Council member, the head of the English department's English language learner committee, and a member of the Proficiency Index implementation team, Rothman explains the methodical process by which the former was administered and scored. He described the CAT-W as a "tightly honed practice" comprising sample essays to norm readers on the evaluation process. Grading would be carried out in a conveyor belt fashion, overseen by a chief reader: When a CAT-W essay would receive similar scores from first and second readers, a third reader would review and re-score the given essay. Further, if one reader passed an essay and the other didn't, a third reader would break the tie. In contrast to this systematic process, only one reader evaluates each ESL-D student essay, which presents a greater chance of reader bias and limits the areas of expertise that multiple readers would otherwise lend to the process (D. Rothman, personal communication, January 6, 2021).

Furthermore, the CAT-W provided fewer opportunities for students to plagiarize or receive outside help, as students were required to take it at a CUNY testing center with proctors enforcing protocol. Because it is taken at home, the ESL-D cannot be as strictly enforced. Students are free to consult friends, family members, and the internet for help. Google Translate, for one, can be used as a workaround to write an essay in an unfamiliar language. "When this happens, you're not getting a valid placement," says Rothman. For him, a student's level of English competency is more accurately measured when writing is done in a controlled setting, away from any opportunities to consult outside help. Still, circumstances considered, the protocol does the job for now: "I'm glad that we're doing something rather than nothing," he says, adding that on the plus side, the looser protocol of the ESL-D makes for much more efficient evaluations; a scorer may read up to 15-18 essays in an hour (D. Rothman, personal communication, January 6, 2021).

Since its establishment, changes have been made to the ESL-D to curb the possibility of plagiarism and the use of outside help. As of Spring 2021, students no longer have a two to three-day window to complete their ESL-D writing sample. Instead, they have two hours to complete the task, in one sitting. Additionally, the student survey portion of the diagnostic has been broadened to give the placement team more information about the students' experience with academic English. Yet, some challenges linger. The time it took to launch the ESL-D meant matriculated students waited months before being able to be advised and registered. To date, ESL students who deferred their enrollment have not been contacted to take the test. As placement milestones could not be given to already-admitted students, a separate system needed to be created to place them.

Faculty, on the Merits of "Flagging" Criteria

It is important to note that discussing the efficacy of CUNY's Spring 2020 placement reforms inextricably considers *the new placement procedures themselves*

and their *timing*—the move to online learning (namely, the learning management system Blackboard) during a pandemic. This intersection of circumstances means the "root" cause of any changes in student outcomes cannot easily be attributed to one specific factor. With this in mind, QCC English faculty reflected on key factors that may have impacted their ESL students' performance before and after Spring 2020. These ranged from a lack of peer and faculty interaction, the lack of non-verbal cues, the lack of urgency yet greater flexibility that came with asynchronous classwork, limited access to necessary technology, and general life circumstances (Che, 2023). In evaluating the efficacy of the ESL "flagging" process, some key themes were found in faculty responses: the need for us to move beyond place-based assumptions of a student's ESL status, to consider students' multiple language proficiencies, and to not think of a "passing" exit score as synonymous with English proficiency.

For some faculty, the shortcoming of the six-month criteria came in its assumptions of a student's English proficiency based on place of instruction. Madi S.[4] thinks that the flagging rule is fine "in theory"; however, "many times students can be ELL even if they have attended an English speaking school." Factors such as diaspora and generationality challenge educational locality as a sole determinant of English proficiency. Though CLIP Instructor Anthony Prato agrees that any student who has spent at least six months in a non-English learning environment should be flagged as an ESL student, he believes the criteria should be expanded (personal communication, April 22, 2021). "This . . . guideline likely missed many Generation 1.5 students," he says. "If a student moves from China to NYC at age 13, and then completes 4 years of high school, I imagine this student would not be labeled as an 'ESL student.' In fact, he/she could have easily graduated [from] a typical NYC high school without the English skills necessary for even basic community college courses." The flagging criteria overlooks students who have largely or only been educated domestically in English-speaking contexts, yet may still need supplemental English instruction. A student who has only studied in an English-speaking context can be just as prepared—or unprepared—for first-year writing as a student who has studied in a non-English speaking context.

Other faculty believe students' rich linguistic backgrounds are not adequately accounted for in the placement process. Corona points out that "fully bilingual students . . . may present as ESL," and that they may in fact be proficient in English. Considering a student's linguistic background also means taking into account the possibility that they have more than one first language and may therefore possess what Suresh Canagarajah (2006) deemed a "poliliterate orientation to writing"; these students would be "simultaneously bilingual" or multilingual (pp. 583, 587).

Just as a student can be proficient in multiple languages at once, merely identifying a student as ESL does not account for the level, or type, of additional English instruction they need. "[The flagging criteria] does not address the depth

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4.   Pseudonym

of the student's unfamiliarity with English," says Emanuele. A student's "depth" of English language knowledge can also be undetectable when looking at high school exit exam scores: Passing does not necessarily mean proficient. Rothman asks, "What about ELL students who struggle through an American high school experience, but manage to pass with decent enough grades to avoid an ESL placement?" Gina makes a distinction between the accuracy of high school exit exams and a college's own placement methods in determining an ESL student's rightful English proficiency. "Some leave high school with passing Regents scores, but cannot read and write well, especially not at the college level," she says, adding that these students have a greater chance of failing English 101. A rift between high school exit procedures and college entrance exams can often lead to the misplacement of students in ESL courses, given that collaborations between secondary and post-secondary institutions are often absent during students' transition to college. Even though the Accelerated Learning Program (ALP) was conceived to mitigate the learning gaps this rift presents, it has often served to merely shift the locus of failure to these classes. (Since the implementation of the ESL-D, many of Rothman's ESL students have continued to excel; however, he is noticing an increase in lower-performing ESL students in his remedial ALP classes.)

Jacobowitz took issue with the flagging criteria given the psychic effects being "flagged" can have on a student. "I don't know if this 'flagging' makes students feel singled out in a bad way or in a helpful way," she says. Diaz, meanwhile, wondered if placing students based on their English proficiency is prudent to begin with. "I worry that ESL students will be placed together and won't have contact with native speakers," she says. While these faculty's concerns do not fit under the main themes found across faculty responses, they signal the need to consider the unseen matters of "flagging"—how students may internalize having been "flagged," similar to the stigma that already surrounds being "ESL," alongside what students may miss if they are placed in an ESL sequence.

Overall, English faculty are well aware that what constitutes an "ESL student"—that is, a student requiring additional English language assistance—is much more complicated than its flagging criteria posits. So we don't unnecessarily place first-year-writing-ready freshmen into interventional courses, we need to cast aside the Eurocentric notion that receiving an English education in a non-English speaking context signals a deficit. Conversely, so that students who do need additional support don't fall through the cracks, we need to adapt more flexible ESL "identifiers" that are not bound by place or exit exam scores, but instead look at a student's multiple language proficiencies, the depth of their English knowledge, and their specific English language competencies and needs.

Conclusion: Implications and Avenues for Improvement

Based on their experiences with placement design and scoring entrance exams, QCC administrators offer suggestions on how current roadblocks to effective ESL

student placement could be remedied—as well as efforts currently being made to do so. Alongside moves to streamline exit exams and re-introduce the CAT-W upon the resumption of in-person learning, some key faculty suggestions include: adding a *speaking component* to placement, *giving students more say* in where they should be placed, *being clearer* with incoming students on the intricacies of the placement process, establishing *more accommodating testing conditions,* and *placing less capital* on high school exit scores.

Building on Existing Measures Within the PI, CAT-W, and ESL-D

Flaherty said during a Spring 2021 composition committee meeting that the CUNY Language Immersion Program (CLIP) is working to develop a more streamlined pathway for students who pass the program and move toward matriculation, by standardizing the CLIP exit exam to coincide with classwork, the class final exam, and the ESL-D. Additionally, per an ELL Discipline Council meeting handout from January 2020, the council has expanded its ESL "flagging" process to *potentially* include students who have graduated from a secondary school where the language of instruction is English and who have completed at least one semester in a non-English secondary school environment and those who completed their High School Equivalency Examination (GED, TASC, HiSet) in a language other than English.

ESL placement may revert to familiar protocol soon should in-person classes resume; "[M]y understanding is that the CAT-W will return briefly and will be replaced by another assessment for Fall 22 cohort," Flaherty states. Some instructors point out that the CAT-W had its merits, *but could use a few tweaks*. Rothman believes it is "more accurate" in identifying ESL students than the ESL-D, and Anderst believes its uses could be more flexible—"since it was both a placement exam and an exit exam." Professor J also saw some flaws in the CAT-W, yet also acknowledges its strengths. "The old CAT-W had some false positives for remediation and false negatives for not needing it, but it seemed pretty good," he says. "With that said, it is very hard to disentangle having spent so much time using that line as a marker to objectively say whether it was accurate." If the CAT-W were to be reinstated in what Rothman describes as its "more culturally-sensitive" form, we may be able to observe its efficacy in ESL student placement. However, we would still be conducting this observation through an all-too familiar lens of the CAT-W. The assessment has been in place for so long that instructors don't have another measure by which to assert placement effectiveness. Perhaps it's not enough that we tweak it, as much as we need to overhaul it.

At the composition committee meeting, some English faculty expressed what seemed to be an essential missing piece of the ESL-D: *a speaking component*. "That would be so easy to tell the students apart, non-native student English speaker and a native English speaker," one colleague commented. Leah echoes, "Having a current writing sample alongside an in-person conversation with students about

placement would be so great." However, Rothman disagrees, believing a student's oral English proficiency is irrelevant to their readiness for a first-year writing course. "All the benchmarks are based on literacy, reading and writing. So I don't see where the need comes for any oral [component]; it doesn't fit the course," he says. This debate around which English language proficiencies—speaking, reading, writing, and listening—should be factored into the "flagging" equation, and which should be overlooked, is a salient one. If we were not to assess a student's oral proficiency, what information about a student's English competencies that would be useful in the writing class (say, for the purposes of accommodating group work or presentations) might we miss? Conversely, if we test for oral proficiency even if ENGL 101 doesn't teach it, what would be the rationale—to identify ESL *learners* or just overall ESL *individuals*?

Logistically, more considerate testing conditions could better students' performance and not bind them to the stressors of test-taking. If CUNY and QCC were to reinstate standardized exams, Gina says, "they must be fair, and more accommodating. Asking an ESL student to read and respond to a passage in 90 minutes is not always fair."

Furthermore, the PI for some is still lacking, despite its aim to be a more holistic multiple measures replacement for standardized exams. "I think we need more than the CUNY Proficiency Index because grades on the Regents exams are grossly inflated," Gina says. Until the CAT-W is reinstated, Rothman reminds us that a student's test-taking abilities, whether in a high school exit exam or a writing placement measure, do not necessarily reflect their English proficiency. "We should . . . re-evaluate the current system in which some under-prepared ESL students may well place out of taking a writing placement due to their high school grades," he says. "As we all know, sometimes grades reflect effort more so than competence in a skill area." Echoing his previous allusion to the rift between high school exit testing and college placement methods, Rothman touches on a key distinction between the skill of test-taking and the act of reading and writing itself: The latter is something that ESL and non-ESL students alike may struggle with due to time constraints, anxiety, learning disabilities, and other factors, and may not be an accurate indicator of their competency in a subject area.

Fostering Agency and Greater Transparency with Students

Other faculty call for *more transparency* offered to students on their placement options. "At non-CUNY institutions where I've taught, there has also been a category for students who were born in the US, but grew up in a family that spoke a different language at home," says Lago, adding that knowing what languages her students spoke at home would be especially useful in a distance learning environment. In this statement, Lago challenges strict place-based criteria for ESL "flagging" so as to not overlook students born in the United States. For any student who may lack English reading comprehension (and arguably, any incoming stu-

dent despite English proficiency), Lago says students need to be better informed of what each interventional program entails before entering one. "I think they have to know ahead of time what that placement means," she says. "Unfortunately, students who have weak English language mastery may not understand the structure and requirements of the ALP sequence." As CUNY continues to revise its placement roadmaps, perhaps something in the form of one-on-one consultations with placement administrators, or small orientation courses, could help in clarifying any questions incoming students may have about where they would fall in the placement path—and what course options would be available to them as a result.

Alongside educating students on the placement process, faculty advocate for *more nuanced, agentive placement methods.* Anderst and Diaz believe more credit should be given to students to already be cognizant of where they are on their "college writing readiness." "Most students are aware of their level of proficiency and want to progress at the right pace," Diaz says. "A student's own input is very important," Anderst agrees, adding that a directed self-placement model could enable assessors to gauge students' reading and writing experiences in ways that aren't captured by the fact of having spent time abroad. However, she acknowledges that this "holistic approach" would be costlier to implement.

Their colleagues echo the potential for a more self-determined placement approach, but with a subtler approach, given the uncomfortable and perhaps stigmatizing spotlight that might come from directly inquiring about a student's language competency. Rothman considers "a gentle sort of survey for a 101 course . . . to find out about their languages that they speak." Kathryn[5] concurs, adding that the survey could also ask about students' interests, majors, and what particular topics interest them. "If you find something that students latch onto, they're more likely to engage than if it's something that . . . is just so foreign to them for whatever reason," she explains. "Maybe you can census and say you're thinking of assigning a text and you want to assign something that, you know, will engage them." Asking questions not just about a student's language background, but also their overall interests academically or otherwise, can give instructors a more personalized sense of what class materials and praxis can best engage their students each semester, thus potentially yielding more motivated and effective writing.

Mobilizing ESL Students' Assets in Placement Materials

In interviewing English faculty on what they believe to be some of their ESL students' assets, there was a recurring theme: English instruction in a classroom whose lingua franca is not English can indeed be more rigorous in areas such as academic writing and mechanics than in some English-speaking classrooms.

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5.   Pseudonym

Prato claims that students' prior English training can have beneficial or detrimental implications for their academic success: "Some students have experienced somewhat rigorous academic backgrounds in the past (in their native countries) and these backgrounds better-prepare them for CLIP and college writing in general" (personal communication, April 22, 2021). Rothman notes his ESL students' prior instruction has taught them to prioritize certain skills and topics when they enter the writing classroom:

> Many of my students have strong study habits. They are willing to work hard through the drafting process to produce a stronger final draft. Many of my students place a high value on 'language related' instruction. They do not doubt that they need to improve these skills in order to be successful in college.

These students' personal experiences and ways of thinking can also work to their advantage. Anderst says, "Some of my ESL students have a lot of education from another country and bring to the class experiences and ideas and thinking skills that enrich the papers they write."

Others acknowledge that precisely because their ESL students learned English as a second language, the learning skills they've picked up are more methodical than English instruction in an English-speaking classroom. "Many ESL students have studied English from a structural perspective in the act of acquiring a second language and often have a greater vocabulary around issues of grammar and sentence conventions that make conversations grammatical and structural issues easier to navigate," says ENGL 101 instructor Aliza Atik. ESL students can also be more creative in their prose. "They come up with interesting ways of conveying their ideas, sometimes even poetic," says Jordan Schnieder. Susan Jacobowitz echoes, "I think the strength is in the stories. . . . Sometimes there is an unusual way of stating something that is very poetic." Elise Denbo believes that multilingual students have a rich repertoire of language resources to draw upon, and tapping into it can in fact boost their confidence as writers. "Often . . . ESL students bring the 'flavor' of their language to their writing, using metaphors, terms, figurative language in special ways, bringing the rhythms of their language to the writing of English," she says.

In observing these assets at work in the writing classroom, perhaps we can consider ways to mobilize them in our placement practices. If ESL students have commonly been observed to have regimented studying skills, motivation to rewrite a piece, a definitionally-based understanding of grammar, and "poetic" ways of expressing their thoughts, why not think of ways we can offer them opportunities to demonstrate these skills on the CAT-W, the ESL-D, or their interventional coursework exit exams? "Many appreciate hearing how their voices add to their writing and to the language," Denbo says. Acknowledging the different meaning-making practices of students who have studied in other cultural and linguistic contexts can not only be a more equitable way to place them in writing classes;

it can also be empowering and instill in them the belief that the knowledges they have brought with them to U.S. higher education are valuable, and useful.

Instructors, Adapting in the Meantime

It is unclear whether or when placement procedures for incoming QCC (and CUNY, broadly) students will be finalized, and what these procedures would look like. English faculty in the meantime continue to brainstorm ways they can best accommodate the ESL students that have been placed in their classes through their own pedagogies and assessment practices. Corona wishes she could see her students' writing before classes begin, but as things are, she finds a colleague's precursory research on her students potentially helpful: "She goes into CUNY First[6] and looks up information on every student in her classes to get a sense of their placement," she says. "Just getting that information would be helpful in the formation and development of an introductory English course."

As placement reforms continue to be in flux, Prato (personal communication, April 22, 2021) believes faculty should also rethink the *type of writing instruction itself* that we provide ESL students so they can successfully navigate non-academic spaces. "Most ESL students in CLIP speak/write little or no English outside of the classroom environment," he says. "They need to learn the basics of English dialogue in real-life situations. . . . A non-native speaker . . . can 'get by' in an academic environment due to technology," he adds, referring to translation technologies. "But when that person graduates, he/she will unlikely be able to communicate effectively in the real world. What good is it to be able to summarize an article when you cannot even ask someone where the nearest bus stop is located?" Indeed, Prato's call for a more expansive writing curriculum echoes Kip Strasma and Paul Resnick's (1999) emphasis of "literacy" at the two-year college as needing to not only include reading and writing, but also workplace literacies and civic literacies.

CUNY's new placement measures have taught faculty and administrators the difficulties of adapting to an online environment, and the particular challenges they pose to ESL students. Strong stances have been taken on the CAT-W, PI, ESL-D, and the criteria by which potential ESL students are identified. At the same time, the timing of these measures working in concert together leaves many questions unanswered. Former English department chair David Humphries believes it is "too soon to tell" these reforms' effectiveness. And Lago perhaps sums it up best: "Since the placement changes occurred in the midst of the pandemic, it's hard to parse out all the factors that impact a student's success." As the pandemic ebbs and NYC schools begin to move back to in-person learning, we should begin to see which post-Spring 2020 factors—the move to online learning and the new placement measures—coincide with specific ESL student outcomes.

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6. Online platform used by students to enroll in classes, and by faculty to view course information

Until then, it is our hope that our pre-existing and newly gained knowledge of ESL students' assets, nuanced backgrounds, and challenges can leave us with better guidance on how to fairly determine ESL "flagging" criteria and placement roadmaps. Holly Hassel (2013) stressed the importance of considering two-year college students' intersectional identities as we work toward more equitable teaching and assessment praxes: "Future areas of research must explore how class, race, and other forms of difference disproportionately impact students at two-year campuses and how we can and should address them" (p. 349). By challenging monolithic assumptions of what makes an "ESL student," we may begin to develop more agentive, personal, equitable, and accurate placement protocols for our diverse community college students.

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Appendix A: Student Demographics, QCC 2019-2020 Factbook

QCC First-Time Freshmen by Country of Birth: Top Ten Non-USA

	Fall 2016		Fall 2017		Fall 2018		Fall 2019	
	Country	Heads	Country	Heads	Country	Heads	Country	Heads
1	China	125	China	86	China	101	China	102
2	Jamaica	51	Guyana	45	Jamaica	58	Guyana	68
3	Bangladesh	41	Jamaica	44	Guyana	46	Jamaica	62
4	Guyana	40	Bangladesh	31	Bangladesh	42	Dominican Rep.	45
5	Haiti	39	Haiti	30	Dominican Rep.	30	Haiti	42
6	Dominican Rep.	36	Dominican Rep.	29	Haiti	26	Bangladesh	40
7	Ecuador	34	Pakistan	22	Ecuador	23	Ecuador	35
8	South Korea	28	India	20	Columbia	19	India	28
9	India	27	Columbia	19	South Korea	19	Pakistan	27
10	Pakistan	24	Ecuador	18	India	18	Mexico	24

QCC First-Time Freshmen Native Languages: Top Five Languages Other Than English

	Fall 2015		Fall 2016		Fall 2017		Fall 2018	
	Language	Heads	Language	Heads	Language	Heads	Language	Heads
1	Spanish	244	Spanish	234	Spanish	243	Spanish	169
2	Chinese	161	Chinese	115	Chinese	93	Chinese	96
3	Bengali	38	Bengali	44	Bengali	34	Bengali	37
4	Creole	30	Creole	30	Urdu	32	Creole	19
5	Urdu	29	Urdu	24	Creole	23	Urdu	15

Note: Due to a change in the admissions application, data for Fall 2019 is not available

Percent of First-Time Freshmen Who Speak a Language Other Than English at Home

Fall 2015	Fall 2016	Fall 2017	Fall 2018
39.1%	37.7%	38.7%	35.4%

Source: CUNYfirst and CUNY IRDB

Appendix B: Definitions for Understanding Incoming QCC Student Placement

a.   *Administrative Offices:*

- **The Office of Academic Affairs (OAA):** Oversees CLIP and CUNY Start[7] (see Developmental Coursework below). Supports faculty, staff, and students by collaborating with other administrative divisions. Aims to facilitate, disseminate, and implement assessment and strategic planning across the college (OAA, 2020b).
- **CUNY Task Force on Developmental Education:** Established by the OAA. Members include faculty chairs or co-chairs of the Mathematics, Reading, and English Discipline Councils, four chief academic officers from colleges offering developmental instruction and two from senior colleges, and members of the central OAA. Members deliberate on issues regarding "placement into developmental coursework, developmental instruction and supports for students, and the criteria for determining readiness to exit from developmental instruction" (CUNY Task Force on Developmental Education, 2016).
- **ESL Discipline Council:** Per council member David Rothman, a cohort of TESOL faculty that discusses and works toward "the resolution of issues relevant to CUNY's ESL population." Rothman defines an "ESL student" as one who lacks adequate English language competence, and works with the OAA "to develop better ESL placement tools" (OAA, 2019).
- **The Office of Institutional Research and Assessment (OIR):** Aims to "provide official, accurate, unbiased, and useful information and analysis to support institutional planning, assessment, decision-making, and reporting obligations." Works across CUNY campuses to gather data "for daily operations, decision-making, and assessment support" (OIR, 2020).

b.   *Developmental and Interventional Coursework:*

- **CLIP (ESL students):** *CUNY Language Immersion Program*. A developmental "intervention" available to "flagged" ESL students who do not meet benchmark entrance requirements and are in need of improving their English language skills (QCC Student Affairs, 2020). Recommended for students who have received a PI score of 39 or lower.
- All CLIP instructors are full-time and have TESOL (or related) training: Students learn writing, reading, listening, and speaking skills through "focused academic content," according to Flaherty. The program integrates advisement with "college knowledge." Students may take the program for

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7.   CUNY Start is not a suggested pathway for ESL students, and is therefore not listed under Developmental Coursework.

up to three terms (two semesters and a summer term). A score of at least 75 percent on the exit exam is needed for a student to be deemed "proficient" and advance to ENGL 101. (See sample CLIP exit exam and scoring rubric in Appendix C.)

- CLIP courses are offered at four levels: beginner, intermediate, upper intermediate, and advanced. While students are directed to CLIP by a single measure that prioritizes writing and reading, Flaherty explains that students are placed into their appropriate levels based on multiple measures: They complete "a combination of an essay, a listening diagnostic and in the first three to four days of class they have one on ones [during] their small group conversations with their instructors that will then perhaps shift their placement."

- **ENG 90 (ESL students):** ESL Reading and Writing. Six-hour integrated reading and writing course to support English Language Learners. For ESL students with a PI score of 40-48. Any ESL students with a PI score of 50-64 may also register with an advisor.

- **USIP (ESL and non-ESL students):** *The University Skills Immersion Program.* Intended for students that are required to complete a math, reading, or writing developmental course prior to their matriculation. Includes tuition-free workshops and courses that are usually offered before the fall semester and between or during semesters (Office of Undergraduate Studies, Academic Programs & Policy, 2021).

- **BE 29:** Developmental Reading/Writing Workshop for Continuing Students. Offered by USIP. Six-week combination reading and writing summer workshop open to any returning student who must satisfy a remediation need. This includes those who are repeating BE 102, or exiting ENGL 90. Also eligible are students exiting CUNY Start with a developmental need in English and students exiting CLIP who have been advised by their instructors to take ALP. Students who pass the workshop would be eligible to take ENGL 101.

- **ALP (ESL and non-ESL students):** *Accelerated Learning Program.*

4. Dual enrollment program comprising ENGL 101 (English Composition) and BE 102[8] (Developing Competence in Reading, Writing, and Study Skills). For students determined to need developmental writing support. While BE 102 is non-credit-bearing, ALP students must pass it and ENGL 101 in order to advance to ENGL 102 (English Literature).

5. According to QCC's English department "New Student Placement" outline for Winter and Spring 2020, new students with a PI score of 50-64 or a CAT-W score of 49-55 may take ALP (QCC English Department, 2020a). (As stated previously, the ESL-D replaced the CAT-W to determine their placement upon the COVID-19 shutdown.)

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8. As of 2022, BE 29 will be referred to as ENGL 99.

Appendix C: Sample Placement and Exit Exam Materials

The CATW uses an analytic scoring guide, called a rubric, to evaluate student writing samples. Each test is scored independently by two faculty raters and both raters assign scores in each of five grading categories.

The Five Scoring Categories

1. "Critical Response to the Writing Task and the Text": This category emphasizes your ability to complete the entire writing task and to demonstrate understanding of the main ideas in the reading text, using critical analysis, and integrating your own ideas and experiences to respond to the main ideas in the text

2. "Development of the Writer's Ideas": In this category you are evaluated on your ability to develop your ideas (for example, by using summary, narrative, or problem/ solution) in a clear and organized way. Your response should include both general statements and specific details and examples. These details and examples can be drawn from your personal experiences, what you have read, or other sources. You must make specific references to ideas in the reading with these details and examples.

3. "Structure of the Response": This category evaluates your ability to organize ideas into an essay that supports a central focus, or thesis. The structure of your essay is evaluated for evidence of clear connections between ideas and the use of appropriate language to convey these connections.

4. "Language Use: Sentences and Word Choice": This category evaluates the degree to which you demonstrate sentence control and variety in sentence construction. This category also evaluates your ability to use appropriate vocabulary to make your ideas clear.

5. "Language Use: Grammar, Usage, and Mechanics": This category evaluates your ability to follow the conventions of standard American English language use in terms of grammar and mechanics (i.e. punctuation, spelling, use of capitals, etc.), so that your meaning is clear.

Figure 8.C1. Sample CAT-W and rubric.

Appendix D: Sample ESL-D Placement Exam Web Pages

Webpage Section 1

CU NY THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Full Name: Sarah Truelsch

EMPLID: 789xyz

Section 1

Directions: Please read the passage below and write an essay in English. You will have 120 minutes to write your essay, and you may use a dictionary, including a bi-lingual dictionary. You are expected to write this essay by yourself, with no help from any other outside sources. Your essay should do the following:

1. Explain the main point the author is making.
2. Share what you think (your opinion) about the author's main point.
3. Support your opinion about the author's main point by connecting it with your personal experience and/or what you have read, seen, learned about in school and/or on TV or social media about the topic.
4. Once you have finished your essay, be sure to review your writing and make any changes or corrections that will help the reader clearly understand the points in your essay.

"Reading Passage"

by Author

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Sample ESL-D Placement Exam Web Pages, Continued

CUNY THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

Section 2

Directions: Please fully complete the following questions. You must respond honestly and truthfully to the questions because your responses will be used to help you register for the English class that is best suited for you! If you get placed into the wrong class, you will have to b moved. Please help us understand your English level.

You must complete this section in order to submit your response to the ESL Diagnostic Assessment.

Please click on the response that best matches your understanding of the reading.

How comfortable were you with the reading that you were given to use to write your essay:

I was very uncomfortable with the reading, and I understood almost none of it.

I was quite uncomfortable with the reading, and I understood a little of it.

I was uncomfortable with some parts of the reading, but I was comfortable with other parts.

I was comfortable with most of the reading, but a few parts of it were unclear.

I was very comfortable with the reading, and I understood all of it.

Please click on the response that best matches your experience.

I needed to use a translation dictionary to understand the reading and write my essay.

All the time, as I was reading the text.

Frequently, as I was reading the text.

Sometimes, as I was reading the text.

A few times.

Never, as I understood every word.

Sample ESL-D Placement Exam Web Pages, Continued

How many years of high school did you complete in the U.S.?

1 year.
2 years.
3 years.
4 years.
I did not attend high school in the U.S.

Please describe in as much detail as possible the type of writing you practiced or you learne
and what language instruction, including grammar, you had in your English Language Arts
(ELA) class (if you took it in a U.S. high school), or in your English class (if you took a
language class in another country).

Please write your answer in one paragraph, using sentences, **NOT** a list, in the blank space
below:

Sample ESL-D Placement Exam Web Pages, Continued

How would you describe your ability to speak in English and be understood by other people

I get nervous about speaking in English; people have trouble understanding me.

I get nervous about speaking in English; people often ask me to repeat what I said.

I rarely get nervous speaking in English, but sometimes people do not understand me.

I am quite comfortable speaking in English, and most people understand me.

I am fine speaking in English, and everyone understands me easily.

If you could place yourself into an English class in college, based on what YOU think of you English language ability in speaking, reading writing and listening, which class would it be:

I need a lot of language instruction, in all skills areas: speaking, reading, writing and listening.

I need instruction in speaking, but I am fine with reading and writing.

I need instruction in reading and writing.

I need instruction in writing only.

I think my language skills are good enough to take a College Composition class.

→

Appendix E: Sample CLIP Essay Prompt

An Environment

An environment is everything around us. A physical environment is everything that someone can see, hear, smell and touch. It also includes invisible things, such as chemicals in the air. A social environment contains the people someone interacts with, such as family or friends. An online environment includes all the places on the Internet that someone visits, such as YouTube and social media sites like Facebook and Instagram. People are always in an environment. However, they don't often think about how it affects them. Here are some ways it does.

Many studies have shown that the physical environment affects us. The exhaust from cars or factories can increase the risk of having a heart attack. This type of pollution can also make health conditions like asthma worse. The environment can also affect our mental health. A recent study compared people walking in a park with people walking on the street. It found that people walking in a park had significantly lower levels of negative emotions and anxiety.

A social environment can influence someone in many ways. It certainlyinfluences how they behave. David, a 16 year old, explains how his social environment influenced his behavior. He remembers, "I smoked my first cigarette when I was 11. I didn't want to, but all my friends were smoking and I didn't want to be out of the group." David's experience is not unique. Friends in a person's social environment influence that person's behavior.

An online environment can also have a powerful effect on someone. The online environment encourages people to shift their attention. When online, everything is just "one click away." For example, while someone looks at a social media post, they click on a link to a YouTube video. This constant shifting of attention negatively affects their ability to focus. In fact, research has shown that people who repeatedly click from one website to another have more difficulty focusing – even when they are not online.

An environment is not only around us. It also affects us in many ways.

Writing Directions: Read the passage above and write an essay about it. Summarize the main ideas of the passage in your own words. In addition, explain how one or more ideas in the passage relate (connect) to something you have experienced, seen, read, and/or learned in school.

Only a small part of your essay should summarize the passage, but make sure to include all the author's main ideas. Most of the essay should explain how one or more ideas relate to something you have experienced, seen, read, and/or learned in school.

Remember to review your essay and make any changes or corrections that will help your reader clearly understand your essay. You will have 90 minutes to complete your essay.

Appendix F: Scoring Guidelines for the CLIP Essay Rubric (2/8/2018)

OVERALL GUIDELINES

Choose the score with the criteria that best describe the essay.

In some cases, the essay will meet all three of the criteria for a score. In other cases, the essay may not meet one of the criteria for a score. The essay should not be disqualified for a score because it does not meet one of the criteria. Instead, choose the score whose criteria most closely describe the essay.

Think of "competent" as equivalent to a C+ level of performance for an in-class essay exam in the highest level CUNY developmental writing class. An in-class essay means an essay like the CLIP essay in which, within 90 minutes, the student summarizes and responds to a prompt that they have not previously read. The highest level developmental class at CUNY is the class that now uses the CATW as a final exam. Refer to anchor papers A and C for components that reach a "competent" level of performance.

When reading the essay, do not translate from ESL interlanguages to English. Read at a normal pace and do not re-read to try to determine meaning. Anything that is not comprehensible to a reader unfamiliar with ESL writing or speech should not receive credit for any components. It's helpful to read the words the student writes one at a time and determine what, if anything, these words communicate. It is especially important to use this strategy with summaries, since the scorer already knows the content.

Lack of clarity due to word choice, sentence structure or grammar can also lower the scores in critical response, development and organization. If parts of the essay are unclear to the extent that a student is unable to articulate a clear response, to competently develop ideas, and/or to construct a well-organized, unified paragraph, this can lower the scores for critical response, development, and/or organization.

When evaluating whether a student "almost never," "sometimes" or "mostly" achieves a level of performance, think of these terms in reference to a four to five paragraph essay. Therefore, an essay with just one or two short paragraphs can never "sometimes" or "mostly" achieve a level of performance in critical response, development, organization, word choice or grammar. *An essay with four or fewer independent sentences should never receive a score above "1" in any category*

CRITICAL RESPONSE

Only parts of the student essay that are summarized or paraphrased should be evaluated for the summary. Any text that is copied (or very, very closely copied) should not receive any credit towards summarizing. Read the prompt four or five times before you score so you remember the key phrases. Underline the main points to quickly check for copying.

Make sure to evaluate if the student is accurately summarizing the main points of the essay. Alwaysask if reading the words on the student's essay gives you an accurate understanding of the main points. Misrepresentations of the main points (even if they include some information from the text that is accurate) should receive no credit towards summarizing. The essay should be evaluated on summarizing the main points of the prompt. Merely stating facts from the prompt does not constitute summarizing.

If the student does not summarize the article, or summarizes it poorly, look at the other two components of the critical response score – relating and integrating and focusing on the task – to determine the score. The student should receive the score that best describes the essay. Generally, this means that two of the three criteria for the score describe the essay. Since an essay without a summary is not "almost always" focused on the task, an essay without a summary in the student's own words should never be given a score of 6. However, the essay could possibly receive a score of 4 or 5, depending on how well the student relates and integrates idea(s) from the article and stays focused on the task.

When evaluating "focus on task," evaluate how well the student has actually summarized and responded to the prompt. For example, if the summary copies almost all the text from the prompt, or if the summary is inaccurate, the student has not focused on the task of summarizing. If the student discusses something unrelated to an idea in the article, the student has not focused on the task of responding.

When evaluating whether a student responds to an idea related to the passage, students should not be penalized for responding to an idea from the passage that is not a main idea. For example, the prompt "Feeling Lonely? Too Much Time on Social Media May be Why" concedes that "Social media sites are a good way to keep in contact with people." Since the article is focused on how social media leads to loneliness, this is not a main point. However, a student should not be penalized for responding to the concession ("Social media sites are a good way to keep in contact with people").

DEVELOPMENT

When evaluating how well the student develops ideas, focus on the development of ideas, not the development of a paragraph. For example, an essay could include paragraphs with two unrelated, but competently developed ideas. If the ideas are competently developed, the student should receive a higher score for development. The issue with unrelated ideas in paragraphs should be reflected in the score for organization, not development.

Statements that are completely inaccurate should not receive credit for development. For example, if a student states that people who don't know a second language cannot get a job, that statement should receive no credit towards development.

Organization

The student should not be penalized for responding to more than one idea. The writer's central focus, and the organizational structure that supports that focus, can be a summary, followed by three paragraphs, each with an explanation of how a different idea from the passage is related to what the student has experienced, seen or read, and/or learned in school. The student may choose to include a statement at the end of the first paragraph previewing that this is what the essay will do. However, the student may also signal that s/he will be responding to three different ideas with signal phrases such as "one idea that relates to my life is," "another idea that relates to my life is."

Word Choice

Since there is some gray area between intermediate and advanced vocabulary, **focus on the total number of intermediate or advanced words in the essay when scoring for Word Choice.**

Sentence Structure, Grammar and Mechanics

The words "comprehensible," "impedes comprehension," or is "incomprehensible" mean comprehensible, impedes comprehension or incomprehensible for a reader unfamiliar with ESL writing and speech. To help approach how a reader unfamiliar with ESL interlanguage would comprehend or not comprehend parts of an essay, scorers should not re-read sentences or phrases that they find confusing.

Text that is a copy of phrases from the text (or a near copy) should receive no credit for demonstrating proficiency in sentence structure, grammar, or mechanics.