

INTENSIVE ENGLISH PROGRAMS

Questions and Considerations



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Shifts in U.S. policy in recent years have led to considerable concern about the ability of colleges and universities to maintain a robust international student population; recent data from the Institution of International Education and the Council of Graduate Schools indicate that this concern is warranted. Intensive English programs (IEPs) are gaining attention on many campuses as a means to enhance the institutional value proposition for international students, increase numbers, and provide an additional level of support for matriculated students.

WHAT ARE IEPs?

IEPs are full-time educational programs that:

- Provide **non-native English-speaking international students** with instruction in grammar, reading, writing, and speaking.
- Focus on English for **high-level daily communication and academic study**, and serve students with varying levels of English proficiency.
- Entail a minimum of **18 hours of coursework per week**, due to requirements of the F-1 student visa, which is held by a majority of IEP students in the U.S.
- Offer primarily **non-credit-bearing** courses.

CORPORATE PATHWAY PROVIDERS IN THE NEWS

A 2018 *Inside Higher Ed* series explored the experiences of U.S. colleges and universities working with corporate pathway program providers. Topics include an overview of current providers and their institutional partners; institutional goals, expectations, and outcomes; and the relationship between pathway programs and international student recruiting.

- “The Lay of the Land”
- “As Pathway Market Expands, Enrollment Outcomes Diverge”
- “Commissions and Incentives”
- “Parting Ways”

Why do international students enroll in IEPs?

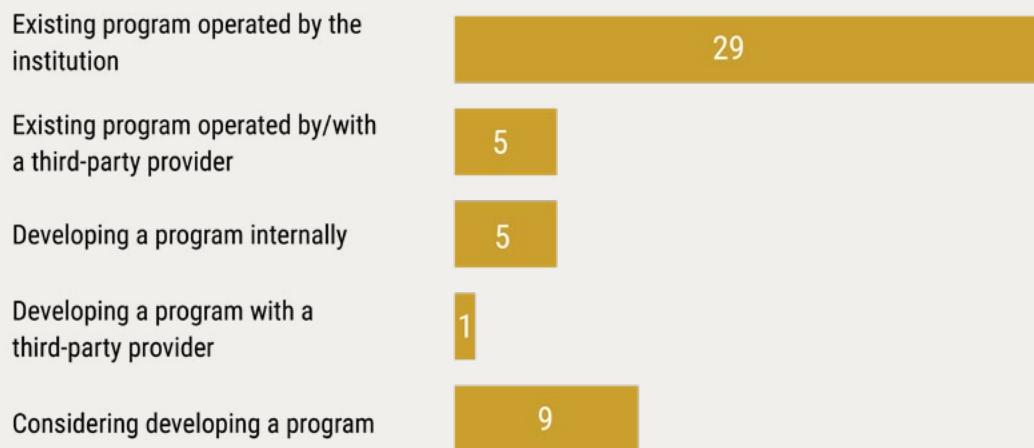
- **Improve career prospects.**
 - » Isabella is a 22-year-old college student who is studying law in her home country of Mexico. She is currently enrolled in an IEP in Missouri for the summer to improve her English proficiency. She hopes to practice international law someday.
- **Fulfill conditional admission requirements.**
 - » Hamdy, a graduate student from Iraq, was admitted to a master's in public health (MPH) program on the condition that he improve his English proficiency prior to enrollment. He will study in an IEP in Washington for at least one year prior to beginning the MPH.
- **Meet a test standard required for admission.**
 - » Jun is a first-year student from Shanghai who will study in an IEP for a semester to prepare for the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) exam; upon achieving the score required by his university, he will matriculate into his major in business.

Who operates IEPs?

- **Colleges and universities.** IEP administrators and faculty are employees of the institution, and are trained in the field of teaching English as a foreign language. Often the IEP is housed within an academic unit, or within an outreach, continuing education, or international programs office.
 - » [Center for English as a Second Language, University of Arizona](#)—administered by the College of Humanities
 - » [The Intensive English Program, Georgia State University](#)—administered by the Applied Linguistics and English as a Second Language Department
 - » [English Language Center, Georgetown University](#)—administered by the School of Continuing Studies
 - » [Center for English Language Learning, University of Missouri](#)—administered by the Office of International Programs
- **Proprietary providers, in partnership with a college or university.** Courses are offered in a center located on the institution's campus. Faculty, administrators, and curriculum are governed entirely or partially by the company via a range of administrative structures.
 - » [Spring International Language Center, University of Arkansas](#)
 - » [INTO Oregon, Oregon State University](#)
 - » [Shorelight International Accelerator Program, University of South Carolina](#)
- **Independent language schools.** Free-standing, for-profit entities that operate at a single site or multiple sites, but are not affiliated with a college or university. Some students in these schools transfer to a college or university once they meet requirements for admission, while others return to careers or further study at home.
 - » [Gulf Language School](#)
 - » [ASC English School](#)
 - » [Atlanta English Institute](#)

In ACE's 2017 *Mapping Internationalization on U.S. Campuses* study, nearly half of responding institutions reported that they were operating, developing, or considering an intensive English language program. As illustrated in Figure 1, the dominant model for such programs is in-house development and administration, though a limited percentage of institutions are collaborating (or considering collaborating) with third-party providers to establish and operate such programs. Doctoral institutions are most likely to have existing programs in place; however, the proportion of institutions considering developing them is fairly consistent across sectors.

Figure 1. Percentage of institutions offering, developing, or considering intensive English programs (2016)



Source: Adapted from Robin Matross Helms, Lucia Brajkovic, and Brice Struthers, *Mapping Internationalization on U.S. Campuses: 2017 Edition* (American Council on Education, 2017).

In what ways do campus-based IEPs add value to the institution and contribute to internationalization?

- **Grow and diversify the international student population.** Via conditional admission arrangements, IEPs broaden the institution's pool of prospective international students to include candidates who are academically qualified, but need time to improve their English skills prior to matriculation. Often, international scholarship programs, such as those administered by the Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission and the Kuwait Cultural Office, will cover expenses for students to study English before beginning their college or university studies.
- **House expertise that can be tapped to support other units.** Generally, IEP faculty hold an MA or doctorate in English language teaching. In addition to teaching, these faculty language experts can help develop curricula tailored to the needs of specific college and university programs or students. And because IEP faculty are experts in working with international students, they can be called upon to train other faculty colleagues on teaching non-native English speakers—one of the fastest growing demographics in many globally focused colleges and universities.

- **Enhance the curricula of related academic programs.** Some IEPs work directly with the institution's graduate program in applied linguistics (such as the Program in Intensive English at Northern Arizona University) to provide teaching and internship opportunities for graduate students.

How can institutions support IEP students and ensure they are integrated into campus life?

- **Allow access to all standard student support services**, including those that are typically reserved for full-time degree students. Campus clinics, student health insurance, libraries, and computer labs, for example, should be made available to IEP students. It is also important to provide IEP students with ID cards and to include them in student databases and directories.
- **Provide language access services (e.g., interpretation)**, particularly when students are dealing with medical and legal issues. Compared with their non-IEP international student peers, the challenges of adaptation may be magnified for IEP students due to their lack of English proficiency; the use of native language in certain situations can go a long way toward mitigating anxiety.
- **Offer intercultural competence-focused professional development programming for the wide variety of faculty and staff who interact with IEP students**—from classroom professors to food service attendants to campus health counselors—in order to help these professionals meet students' needs and facilitate communication.
- **Develop cocurricular programs that bring together IEP and domestic students.** Examples include conversation partner programs through which an IEP student is paired with a domestic student to practice speaking English or trade time between English and the IEP student's native language.
- **Create curricular bridges between intensive English study and degree programs.** Some IEP programs, for example, offer specialized courses that teach English for a specific purpose, such as English for Law for future master of law students, and Medical English for future nursing students. And many IEPs—both college or university and private provider administered—allow advanced-level English students to take a limited number of regular academic credit courses while continuing to polish their English skills in preparation for full matriculation.
 - » In the Undergraduate University Track program at the University of Arizona, students can earn up to six credits per semester while honing their advanced English skills.
 - » International graduate students at Florida State University can take advantage of the Summer Bridge Program to study in a pre-semester intensive course, tailored to address the students' upcoming linguistic challenges in their majors.
- **Make sure that IEP leaders have a seat at the table in all conversations about integrating international students.** Both the challenges that IEP students face and the strategic solutions that IEPs implement to resolve them will inform the future experience of all international students on campus.

IEP ACCREDITATION

The issue of accreditation for IEPs came to the fore when President Obama signed into law the Accreditation of English Language Training Programs Act (2010), which requires national or regional accreditation for entities bringing students to study English in the United States. Regional accrediting bodies align with the home institution's accreditor (such as Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, the Higher Learning Commission, etc.). National accrediting bodies include the Commission on English Language Program Accreditation (CEA) and the Accrediting Council for Continuing Education and Training (ACCET), which accredits non-collegiate continuing education and training programs. Rigorous academic review processes required for accreditation protect students' interests and ensure an overall high level of program quality.

What should institutions think about when considering an IEP?

- **Institutional appetite/tolerance for risk.** Enrollments in IEPs can fluctuate rapidly, prey to political and economic variances that impact international education, health issues spreading in the world, and visa issuance rates. IEPs are known to be “canaries in the mine,” often facing challenges in international student recruitment well in advance of recruiters in college and university admissions offices. To this end, recruiting a diversified cohort of IEP students is critical to mitigating sudden economic and political crises that might befall a group of students from a particular part of the globe.
- **Nuances of recruiting strategies.** Many colleges and universities invest in international student recruitment agencies to find a diversified group of IEP students. While using agents to recruit IEP students is less controversial than for recruiting degree program students, IEP leadership must develop processes to vet and ethically incentivize recruitment agents.

In addition, institutions whose undergraduate English language admission requirements are relatively high (such as a TOEFL iBT score of 80 or 90) may find that students arrive initially to study English but then transfer to an institution requiring a lower TOEFL admissions score for full admission, so recruitment efforts have to be well articulated between the IEP and the institution.

- **Procedures for student visas.** Will the institution work through the lengthy task of adding an IEP to the college or university's I-17, or should the IEP hold its own I-17? The I-17 certifies the official permission of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security Student Exchange Visitor Program for each college and university to invite students to the U.S. There are pros and cons to both approaches, particularly depending on the size and immigration document needs of the institution itself.
- **Teacher availability.** Depending upon the location of the institution, hiring ESL faculty may be a challenge. Colleges and universities in smaller towns or rural areas may not have access to professional part-time faculty, yet enrollments may fluctuate so much that retaining full-time faculty is prohibitively expensive.
- **Logistics and scheduling.** Given the required minimum 18 clock hours that IEP students must be in class, course schedules may not match those of regularly scheduled academic classes. Both classroom availability and the potential need for creative scheduling should be taken into consideration.

ORGANIZATIONS AND RESOURCES

Several professional organizations offer useful information and resources on IEP development and administration:

- » **UCIEP**: Independent consortium of about 80 university- and college-administered intensive English programs. (uciep.org)
- » **English USA**: Larger organization composed of both college- and university-governed and proprietary IEPs. (englishusa.org)
- » **TESOL International Association**: Individual member global association of more than 12,000 English language teaching professionals with interest sections dedicated to IEPs and program administration. (tesol.org)
- » **CEA**: Programmatic accrediting agency for IEPs. (cea-accredit.org)

To learn more about IEPs, good practices in leading IEPs, and how to foster greater student success for IEPs in colleges and universities, the following texts are recommended:

- » *Creating a Culturally Inclusive Campus: A Guide to Supporting International Students* (2018) by Barbara J. Hoekje and Scott G. Stevens
- » *A Handbook for Language Program Administrators* (2015) edited by MaryAnn Christison and Fredricka L. Stoller
- » *Fostering International Student Success in Higher Education* (2014) by Shawna Shapiro, Raichle Farrelly, and Zuzana Tomáš

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