

UW Seattle English Language Proficiency Requirement: Autumn 2009 Cohort

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INTRODUCTION

Beginning Autumn quarter 2009, the University of Washington (Seattle) instituted new English Language Proficiency Requirement (ELPR) procedures for incoming undergraduates. The new (interim) policy requires that all entering undergraduate students (both freshmen and transfers) demonstrate English language proficiency prior to enrollment in classes. This policy was implemented following a pilot study conducted in Summer 2008 (See [OEA Report 08-03](#)). This report summarizes the Autumn 2009 entering cohort's ELPR status up through the point of taking the DELNA screening.

Figure 1 depicts the process by which students could satisfy the requirement. As shown, entering students who had not presented minimum standardized test scores, satisfactorily completed the UW Intensive English Program, or obtained an associate's degree from a Washington state community college were required to take a screening test called the Diagnostic English Language Needs Assessment (DELNA).

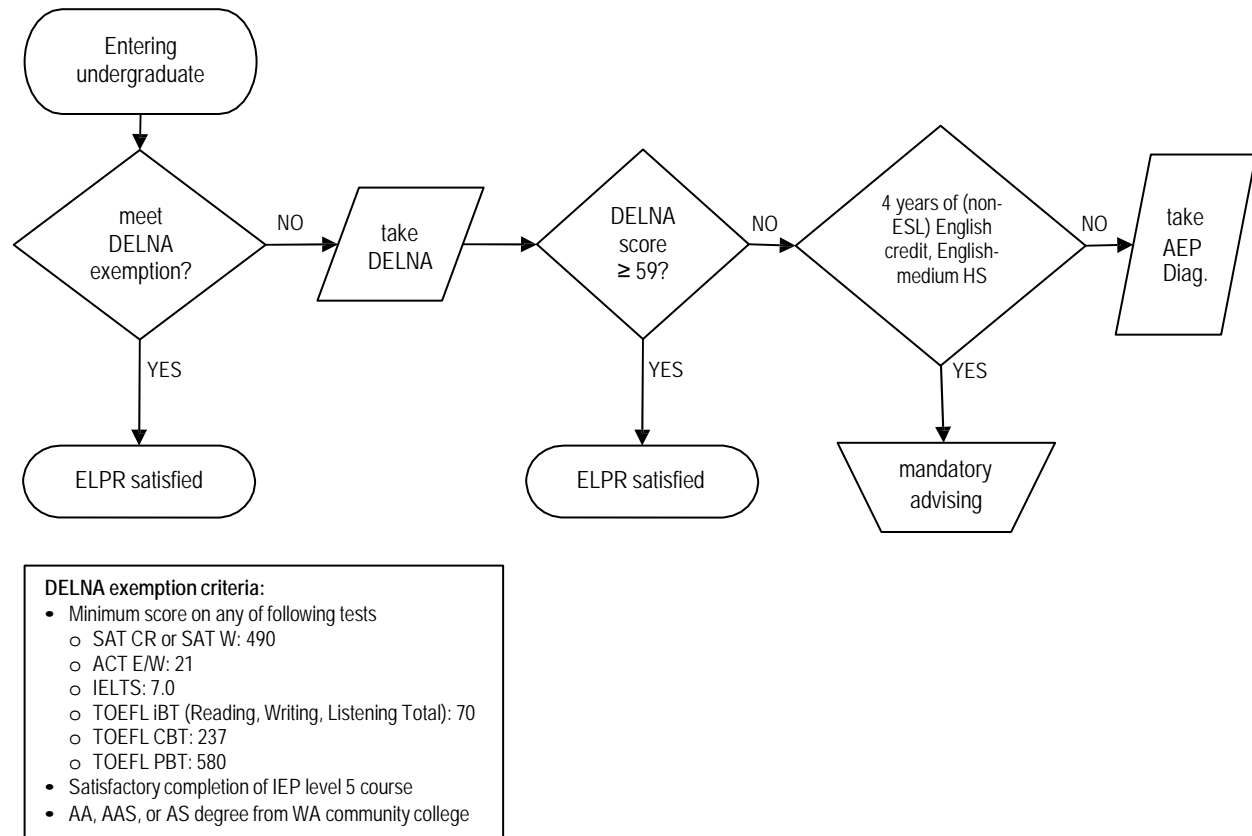


Figure 1. English Language Proficiency Requirement (ELPR) flowchart

RESULTS

Entering Cohort

For the purposes of this report, the entering cohort was defined as all undergraduate students at the Seattle campus who registered for the first time in Autumn 2009, and who were enrolled in classes as of the tenth day of the quarter. This yielded 6,769 students. However, after excluding 169 Undergraduate Exchange students (Special Program Code 61), the final population consisted of 5,338 freshmen and 1,431 transfer students.

Initial ELPR status

The vast majority (92%) of freshmen satisfied the ELPR upon entry by submitting qualifying test scores. Approximately half (52%) of transfer students entered with a qualifying associate's degree. Of the transfer students who did not enter with a qualifying degree, 47% satisfied the ELPR by submitting qualifying test scores.

Table 1 shows the number of AU 2009 undergraduate entrants who either 1) did not present standardized test scores, or 2) presented scores below the mandated minimum. As shown, 764 (11%) of the 6,769 incoming students were flagged as required to take the DELNA Screening (402 freshmen and 362 transfer students without an associate's degree).

Table 1. Test score qualification status by student group.

Student Group	AU09 Cohort		No Test Scores		Below Minimum		Above Minimum	
	N	Col. %	N	Row %	N	Row %	N	Row %
Total	6769	100.0	779	11.5	535	7.9	5455	80.6
Gender								
F	3615	53.4	366	10.1	292	8.1	2957	81.8
M	3154	46.6	413	13.1	243	7.7	2498	79.2
URM status								
non-URM	5073	74.9	578	11.4	278	5.5	4217	83.1
URM	763	11.3	124	16.3	125	16.4	514	67.4
other/unknown	933	13.8	77	8.3	132	14.1	724	77.6
U.S. citizenship status								
citizen	5664	83.7	677	12.0	334	5.9	4653	82.2
non-citizen	1105	16.3	102	9.2	201	18.2	802	72.6
Freshman*	5338		2	0.0	404	7.6	4932	92.4
citizen	4525	84.8	2	0.0	264	5.8	4259	94.1
non-citizen	813	15.2	0	0.0	140	17.2	673	82.8
Transfer (no degree)	685		308	45.0	54	7.9	323	47.2
citizen	544	79.4	257	47.2	36	6.6	251	46.1
non-citizen	141	20.6	51	36.2	18	12.8	72	51.1
Transfer (AA/S degree)	746		469	62.9	77	10.3	200	26.8
citizen	595	79.8	418	70.3	34	5.7	143	24.0
non-citizen	151	20.2	51	33.8	43	28.5	57	37.7

Note. Four freshman entrants with "below minimum" test scores presented an Associate's degree from a Washington State Community or Technical college.

DELNA Screening Performance

The DELNA Screening is a short online assessment developed at the University of Auckland for use with student populations similar to that of UW. Part A (7 minutes) consists of 27 multiple-choice vocabulary items requiring students to identify the best synonym for specified words. In Part B (10 minutes), students are asked to speed read 73 lines of text and to identify an extraneous word on each line. Students needed to achieve a total score of 59 or greater to satisfy the ELPR.

Most students completed the DELNA Screening in Mary Gates Hall computer labs during summer Advising & Orientation. Testing sessions were scheduled at 30-minute intervals. Other students completed the screening by appointment at the OEA Testing Center in Schmitz Hall.

To date, not all students who were identified as required to take the DELNA Screening have done so (Table 2). Specifically, 35 (8.7%) of the freshmen and 113 (48%) of the transfer students have not been tested as of this writing. This report summarizes the performance of the 616 (367 freshmen and 249 transfer) students who had tested as of January 8, 2010.

Table 2. Number of DELNA examinees by student group – June 21, 2009 - January 8, 2010

DELNA required?	Took DELNA?	Freshman	Transfer (no degree)	Transfer (AA/S degree)		Total
				Projected	Awarded	
No	No	4907	211	111	730	5959
	Yes	29	1	0	16	46
	Total	4936	212	111	746	6005
Yes	No	35	71	42		148
	Yes	367	180	69		616
	Total	402	251	111		764

English language background of test-takers. At the start of the testing session, examinees answered a series of questions about their language background. These items asked students to indicate whether they spoke English at home while growing up (i.e., as a native language) and whether it was their "best" language for casual conversation, reading, and writing. They were also asked to indicate whether any other languages were (also) "best for" those same tasks.

A majority (58.5%) of the 616 test-takers indicated that they grew up speaking English, and the proportion of native English speakers was much greater among transfer students than freshmen (77% vs. 45%). Sizable percentages of non-native English speakers reported being equally comfortable with English for conversation, reading, and writing (31.2%, 32.3%, and 35.7%, respectively).

Table 3. Responses to lead-in language questions by student group and English language-native status (percentages of Yes responses)

	English growing up				Total	
	No		Yes			
	Freshman	Transfer	Freshman	Transfer	Freshman	Transfer
English best for conversation	30.8	32.3	99.4	98.5	61.9	81.9
English best for reading	31.8	33.8	100.0	98.5	62.7	82.3
English best for writing	34.8	38.5	100.0	97.4	64.3	82.7

The Office of Admissions provided information about examinees' enrollment in English as a Second Language (ESL) courses during high school. Among the 526 examinees for whom that information was available, 32% of the freshmen and 17% of the transfer students had taken ESL in high school. The vast

majority (95%) of those with records of high school ESL reported in the DELNA Screening that they had not grown up speaking English (Table 4). However, only 58% of those who did not endorse English as a native language had taken ESL in high school.

Table 4. English language-native status by High School ESL (percentages)

ESL in high school	English growing up		English growing up	ESL in high school	
	No	Yes		No	Yes
No	41.6	97.6	No	25.0	95.1
Yes	58.4	2.4	Yes	75.0	4.9

Overall performance. The average total score on the DELNA Screening was 62.4, and 51% (314) of the test-takers passed. Students performed significantly better on the Vocabulary subtest ($Mn = 87.8$) than on the Speed-Reading subtest ($Mn = 53.1$), $F(1,550) = 1714$, $p = 1.7E-180$ (see Table 5).

Performance by student groups. Transfer students out-performed freshmen on both subtests (Table 5), $F(1,618) = 240$, $p = 6.1E-46$. The pass rates for transfer and freshmen students were 77% and 34%, respectively.

Table 5. DELNA Screening performance by entry type

DELNA subtest	Freshman (34% passed)			Transfer (77% passed)			Total		
	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	n
Vocabulary (%)	84.3	8.7	363	93.0	8.7	247	87.8	9.7	610
Speed-Reading (%)	42.4	16.8	362	68.8	26.0	247	53.1	24.7	609
Total score	53.6	12.9	367	75.3	20.5	249	62.4	19.6	616

U.S. citizens achieved higher scores than non-citizens (Table 6), $F(1,618) = 136$, $p = 1.8E-28$, and U.S. citizens were more likely than non-citizens to achieve a passing score (63% vs. 18%), $\chi^2(1, N=627) = 103$, $p = 3.0E-24$.

Table 6. DELNA Screening performance by citizenship status

DELNA Total score	Non-U.S. citizen (18% passed)			U.S. citizen (63% passed)		
	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	n
DELNA Total score	48.2	12.6	163	67.5	19.1	453

As shown in Table 7, examinees who reported that they grew up speaking English had significantly higher scores than non-native speakers, $F(1,618) = 166$, $p = 9.9E-34$. A greater percentage of native English speakers (66%) than non-native speakers (26%) passed, $\chi^2(1, N=627) = 105$, $p = 1.1E-24$. Notably, non-native speakers who reported being comfortable with English for either casual speech, reading, or writing performed somewhat better than non-native speakers who were not comfortable with English for any of those tasks ($Mns = 49.9$ vs. 54.1), $F(1,256) = 4.97$, $p = .03$.

The effect of native language was larger among transfer students than among freshmen $F(1,612) = 16.4$, $p = 5.8E-5$. It was 20.8 points among transfer students ($Mns = 59.3$ vs. 80.1) and 9.6 points among freshmen ($Mns = 49.3$ vs. 58.8).

A regression analysis showed that SAT language score (Verbal, Critical Reading, or Writing) and English-native status each independently influenced DELNA Screening total score. The two predictor model accounted for 22% of the variance in DELNA Screening score, $F(2,322) = 47.2$, $p = 1.1E-18$.

Table 7. DELNA Screening performance by self-reported native language and high school ESL

	Spoke English Growing Up					
	No (27% passed)			Yes (68% passed)		
	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	n
DELNA Total score	51.5	14.7	258	70.2	18.9	358

	High School ESL					
	Yes (12% passed)			No (63% passed)		
	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	n
DELNA Total score	45.7	13.0	142	67.4	17.8	384

There were no statistically significant main effects for student gender on either subtest. Under-represented minority (URM: Native-, African-, Hispanic/Latino-, Hawaiian/Pacific Islander American) students obtained significantly lower mean scores than non-URM (i.e., White- and Asian American) students (Table 8), and this difference remained even when the analysis was restricted to native English speakers. There were significant differences by URM-status on both Vocabulary ($F(2,614) = 3.2, p = .04$), and Speed-Reading ($F(2,614) = 21.5, p = 9.7E-10$).

Table 8. DELNA Screening performance by Under-Represented Minority status

	Non-URM, Citizen			URM, Citizen			Unknown, Citizen			Perm. Resident			International		
Percentage > 59	69%			43%			92%			26%			8.0%		
	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	n	Mean	SD	n
Total score	69.7	19.3	299	60.2	17.3	129	77.5	15.2	25	51.2	14.5	88	44.7	8.8	75

Special Program and AEP involvement. We examined support structures for students who did not pass the DELNA. Approximately one-third of DELNA Screening examinees who failed to meet the ELPR-minimum were enrolled in a special program (Table 9). Among those 203 students who were not enrolled in a special program, 105 had enrolled in an AEP course (English 101-104) during Autumn quarter. This left 98 non-passing students involved in neither AEP nor a special program — including 22 students with record of ESL in high school. Among the 34 non-passing students whose high school English record was ambiguous, six were affiliated with EOP, eight with student athletics, four were enrolled in AEP, and 16 were enrolled in neither AEP nor a special program.

Table 9. Special Program involvement among students who scored below 59 on DELNA Screening

Special Program	Freshman		Transfer		Total	
	N	Col. %	N	Col. %	N	Col. %
None	151	61.9	52	89.7	203	67.2
<i>Enrolled in AEP course AU09</i>	91		14		105	(34.7%)
1: EOP 1	47	19.3	5	8.6	52	17.2
13: EOP 3	30	12.3	0	0	30	9.9
34: SP Athletics	15	6.1	0	0	15	5.0
60: Staff/Faculty Exempt	0	0	1	1.7	1	0.3
93: ADM Committee admit	1	0.4	0	0	1	0.3
Total N	244	100	58	100	302	100

SUMMARY

The vast majority (92%) of freshmen satisfied the ELPR upon entry by submitting qualifying test scores. A little more than half (52%) of transfer students entered with a qualifying associate's degree. Of the transfer students who did not enter with a qualifying degree, 47% satisfied the ELPR by submitting qualifying test scores.

Among the 764 (11%) incoming undergraduates who were identified as required to take the DELNA Screening were 402 freshmen and 362 transfer students (without associate's degrees).

As of January 8, 2010, 35 (9.6%) of the freshmen and 113 (48%) of the transfer students who were required to take the DELNA Screening have not done so.

A majority (58%) of the DELNA Screening test-takers indicated that they grew up speaking English; however, about 30% of non-native English speakers reported being equally comfortable with English for conversation, reading, or writing.

The average total score on the DELNA Screening was 62, and 51% of test-takers obtained the ELPR-specified minimum score of 59.

A large majority (72%) of non-native speakers did not pass the DELNA Screening, and one-third (32%) of native English speakers did not pass.

U.S. citizens achieved higher mean scores than non-citizens and were more likely than non-citizens to achieve a passing score (63% vs. 18%).

On average non-URM students received significantly higher scores than did URM students, but no differences were found by gender.

Of 302 students who did not pass the DELNA Screening, 105 were enrolled in an AEP course and another 99 were enrolled in a special program (e.g., EOP or Athletics).

As of January 8, 2010, 93% (6,319 of 6,769) of the entering class had satisfied the ELPR through a qualifying test score (81%), a posted Associate's degree from a Washington CTC (8%), or the DELNA Screening (4%). The remaining students did not pass the DELNA screening (4.5%) or are unexplained (2.2%).

Taken together, the results from the Autumn 2009 entering cohort indicate that the DELNA Screening is an effective tool for gauging academic English language proficiency. Native speakers of English significantly outperformed non-native speakers. Furthermore, the DELNA Screening was able to pick up fluency differences between non-native speakers who were comfortable with English for at least one activity (particularly casual speech or reading) and those who were not.

Two findings strongly suggest that the DELNA Screening detects not just English native status and not just academic achievement, but rather the synergistic result of the two. First, a regression analysis showed that English-native status and SAT language score each contributed uniquely to the prediction of DELNA Screening score. Second, non-native-speaking transfer students performed no differently than native-speaking freshmen. If the screening could detect only academic experience, one would expect all transfer students, regardless of language background, to outperform all freshmen. Likewise, if the screening could detect only English-native status, one would expect all native English speakers to outperform all non-native speakers. Neither was the case. DELNA Screening performance was enhanced by having some postsecondary experience, and it was enhanced by speaking English in childhood, but among all groups, only transfer students who were also native English speakers showed a greater than 50% probability of success.