

Survey of ESL Placement Instruments Used by New Jersey Institutions of Higher Education in Spring 2009

Compiled by

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OUR AIM

- ✘ To share information on ESL placement testing so that each participating institution would have an opportunity to gain from the knowledge of the practices of other institutions

WHO PARTICIPATED

- ✘ Fifteen institutions of higher education in the state of New Jersey
 - + Seven 2-year colleges
 - + Eight 4-year colleges

WHAT WE ASKED

- ✘ How ESL students were identified
- ✘ Which placement testing instruments were used
- ✘ The degree of satisfaction with the instruments

WHAT WE FOUND OUT:

- ✘ The processes used for placing and identifying ESL students and the instruments used are constantly changing as institutions seek more accurate means and methods.
- ✘ At the time of the survey in Spring 2009, approximately half of the respondents reported recent changes in ESL placement instruments.

WHAT WE FOUND OUT:

SURVEY HIGHLIGHTS

- ✘ Most institutions have a procedure in place for identifying ESL students.
- ✘ A questionnaire, along with reviewing essays for ESL traits, is the most common method of identifying ESL students.
- ✘ Multiple criteria are used for ESL placements by almost all programs.
- ✘ Electronic instruments are part of ESL placement process in about two-third of the responding institutions.
- ✘ An essay is a part of the placement process in all programs (except for one program in which it is the sole placement instrument).
- ✘ Almost all programs use human—not electronic—assessment of placement essays.
- ✘ Generation 1.5 activities are in place at one-fifth of responding institutions.
- ✘ Degree of satisfaction with current placement procedure varies from program to program..

WHAT WE FOUND OUT:

IDENTIFICATION OF ESL STUDENTS

- ✘ Methods of identification varies with the nature of the ESL program and with the institution itself.
- ✘ The most common method involves students answering several questions in either the admissions or testing process. Often this is supplemented with some sort of testing.
- ✘ Most programs report themselves satisfied or very satisfied with the process.

WHAT WE FOUND OUT:

PLACEMENT INSTRUMENTS USED

- ✘ All fifteen colleges use an essay or writing sample
- ✘ Most programs use holistic scoring and/or a holistic rubric.
- ✘ Cutoff scores are set by the ESL program and/or ESL director.
- ✘ In two institutions, the essay is machine-scored, while in the others the evaluators are human beings, usually full-time ESL faculty.
- ✘ Three institutions use non-ESL placement tests

