

# Bergen Community College

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## ASSESSMENT REPORT FORM FOR ACADEMIC PROGRAM

**Assessment Period:** 2014 - 2016

**Department/Program:** American Language ESL Program

**Department Chair:** Dr. William Jiang

**Department Assessment Liaison:** Prof. Robert Freud

**Date Submitted:** 7/5/16

❖ **Program Description or mission/goal statement of the Department/Program:**

The mission of the ESL Department is to provide ESL students, from beginner to advanced levels, with knowledge and English language skills needed to reach their academic, professional, and personal goals.

The ESL Speech Department gives instruction in listening and speaking to non-native speakers of American English by providing them with the skills needed to succeed in academic and professional environments.

**Program Learning Goals/Outcomes:**

ESL Students will:

- Use reading strategies and critical thinking skills to understand and analyze college-level texts;
- Understand and use vocabulary needed for college-level course work;
- Use the writing process to write essays using academic rhetorical patterns;
- Demonstrate information literacy skills in research assignments;
- Use study skill techniques to understand and recall information in texts;
- Understand and use the grammar of the English language correctly in written and oral production.

ESL SPEECH Students will:

- Use spoken language to communicate meaningfully and appropriately;
- Demonstrate listening comprehension;
- Identify and produce the segmentals and suprasegmentals of American English;
- Expand their vocabulary;
- Make oral academic presentations;
- Be able to use technological and informational resources to conduct research.

### SEMESTER 1: CREATING PROGRAM-LEVEL ASSESSMENT PLAN

**1. Program Learning Goal(s) or Outcome(s) to be assessed (from the above section):**

ESL Goal 2: Understand and use vocabulary needed for college-level course work.

## **2. Means of Assessment:**

Level 2 and 3 Reading teachers will administer the VLT (Vocabulary Levels Test). John Read called the VLT “the single most influential and widely used L2 vocabulary test” in his chapter on assessing vocabulary. (The Cambridge Guide to Second Language Assessment. New York: Cambridge UP, 2012. 257-63. Print.)

### **▪ Feedback from Dean: 2/3/15**

The Program Learning Goal for Reading for students to “expand their vocabulary” seems a bit vague. It does not elaborate on how this goal is reached and assessed at the program level. Perhaps this is a discussion that this assessment plan can generate so the department can obtain valuable information to guide instruction and improve this learning objective.

## **SEMESTER 2: DEVELOPING ASSESSMENT TOOL (s) and TIMELINE**

### **3A. Describe or attach assessment tool (s), including sources of data, timeline for data collection and how data will be analyzed.**

**Source of Data:** VLT and NVLT tests (see attached)

**Data Analysis:** Data will be analyzed by vocabulary frequency, by student language and by the students’ course levels.

In Semester 2 (Spring 2015), the VLT (Vocabulary Levels Test) was piloted in two ESL reading classes to understand any potential issues regarding test administration. This was helpful in determining how much time students would take and pitfalls regarding directions and administering the test.

### **3B. Desired results faculty would like to see.**

Faculty would like to see:

- 80% of students exiting Level 2 have a vocabulary of 2000 words of the first 5000 words + a knowledge of half of the Academic Word List (AWL).
- 80% of students exiting Level 3 should know at least 3,000 words plus at least 80% of the complete AWL.

Before this assessment project, faculty did not accurately know the vocabulary level of our students. This is a common dilemma since measuring what it means to know a word and how many words ESL students need to know is a hotly debated topic in the field.

At a bare minimum, a 3,000-word vocabulary is often considered a standard. Some writers suggest that 3000 words plus the AWL would give adequate coverage for the comprehension of academic texts. Eli Hinkel, an expert on ESL academic writing, recently suggested at a presentation at the June 2016 NJ TESOL conference that the 5,000 range is nearer the desired mark.

Milton and Alexiou's proposed comparison of vocabulary knowledge and language proficiency levels is given below. Bergen Community College ESL levels have been added to three other recognized scales used for distinguishing the level of language ability: the Common European Framework, Foreign Service Institute scale and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages scale

Fig. 1 Comparing Language Levels

| BCC         | CE FR   | FSI  | ACTFL                 | Vocabulary Size |
|-------------|---|------|-----------------------|-----------------|
| Foundations | A1  | 0/0+ | Novice Low/Mid/High   | <1500           |
| Level 1     | A2  | 1    | Intermediate Low/Mid  | 1500 – 2500     |
| Level 2     | B1  | 1+   | Intermediate High     | 2750 – 3250     |
| Level 2-3   | B2  | 2/2+ | Advanced Low/Mid/High | 3250 – 3750     |
| Level 3     | C1  | 3/3+ | Superior              | 3750 – 4500     |
|             | C2  | 4/4+ | Distinguished         | 4500 – 5000     |
| CEFR        | The Common European Framework. A level system developed for all foreign language proficiency and widely accepted in Europe. |      |                       |                 |
| FSI         | Also known as the ILR, this is the system used by the US government to rate language proficiency.                           |      |                       |                 |
| ACTFL       | The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages   |      |                       |                 |

Based on Milton J and T. Alexiou (2009). Vocabulary size and the Common European Framework of Reference in Languages. In B.Richards, H. Daller, D. Malvern, P. Meara, J. Milton and J. Treffers-Daller (eds), Vocabulary studies in first and second language acquisition. Palgrave: Macmillan, 194-211.

*It is important to realize that “knowing” a word includes far more than just knowing its meaning. Truly knowing a word also involves knowing the word’s part of speech and grammatical information about its use, the words that often appear with (collocations) it, constraints on when the word can and cannot be used, the appropriate social register of the word and a variety of other facets. These aspects of vocabulary knowledge are called vocabulary depth as opposed to vocabulary breadth (how many words a student knows), which is the focus of this project.*

For many ESL students, having a vocabulary sufficient to read unsimplified English remains a goal they have not reached. According to Paul Nation, the author of the original VLT and many other writers, with a vocabulary of 2,000 words, only about 80% of the given words in any text will be familiar to students and they will still have difficulty with general purpose academic words like assume, concept, diverse, emphasis or subsequent.

For most students, the technical terms used in their academic majors are not the biggest stumbling block problem in comprehension, but these “sub-technical” words are. These words make up the bulk of the Academic Word List (AWL), a recognized list of 570 base words that appear on frequently in academic contexts but do not appear on the list of 2,000 most common words.

**As a result of administering the VLT/NVLT, faculty hoped to have accurate information giving us a better profile of our students’ vocabulary breadth and providing us with valuable information to guide instruction.**

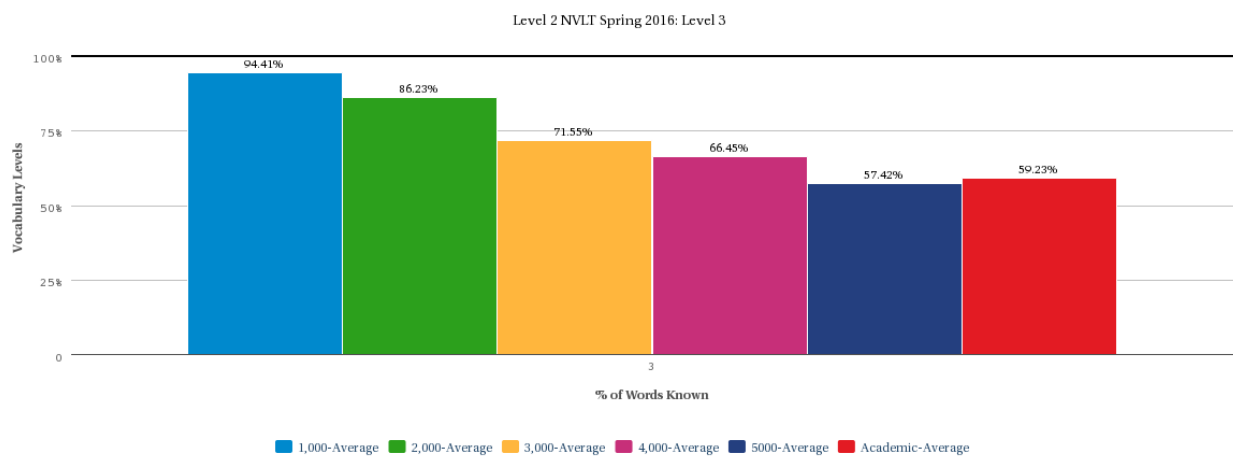
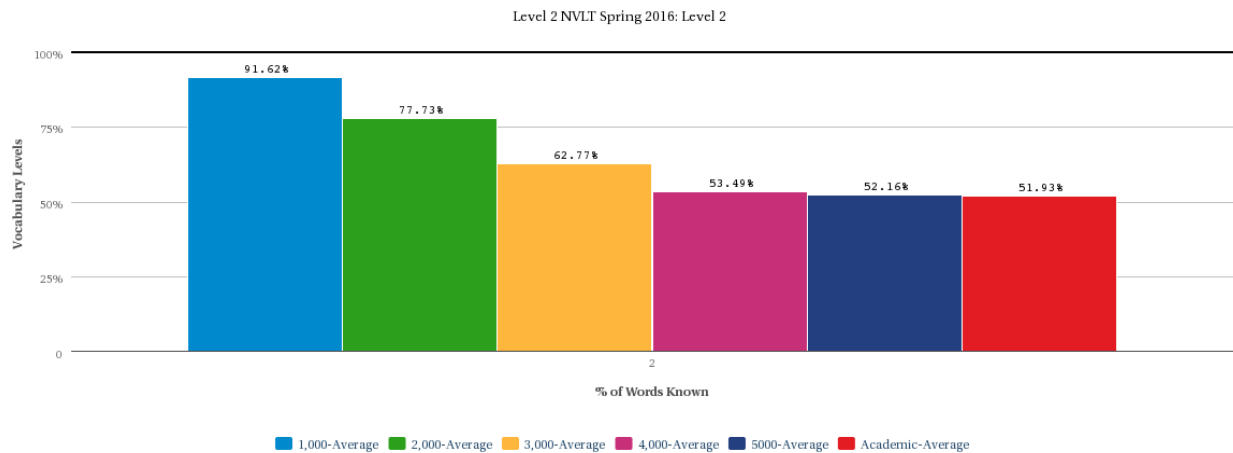
- **Feedback from CIE:**

### SEMESTER 3: COLLECTING AND ANALYZING DATA

#### 4. Summary of Results (attach aggregated data table, survey tool, etc., to support the summary)

All Level 2 and Level 3 teachers with Reading classes were asked to participate in the study, with the exception of classes given completely online. This assessment project focuses on the results of the Spring 2016 NVLT test because it includes data for each of the 1,000 word vocabulary lists, unlike the VLT. For the Spring 2016 test, results were received for eight out of nine Level 2 classes and five out of nine Level 3 classes.

| NVLT Spring 2016 – Averaged Student Results |                                  |   |                                  |   |
|---|----------------------------------|---|----------------------------------|---|
| Vocabulary range                            | % of Words known Level 2<br>N=74 | Extrapolated Total Words Known at Level 2 | % of Words known Level 3<br>N=64 | Extrapolated Total Words Known at Level 3 |
| 1k words                                    | 92%                              | 920                                       | 94%                              | 940                                       |
| 2k words                                    | 78%                              | 780                                       | 86%                              | 860                                       |
| 3k words                                    | 63%                              | 630                                       | 72%                              | 720                                       |
| 4k words                                    | 53%                              | 530                                       | 66%                              | 660                                       |
| 5k words                                    | 52%                              | 520                                       | 57%                              | 570                                       |
| Total of 1-5k Lists                         | 68%                              | 3380                                      | 75%                              | 3750                                      |
|   |                                  |   |                                  |   |
| Academic Word List (570 words)              | 52%                              | 296                                       | 59%                              | 336                                       |
|   |                                  |   |                                  |   |
| Average Total Vocabulary                    |                                  | 3676                                      |                                  | 4086                                      |



### The VLT/NVLT Test

Two different versions of the Vocabulary Levels Test were administered in class to Level 2 and 3 Reading students: the VLT in Semester 3 (Fall 2015) and the NVLT (New Vocabulary Levels Test) in Semester 4 (Spring 2016).

Faculty discussed whether it was advisable to administer the VLT twice and be able to compare results or administer the newer version, which has greater face validity and is easier to administer.

Reading 2 and 3 faculty administered the VLT before December 10, 2015. Six ESL department members participated in hand scoring the results of the VLT in two scoring sessions in February 2016. Three faculty members created charts to describe the results. A presentation and discussion of the initial results occurred at the March 2016 Department meeting.

Reading 2 and 3 faculty were again asked to administer the NVLT before the end of the Spring 2016 semester. Five members of the ESL department faculty scored the NVLT in two sessions during June 2016. A meeting presenting the findings was held on June 29, 2016. Copies of the assessment will be mailed to all department faculty in July 2016 and it is expected that discussion will continue throughout the Fall semester.

## Results

### Basic 5000 words vocabulary

These results indicate that the ESL department is doing a good job helping students achieve what is considered to be appropriate levels of vocabulary knowledge of the first 5000 most common vocabulary words but need to place greater emphasis on teaching the Academic Word List.

The average Level 2 student has a general vocabulary of 3380 plus 296 words from the Academic Word List. This greatly exceeds the 2000-word vocabulary teachers hoped to see and falls well within the intermediate levels given in Fig. 1. It exceeds the departmental Level 2 Reading syllabus suggestions:

*ALP-054 American Language II: Reading emphasizes reading for content and helps students develop their inferential skills on reading material up to the 3,000-word vocabulary level.*

The average total Level 3 vocabulary of 3750 words plus 336 words from the Academic Word List also corresponds well to the description given in the Departmental Level 3 Reading syllabus but points to need for greater emphasis on vocabulary instruction at this level:

*ALP-064 American Language III: Reading emphasizes reading for content, making inferences, distinguishing main and subordinate points, and evaluating the ideas and presentation of reading material at and beyond the 4,000-word vocabulary level.*

### The Academic Word List

The results suggest that a much greater emphasis should be placed on teaching the Academic Word List.

It was hoped that 80% of Level 2 students would show mastery of 50% of the AWL and 80% of Level 3 students would show mastery (defined as a knowledge of 80% or greater of the words on the AWL).

In Level 2, 54% of students (40/74 students) knew at least 50% of the Academic Word List. In Level 3, 36% of Level 3 students (23/64 students) knew at least 80% of the Academic Word List.

The results also point to the need for a greater emphasis on teaching the Academic Word List. Additional vocabulary instruction will assist ESL students in reaching even higher levels of proficiency.

It is desirable that percentages at the 4000, 5000, and AWL levels be higher at the end of Level 3 for more fluent reading in college courses. The results point to a need for more systematic and

intensive instruction. Although the vocabulary growth from Level 2 to 3 is significant, it is hoped that we can achieve even better results with a new approach to learning and teaching. The use of technology should be explored as there is much evidence that programs that repeat unlearned items at specific intervals assist learning and that spaced repetition of learned items is vital to retention of new words.

Individual student scores will be helpful in creating individualized learning plans for weaker students. Although the average Level 3 student knows 4179 words, some individuals know far fewer and will struggle with academic reading and writing unless their deficiency is addressed.



# VLT Fall 2015 Results

## Level 2

| Language | Responses | 2000 words | 3000 words | 5000 words | 10,000 words | AWL |
|----------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|--------------|-----|
| Albanian | 4         | 74%        | 55%        | 55%        | 10%          | 48% |
| Arabic   | 11        | 71%        | 53%        | 37%        | 10%          | 44% |
| Chinese  | 1         | 73%        | 90%        | 87%        | 0%           | 0%  |
| Farsi    | 1         | 67%        | 57%        | 43%        | 7%           | 50% |
| German   | 1         | 70%        | 80%        | 57%        | 40%          | 73% |
| Indian   | 3         | 90%        | 83%        | 48%        | 17%          | 59% |
| Korean   | 13        | 84%        | 73%        | 56%        | 17%          | 60% |
| Polish   | 1         | 97%        | 70%        | 77%        | 40%          | 70% |
| Russian  | 1         | 63%        | 40%        | 60%        | 17%          | 63% |
| Spanish  | 23        | 86%        | 70%        | 73%        | 33%          | 79% |
| Turkish  | 3         | 81%        | 60%        | 50%        | 9%           | 66% |

## Level 3

| Language    | Responses | 2000 words | 3000 words | 5000 words | 10,000 words | AWL |
|-------------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|--------------|-----|
| Albanian    | 5         | 88%        | 71%        | 64%        | 27%          | 72% |
| Arabic      | 12        | 86%        | 67%        | 59%        | 19%          | 67% |
| Chinese     | 8         | 89%        | 69%        | 44%        | 22%          | 68% |
| French      | 1         | 90%        | 70%        | 77%        | 43%          | 97% |
| Indian      | 5         | 91%        | 75%        | 69%        | 19%          | 65% |
| Korean      | 7         | 96%        | 83%        | 83%        | 46%          | 85% |
| No response | 1         | 93%        | 70%        | 73%        | 30%          | 63% |
| Portuguese  | 1         | 97%        | 77%        | 73%        | 47%          | 83% |
| Punjabi     | 1         | 93%        | 67%        | 47%        | 10%          | 70% |
| Russian     | 3         | 93%        | 80%        | 72%        | 23%          | 53% |
| Spanish     | 29        | 86%        | 70%        | 67%        | 27%          | 66% |
| Thai        | 1         | 87%        | 67%        | 60%        | 16%          | 53% |
| Turkish     | 3         | 92%        | 76%        | 71%        | 22%          | 81% |
| Vietnamese  | 1         | 100%       | 87%        | 73%        | 30%          | 83% |

# NVLT Spring 2016 Results

## Level 2

| Language    | Responses | 1000 words | 2000 words | 3000 words | 4000 words | 5000 words | AWL |
|-------------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-----|
| Albanian    | 2         | 81%        | 84%        | 61%        | 69%        | 46%        | 38% |
| Arabic      | 7         | 89%        | 59%        | 35%        | 30%        | 35%        | 38% |
| Chinese     | 7         | 82%        | 66%        | 46%        | 39%        | 34%        | 37% |
| Ewe         | 1         | 96%        | 63%        | 75%        | 63%        | 63%        | 83% |
| Georgian    | 1         | 88%        | 83%        | 67%        | 33%        | 79%        | 53% |
| Indian      | 5         | 93%        | 81%        | 66%        | 50%        | 61%        | 53% |
| Japanese    | 1         | 100%       | 67%        | 46%        | 29%        | 25%        | 40% |
| Korean      | 9         | 96%        | 87%        | 67%        | 57%        | 54%        | 52% |
| No response | 2         | 98%        | 76%        | 63%        | 50%        | 38%        | 26% |
| Polish      | 8         | 97%        | 81%        | 67%        | 59%        | 58%        | 54% |
| Spanish     | 23        | 92%        | 83%        | 73%        | 64%        | 60%        | 67% |
| Turkish     | 7         | 90%        | 72%        | 62%        | 51%        | 54%        | 38% |
| Vietnamese  | 1         | 100%       | 100%       | 50%        | 58%        | 42%        | 30% |

## Level 3

| Language    | Responses | 1000 words | 2000 words | 3000 words | 4000 words | 5000 words | AWL |
|-------------|-----------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|-----|
| Albanian    | 1         | 100%       | 88%        | 75%        | 67%        | 58%        | 57% |
| Arabic      | 6         | 98%        | 90%        | 74%        | 86%        | 60%        | 52% |
| Chinese     | 3         | 96%        | 85%        | 61%        | 47%        | 47%        | 55% |
| Farsi       | 1         | 92%        | 79%        | 92%        | 75%        | 92%        | 83% |
| French      | 2         | 81%        | 78%        | 73%        | 69%        | 59%        | 85% |
| Hebrew      | 1         | 92%        | 83%        | 58%        | 67%        | 67%        | 63% |
| Indian      | 3         | 95%        | 88%        | 72%        | 73%        | 54%        | 39% |
| Italian     | 1         | 96%        | 88%        | 88%        | 63%        | 63%        | 63% |
| Korean      | 13        | 96%        | 89%        | 73%        | 70%        | 49%        | 46% |
| No response | 2         | 90%        | 92%        | 75%        | 73%        | 69%        | 58% |
| Portugese   | 1         | 100%       | 96%        | 83%        | 79%        | 71%        | 97% |
| Russian     | 4         | 96%        | 93%        | 76%        | 65%        | 68%        | 68% |
| Spanish     | 18        | 92%        | 86%        | 70%        | 60%        | 59%        | 70% |
| Turkish     | 6         | 97%        | 76%        | 65%        | 61%        | 64%        | 47% |
| Ukranian    | 2         | 96%        | 86%        | 71%        | 63%        | 27%        | 69% |

## **5. Recommendations for Improvement:**

### **Teaching and Learning**

- A. Form a multi-level ESL department faculty workgroup to research and implement teaching approaches and materials into the curriculum in all skills and at all levels, especially Reading and Writing courses.
- B. Implement technology-assisted vocabulary teaching and learning. Capitalize on the nearly universal use of smart phones and tablets by students to encourage self-directed anytime learning.
- C. The percentages at 4000, 5000, and AWL should be higher at the end of level 3 for more fluent reading in college courses.
- D. Develop more systematic and intensive vocabulary instruction. Improvement from Level 2 to 3 is significant but could be even better.
- E. Aim high! Set 75% mastery of the 5000-word level and 80% mastery of the AWL as the target for Level 3.

### **Research**

- F. Continue this project for another assessment cycle.
- G. Give pretest and posttest to measure vocabulary growth during the semester.
- H. Explore use of the version of the test that does not favor speakers from Romance language backgrounds.
- I. Write better supplementary test instructions. The NVLT is divided in six sections. The first five sections (the 1K through 5K vocabulary levels) get progressively harder. The sixth section is a test of the Academic Word List, which is significantly easier than the last level. It appears that quite a few students were discouraged by the last section and did not attempt the AWL section.
- J. Collect additional demographic information, including, but not limited to the length of time in the United States, the number of years of English studied, and highest level of education in their native language. This information, especially the length of time in the United States, should give insight into what type of language learner the student is and what techniques/methods/materials may prove helpful.
- K. Use a larger sample size to enable the application of more rigorous statistical methods.

### **▪ Feedback from Dean:**

## **SEMESTER 4: CLOSING THE LOOP AND SHARING KNOWLEDGE**

### **6. Use of Results:**

**Sharing knowledge:** Results of the second year 3rd semester vocabulary assessment were shared at departmental meetings in February 2016 and at a summary meeting in June 2016 to go over the findings and discuss implications for teaching and learning.

**Use of results:**

As early as June 2016, several teachers indicated that information from the assessment study about the vocabulary levels of students in Level 2 and Level 3 will actively guide their development of materials and the choice of words and phrases to be included as targets for instruction in their note-taking, summarizing and paraphrasing activities in their reading courses during 2016-17. They anticipate being able to understand the appropriate starting point for learning new vocabulary and to be able to reinforce what students already know. At the end of the semester, these teachers have expressed a desire to administer the NVLT and compare results for Level 3 with students who took the test in Spring 2016. This will help us to assess our approach to vocabulary development through reading, notetaking, summarizing and paraphrasing.

Results from vocabulary assessment can assist us in advising students. During Spring 2016, VLT test results were used to get a more accurate profile of a student with learning disabilities. Based on his spoken production in class, his teacher thought the student had been placed into the wrong ESL level and should not be in the class. The results of the vocabulary assessment pointed to the probability that the student actually had very good receptive language skills (but poor productive skills) and that he would benefit from his teacher's use of the Universal Design for Learning Principle II. Provide Multiple Means of Action and Expression: Guideline 5: Provide options for expression and communication (<http://www.udlcenter.org/aboutudl/udlguidelines/>)

▪ **Feedback from CIE:**

The use of results should be dept. changes not just individual faculty changes. What should instructors teach or teach differently to improve vocabulary levels in all sections of each level?