



## Sharing Our Stories: Multiple Perspectives on Leading the Comprehensive ELL Program Reform

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## ABSTRACT

In 2016, Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC) was awarded an Asian American, Native American and Pacific Islander Serving Institution (AANAPISI) Title III grant which paved the way for a major five-year reform of the ELL program. This comprehensive reform was the heart of this grant, designed to address the structural inequities of the original ESL program that resulted in low retention rates of ELL students as they progressed through a long sequence of ESL classes, sometimes totalling as much as 36 credits.

In this article, three professors of the ELL Department discuss their roles, perspectives, and stories in leading this reform, each one of them contributing a section to the article. The project director of the grant introduces this article with a brief overview and rationale for this grant and the need for reform in the first section. The second section then examines the important role played by a faculty-led research review of best ELL practices in scaffolding and anchoring the program reform. The third section details previous attempts and obstacles to reform at BHCC, and then narrates the steps taken during the grant's duration in defining new program outcomes and course sequencing. The final section discusses the key institutional steps and intentional collaboration needed in completing a major program reform.

## SECTION 1: CONFRONTING INEQUITIES: AN OVERVIEW OF THE AANAPISI GRANT by Maria Puente

Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) students come from highly diverse communities that represent over 40 ethnic groups, and there is great heterogeneity among them in terms of their immigration histories, languages, customs, religions, educational attainment levels, socioeconomic status, and other distinguishing factors (Maramba & Fong, 2020). Yet, despite this diversity, AAPI students continue to be treated as a homogeneous group, best exemplified by the model minority myth that portrays all Asian American students as remarkably successful high achievers who never struggle with any challenges (Suzuki, 2002; Museus, 2013; Murjani, 2014; Jin, 2021). The myth persists because data on Asian American student success are always presented as one aggregate statistic, consequently masking the academic and non-academic struggles of other AAPI students who may be falling through the cracks (Wu-Winiarski, Geron, Geron, & Hoang, 2020). As the CARE Report notes, “the homogeneity of statistics on AAPIs conceals

the complexities and differences in English-language proficiency and socio-economic backgrounds that affect the treatment of AAPIs in education policies and programs” (National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2013, p. 2).

Limited proficiency in English is in fact one of the major barriers to AAPI students' academic success and career advancement (AAPI Data, 2017; Wu-Winiarski, Geron, Geron, & Hoang, 2020). These barriers exist, not because AAPI students lack the cultural capital to overcome them but because the institutional mindset in American higher education has historically been flawed (Murjani, 2014). In particular, AAPI students who are also English language learner (ELL) students are often viewed through a deficit lens, labeled as ‘unprepared,’ ‘lacking the necessary skills,’ or ‘needing more course time,’ instead of being acknowledged for the linguistic and cultural assets they possess that enrich everyone's educa-



1) As a result of the ELL program reform, ELL (English language learner) has replaced ESL (English as a second language) as the standard designation at BHCC to identify the department, program, faculty and students who were previously designated as ESL. But since that change in designation only happened at the end of the program reform, both terms ELL and ESL are used in this article (and others in this journal issue), with ESL usually used to designate titles as they were known before this institutional change.

Figure 1. 2016 Comparison Profile of AAPI vs. All BHCC Students  
Source: BHCC Office of Institutional Research and Assessment

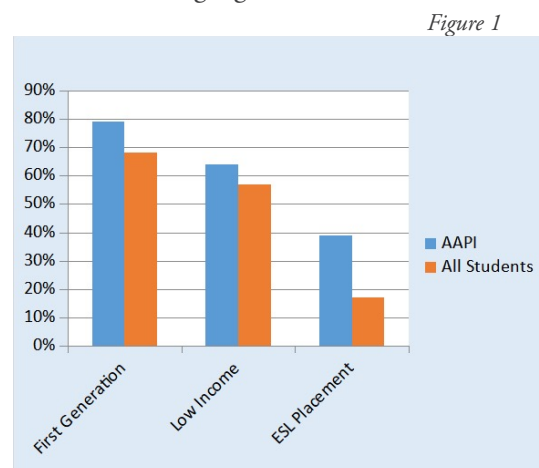
tional experience. Sadly, the same institutional biases extend to all ELL students who are often viewed as “linguistically deficient” (Shapiro, 2011, p. 27). These biases are demonstrated most concretely by remedial models of English language instruction (Shapiro, 2011) and structural barriers embedded in course curricula that make it nearly impossible for all ELL students to achieve academic progress in a timely manner.

Against this national landscape, the Federal Government designated Bunker Hill Community College (BHCC) in 2016 as an Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institution (AANAPISI), and shortly after awarded the College its first AANAPISI Title III Part F grant. These two events, which occurred within a few months of the other, could not have been more timely. The year prior, the College had just adopted a new mission and vision statement that articulated a core value for advancing equity. With its AANAPISI designation, the college joined the community of Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) across the nation, unequivocally embracing its core identity as an equity-focused institution charged with improving educational outcomes for low-income, first generation, underrepresented students of color.

AANAPISI grant-funded institutions use their grant funds to provide targeted support for AAPI students. However, the interventions they design are also intended to benefit the entire student population. For this reason, AANAPISI grants are inherently capacity-building grants. In the process of supporting the success of AAPI students, they ultimately support the success of all students.

Within this context, BHCC’s AANAPISI Part F grant provided the right platform to achieve this goal. The AAPI community is the fastest rising demographic group in the state of Massachusetts and across the United States (Museus, 2013; National Commission on Asian American and Pacific Islander Research in Education, 2013; Watanabe & Lo, 2019). Yet, opportunities for social and economic mobility among AAPIs continue to be hampered by lack of educational support systems critical to their success. The College’s data represented a microcosm of this widespread phenomenon among AANAPISIs (Maramba & Fong, 2020).

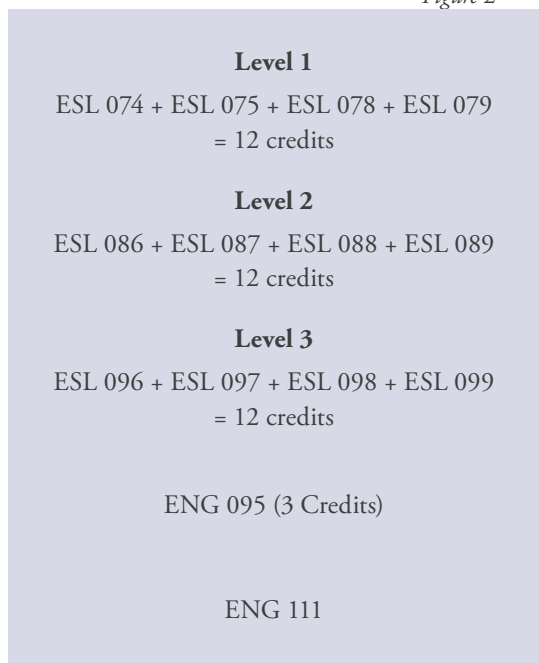
Compared to the general student population (see Figure 1), AAPI-identifying students at BHCC are overrepresented in terms of being first-generation in college, low-income, and more likely to be placed into courses in English as a Second Language (ESL).



Given the critical role that proficiency in English plays in one’s academic progress and social-economic mobility in American society, the AANAPISI grant sought to address a clear, identified need that had existed for years at BHCC: the comprehensive reform of the ESL<sup>1</sup> Program. Momentum for the needed change had gradually built up even before the College won the grant. ELL students hurdled formidable educational barriers that were rooted in inequitable structures, a reality that was most palpable for AAPI-identifying students who comprise about one-fifth of the total ELL student population (BHCC Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, 2018).

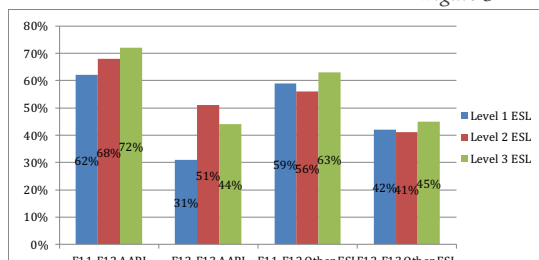
The greatest barrier and most inequitable structure was the curriculum itself. The Academic ESL Program consisted of a total of 36 pre-college level credits across three levels of ESL courses. Students were required to successfully complete four 3-credit ESL courses, or a total of 12 credits at each level, before they could either move on to the next ESL Level, or be allowed to take Developmental English (ENG-095). Given that 65% of ELL students enrolled part-time, finishing one level of ESL coursework could take up to a year. Thus, a student who was placed into Academic ESL Level I (the lowest level) typically finished the ESL program and ENG-095 in three, sometimes four years, before they could even take College Writing I (ENG-111), the first college-level gateway course in English (see Figure 2).

Figure 2



Not surprisingly, students were dropping out of the ESL program at significantly high rates. Among AAPI-identifying ELL students in particular, a snapshot of the Fall 2011 cohort indicates that the ESL program was retaining only 31% of them in Level I and 44% of them in Level III within two years. (see Figure 3).

Figure 3



The ESL Department faced a very difficult challenge. Clearly, ELL students were not progressing successfully in the current ESL Program. Yet the ESL program curriculum, which was grounded in a remedial and skills-based teaching approach, had been in existence for decades. It was also widely practiced across community colleges in the country and considered the standard model of ESL instruction. How could ESL faculty leaders of the reform successfully get the buy-in of colleagues who had taught a well-established academic ESL curriculum for years and sincerely believed in its effectiveness?

Simultaneously, the advocacy for accelerated progression into college-level courses within the ESL Department and across many academic units was also gaining momentum. As the College started to see evidence of successful student accelerations in developmental math clustered courses, co-requisite courses in math and English, curriculum alignment with area high schools, and accelerations via high school GPA placement (BHCC Fifth Year Interim Report, 2015), the question became inevitable. If students were successfully completing their math and English courses via innovations in accelerated coursework, how could a similar acceleration model be created to support ELL students in accelerating into the gateway college-level course in English?

In the following sections, three ELL faculty leaders at the helm of the comprehensive ELL program reform reflect on some of the most critical elements that effectively addressed these inequities as they discuss the steps and strategies that led to the success of the reform. In Section 2, Professor Jeff Ellenbird describes how a faculty-driven, inquiry based approach helped ELL and non-ELL faculty find common ground as the language of theory, research and evidence became central to creating a new department mission statement and engaging the college community in professional development. Professor Alan Shute further discusses the liberating impact of this approach in Section 3. Active and collective faculty engagement in research paved the way for exploring a number of possible ways to overhaul the old ESL program. Strong disagreements among colleagues that had become increasingly divisive over the years gradually dissipated as well, as faculty began to share research findings and apply them in drafting the learning outcomes of the new ELL program. Finally, in Section 4, Professor and Department Chair Lindsay Naggie underscores the critical role that collaborative leadership played in harnessing the expertise of other faculty, staff and administrators outside the ELL Department and forming alliances with like-minded leaders at the college. Altogether, these intentional strategies created momentum for a concerted movement towards transformational change at our institution.

Figure 2: The old ESL Program at Bunker Hill Community College  
Figure 3: Fall-to-fall Retention Rates of AAPI-identifying ELL Students vs. All Other ELL Students by Starting ESL Level, Fall 2011 Cohort  
Source: BHCC Office of Institutional Research and Assessment

We encourage readers to use the reflections of our ELL faculty leaders before or even while embarking on similar curricular reforms at their institution. To be certain, this kind of undertaking is never easy, given the reality that opposing factions can and do emerge in higher education. Bridging the divide and finding common ground among colleagues can be a daunting task, as our own ELL faculty leaders share in their reflections below. But that is also what makes the work profoundly rewarding, especially when team

leadership is cohesive and intentional in its choice of strategies to unite rather than to divide. Finally, the reform process will always be different for each college, shaped necessarily by each institution's history, culture, dynamics, and structures. Thus, even as we offer some seeds of thought that we have sown, cultivated, reaped, and shared in this article, we hope that by sharing our own stories, you are inspired to shape your own.

## SECTION 2:

### ANCHORING AND SCAFFOLDING THE ELL PROGRAM REFORM IN RESEARCH AND EVIDENCE

by Jeff Ellenbird

Comprehensive reform of the ESL program was the core initiative of the AANAPISI grant at BHCC. As part of this initiative, the grant stipulated funding support for the creation of faculty design teams that would overhaul the then linear and skills-based ESL program into an integrated, accelerated model. As a first step, the grant called for a faculty-led research review of best ELL models and practices. Carrying out a research review to determine the most effective ESL program when the general model had already been determined struck some of the ESL faculty as an inherent contradiction. Yet it was a strategic move on the part of the grant to ground the reform in research and engage faculty expertise and leadership.

From the success of an earlier Title III grant, the Engaged Campus Initiative - which was modeled on research, design, pilot, evaluate, scale - the BHCC AANAPISI team believed that the same model would be effective for reforming the ESL program. In the words of Lori Catalozzi, Dean of Humanities and Learning Communities and Activity Director for the grant initiative, "It is critical for the working group to gather and present research to the rest of the team. All of the research on faculty change points to the importance of taking a faculty-driven, inquiry-based, data-informed approach" (personal communication, October 24, 2016). Previous to this grant, there had been piecemeal changes to the ESL curriculum and program over the years, but no significant reform of the ESL program had been institutionalized (which Alan Shute details in Section 3). Therefore, the AANAPISI Grant called for a wholesale revision of the department mission, learning outcomes, master syllabi, and exit assessments to get the work done. As Catalozzi stated, "That is one of the reasons we pursued this grant -- because the grant structure not only

gives us money to fund the work and a framework to guide the work but concrete objectives and deliverables that cannot be ignored" (personal communication, October 24, 2016).

Broad participation from the ESL faculty and buy-in from both ESL and content faculty in supporting this program revision was key, but the success of this reform also hinged on faculty reflecting on their own pedagogy and transforming their own practice in the classroom. Real program reform requires not only changes in structure and templates but also changes to faculty beliefs and practices. Carrying out a faculty-led research review of best practices on ELL learning therefore had many purposes in institutionalizing this program reform:

- Bring together broad participation from the ESL Department to achieve buy-in for the reform
- Ground the ESL reform in research and data
- Support ESL faculty in reflecting on their own teaching practices and moving towards more asset-based ones
- Provide a rationale for ESL program reform in order to achieve buy-in across the campus community

But after carrying it out, the research review and its findings found a new purpose as an effective anchor and scaffold for building the new program reform. In this section, I will discuss both this new purpose as well as the process – warts and all - in carrying out the research review.

## Carrying out the ELL Research Review

Following the guidelines of the AANAPISI grant, faculty in the ESL Department were organized into work areas, and I was tasked with leading a team to carry out the research with four other ESL faculty members and a staff member from the Language Lab. Our principal charge was:

*Carry out research on effective approaches to teaching ESL (accelerated, asset-based, integrated/holistic, content-based, learning community models and culturally relevant approaches) by reviewing the literature as well as other community college ESL programs.*

Our team's first meeting came with a packed agenda. A lot of the meeting focused on the timeline for our research and questions about the grant, with little time spent on planning how we would carry out the research. In hindsight, I see that our plan for reviewing the research and method of dividing up the work was haphazard. Though we divided up among ourselves different topics to research, such as remedial versus accelerated pathways, transformative and constructivist approaches to learning, content-based approaches, culturally relevant pedagogies, asset-based approaches, and learning community models, there was too much overlap between these categories to make the distinction meaningful. More valuable would have been for us to determine and assign a more precise and objective way for searching and identifying the research. For example, we should have collectively determined the exact search words to use and identified the appropriate databases to search within. Then, we could have assigned different search criterias and databases among us. Finally, we should have determined a common cut-off date to ensure that our research was current and determine what types of publications we would consider to ensure the research was authoritative. For that reason, having an experienced researcher or someone from the library on the team would have made the research review more efficient and of a higher quality. As it was, I believe most of us – myself included – did most of our searching on Google with chains of search words like “ESL” “culturally relevant pedagogies” and “colleges”. Though we did find and include some quality, authoritative and current research, some of the research we included in our final synthesis was not current, peer-reviewed or evidence based.

The other question to address was how to document our analysis of the literature. For taking notes on the research, we agreed on a simple format: A summary of the article (written as a paragraph or bullet points)

and then an analysis of the article including usefulness and implications for our team's focus. We then shared these summaries and analyses on a Moodle page we had created for the team. Over the course of the next three months, we reviewed over 30 articles, chapters or books and compiled a 15-page document of notes.

The next question was how to synthesize this analysis. One of our team members came up with a simple template for recording his analysis of the works. Since the goal of our program reform was to transition from a remedial model to an accelerated model, the team members began organizing notes of each reading under two columns - accelerated and remedial - to highlight the contrast between these two models. Faced with the challenge of synthesizing and condensing 15 pages of dense notes into a concise statement on the research, we decided to use this same organizational framework for synthesizing the findings from all the articles. But then we added the additional contrast of asset-based and deficit-based to try to better reflect the research, so that the framework looked like the following:

ASSET-BASED / ACCELERATED	DEFICIT-BASED / REMEDIAL
The learning of language and content is integrated through thematic classes and linked classes.	ESL classes are taught as stand-alone classes with unrelated content. Language must be mastered before students can move onto academic content.
ESL coursework is integrated with holistic, iterative methodologies.	Skills and grammar are taught in isolation.

In doing this, we pulled out common threads on effective ELL practices from our notes and framed them as corollaries as a way to better highlight the effective practices. For each of these common threads (or practices), we cited the articles that supported the practices. Though this system of categorization has some drawbacks, such as precision (a practice could be both accelerated and deficit-based) and oversimplification (some of the deficit-based/remedial practices could certainly be carried out in a way that is asset-based and accelerated), the simple contrasting format made the findings easy to make sense of.

The last step was to synthesize the long list of contrasting practices and categorize them under four key findings (see below) that our research had uncovered. Though there is certainly overlap between the key findings (particularly between the third and fourth findings), they are organized as such to prioritize the importance of ESL program reform at the institutional level (beyond just the ESL Department) and the other important spheres of student perceptions, teacher attitudes/approaches, and class practices/curriculum. The final report was a six-page document, with the first page highlighting the four key findings,



the following four pages identifying the specific practices that support each key finding, and the final page listing the sources.

### Research Findings on Best Practices for Teaching ESL

#### Four Key Findings:

- **Institutional Support:** ELL students succeed when they are supported by all faculty and staff and there exists close collaboration between content faculty and ESL faculty.
- **Student Perceptions:** ELL students succeed when they see their ESL teachers and the ESL Department as advocates, supporters and a resource.
- **Teacher Attitudes and Approaches to Learning:** ELL students succeed when instruction is based on students communicating and negotiating meaning rather than students demonstrating their knowledge of the standard language.
- **Curriculum:** ELL students succeed when the curriculum is driven by challenging academic content through linked content classes and other classes that support students in 1) making personal connections between academic content and their lived experiences and 2) entering into the academic life of the college.

After four months of research with monthly team meetings to discuss and share our research findings, we had compiled a concise document to highlight these findings. The next step was to bring the document to the ESL Department and request the approval of our colleagues. It's important to note that the practices deemed deficit-based/remedial in the research findings were in many ways the dominant institutional and department-wide practices at BHCC. The ESL Department's role and relationship within the institution, the skill-based descriptions and course objectives of the Department-approved syllabi, and even many of the ESL course materials we were using in our classes reflected the deficit-based/remedial practices identified in the findings. For that reason, I was not sure how my colleagues would react to this document, especially since tension had been growing among us, with some of us expressing skepticism and resistance to reforming our program. But to my surprise, every ELL faculty member stated their approv-

al of the final report on the findings and there was a general consensus that the document simply reflected good pedagogy. In this way, the document helped solidify a rationale and anchor for moving the program reform on. For some of us, the document also provided a framework for reflecting on how effectively we were carrying out best practices in our classes. These findings provided a starting place for doing that.

The research findings were approved by the ESL Department in April of 2017, just six months into what turned into a four-year long program reform. The findings then played a prominent role in creating a new mission statement for the ESL Department, supporting two college-wide professional development days that took place the following fall and spring, and guiding and anchoring the ELL program reform through the ensuing two years.

### Defining a New Mission Statement

Just a month after their approval, we called a meeting of team leaders to start a discussion of a new mission statement for the department with a request for each of us to bring a statement to the table. In crafting my statement, I simply copied the four key findings from the research with some slight reorganizing. At the meeting, we agreed to use that statement as the template and I was assigned the work of incorporating other ideas from that meeting that were not already captured in that template. Over the next six months, we met twice more with the statement evolving but still reflecting the core elements of the research findings. The draft statement was then presented at an ESL Department meeting where it again was revised according to input. Finally, nearly two years after the Department approved the research findings, the department gave its approval to a new mission statement<sup>2</sup>.

### Grounding Professional Development in Research

At that same time, just two months after the approval of the research findings, the ESL Department, in partnership with the AANAPISI leadership, proposed and was approved to plan and host the Fall and Spring Professional Days (PD) for 2017-2018. These half-day PD events are scheduled each semester and all full-time

2) [www.bhcc.edu/ell/missionstatement](http://www.bhcc.edu/ell/missionstatement)

To see the complete research findings go to [bhcc.edu/ell/ellprogramreform/bhcc](http://bhcc.edu/ell/ellprogramreform/bhcc)

faculty, staff and administrators are required to attend. Titled “Supporting English Language Learners at Every Step”, the Fall PD Day was focused on supporting ELL students across divisions and work areas, reflecting the above BHCC key research findings on institutional support. Our goal for this PD event was to provide our colleagues a better understanding of ELL students and engage them around the effective pedagogies and practices that support them. Basically, we wanted participants to walk that same road - for a short stretch of it - that the ESL faculty team had taken in carrying out this research and for them to immerse themselves in these research findings. Another goal was to raise awareness about the ESL program reform as well as garner more collaboration between the ESL Department and other departments.

In planning the event, we recruited faculty and staff from outside the ESL Dept who we knew supported this reform to help lead the event in order to solidify allyships for the program reform as well as showcase the importance of a campus-wide support system for ELL students. We were also very conscious in organizing the event around the same research model we were using for our program reform: Begin by engaging our colleagues with the research, and then let them walk the same path we had walked. To that end, we requested our colleagues read beforehand one of the seminal research works that had impacted our team the most, “Stuck in the remedial rut”<sup>3</sup> by Shawna Shapiro (2011), who is also a contributing writer to this edition (see Naggie, this issue). We also created a truth/myth handout with a list of statements drawn from our research findings, including both asset and deficit-based statements to engage our colleagues around this research. Below is a condensed version of that document.

### Myth or truth?

Is it a myth or a truth? Or is it more complicated than that? Discuss the following statements with the people at your table:

- Stricter prerequisites for entering content classes enable ELL students to receive needed English instruction instead of failing in those content classes.
- ESL materials should be simplified in order to best teach reading skills.
- Effective ESL learning activities prioritize use of small group project-based activities with students interacting primarily among themselves.
- Helping ELL students develop their English skills is

most effective when they are supported by all departments within the college.

- Professional development sessions, like this PD Day, are the most effective way to support collaboration between the ESL Department and content faculty and staff.

The PD event began with participants seated at tables, given this handout and asked to share their opinion on whether the statements were truths and myths. The purpose of this activity was not for our colleagues to correctly identify which were truths and myths – if that is even possible – but rather to begin reflecting on their own practices and attitudes around teaching their ELL students. After the truth/myth activity, we provided participants a handout with selected passages from “Stuck in the remedial rut” with an event leader placed at each table to facilitate a discussion of the article. This discussion was followed by a 15-minute review of the ESL Department research findings, with each participant asked to identify asset-based practices that they already utilize in their classes, asset-based practices they would like to try out and practices that they would need support in trying out. After this brief engagement with the research, the rest of the event was structured around 30-minute workshop presentations on a range of ELL focused topics.

By far the most engaging and contentious of the activities were the discussions of the article and the research findings. Based on both feedback surveys and report-backs by the facilitators, the tenor of these discussions had a lot to do with the makeup of the table. In the feedback surveys, some colleagues responded positively to discussing the research while others considered it a waste of time. Likewise, some facilitators reported fruitful discussions of the research while other facilitators reported discussions dominated by anecdotal stories meant to refute the research findings.

One of the research findings is “professional development is more effective when it supports continuous collaboration instead of the more common one and done 1-day model of PD.” For that reason, we planned a follow-up PD Day for the spring semester to engage faculty, staff and administrators in reflecting on their practices with ELLs and make connections between theory and their practice. The research findings therefore served as a foundation for challenging the dominant deficit-based perception of ELL students at the college and helping to find and cultivate allies with other departments. The PD Days also contributed to building a critical mass of faculty and staff at BHCC in support of our program reform as well as moving towards a culture change at the



college with professional development framed around scholarship and evidence rather than anecdotal stories.

After Spring PD Day in 2018, the ESL Department again became the locus of the program reform. Over the next two years, as Alan Shute recounts in more detail in the next section, we grappled with defining new program and course outcomes, creating a new streamlined and accelerated pathway out of the program and eventually bringing a new identity to our department by renaming ourselves the ELL Department. All of these changes were supported by the research findings, but more importantly the findings were used as leverage to make those changes happen. Reflecting the campus culture

### SECTION 3: TRANSFORMING THE CURRICULUM by Alan Shute

As an academic department in the Massachusetts community college system, we are only obligated to meet once a month each semester for 75 minutes, which does not lend itself well to implementing major curricular changes, never mind just taking care of routine business. Nevertheless, some years the department would volunteer to meet twice as often without compensation, but it wasn't until the AANAPISI grant provided the wherewithal to conduct research, fund PD with outside facilitators, and pilot courses, that significant curriculum reform could be achieved, not that there hadn't been some successful, some furtive attempts to incrementally change the program over the years.

When I started in the spring semester of 1991 as an ESL adjunct at BHCC, the ESL Program had a grammar-based curriculum: six credits of Listening/Reading and Speaking and six credits of Grammar/Composition at the intermediate and high intermediate levels of the academic program; and four 3-credit courses focusing separately on each of the four skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing at the advanced level. Half of the ESL faculty were former foreign language teachers who focused primarily on grammar, and half were TESOL graduates who were more varied and eclectic in their approaches to language teaching and learning, mostly focused on communicative competence, the focus of most TESOL programs at the time. There were certificate programs in Electronics and Allied Health that focused on content and career rather than grammar and academics. Years before, the ESL courses had focused on content; some even awarded academic credit, but somehow that was abandoned and no longer supported by the institution.

at the time, department meetings and decisions would often get derailed by anecdotal evidence or emotions. The research findings helped disrupt that tendency by providing a solid framework to return to when discussing important decisions and a common language for discussing what is best for the students. We continue to refer to the research findings when writing proposals or making presentations to our colleagues within and outside the college. Rooted in scholarship, these findings have helped change the culture of department meetings by anchoring our discussions and decision making in evidence and they continue to scaffold our ongoing work and collaboration in building on the ELL program reform.

At that time, there was little oversight of what ELL faculty were doing in their classes. Curricular guidelines were minimal and open to interpretation, and since the supervising deans had no expertise in TESOL, they could only observe how the classes were managed. This made for a rather spotty program and uneven experience for students, who sometimes wrote extensively in a lower level course and then just studied grammar in the next course, hardly writing at all. I remember one colleague asking me how students could write about a particular topic if they haven't yet mastered the grammar it requires. To which I replied, "How will they learn the grammar if they have no need for it?"

Gradually, the focus of the curriculum changed from grammar to academic skills. Although all four skills were practiced in each course, only one skill was assessed accordingly. Thus, speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills were only assessed in their respective classes, and writing was distributed across the curriculum. Over time, some reading and writing courses were combined into six-credit courses so that students could write about what they were reading. To encourage critical thinking, the writing exit test changed from writing a paragraph in response to a simple prompt to writing an essay in response to a provocative reading, as it had changed in the English department. Exit tests were gradually added for the reading courses, and then the listening courses, while speaking courses required classroom presentations.

Over the years, there was not much incentive or opportunity to change the curriculum except for grant initiatives such as a Title III grant in the mid-nineties

that enabled BHCC to pair advanced ESL courses with introductory college courses in Psychology, Sociology, Computers, and Business. After one 5-year program review, the Department tried a Fluency First model with students reading books rather than using textbooks. When Learning Communities were implemented college-wide through an earlier grant, there were additional pairings with History and Art courses at the advanced level and theme-based courses added to the ELL program, but it was piecemeal, nothing comprehensive. Faculty could find or develop a niche where they could pursue their chosen theme, but there were still exit tests to determine advancement through the three levels of the academic program.

By the time the AANAPISI grant was awarded, two factions had developed within the ESL Department. One faction was heavily invested in the existing curriculum, finding it difficult to imagine how all skills could be adequately taught and assessed otherwise. It was thought that most ELLs would benefit from more time in ESL before attempting college level courses where they might encounter the displeasure of English teachers and content faculty members who would complain about their grammar, pronunciation and/or readiness for college credit courses. The other faction questioned whether students needed so many courses or such a high skill level before attempting college-level courses and the effectiveness of our curriculum in preparing them for that. Thus, while one faction sought to accelerate students through the program by exemption from courses, the other faction viewed this as lowering the standards and an existential threat to the program itself. This led to mistrust and the questioning of each others' motives. One faction was holding students back while the other was not valuing our work. Inevitably, this factioning also led to inequities in student accelerations through the reading/writing levels of the program and in exemptions from listening and speaking courses. Students came to see the reading/writing courses as essential to their success and the listening/speaking courses as optional, while some faculty members were more willing to grant exemptions than others.

Meanwhile, ongoing changes at BHCC led to an institutional transformation. Gradually increasing contact between the ESL and English departments in evaluating exit tests led to norming sessions, which resulted in more ESL students moving into college level rather than developmental English. It became apparent that newly hired English faculty members focused more on fluency than accuracy. Newer faculty members college-wide expressed appreciation for students' expressed and implied ideas more so than

concern with the frequency and type of language error. Their eagerness and readiness to work with ESL students reflected a less deficit-based, more asset-based approach to ELLs. Yet only those few faculty members who participated in these norming sessions were aware of these changes. Most ESL and English faculty were still operating under the previously established norms, which viewed ELL student writing as having deficits that needed remediation. Nevertheless, the range of criteria for failing the English Department writing competency test evolved over the years from three errors of the same type to consideration of only those errors that interfered with meaning. Given the culture of academic freedom at BHCC, it took a long time for all developmental writing courses to change from developing a given topic sentence into a paragraph to composing an essay in response to a reading, which required critical thinking, and thus, different criteria to evaluate. Unfortunately, for some ESL students the developmental writing course was less challenging than their previous ESL courses, resulting in even more inequities for ESL students as they transitioned from ESL to English.

Who knows how long the status quo curriculum with incremental changes semester to semester would have persisted without the impetus provided by the AANAPISI grant? Carmen Magaña, BHCC Language Lab Coordinator, repeatedly informed the department how our students were going elsewhere because they could not see themselves plodding through our comprehensive program, and it was well-known that our numbers were decreasing because of demographic changes in the number of recent high school graduates, political changes in immigration and international student visas, and economic conditions making higher education less affordable. As a result of all the converging factors, ESL enrollment decreased significantly.

Before applying for an AANAPISI grant, Dean Lori Catalozzi attended an ESL department meeting, described the grant, the required work and outcomes, and asked the department for our approval. Everyone agreed, though some tentatively, as some questioned the need for it. Unexpectedly, the grant was accepted earlier than anticipated. When I first read the grant, I thought that it depicted our department in an overly negative light, but it was a small price to pay for all the funding and opportunity it provided to reform the program. Later, I didn't think that our program compared to the deficit-based university ESL program discussed in "Stuck in the remedial rut" mentioned by Jeff in Section 2, while Jeff thought that those same issues and tensions existed within our department

and program. Nevertheless, it started an exchange of ideas and perspectives, especially about deficit versus asset-based practices. Albeit defensively, I couldn't help thinking that the grant itself used a deficit-based approach to the faculty rather than an asset-based approach in that it described in detail the faculty's deficits, but failed to recognize our many assets. There was an initial disconnect in that we were told we needed to integrate skills in theme-based courses when most of us felt we already did that.

Few faculty members volunteered to get the grant started, with some wary of the ensuing changes and others excited for the opportunities the grant offered. I think some were hesitant to get involved because of skepticism that things would ever change, or that anything needed to change, and/or the perceived difficulty of ever reaching consensus. Personally, I thought it was our professional obligation as the faculty to implement the grant, though I seriously doubted its ability to transform the culture of BHCC whereby faculty members could continue teaching however they wanted, but I was thankfully proven wrong about that.

There were funds for faculty-driven research, college visits, pilot courses, integration of student mentors and professional staff as Success Coaches and reform of the intake and placement system over a five year period. Crucially, there were funds for outside consultants to be hired as needed but not in a prescribed way. Since such opportunities are rare, it was time to seize the day!

As the faculty conducted research and visited other community colleges, the consensus was that we didn't need professional consultants with language learning and teaching expertise to tell us what to do or how to do it; we needed a facilitator to break previously established patterns in our interactions and guide us through the process of sharing our ideas and expertise and reaching consensus on the curriculum reforms we wanted to undertake on behalf of our students. We were very fortunate to enlist Elise Martin, former Dean of Assessment and Professional Development at Middlesex Community College and now a consultant who has worked with various community colleges supporting institutional assessment work. Elise gently guided us in a way that emphasized our mutual desire to do what is best for our students despite often disagreeing on what would be best as we discussed potentially contentious issues, such as how to streamline the curriculum yet maintain academic standards; at what point and skill level students would have the capacity to succeed in college-level, credit-bearing

courses; what would happen to students who could not study in Learning Communities of six, nine, or even 12 credits, or conversely international students who were obligated to take 12 credits; and most of all, how faculty would do more pedagogically in less time when we were already overwhelmed and bogged down in a cycle of teaching and testing that didn't always measure up the way we wanted. For me, those test results were most often disappointing.

The process of doing research and sharing findings with colleagues liberated faculty members from the constraints of the existing program curricula and levels, opening up many possibilities. In one of the first sessions, Elise Martin asked us to proceed as if we were starting from scratch with a new program. The faculty was so engaged by the brainstorming process that what would have seemed sheer fantasy previously was actually thoughtfully considered. Discussion about transforming the three existing levels included a wide range of conflicting possibilities, such as clearly defined but overlapping steps that students would take according to their needs, or fully mixed level classes with multiple means of assessment resulting in multiple pathways to individual career paths, or small cohorts of ELLs in workshops designed to support their participation as one half of college-level courses, with the other half being native speakers of English, and so on. The focus changed from why we couldn't do this or that to what would be best for the students and how we could make that happen.

After the revision of the ELL Department mission statement, our next goal was to develop program outcomes. With this in mind, we started meeting on Fridays (when most faculty didn't have classes) for 2-3 hour sessions every few weeks over the course of the semester, with Elise as our facilitator and refreshments and compensation to ease the sacrifice. Calling them ELLFFs, we invited ELL-friendly faculty members from other departments who told us what they appreciated about ELL students, not what was wrong with them and still needed fixing. We got their input on what kinds of support ELL students needed to meet outcomes in their courses and what levels of performance were expected. This helped us revise and reduce the number of ELL program outcomes and establish multiple ways of assessing them, culminating in projects that encompassed all the skills rather than discrete testing of each skill. Maybe it was not necessary to assess the skills independently, and more holistic assessments would suffice. This model could be attempted and evaluated in pilot courses that would also include Success Coaches, ACE mentors, and content faculty, all of whom could be enlisted in the assessment of the final four learning outcomes:



Students who successfully complete ELL courses can:

1. Build upon prior knowledge and experiences, using critical reading and listening skills to generate and communicate new knowledge.
2. Develop and improve pieces of writing, considering their audience and purpose, using the writing process.
3. Develop, organize and present ideas fluently, orally and in writing, to inform and persuade audiences.
4. Make personal connections between the curriculum, their learning and their lives.

There were many discussions about how to assess these outcomes and what level of competence students should reach at each level, but it wasn't until a decision was made to forego the time-consuming, high-stakes, extensive exit testing associated with the existing curriculum and alternatively develop a series of assessments that were lower-stakes, more cumulative, and theme-based that the realization that these streamlined, but all encompassing, outcomes could liberate us from previously established pedagogy. I distinctly remember one of the pilot faculty exclaiming: "You mean we don't have to use the exit tests!" It was a mutually liberating moment. Instead of assessment affecting what was taught, content would affect assessment. As faculty implemented pilot courses, they found multiple ways to assess these outcomes over the course of the semester and in cumulative projects that showcased student learning in portfolios at the end of the semester.

Many iterations of course sequences and pairings of theme-based courses were considered, some just three credits, but eventually, a sequence of three 6-credit theme-based courses that could be paired with college level courses at each level was agreed upon (see Section 4 by Lindsay Naggie). Consistent with the BHCC key research finding on institutional support (see Section 2), students who needed or wanted more credits were concurrently enrolled in college level courses that did not require English prerequisites, such as math, art, and some introductory classes. This enabled students to test out their skills in college-level courses and ELL faculty to support them in earning college credits earlier, resulting in a more streamlined and supportive ELL program.

Following the BHCC key research finding on curriculum, we tried pairing content courses with ELL courses at all three levels, but students in Levels 1 and 2 primarily enrolled in the unpaired six credit courses. For students in Level 3, the ELL class paired with

College Writing I consistently filled up first. Students recognized that as a shortcut to their goal of finishing ELL and starting their career path unhindered by additional required courses.

We started with just a few pilot courses, one 6-credit theme-based course at each of the three levels, and some additional pairings with the Level 3 courses. Pilot faculty members were required to participate in a few PD sessions over the course of the semester in which they shared best practices and resolved issues as they emerged, culminating in a reflection at the end of the semester facilitated by Elise. During the reflection, the pilot faculty members expressed their appreciation for the freedom to experiment and engage students in more relevant and meaningful ways. These sessions helped bring faculty together and thus removed the need for Elise to facilitate. Actually, she was in high demand and moved on to the English Department to facilitate their development of program outcomes, but she still occasionally facilitates timely and potentially contentious ELL department negotiations such as the role of speaking in assessment.

As more and more courses were converted to the new six-credit theme-based model, the three-credit skill-based courses fell by the wayside as students naturally opted for the more streamlined sequence. Internal data from focus groups and student surveys tell us that students were more engaged and confident in their proficiencies especially due to the increased embedded support (see Lambert, Lim & Ismatu-Olivia, this issue) which also echoes the BHCC key research finding on student perceptions.

I was part of a Design Team that made decisions throughout this process and planned PD sessions (see Lindsay Naggie's discussion in Section 4). We decided that full-time and adjunct ELL faculty would propose pilot courses through the Learning Communities application process, which required a theme, plans for assessment and reflection, and incorporation of Success Coaches, ACE Mentors, and Language Lab staff support into the curriculum. Thus, proposals were vetted and amended if needed. The initial teaching semester includes PD sessions in which faculty share best practices, participate in norming sessions, and assist each other in developing and assessing portfolios, all in the spirit of the BHCC research findings. This process proved to be crucial in the program wide adoption of the curriculum reform, unlike previous attempts, which were merely piecemeal. As faculty piloted courses with themes and additional faculty subsequently proposed pilot courses through the Learning Communities application, it made a signifi-

cant difference in the curricular reforms actually being fully and equitably implemented.

As faculty members pilot these integrated courses, they find it liberating and transformative. We hear this at the end of each semester when the pilot faculty reflect on what went well and what needs improvement. Recently, I was reminded of my first semester piloting a course with the new outcomes which at the time included students' self reflection on learning, which inadvertently led to praising the teacher with excessive compliments that were not credible. This semester five years later, student self reflection happened

quite naturally, with some students sincerely relaying to their classmates how much Language Lab staff, the Success Coach, and the Ace Mentor had helped them and giving examples that made it all credible. They explained how much they had learned about the theme, how it had affected them, and how it related to their lives. Some even claimed they were ready and eager to learn remotely. Finally, most students had plans that were realistic and truly reflected their strengths and challenges. That is why we forge ahead, still focused on balancing what is best for the ELL program as a whole with individual students with their personal needs and goals.

## SECTION 4: COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP

by Lindsay Naggie

In this section, you will read about the steps taken to transform an essentially non-credit program into a program with transferable credit and the leadership and steps required for getting approval from the ELL Department, the General Education Standards Committee, the Curriculum Committee and finally the College Forum. To the outside world, the process of shepherding a program reform through the college governance process seems like steps that build off one another, but a successful reform proposal requires awareness, knowledge and advocacy from the whole college community in order to be considered and received. First, I'll begin with a detailed explanation of the curricular reform process and procedures so that those at similarly governance-structured institutions or those new to the process have a sense of the steps taken. Then, in the section Identifying Allies and Expertise, I will discuss how we were able to leverage our collaborative assets in order to gain acceptance and approval within the institution. For those of you reading who want to make a collective change, this contains our advice to you alongside student stories and the faculty perspective of working within a large institution.

### Internal Processes for Curricular Reform

At BHCC, curricular revision is faculty-driven and requires multiple approval steps through the internal governance of the college. It is (usually) initiated by a faculty member, with support of the Department Chair and Division, who submits a proposal for a new course or program. The proposal provides a rationale for addition or change, supported by internal and external data. If impacting a whole department or directly affecting other areas of the College, the

proposal is reviewed and agreed upon prior to submission to the College's Curriculum Committee. The Curriculum Committee, a college governance committee consisting of 21 members who are faculty, staff, administrators and two student representatives, meets twice a month to review, discuss, and vote on said proposals. The proposal author is invited to provide an overview of the proposal submitted and answer the committee's questions. The proposal is then voted upon, and if accepted, moves on to one of two stages. If the proposal is not accepted, the proposal is either revised and resubmitted or tabled. Proposal entry and the committee schedule lines up with the production of the College Catalog. The committee meets during the academic year and proposal acceptance occurs in advance of the four-month deadline for the College Catalog.

If the course is intended for inclusion on the General Education Requirement Menu, the proposal is also reviewed by a separate College Governance Committee the General Education Standards Committee-another committee comprised of faculty, staff, and administrators. The General Education Requirement Menu gives options for all degree-seeking students to take courses from seven areas that align with Institutional Outcomes and Mass Transfer. The Curriculum Committee and General Education Standards Committee work in tandem, but the proposal submission, discussion, and vote are separate from one another.

There are two final stages of the approval process: College Forum and Presidential Review. Once the proposal is approved by the Curriculum and General Education Standards Committees, it is brought to the all-college Forum which meets once a month

and is a contractual requirement for full-time faculty, administrators, and unit professional staff. By the time a proposal reaches this stage, it has been vetted by a representative sample of the College. Now, the proposal is distributed to all stakeholders. At the Forum, a representative for the proposal provides a brief rationale answers questions. If satisfactory, a motion is made from the floor and a vote is called. If the proposal is accepted by majority vote at the College Forum, it moves to the President, whose signature of proposal is the final step prior to implementation. The College President maintains veto power. Approval of proposals are more frequent than not as each stage of the vetting process allows ample opportunities for discussion and editing.

This seemingly straightforward multi-step approval process requires an investment of time and resources on the part of the faculty requestor. Good proposals require not only a solid, evidence-based rationale grounded in subject area expertise and environmental factors, but also an understanding of how the proposal will fit into the larger goals of the College environment and the institution's mission, vision, and outcomes.

While new programs are developed and created by full-time faculty in a short window of time (approximately one academic year), a program modification often requires a longer time frame. When the College has identified a need for a new program, the approval process is quick, but the build of the program (after approval) takes time. However, to modify an existing program takes longer on the front end. Changing a curriculum, course offerings, and internal processes requires time to introduce a new mindset, retrain faculty and staff, pilot models, collect data and adapt. Some time after I became Department Chairperson, I began to get the question, "When will the ESL Department be ready to present the new curriculum?" and I had to respond with, "not yet." I remember feeling particularly dispirited due to slow progress despite a grueling amount of work. It was then that Lori Catalozzi, the Dean of Humanities and Learning Communities quoted a known saying in the field of education: "Real curriculum reform in higher education is one of the most difficult things to accomplish because it necessitates culture change." At that time, I remember feeling not particularly comforted by this imparted wisdom, but can appreciate it now that I have had years to think about it and live through it.

For other institutions considering a significant change, there are a number of strategies that can be employed to be successful, but the one that ultimately worked

for the ELL Department during its reform process was a collaborative leadership model that included transformational leadership practices which built on an existing knowledge of institutional history, established a goal-driven framework, utilized existing partnerships and expertise, and created opportunities for agency and advocacy.

### Identifying Expertise and Allies

Collaborative leadership comes with the fundamental understanding that expertise can be found in many forms. When diffused across an institute, that expertise can be gathered for a greater purpose. Utilizing expertise provides opportunity to both challenge the present circumstances and create allyship.

Firstly, a discussion of ELL faculty expertise and their contribution to collaborative change is warranted. The small but active roster of full-time faculty in the ELL department is noteworthy. While contractual requirements state a minimum of college service performed through serving on a governance committee or in other college-wide initiatives, the ELL full-time faculty often exceed these obligations. At any given college community function, whether it be an institute, day of service, or ceremonial exercise, the majority of full-time faculty from the Department are participants or serve as facilitators. In many cases, ELL faculty are asked to present or co-facilitate. This likely is due to the fact that the ELL faculty are area experts in teaching and learning; most, if not all, have degrees in education and are committed to the ideology of lifelong learning. Most, if not all, welcome the opportunity to discuss pedagogy and practices, especially with other content area faculty around the College. In any given class, they are committed to reaching each student where they are at regardless of the student's prior educational history or aspirations. ELL faculty are willing to learn, understand, and serve the students they have. So, it is not surprising that the ELL faculty create their own cultural and intellectual contacts with other faculty and staff at the institution and utilize those contacts to broaden their own horizons as well as those of their students. These college-wide collaborative relationships have led to field study, guest speakers, co-teaching opportunities, continually updated culturally-relevant curriculum, and job opportunities for students.

By the time that the ELL Department agreed to submit the Program Modification Proposal to the College governance, we already had a healthy understanding of how the proposal would be perceived and what questions would be raised. This was due to our



long-standing service on college governance committees, participation in cultural events, and deep relationships with colleagues from other departments and divisions. We anticipated what questions would be raised and prepared at length to speak directly to any objections. In the weeks preceding our presentation at the College governance meetings, we prepared the community by reaching out to deans and department heads as well as professors and staff. Through these individual conversations, we were able to prepare and answer lingering questions on the impact of the reform.

That is the process-oriented picture of the reform, but in actuality it was messier, more complex, and also exciting. The preparation for what I had perceived would be the final challenge of presenting at the College Forum was actually the easiest (!) while the preceding years were much more difficult. A colleague often said that we were driving a car a hundred miles an hour while building the engine.

Humphreys (2013) in peer review of *Deploying Collaborative Leadership to Reinvent Higher Education for the Twenty-First Century* notes the following:

*Collaborative efforts in any setting cannot be successful if they are built on purely voluntary efforts by the early-adopters and the “true believers.” Educational leaders must enable “full-time” individuals to include collaboration as part of their “day jobs.” Even though it is powerful and necessary, collaboration is also messy and time consuming. We must find ways to stop doing other things that may no longer be necessary in order to “support, nurture, and feed the collaboration (paras 14).*

In order to tell you about how we utilized expertise and allies in and out of the department, I want to speak honestly about the ‘messiness’ and ‘time consuming’ parts of collaboration. That involves telling you a little more about the years preceding the reform that you have previously read through Alan Shute, Jeff Ellenbird, and Maria Puente’s perspectives. I also affirm that in addition to taking time, the messiness is equal parts practical and emotional. Faculty commitment to change means having the intellectual and emotional energy to sustain the work while continuing to teach and keep our students as a priority. It’s a lot to ask.

The fact is, being awarded the grant took us all by surprise in 2016. The two faculty who showed up to the unveiling became two of the design team leaders and stayed true to hope until the end -- they are my colleagues Jeff Ellenbird and Alan Shute, whom I

will forever be grateful to for the collaboration and support. There were two non-ELL faculty appointed as Project Director and Activities Coordinator who, bless them, sought equity for AAPIs and had enough diverse past experiences at the College to know what they were getting into (and still voluntarily said ‘yes’). The remainder of the Department, by all accounts, were wary of how much needed to be done and how it would be done. We continued to teach and went about our duties slightly mystified at the news. Some were recruited to join working teams within the grant and those teams shifted like sand in the first two years. Some recruits claimed institution initiative fatigue. Others just didn’t know how we could possibly transform ourselves from a pedagogically split and siloed department. So, in the beginning, the grant was a curse on our tongues instead of manna from heaven. We couldn’t imagine what money could do to fix what we hadn’t ourselves yet figured out how to fix. For me, these factors were the primary motivations to go outside of our Department and the institution--while we were a group of truly dedicated educators who all believed that we were doing our best to put our students first, we would need outside help to bridge the divide.

Having spent the previous three years developing the acceleration process to extend from within ELL to the English Department, I was one of those who dragged their feet when the news of the grant was announced. Although I was strongly in favor of the grant’s goals, I could not see myself in a leadership position as the acceleration project left me feeling like I was barely keeping my head above water (and I am a strong swimmer). When I was approached to take a leadership role within the grant, I initially declined because I did not see a structure in place to support the leaders to succeed at making drastic changes. I was worn out by the conflict over pedagogy in the department and burned out by a contested acceleration process and the demands of serving on multiple college initiatives. But those who approached me are very intelligent in their ways and kept including me in conversations about the grant. I could no longer resist being part of what I knew was best...to be the change. So after a semester sabbatical, I applied and was elected to be the Department Chairperson, and when I accepted that, I said that I would serve until we had seen through the changes outlined in the grant.

When I returned at the end of Spring 2018, I learned that eight sections of the integrated pilot courses had been successful, but there were confusion and communication issues over what was to happen or be done next. I could sense that three things needed

to happen very quickly so that the traction that had been gained wasn't lost. We needed to accept that we (the ESL Department) were in charge of the grant and the grant was not in charge of us. There needed to be detailed plans and steps to bring each year's goals into fruition. Lastly, we needed as much help we could get from colleagues outside our department and even outside of the institution in order to make it happen. I could see that the two previous years were already starting to feel like a burden on the "true believers" and we had a long and difficult road still ahead of us. While our administrators stood firm in the sentiment that the reform needed to be faculty-led (and, absolutely they were right), I finally understood that that didn't mean we were on our own. We just needed to ask specifically for the support we did need. That support most often came in the form of faculty and staff from across the institution.

While you have previously read about the work the ELL faculty did in partnership with others around the institution on redeveloping the curriculum, this next section will focus on how the members of the Department strengthened existing relationships within the College with the English Department, The Language Lab, and the Learning Communities Program to support the reform. These three collaborative relationships helped propel our acceptance among the greater college community, but they are not the only ones. We also extend our gratitude towards the ELL Success Coaches (advisors) and the ACE Mentor (student peer mentor) Program whose efforts not only changed how students received support but changed how the College perceived ELL students. I encourage you to read a more focused piece on that work by Lambert, Lim, and Istambul-Olivira in this issue.

### The English Department

I will begin this section about our partnership with the English Department with a glimpse at the process of accelerating students from ELL. The Acceleration Program (formerly known as ESL exemptions) ramped up in Fall 2009 when my predecessor, a visionary educator, got a group of us to co-teach a course called ESL First Year Seminar. We co-taught 109 students in an auditorium and many of those who enrolled were Generation 1.5. The story of this course is a whole different story and not solely mine to tell, but it helped us collect a lot of data on the new ELLs we were seeing and pave the way for students to begin to see their instructors as advocates to get them out of single skill stand-alone courses in the existing 36-credit program. That course was truly eye-opening, and I can still picture those students' faces staring out

from the tiered seats. One of those faces belonged to Ildo.\* Ildo was not the "all-star student" like his friend who sat next to him posed ready to answer every question, but he wasn't the traditional "I'm going to take things slow and learn perfectly" student like many traditional immigrants, either. Ildo needed a little more focus on some areas, less on others, and the extrinsic motivation of learning content. It was hard for him to stay afloat in four classes with four different instructors. Although Ildo got exempted from a number of ESL courses, he ultimately wasn't a good candidate "on paper" to get into College Writing I from Level 1 ESL via the Department exit tests. But I also knew that his development was far beyond the course work in English 095 and that two additional levels of a 3-credit writing course in ESL might not make a significant impact on what he could produce (especially if it were during the confines of a timed assessment).

Early in my career at BHCC, I was mostly assigned to teach the lower-level ESL writing courses. One semester, I had the opportunity to teach a section of College Composition I which brought me into contact with the English Department faculty. I later requested the upper-level ESL writing courses so I could pilot an acceleration project. I knew what the learning outcomes were for college composition and I knew what our ELLs were capable of—even in Level 1. I knew some faculty in the English Department willing to start some small fires with me. After all, the default path to take yet another developmental writing course after 36 credits seemed egregious.

Since I was an added position at a time the College enrollment soared, my office was a half cubicle on an open tier with other newer faculty and staff rotating in and out. It was away from the other ESL faculty offices and that was one of the best things to happen to me as an introvert—not because of the quiet, but because over the years I met faculty from many other departments and I got to talk to and listen to them about their teaching. If they were staff, I learned how things worked (really worked) at the College. I found ways to ask questions about their perspectives on ELLs, and I also had opportunities to advocate for change. Since I also had a long walk from my office through many buildings to where I taught my classes, I had many opportunities to walk with faculty from different disciplines, bump into others in the hall, and drop in on the student support services offices. The discussions in these in-between class meeting times built a map of faculty and staff across the institution who were like-minded practitioners. Those conversations as well as an intentionally-designed Learning Community

sponsored faculty professional development series in 2011 created a collage of allies and advocates across the institution. Many of those faculty members were change-makers in our reform and others became vocal supporters of the work.

While I was working late one night on this open tier in Fall 2011, a former ESL student dropped by to say hello. Wilmer\* was from the Dominican Republic and he had a degree from a technical college back home which did not transfer to the U.S. system. He had done well in my low-intermediate classes. He was cheerful and willing to pair up with anyone in class. Although he worked long hours, he was driven by the promise of economic uplift. But when he came to see me that night, something had shifted in him. He looked tired and world-weary. He had taken a number of ESL courses and was exempted from others, but now, after three semesters of ESL, was enrolled in the developmental English course that focused solely on paragraph and sentence-level writing. He could only manage to take 3-6 credits each semester while working full-time to support his family, and this course was preventing him from starting on his degree work. In this developmental English course, he encountered course outcomes that represented skills that he had mastered years before. He told me it was like taking a big step backwards. He asked me why. Why was he required to take this English class? And in that ‘why’ there was anger, sadness, and disbelief. I knew that I could not bear to try to explain it away, so I told him the only thing that I thought was truthful: that I did not know and that it was not my department. He looked at me long and hard. He was not the only one who left that conversation feeling worse than when it began.

So that was it. I felt fed up. I felt like I was always going to have to answer to the English Department and like we were not equals. I felt extremely discouraged. I felt as if students saw my classes (essentially me) as if I were another broken cog in a wheel. I added up all the students I had taught by then (hundreds) and tried to count how many were still there (not many) or had made it to graduation (fewer still). Okay, maybe that wasn't it...there were many fits and starts-- pilot projects that didn't gain traction and a discernable pedagogical divide in the English Department that resembled the same divide in the ESL program. But that's the point I remember feeling like I wasn't going to wait around for a blessing and that I couldn't continue to observe and be complicit in what happened to the Ildos and Wilmers in my courses. I took advantage of any opportunity to get to know and work with English faculty, got myself invited to some English

-faculty-only PDs, and piloted some experiments with another like-minded colleague in the English Department. When new English faculty members were hired, I made it a point to introduce myself to them and find out about their interests. Eventually, with the support of department chairpersons and the division dean, we built up an acceleration system which now has the support of an acceleration coordinator, multiple faculty scoring teams from both departments, and most importantly an understanding that acceleration is a process of evaluating student work using a common framework that promotes equity. One result of this project is that it removed that developmental English course from our students' paths.

Although acceleration and alignment between two departments are different entities, the Acceleration Program was a catalyst in the reform. It allowed a couple of key things to happen. We made space for really important and difficult conversations with faculty from both departments which we later turned into a professional development series. We also identified more allies and invited them into our reform, while tracking the accelerations over a period of years provided us with some outstanding and robust data which helped sell the reform. ELLs who were accelerated into College Writing I have the highest success rate of any of their peers. The general population at BHCC completes College Composition 1 at a 70-74% success rate, whereas all ELLs have a completion rate 80-84% and accelerated ELLs succeed at the highest completion rate—in the 90's. The data in Figure 4 speaks for itself.



Figure 4

ENG-111 Success Rates							
Students who took ESL vs. Those who did not take ESL Prior to ENG-111							
	Fall 2013	Fall 2014	Fall 2015	Fall 2016	Fall 2017***	Fall 2018***	Fall 2019
Overall ENG-111 Success Rates	73%	72%	72%	74%	74%	70%	69%
Took ESL Prior to ENG-111 (n ~200)	75%	76%	74%	84%	81%	80%	86%
Did not take ESL Prior to ENG-111 (n~1300)	72%	71%	71%	72%	73%	69%	67%
ESL Students who were accelerated*				86% (n=123)	86% (n=244)	84% (n=169)	**
	Spring 2014	Spring 2015	Spring 2016	Spring 2017	Spring 2018	Spring 2019	
Overall ENG-111 Success Rates	69%	66%	71%	71%	69%	67%	
Took ESL Prior to ENG-111 (n~200-300)	77%	77%	81%	84%	83%	85%	
Did not take ESL Prior to ENG-111 (n~900-1000)	68%	64%	69%	68%	65%	63%	
ESL Students who were accelerated*				86% (n=116)	85% (n=254)	93% (n=59)	

\*Success rate is for students who were accelerated through ESL in the given semester who have enrolled in and successfully completed ENG-111.  
 \*\*No students have yet successfully completed ENG-111 who were accelerated in Fall 2019.  
 \*\*\*Fall Accelerated students include students accelerated during the prior summer semesters.  
 Prepared by the Office of Institutional Effectiveness // AC // 02.18.2020

Figure 4. ENG-111 Success Rates for Students Who Took ESL vs. Those Who Did Not Take ESL Prior to ENG-111. Source: BHCC Office of Institutional Research and Assessment.

## Language Lab

When I am grappling with a difficulty that I just can't totally parse out—whether it be something that happened in my classroom, with a student, or at the institution, I take a walk from the solitary confines of my office to the Language Lab. Whomever I encounter there, whether it be a former student or a multilingual staff member, I know I will always be welcomed and I will walk away with a new perspective. Under the Division of Academic Support and College Pathway Programs, the Language Lab is one of three student-focused tutoring centers for BHCC students and is the service most frequented by ELLs. Data collected by the Language Lab in 2019-2020 recorded nearly 7,000 student visits. “The Bunker Hill Community College Language Lab provides students a high-tech learning environment and a knowledgeable tutoring staff to guide them with any aspect of language learning: from speaking, listening, and pronunciation to reading, writing, grammar, and punctuation. The Lab’s objective is to help students enrolled in language courses improve their language skills.” The Language Lab Coordinator and staff members were significant co-collaborators in the ELL Reform process.

The Language Lab is more than a physical space; it is a community of staff, student workers, student users and faculty who embody the institution’s goal of identifying and addressing disparities in academic achievement among student groups and implementing learner-centered curricular and co-curricular practices. An initial visit to the Lab may seem chaotic to the uninitiated, but it is actually

an elegant dance serving many persons and multiple needs at the same time. You may see a whole language class of 22 students engaged in a workshop while multiple private tutoring sessions are happening in pockets around the room, students making appointments, students working independently, the director consulting with students and faculty on needs, and the lab staff flowing between all these entities.

To me, the Lab feels like home. It’s the first place I felt truly welcomed as an adjunct faculty member in a large, often disorienting institution and I know it is the same for many of our learners. It is more than a place to work and be supported, the Lab and its staff also tend to the emotional well-being of students, faculty, and staff. All who work there embrace the pedagogy of wholeness.

Estherline\* was my student twice in the stand-alone skills program. In 12 non-cumulative semesters at BHCC, she accumulated the equivalent of 15 credits of Basic English as a Second Language (BESL) in the Division of Community Education and Workforce Development and 30 credits of Academic ESL, and then withdrew during the first semester in which she would have made actual progress in her major. Estherline had lots of systems figured out—she had two young children that she was raising mostly on her own. She worked and made her classes as much of a priority as she was able. Having lived for many years as a working adult in the U.S., she was orally fluent and needed more support with literacy. In my visits to the Language Lab, years after she was my student, I would often see her there and we’d get to chat. I would see her finishing up

her assignments after class because it was the narrow window of time she had to complete them and could call upon the staff for support. For students like Estherline, much more happens in that room than academic support.

For these reasons and more, the Lab staff and the Lab itself have been able to contribute meaningfully to all stages of the reform. Because of the diverse encounters they have with students and faculty members, they were able to help the ELL faculty see a whole spectrum of the student experience...from the most vulnerable students who take refuge there while working on class assignments to the students who return for support and community long after their language classes are over. Probably the single most significant issue the Lab staff continued to bring to the Department's attention was the impact of the number of remedial credits on students' financial aid packages. Although I do not know the precipitating details that prompted Estherline to drop out of BHCC, one can surmise that her pace towards completing language requirements and the credit impact on her financial aid package were likely factors.

Even as amazing and as student-centered as the Language Lab was, the structure of the previous ESL program which primarily offered the Lab as additional support only impacted the retention of a portion of the whole population. It's not that students like Estherline don't want to persist; it's that they can't. It's difficult to move out of a deficit-based structure even with targeted support. While the Language Lab continues to offer beneficial programming (tutoring, conversation groups, workshops) to meet the diverse needs of BHCC students, its services also evolved due to partnership in the reform. As the integrated pilot classes began to strategically embed language support during class time, the Lab shifted to align its outcomes with the new course outcomes.

The staff at the Language Lab also keenly recognized the need to support faculty from different departments around the College. While ELL was familiar with how to deflect the attitude from the English Department about ESL students needing to be "fixed" before they entered content courses, the Language Lab staff regularly heard or saw other departments dropping students off at their door expecting that the student would emerge from the space polished and fluent. The coordinator of the Language Lab, Carmen Magaña, presented the concept of ELL *Across the Curriculum* which is now an ELL faculty-led professional development series for a cohort of content area faculty who are primed to apply the concepts of Universal

Design and learn about how to adapt existing curriculum to reflect the research and best practices of working with ELLs.

## Learning Communities

ESL Learning Communities predate the existence of the BHCC Office of Learning Communities. They go back decades, and prior to the reform, notably, the ESL Department had a Learning Community model with an Electronics Certificate in 1984. During the past few decades, the Department predominantly offered only ESL Learning Community Clusters at the highest level of ESL coursework. Two faculty, one ELL and one content area faculty, codesign and collaboratively teach 6-9 credits following these grounding principles: Each learning community is grounded in a set of core academic and student development outcomes that include reflection and self-assessment, critical thinking, integrated communication, intercultural knowledge and competence, and teamwork. Prior to the reform, data on the Clusters' effectiveness superseded the stand-alone course data which is one of the reasons, in addition to outside research, the Department was willing to pilot more six-credit courses within ELL with thematic content and expand the interdisciplinary Cluster model.

Data collected by the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment from Fall 2015 to Spring 2018, summarized three major findings on Learning Community clusters. BHCC offers Learning Community Clusters for Accelerated Math and English, ELL, Developmental Reading and Writing, and Interdisciplinary Clusters. Below is a summary prepared by Institutional Effectiveness on Cluster data (which includes ESL Clusters):

- Overall, students who enroll in any Learning Community Cluster their first semester at BHCC are more likely to persist from the Fall to Spring semester than students who take these courses in their first semester as a stand-alone option.
- Students enrolled in a Cluster their first semester are also more likely to be retained than their peers who enroll in these courses as a stand-alone option in their first semester.
- Persistence rates for part-time students are consistently higher (by seven to nine percentage points) for those enrolled in a Cluster than those who are enrolled in stand-alone courses.

The effective data speaks to the intentional design of Learning Communities. The former Director of

Learning Communities, Jenne Powers, often began our professional development meetings by reminding us that “a Learning Community is more than the structure of pairing two courses together. It is the intentional use of Learning Communities pedagogy to center student voices, integrate academic and career planning resources, and build a culturally responsive community.”

The data, which represents good design and great pedagogy, is just one of the reasons why I approached the Office of Learning Communities to create a more formalized relationship with the ELL program and replace the previous model of instructor-initiated design and proposal. The Office of Learning Communities already had an existing model of professional development that I thought would be beneficial to tap into. It also has a faculty-led Think Tank. The Think Tank is composed of faculty around the institution with long experience with Learning Communities. Think Tank members review new Learning Communities proposals and provide support to faculty who propose. They also serve as facilitators during professional development opportunities. Even with the research and work happening within the ELL Department to write outcomes and design curriculum, bringing to scale the content based model would be a challenge especially considering that 75% of the ELL instructors were adjunct faculty who worked a number of jobs. The time that adjunct faculty members could devote to developing new courses was different from the full-time faculty members who are charged with curriculum development as part of their duties. In addition, the pedagogical divide discussed earlier was also a challenge among adjuncts. The experiences of Learning Community faculty members outside of the ELL Department allowed more perspectives in the room, which helped move the discussion beyond the divided camps. The Think Tank review and support of any new integrated course proposal also added more room for equity and equality in terms of which courses were accepted. The peer-review process by the Think Tank reduced the question of unfair influence by the Department Chair and Design Team, who as PD contributors and leaders of the reform were openly vested in the move to the integrated skills model. Through our partnership with the Office of Learning Communities, the ELL Department and the ELL Design Team/AANAPISI Leadership were able to consistently offer professional development opportunities throughout the five years of reform.

I have one more student story to tell and that is from my own previously inconsistent relationship with Learning Communities prior to the reform. This, I

hope, will illustrate why not just one change needed to happen, but a million of decisions led to the whole scale reform. One of the ELL Learning Communities I have taught is a visual arts themed course. A multilingual Professor of VMA and myself have taught many iterations for our Cluster targeted for arts-interested students, most of whom have been first generation college students, generation 1.5 language learners, and identify as Asian or Asian American. One of these students who enrolled in our LCC prior to the reform was Jinhai\*. In this third semester at BHCC, one year after he graduated from a local high school where he took many courses in studio arts, he was in our Cluster and he straight out told me that he pretty much hated school, hated reading, and just wanted to get out of BHCC as fast as he could and transfer into an arts college. I didn't see this as an affront. I understood what he was getting at, so I said, “Okay, tell me what I can do to keep you motivated and get you through.” He had already spent two full-time semesters in ESL and was impatient to begin courses for his major. He knew he made a lot of mistakes and outright said that studying grammar was not for him. Despite his protestations, all I could see were positives. He had intercultural communication skills, cultural capital, intrapersonal skills, and design skills that far exceeded many of his peers.

Jinhai had many talents and that the system of language and language education had not leveraged his assets enough up to this point (although he had some great teachers which he enjoyed interacting with). The Learning Community Cluster allowed him to earn credit in his major and connected him with other visual media arts students and faculty. This was the motivation he needed to persist. Successfully completion of our LCC VMA cluster allowed him to take another VMA course his next semester while facing the “dreaded” (his words) gatekeeping English course. I felt pretty awful when his recommendation to accelerate him directly to College Composition (based on a single in-class writing sample) was denied, but he told me (!) not to worry and he'd be fine to survive another English language dominant semester. He was fine and he did survive, but I worried because of all the other students like him who have never made it through that final gate. If Jinhai were to apply to BHCC today, more than likely his high school GPA would place him out of ELL. However, that is not always the case for all Generation 1.5 students, so we need to have more options and support for students like Jinhai other than a Learning Community Cluster offered at the highest level of ELL. Students like Jinhai also have the option to demonstrate readiness for College Writing through multiple measures of assessment in lieu of a single timed writing sample.

## ELL Department faculty leadership/structure

So how did we pull it off? I don't know exactly. There are too many conversations and details to remember precisely. During years 3, four, and five of the reform, we established subteams and defined leadership roles so that there would be less confusion as to the who and how. Jeff Ellenbird and Alan Shute led the integrated pilot faculty meetings, Alan Shute led the work on the in-take processes reform and later facilitated the adjunct faculty meetings for those who taught the evening and weekend sections. The three of us, along with the AANAPISI Activities Coordinator, Professor Aurora Bautista, made up the ELL Design Team. Aurora Bautista has worked at the institution for 17 years and has served on every committee and nearly every initiative. "No" is not in her vocabulary, so her expertise and can-do spirit were invaluable to us. We, the Design Team, met twice a month to organize our work, plan agendas, and pull resources. We often consulted with the Project Director, the Dean of our Academic Division, and the Director of Learning Communities, especially when we needed to troubleshoot anticipated issues.

We worked from a backward design model. Since each year of reporting for the grant began and ended in October, we met each June to plan out all the professional development, collaborative decision-making meetings, and resources we would need for the upcoming academic year to make progress on the stated yearly grant goals. We also were sensitive to balance for our collaborators, so we consulted with the institution's calendar to determine meeting days and times that would be most productive for our team members. For us, that often meant Friday afternoon meetings when faculty and staff could breathe and relax into the work. That also meant whole Saturday professional development and evening meetings. That work was always compensated. When we were in-person, food helped us with community building.

As Department Chair, I had to be strategic. Although we were fiscally healthy, the resource I knew we had to be discerning about was human capital. When I came into the role, it seemed that we were at a perceptible standstill and unsure of next steps. I talked to everyone who had been involved in the work during the semester I was on sabbatical. While listening, I noted strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities. This allowed me to develop a strategy to tackle outcomes listed in the grant and break those larger yearly goals down into achievable outcomes for each year, semester, and month. Those goals required defining leadership tasks which I could delegate to my co-leaders,

Jeff and Alan, as well as other colleagues who offered support. It was never easy, but I never felt I was alone. I was able to call on established allies at the institution to address the tasks which needed input from outside the Department. Institutional Effectiveness continued to supply us with independently collected data on the inventions that kept getting better and there was a sense of camaraderie and investment among those involved. My role at the integrated faculty and department meetings, aside from being a contributing faculty member, was to help keep us all focused on the goals we had set out for that month and semester so that we would reach our year-end goal. Just as Jeff or others would often refer back to the anchoring research, my voice drew us back to the big picture when we got too far into the weeds.

Shawna Shapiro (2011) writes in *Stuck in the Remedial Rut* that students in the remedial ESL program that she studied commented favorably on their individual ESL instructors but were dissatisfied with the program and coursework (p. 31). The disconnect between an instructor's positive interaction with a student and the student's progress and lack of autonomy is a significant issue that is often misunderstood and overlooked in the hierarchical structure of an institution. For Wilmer, Ildo, Estherline, and Jintao, I know that this was their experience. I know that it is too late to change their experience as language learners, but I also believe that they are out there continuing to learn, be, grow, and flourish in the world. The reality is that they will likely never return to the institution that made them feel less than. I also know that their stories are representative of many. Too many. For that, I am deeply sorry. I am sorry that I could not find a way for them at the time they needed it.

The student stories viewed together hint at some of the complexities in language learning and first generation community college students, but their language learning was really not the barrier. The barriers were broad, deep, and interwoven structures at an institution which told students to 'imagine the possibilities'. For this group and too many more, dreaming was all they could do. Breaking down these barriers required not one single strategy, but a wholesale reform of everything we knew, had practiced, and had said and done. This required the work of many and the unfailing dedication of those who believe that together we can accomplish a better tomorrow.





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