CHAPTER 3

COHORT DESCRIPTION

A. COHORT DEFINITION

This section describes the characteristics of a cohort of ESL students that will form the basis for the longitudinal analysis of CCSF's ESL program in subsequent chapters. The cohort consists of all students who first enrolled in any credit ESL course and in the non-credit ESLN (General ESL) and ESLF (ESL Focus) courses in the years 1998, 1999, and 2000. Students enrolled in other non-credit ESL courses are not included because (as explained in Chapter 1) it is not possible to assign levels of English proficiency to students in those courses. Thus, it is only possible to analyze most of the major variables with which this study is concerned (such as learning gains and transitions to credit programs) for students enrolled in ESLN and ESLF. Moreover, as Chapter 1 shows, ESLN and ESLF students comprise the vast majority of CCSF's non-credit ESL students.

Subsequent chapters will analyze the progress of students who first enrolled in each of the three years that comprise the cohort over the course of seven years. That is, the progress of students who first enrolled in 1998 will be analyzed through 2004, those first enrolled in 1999 through 2005, and those first enrolled in 2000 through 2006. The analysis will primarily focus on non-credit ESL students.

In total, there were 44,761 students in the cohort studied, with 85% (38,095) enrolled in non-credit and 15% (6666) enrolled in credit. These students are a subset of the students described in Table 1.5 of Chapter 1.

Tables 3.1 and 3.2 describe the characteristics of non-credit and credit students in the cohort. These students are a sub-set of the ESL students enrolled from 1998-2006 described in Table 2.5 of Chapter 2. Accordingly, the same coding system that was used in Table 2.5 was applied to them.

For example, those students not enrolled in any of the College's core-leveled credit courses, or who enrolled in non-credit courses that included more than two levels of proficiency, are represented in the "No Associated Level" row. In subsequent chapters, these students are eliminated from the analysis where indicated. Likewise, students enrolled in ESLN courses that covered two levels of proficiency were coded at the lower of the two levels.[30] Because all ESLF courses are two-level courses, all enrollments in these courses are coded at the lower of the two levels. Chapter 10 will discuss the effect of including ESLN and other two-level students in the cohort.

There are only two important differences between the students in the cohort and those described for the years 1998-2000 in Table 2.5. First, the earlier table describes *all*

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[30] See Chapter 1 for a description of these courses and for a description of the "core" leveled credit courses.

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students enrolled in ESLN and ESLF in the years indicated. In contrast, the cohort includes only *new* students – those who first enrolled in 1998-2000. Second, Table 2.5 includes ESL students who were enrolled for eight hours or more in *any* non-credit course at CCSF as long as the students were also enrolled in ESL. In contrast, the cohort includes students who were enrolled for eight hours or more in ESLN and ESLF classes only. As a result, it excludes slightly more ESL students than Table 1.5 does.

By using this version of the eight-hour standard, the cohort excludes 13% of students who first enrolled in Non-Credit ESLN and ESLF from 1998-2000. That is, 13% of all students who enrolled in ESLN and ESLF from 1998-2000 did not attend ESL classes for more than eight hours in their seven years of academic history, and hence are not included in the cohort.

B. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COHORT

Tables 3.1 and 3.2 show that the largest ethnic group in the non-credit portion of the cohort was Hispanic (39% of non-credit students). Asians were the second largest (35% of non-credit students). In credit, Asians were by far the largest ethnic group – comprising 58% of the credit portion of the cohort. In credit, the Hispanic population comprised 16% of students in the cohort.

These percentages differ from those in Table 2.6 of Chapter 2, where Asians were about 48% of the non-credit population and 67% of the credit population, while Hispanics were 16% of the credit population and 32% of the non-credit population. The difference is due to the fact that Table 2.6 includes *all* students enrolled in the various years indicated, whereas Tables 3.1 and 3.2 (the cohort) include only *new* students. It appears that from 1998-2000, Hispanics made up a larger percentage of new students than Asians, but Asians made up a far larger percentage of continuing students. Because of these percentage differences and because (as Chapter 2 explains) there were more continuing students than new enrollments in all years, Asians made up a larger percentage of total enrollment but a smaller percentage of the cohort (which consists entirely of new students).

Tables 3.1 and 3.2 show that non-credit students in the cohort were older than the credit students. More than half (52%) of the non-credit students were 30 years of age or older at the time of their first enrollment in ESL, while almost one third (32%) of the credit students fell into that age group. Moreover, students in the cohort tended to be slightly younger than those in the ESL population as a whole, as described in Table 2.7 of Chapter 1. This age difference would be expected in a subset of new students drawn from a population made up of new and continuing students, because continuing students advance in age the longer they continue.

Finally, Tables 3.1 and 3.2 show that, similar to the total population of ESL students described in Table 2.5 of Chapter 2, the percentage of non-credit ESL students in the cohort who first enrolled at the lowest non-credit levels was greater than the percentage who enrolled at higher levels. Approximately two thirds (67%) of the non-credit ESL

students in the cohort first enrolled in the Literacy Level and Levels 1-2, compared to 60% of the total ESL population, as represented in Table 2.5. In contrast, a smaller percentage of credit students in the cohort than in the total ESL population first enrolled at the highest levels of credit ESL. Less than half (42%) of the credit ESL students in the cohort first enrolled in the higher level credit ESL classes, compared to 67% who first enrolled in these levels in the total ESL population, as represented by Table 2.5. These differences are due to the fact that the level of first enrollment for the population as whole is calculated in a different way in Table 2.5 than it is for the members of the cohort in Tables 3.1 and 3.2 (See note below.)[31]

C. INCLUDING ESLF

This study included students enrolled in ESLF courses as part of the cohort studied because ESLF is an integral part of CCSF's general non-credit ESL program (ESLN). All ESLN courses teach the four core ESL skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening in English), although the emphasis on these skills differs at different levels of instruction. However, as noted in Chapter 1, it is widely recognized that second language learners often do not have the same level of ability in all of the core skills when they enter ESL programs, and they also develop ability in the core skills at different rates.

ESLF is CCSF's answer to this problem. Most ESLF programs allow students to focus on a single skill they have not mastered as well as the other core ESL skills and, thereby, to bring their overall abilities in English up to the standard being taught in the level of ESL in which they are enrolled.

As a result, eliminating ESLF from this study would mean eliminating an important part of CCSF's non-credit ESL program. This could be accomplished only by eliminating from the cohort either students who took ESLF, or by eliminating the ESLF courses students took. But *eliminating students* who took ESLF would result in eliminating a large percentage of the College's non-credit ESL students. Table 3.3 shows that 33% of students new to ESLN in 1998-2000 also took ESLF courses at some time over the next seven years during which they were tracked. Likewise, *eliminating the ESLF courses* these students took would be eliminating one of the major ways in which ESLN students improve their English. Students who enroll in ESLF courses at any given level probably devote more hours to studying English at that level than other students do. If ESLF

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[31] These differences are due to the fact that the levels of first enrollment given in Table 2.5 and in Tables 3.1 and 3.2 are measured in different ways. The levels of first enrollment in *Table 2.5* include the levels of first enrollment *each year of both new and continuing students from 1998-2006*. In contrast, the levels of first enrollment for members of the cohort in *Tables 3.1 and 3.2* include the levels of first enrollment of *only new students in 1998-2000*. The first level of non-credit students is similar in both tables, because (as subsequent chapters will show) most non-credit students do not advance very many levels. Hence, their level of first enrollment during their first year (when they are new students) is similar to their level of first enrollment in subsequent years (when they are continuing students). In contrast, more credit students advance multiple levels. Hence, their level of first enrollment during their first year in the credit program (when they are new students) tends to be lower than their level of first enrollment in each subsequent year (when they are continuing students).

courses were eliminated from this study, those hours would be either excluded from the study or unexplained.

In short, ESLF courses must be included in any study that seeks to explain how and why students progress (or fail to progress) in CCSF's non-credit ESLN program. In this study, enrollment in ESLF courses is regarded the same as enrollment in ESLN courses. That is, if a student is enrolled in an ESLF course during a particular term they are counted as enrolled in non-credit ESL in the same way that they would be counted if they were enrolled in an ESLN course.

This way of incorporating ESLF courses into the study may seem to pose difficulties. This is because, as explained in the Chapter 1, ESLF courses meet for only five hours per week during a term, whereas ESLN courses meet for 10 hours per week, and because ESLF courses focus only on a single English language skill, rather than on all four core skills. It may appear that by considering them as the same as ESLN courses, the study may be counting students who enrolled in different kinds of non-credit ESL courses as if they were enrolled in the same kind of course.

But these difficulties are more apparent than real, for two reasons. First, students who enrolled in ESLF were, in fact, enrolled in the same kind of course as other students in the cohort. That course was ESLN. As Table 3.3 shows, all except a very small number of ESLF students also take ESLN. What the table does not show is that they usually take ESLF during the same term, or at least in the same year, and at the same level of proficiency as the ESLN courses in which they are enrolled. Thus, the practical effect of students taking ESLF courses is usually nothing more or less than to add more hours to the time they devote to a particular ESL level at the same time they are taking ESLN courses at that level.

Second, as will become apparent, this study is not primarily concerned with how many courses non-credit students take. It is primarily concerned with how many levels they complete (or fail to complete), how many terms and hours it takes them to complete those levels, and the consequences of (as well as reasons for) these level advances. As a result, any courses (whether ESLN or ESLF) that lead to an advance in levels (or lack thereof) are of equal importance for purposes of this study.

ESLF courses, considered separately from ESLN courses, are only of interest for this study because they are one of several curricular options in CCSF's ESL program that helps students advance levels. The effectiveness of ESLF in this regard will be considered together with other curricular options that help increase level advancement in Chapter 10.

Table 3.1 Description of Non-Credit Cohort Students

New Students to Non-Credit (1998, 1999, 2000)

	Percent			Number			
Ethnicity	1998	1999	2000	1998	1999	2000	Total
African American/Non Hispanic	1%	0%	0%	73	56	62	191
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0%	0%	0%	7	5	13	25
Asian/Pacific Islander	36%	35%	35%	4429	4475	4458	13362
Filipino	0%	0%	1%	55	64	65	184
Hispanic/Latino	34%	36%	41%	4186	4607	5237	14030
Other Non White	1%	1%	1%	73	79	65	217
Unknown/No Response	24%	22%	18%	2919	2793	2286	7998
White Non Hispanic	5%	6%	5%	648	735	705	2088
Gender							
Female	42%	38%	40%	5204	4884	5095	15183
Male	37%	37%	39%	4531	4752	4964	14247
No Response	21%	25%	22%	2655	3178	2832	8665
Age							
16 - 19	7%	7%	8%	815	846	1002	2663
20 - 24	16%	17%	17%	2004	2212	2228	6444
25 - 29	16%	15%	15%	1923	1926	1924	5773
30 - 34	13%	13%	12%	1569	1655	1583	4807
35 - 39	10%	10%	10%	1287	1274	1310	3871
40 - 49	15%	15%	15%	1855	1873	1888	5616
50+	16%	15%	14%	1979	1863	1794	5636
Unknown/ No Response	8%	9%	9%	958	1165	1162	3285
First Level							
0	14%	13%	14%	1676	1700	1804	5180
1	44%	43%	45%	5391	5567	5753	16711
2	11%	11%	9%	1348	1353	1149	3850
3	10%	10%	9%	1240	1220	1171	3631
4	4%	4%	4%	505	510	502	1517
5	3%	4%	3%	431	482	450	1363
6	3%	3%	2%	315	373	321	1009
7	3%	3%	3%	364	327	369	1060
8	1%	1%	1%	99	97	114	310
9	0%	0%	0%	2	8	20	30
No Associated Level	8%	9%	10%	1019	1177	1238	3434
Total Number				12390	12814	12891	38095

-"No Associated Level" means that students did not enroll in an ESLN or ESLF course to which a level could be assigned.

Table 3.2 Description of Credit Cohort Students

New ESL Students In Credit (1998, 1999, 2000)

	Percent			Number			
Ethnicity	1998	1999	2000	1998	1999	2000	Total
African American/Non Hispanic	1%	1%	1%	23	15	18	56
American Indian/Alaskan Native	0%	0%	0%		3	2	5
Asian/Pacific Islander	55%	58%	63%	1288	1266	1341	3895
Filipino	6%	6%	5%	144	127	103	374
Hispanic/Latino	15%	15%	17%	359	336	372	1067
Other Non White	1%	1%	1%	16	21	21	58
Unknown/No Response	9%	9%	3%	221	195	69	485
White Non Hispanic	12%	10%	10%	279	230	217	726
Gender							
Female	58%	60%	58%	1349	1314	1233	3896
Male	41%	38%	39%	961	838	836	2635
No Response	1%	2%	3%	20	41	74	135
Age							
16 - 19	19%	20%	20%	443	431	423	1297
20 - 24	31%	30%	33%	732	647	700	2079
25 - 29	17%	18%	17%	388	403	372	1163
30 - 34	13%	11%	13%	299	250	268	817
35 - 39	8%	9%	7%	197	190	155	542
40 - 49	8%	8%	8%	196	180	176	552
50+	3%	4%	2%	71	90	47	208
Unknown/No Response	0%	0%	0%	4	2	2	8
First Level And Course Number							
0 (ESL22)	2%	2%	3%	50	42	64	156
1 (ESL110)	6%	6%	5%	137	130	105	372
2 (ESL120)	12%	12%	12%	273	272	261	806
3 (ESL130)	19%	20%	23%	437	437	499	1373
4 (ESL140)	17%	18%	22%	402	401	463	1266
5 (ESL150)	21%	20%	18%	480	438	382	1300
6 (ESL 82/160)	9%	9%	6%	221	198	138	557
No Associated Level	14%	13%	11%	330	275	231	836
Total Number				2330	2193	2143	6666

-Level 1 in credit ESL is not same skills level as Level 1 in Non-Credit ESL. See the discussion of the relationship between credit and non-credit levels in Chapter 1.

-ESL 22 was a Beginning Mid Level course in credit that was discontinued in 2003.

-"No Associated Level" means that students did not enroll in the credit courses ESL 22 or ESL 110-82/160 during the first year of enrollment.

Table 3.3 Non-Credit Cohort Students Enrolled in ESLN and ESLF Compared to Those Enrolled in ESLN Only

First ESLNF Level	ESLN + ESLF		ESLN Only		
	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Total
0	34%	1748	66%	3432	5180
1	35%	5739	65%	10785	16524
2	27%	1022	73%	2828	3850
3	49%	1678	51%	1778	3456
4	20%	301	80%	1216	1517
5	56%	718	44%	563	1281
6	25%	250	75%	759	1009
7	58%	580	42%	413	993
8	12%	36	88%	274	310
9	30%	9	70%	21	30
(blank)	7%	208	93%	2854	3062
Grand Total	33%	12289	67%	24923	37212

- 883 students (2% of the non-credit portion of the cohort) enrolled only in ESLF. For convenience, they are included in the cohort in future tables, but their small number and percentage undoubtedly makes no significant difference in the findings of this study. They are, however, excluded from Table 3.3 and other tables, where noted.

- It will be noted that the number (and hence percent) of students who took ESLF is lower at Levels 2, 4, and 6 than at 1, 3, 5, and 7. This is probably due to the opportunities students had to enroll in multi-level courses. For example, students who began at Level 1 might have enrolled in a Level 1-2 ESLF course either when they first enrolled, or after they advanced to Level 2. Students who began at Level 2 could only have enrolled in that course at the time of their first enrollment. Hence students who began at odd numbers of levels had twice the chance of enrolling in a multi-level course (if they advanced a level) as students did who began at even number levels. This clustering of ESLF enrollments has no effect on the analysis in this study because, as noted, the study does not count the number of courses students take at different levels, but only the number of levels and hours they take.

CHAPTER 4

PERSISTENCE OF ESL STUDENTS

A. BACKGROUND

This chapter describes persistence in ESL courses of students first enrolled in credit or non-credit ESL at CCSF from 1998-2000 – the cohort examined by this study. In this report, the term "persistence" is used to describe the total number of terms students enrolled in ESL courses, whether that enrollment was continuous or episodic – that is, whether students enrolled in ESL courses during each consecutive term or had breaks in enrollment. Chapter 8 will examine the relative numbers of students who enrolled continuously and episodically, as well as the difference these enrollment patterns made in their performance. The primary focus of this chapter is on the persistence of non-credit members of the cohort.

As Chapter 3 explains, members of the cohort were tracked for seven years from the year of their first enrollment in ESL. As a result, students in the cohort could have enrolled at most for 21 terms – 3 terms a year (the fall and spring terms and the short summer session) for seven years. For purposes of this report, persistence in non-credit ESL is defined as the total number of terms students enrolled in ESLN and/or ESLF courses over the seven years, because ESLN and ESLF are the subject codes that define the non-credit portion of the cohort. Persistence of credit ESL students is defined as the number of terms students enrolled in any credit ESL courses offered by CCSF.

There are two reasons to examine persistence. First, virtually all learners require a considerable amount of time to significantly improve their ability in a second language. Therefore, it is important to study how many terms students are enrolled. Subsequent chapters will show that persistence is closely related to learning gains and to transitions from non-credit ESL to credit studies. Many ESL professionals may feel they have a sense of the persistence rates of their students, but their beliefs are often based on anecdotal or incomplete evidence. The only accurate way to determine persistence rates is to conduct a longitudinal analysis of the kind this study employs.

The second reason to study persistence is that the number of students enrolled is one of the major factors that determines the amount of funding most college receive. Students who persist for longer periods of time make a greater contribution to a college's total enrollment than do students who persist for shorter periods of time, because they increase the numbers enrolled in each term, year, or other period of time used to calculate funding. As a result, the longer students persist, the greater the contribution they make to college revenues. So persistence is very important from two perspectives, that of students and their need to attain their educational objectives and that of colleges and their need for income.

B. MAJOR FINDINGS

- Most members of the cohort did not enroll for very many terms. Thirty-eight percent of non-credit ESL students and 30% of credit ESL students enrolled for only one term. Sixty-eight percent of non-credit students and 63% of credit students enrolled for three or fewer terms, and smaller percentages enrolled for each additional number of terms over the seven-year period studied.

- Students who first enrolled at lower levels of non-credit ESL were more likely to enroll for multiple terms than were students who began at higher levels. This pattern is most pronounced for students who began at Literacy and Beginning Low levels of non-credit ESL. Students who began at these levels comprised 68% of the non-credit cohort. This pattern was not found in credit ESL students.

- Despite their higher persistence rates, many students who first enrolled at the Literacy and Beginning Low levels of non-credit ESL did not persist for a very large number of terms. Sixty-one percent of these students (42% of the total cohort) persisted for three or fewer terms.

- Asians persisted for more terms than Hispanics in non-credit ESL.

- With the exception of the 16-19 year olds, the older non-credit ESL students were at the time they first enrolled the higher their persistence rates. Students who were 16-19 years old had persistence rates somewhat higher that those who were 20-34 years old. Students who were 40 years of age or older had the highest persistence rates.

- Nearly 13% of non-credit ESL students had fewer than eight total hours of attendance. Students who first enrolled at the Literacy Level and at Level 6 were least likely to have fewer than eight hours of attendance. The percentages of those with fewer than eight hours of attendance were about the same for those who first enrolled at all other levels. Asians were less likely than Hispanics to enroll for fewer than eight hours, and students who were 50 years of age or older were less likely than those in other age groups to do so.

- Low persistence rates are a cause for concern in adult education programs of all kinds, because students who do not persist have limited learning gains. CCSF is taking some steps to improve persistence. This chapter primarily discusses measures the College has adopted to improve orientation to ESL courses and the issues posed by an open-entry enrollment system. Chapter 5 will discuss the need for increased guidance and counseling as well as possible changes in CCSF's program design that might improve both persistence and learning gains. Chapters 9-10 will discuss innovative features of CCSF's program that might be expanded to address the issues posed by low persistence rates. Because many other programs face the same issues, this report's analysis of them and its discussion of measures CCSF has adopted (or

might adopt) to deal with them should help other programs consider strategies for improving persistence rates.

C. ANALYSIS

1. <u>ESL Persistence Rates</u>

Table 4.1 describes the persistence rates in ESL for the cohort of credit and non-credit ESL students examined by this study. The Table shows the total number of terms for which students enrolled over the seven year time period during which they were studied. That is, the Table shows the percentage and number of students who enrolled for *no more than* the numbers of terms indicated. Students in non-credit with fewer than eight total hours of attendance are excluded, because the California Community College Chancellor's Office excludes these students in its reporting system. In credit, all students who received a grade, including those who received a withdrawal (W) or an incomplete (I), are included in the data.

As might be expected, Table 4.1 shows that the percent and number of students enrolled for a large number of terms are substantially *less* than the percent and number who enrolled for fewer terms. In fact, it shows that a smaller percent and number of students enrolled for each incremental number of terms. For example, 19% (7,132) of non-credit students enrolled for only two terms, 11% (4,243) enrolled for only three terms, 8% (2,972) enrolled for only four terms, and so forth.

More importantly, Table 4.1 shows that most students did not enroll for very many terms. Thirty-eight percent of non-credit students (14,606) and 30% of credit students (1,985) enrolled for only one term during the seven-year period during which they were studied. It is important to note that students had to enroll for at least one term to be counted as ESL students and members of the cohort.

Conversely, 62% of all non-credit ESL students (23,489) and 70% of credit ESL students (4,681) enrolled for more than one term. But most of these students did not enroll for very many additional terms. Only 32% of non-credit ESL students (12,114) and 37% of credit ESL students (2,454) enrolled for more than three terms during the seven-year period.[32] This means that, in total, 68% (25,981) of non-credit and 63% (4,212) of credit students enrolled for three or fewer terms. Moreover, Table 4.1 shows that only 13% of credit students and 8% of non-credit students enrolled for as long as four terms, and the percentage enrolled fell to 2% of both credit and non-credit students enrolled for eight or nine terms, and a very small number and percentage who enrolled for more terms.

Thus, although about two-thirds of students enrolled for more than one term, most credit and non-credit students in the cohort did not enroll for very many of the 21 terms available to them over the seven years studied.

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[32]Because the percentage portion of the table is rounded to the nearest whole number, calculations of percentages for those persisting for more than 3 terms were performed using the number, not percent figures.

It is important to note that a significant number of students (5,500) who were new to non-credit ESL in 1998, 1999 and 2000 had fewer than eight hours of attendance. If these students had been included in the cohort, they would have comprised 12.6% of the total cohort. Including these students in the cohort would have increased the number and percentage of students who enrolled for only one term, and decreased the percentage of students who enrolled for additional numbers of terms. See Table 4.6 for a description of students with fewer than 8 hours of attendance.

Table 4.1 Persistence of the ESL Cohort of Students at CCSF

Terms Persisted	Percent		Number	
	Credit	Non-Credit	Credit	Non-Credit
1	30%	38%	1985	14606
2	18%	19%	1189	7132
3	16%	11%	1038	4243
4	13%	8%	854	2972
5	8%	5%	563	1974
6	6%	4%	403	1477
7	4%	3%	250	1201
8	2%	2%	151	931
9	2%	2%	101	788
10	1%	2%	67	664
11	0%	1%	31	502
12	0%	1%	12	369
13	0%	1%	13	336
14	0%	1%	5	268
15	0%	1%	4	215
16-21	0%	1%	0	417
Grand Total	100%	100%	6666	38095

-Terms persisted is within all ESL in credit and within ESLN and ESLF in Non-Credit.
-8 hour limitation applies.
-Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

2. Persistence by First Non-Credit ESL Level

Table 4.2 describes the persistence rates for *non-credit* ESL students in the cohort studied by the first ESL level in which they enrolled. Overall, the Table shows that students who first enrolled at lower levels were more likely to persist for multiple terms than were students who began at higher levels. This greater persistence is particularly pronounced at the Literacy Level (Level 0) and Low Beginning levels (Levels 1 and 2). As Chapter 2 indicates, 68% of non-credit ESL students first enrolled at these three levels. For example, 78% (4,055) of students who began at the Literacy Level, 66% (11,065) of those who began at Level 1 and 64% (2,466) of those who began at Level 2 persisted for

more than one term, while only 55% (755) of students who began at Level 5 and 51% (518) of those who began at Level 6 persisted for more than one term.

Likewise, the Table shows that 64% (3,330) of students who began at the Literacy Level, 47% (7,906) of those who began at Level 1, and 45% (1,718) who began at Level 2 persisted for three or more terms, compared to 34% (466) who began at Level 5 and 29% (294) who began at Level 6.[33]

However, most students who began at lower levels did not enroll for very many terms in total – despite their higher persistence rates. For example, 47% (2,384) of students who began at the Literacy Level, 64% (10,735) of those who began at Level 1, and 67% (2588) who began at Level 2 persisted for three or fewer terms. Collectively, 15,707 students who began at the Literacy Level or the Low Beginning Levels 1 and 2 persisted for three or fewer terms. They comprised 61% of students who began at these levels and 41% of the cohort.
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A larger percentage of students who began at higher levels did not enroll for very many terms. For example, 80% (1087) of students who began at Level 5 and 84% (844) who began at Level 6 persisted for three or fewer terms. But *because students who began at the Literacy or Low Beginning levels had to advance more levels to attain fairly high levels of English proficiency, the fact that a significant percentage of them did not persist for very many terms is notable*. The implications of this finding are elaborated in the "Discussion" section of this chapter.

Some ESLN and ESLF classes are multi-level[34]. Regrettably for purposes of this study, student levels are only known for those who are in leveled classes. As a result, students whose first enrollment was in a multi-level class are listed in the NA column in Table 4.2 and in subsequent tables in this report where students are grouped by levels. In subsequent analyses of level advancement, students who enrolled in multi-level classes were not counted as advancing a level because it is impossible to determine the number of levels they advanced.

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[33] Because the percentage portion of the table is rounded to the nearest whole number, calculations of percentages for those persisting for more than 3 terms are done using the number, not percent figures.

[34] See the non-credit course description section in Chapter 1 for a description of the types of multi-level classes at CCSF.

Table 4.2 Persistence of Non-Credit ESL Students by First Level
Percent and Number

Terms Persisted	First ESL Non-Credit Level											
	Percent											
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	NA	Total
1	22%	34%	36%	38%	46%	45%	49%	49%	56%	3%	75%	38%
2	14%	19%	19%	21%	21%	21%	22%	25%	21%	17%	16%	19%
3	10%	12%	12%	13%	12%	14%	13%	13%	11%	47%	5%	11%
4	10%	9%	9%	9%	6%	8%	6%	5%	5%	10%	2%	8%
5	7%	6%	5%	5%	4%	4%	4%	3%	3%	3%	1%	5%
6	6%	4%	4%	4%	3%	3%	2%	1%	2%	3%	0%	4%
7	5%	4%	4%	3%	2%	2%	1%	1%	2%	3%	0%	3%
8	5%	3%	2%	2%	2%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	2%
9	4%	2%	2%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	0%	0%	2%
10	4%	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	3%	0%	2%
11	3%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	7%	0%	1%
12	2%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%
13	2%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%
14	2%	1%	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%
15	2%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%
16-21	3%	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	3%	0%	1%
	Number											
Terms Persisted	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	NA	Total
1	1125	5646	1384	1384	701	608	491	521	174	1	2571	14606
2	725	3159	748	760	324	289	224	267	65	5	566	7132
3	534	1930	456	472	179	190	129	138	34	14	167	4243
4	500	1430	334	316	98	104	61	54	14	3	58	2972
5	364	1019	190	175	58	56	45	33	8	1	25	1974
6	309	740	162	135	39	37	22	11	5	1	16	1477
7	265	618	140	97	25	23	9	10	5	1	8	1201
8	237	478	96	68	23	10	6	9	1		3	931
9	218	393	73	54	19	15	5	6	2		3	788
10	203	331	47	51	12	10	5	2		1	2	664
11	148	245	54	30	11	5	1	3		2	3	502
12	122	165	44	23	6	3	1	1	1		3	369
13	122	152	32	19	5	3	1				2	336
14	88	123	27	11	9	5	2	1	1		1	268
15	78	95	24	9	3		3	1			2	215
16-21	142	187	39	27	5	5	4	3		1	4	417
Total	5180	16711	3850	3631	1517	1363	1009	1060	310	30	3434	38095

-Percents are rounded to the nearest whole number.

3. **Persistence by First Credit ESL Level**

Table 4.3 shows the persistence of *credit* ESL students in the cohort by the first credit level of ESL in which they enrolled. This Table shows that, unlike non-credit students, credit students who began at lower levels were *not* significantly more likely to persist than students who began at higher levels. In fact, the persistence rates of credit students were about the same, regardless of their first level of enrollment, with the exception of those who first enrolled in Levels 5 and 6.

For example, the Table shows that 83% of students who began at the Intermediate credit levels, (ESL 120, 130, and 130 – represented as Levels 2, 3, and 4 in the table), 84% of those who began at of Level 5 (ESL 150), and 81% who began at Level 0 (ESL 22) enrolled for more than one term. In contrast, 77% (286) of students who began at Level 1 (ESL 110) enrolled for more than one term. The highest credit ESL level was an Advanced High class, ESL 160, formerly numbered ESL 82 (shown in the Table as Level 6). Twenty-nine percent (164) of Level 6 students were enrolled for more than one term, although there were no more levels in this sequence for them to take. Most of these students were probably taking other elective ESL courses or repeating Level 6.

About the same percentage of credit ESL students who began at Levels 0-4 enrolled for three or more terms.[35] Sixty-seven percent of those who began at Level 0 (105), 66% of those who began at Level 1 (245), 69% of those who began at Level 2 (558), 72% of those who began at Level 3 (983), and 70% of those who began at Level 4 (892) enrolled for three or more terms. In contrast, 50% of students who began at Level 5 (649) and 4% of those who began at Level 6 (32) enrolled for three or more terms.[36]

The differences between students who began at Levels 5 and 6 and those who began at other levels probably are not very revealing about persistence. This is because those differences were probably due in large part to the fact that there was only one more level in the credit sequence examined by this study that students beginning at Level 5 could take, and no more levels that students beginning at Level 6 could take – regardless of how many terms they enrolled.

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[35] Percentages for students enrolled for three or more terms were calculated using the number rather than the percent figures in Table 4.3.

[36] Some of the Level 4, 5, and 6 students who enrolled for three or more terms probably were taking other elective ESL courses, and others probably were repeating a level of ESL.

**Table 4.3 Persistence of Credit ESL Students
by First Level Percent and Number**

Terms Persisted	First Credit Level								
	Percent								
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	NA	Total
1	19%	23%	17%	17%	17%	16%	71%	82%	30%
2	14%	11%	14%	11%	12%	34%	24%	15%	18%
3	18%	8%	13%	12%	25%	26%	4%	3%	16%
4	10%	10%	10%	16%	24%	15%	1%	1%	13%
5	11%	8%	11%	16%	11%	6%	0%	0%	8%
6	6%	9%	11%	13%	5%	2%	0%	0%	6%
7	6%	10%	9%	6%	3%	1%	0%	0%	4%
8	4%	7%	6%	3%	2%	0%	0%	0%	2%
9	4%	6%	4%	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%
10	2%	5%	3%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%
11	3%	2%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
12	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
13-15	2%	2%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	Number								
Terms Persisted	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	NA	Total
1	29	86	137	233	220	205	393	682	1985
2	22	41	111	157	154	446	136	122	1189
3	28	31	104	164	320	343	22	26	1038
4	16	36	82	218	301	191	4	6	854
5	17	28	87	222	135	74			563
6	9	32	87	177	68	29	1		403
7	10	37	76	83	33	10	1		250
8	6	26	48	48	21	2			151
9	6	21	33	37	4				101
10	3	17	22	20	5				67
11	5	7	9	9	1				31
12	2	3	3	3	1				12
13	2	4	5	2					13
14	1	1	1		2				5
15		2	1		1				4
Total	156	372	806	1373	1266	1300	557	836	6666

-Percents are rounded to the nearest whole number.

4. Demographics of Persistence

Tables 4.4 and 4.5 present persistence rates by ethnicity and age, respectively. Only persistence rates for non-credit ESL students are presented.

Ethnicity. Table 4.4 describes the persistence rates of Non-Credit ESL students by ethnic group. Of the two ethnic groups with the largest enrollment, Asian/Pacific Islanders persisted at the highest rate and Hispanic/Latinos persisted at a lower rate.

Seventy-three percent of Asian/Pacific Islanders (9,808) enrolled for more than one term, compared to 60% of Hispanic/Latino students (8,428). Fifty-seven percent (7,647) of Asian/Pacific Islanders enrolled for three terms or longer compared to only 40% (5,550) of Hispanic/Latinos.[37]

Age. Table 4.5 shows persistence by age. Overall, students at the age extremes –16-19 years old and 35 years old or older – had slightly higher persistence rates than did students in other age groups. Between 64% and 70% of these students enrolled for more than one term, compared to between 58% and 61% of students in the three other age groups. The largest percentages of students who enrolled for more than one term were in the 40-49 and 50+ age groups, 70%.

The percentage of students in the 16-19 year old age group and in the age groups 35-39, 40-49, and 50+ who enrolled for three or more terms ranged between 43% and 53%. The percentage in the age groups 20-24, 25-29, and 30-34 who enrolled for three or more terms ranged between 38% and 42%. The largest percentages of students persisting for three or more terms were in the 40-49 and 50+ groups, 53%.

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[37] Percentages of students enrolled for three or more terms were calculated using the number rather than percent figures in Tables 4.4 and 4.5.

Table 4.4 Persistence in Non-Credit ESL by Ethnic Group

	Ethnicity								
	Percent								
Terms Persisted	African American Non Hispanic	American Indian Alaskan Native	Asian Pacific Islander	Filipino	Hispanic Latino	Other Non White	Unknown No Response	White Non Hispanic	Total
1	41%	44%	27%	58%	40%	44%	53%	44%	38%
2	20%	16%	16%	23%	21%	26%	19%	19%	19%
3	12%	8%	11%	9%	12%	10%	9%	13%	11%
4	12%	4%	9%	4%	8%	5%	5%	7%	8%
5	4%	0%	7%	2%	5%	2%	3%	4%	5%
6	5%	8%	5%	0%	4%	1%	2%	2%	4%
7	1%	8%	4%	1%	3%	3%	2%	2%	3%
8	2%	0%	4%	0%	2%	4%	1%	1%	2%
9	0%	0%	3%	1%	2%	2%	1%	1%	2%
10	1%	12%	3%	1%	1%	0%	1%	1%	2%
11	2%	0%	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
12	0%	0%	2%	0%	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%
13	0%	0%	2%	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%
14	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%
15	0%	0%	1%	1%	0%	1%	0%	0%	1%
16-21	1%	0%	2%	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%
	Number								
Terms Persisted	African American Non Hispanic	American Indian Alaskan Native	Asian Pacific Islander	Filipino	Hispanic Latino	Other Non White	Unknown No Response	White Non Hispanic	Total
1	78	11	3554	107	5602	96	4241	917	14606
2	38	4	2161	42	2878	56	1553	400	7132
3	22	2	1520	16	1680	21	719	263	4243
4	22	1	1224	8	1134	10	436	137	2972
5	8		891	3	710	4	265	93	1974
6	9	2	700		544	3	174	45	1477
7	2	2	595	1	405	7	137	52	1201
8	4		492		284	9	111	31	931
9			450	1	232	5	76	24	788
10	2	3	391	1	159	1	77	30	664
11	3		306	1	130	2	40	20	502
12			229		81		40	19	369
13			216	1	67		34	18	336
14	1		180		44	1	27	15	268
15			146	1	31	2	28	7	215
16-21	2		307	2	49		40	17	417
Total	191	25	13362	184	14030	217	7998	2088	38095

-Percents are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Table 4.5 Persistence in Non-Credit ESL by Age

	Age								
	Percent								
Terms Persisted	16 - 19	20 - 24	25 - 29	30 - 34	35 - 39	40 - 49	50+	Unknown/ No Response	Total
1	36%	39%	42%	39%	35%	30%	30%	64%	38%
2	21%	20%	20%	20%	18%	17%	16%	19%	19%
3	12%	12%	11%	11%	12%	11%	11%	8%	11%
4	10%	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%	8%	4%	8%
5	6%	5%	5%	5%	6%	6%	5%	2%	5%
6	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%	5%	5%	1%	4%
7	3%	3%	3%	3%	4%	4%	4%	1%	3%
8	2%	2%	2%	3%	3%	4%	4%	0%	2%
9	2%	2%	2%	2%	2%	3%	3%	0%	2%
10	2%	1%	2%	1%	2%	3%	3%	0%	2%
11	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	2%	0%	1%
12	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	2%	0%	1%
13	1%	0%	0%	1%	1%	2%	1%	0%	1%
14	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%	2%	0%	1%
15	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%
16-21	0%	0%	0%	1%	1%	2%	2%	0%	1%
	Number								
Terms Persisted	16 - 19	20 - 24	25 - 29	30 - 34	35 - 39	40 - 49	50+	Unknown/No Response	Total
1	952	2541	2426	1852	1362	1677	1710	2086	14606
2	559	1270	1171	942	703	958	899	630	7132
3	327	786	616	552	447	622	625	268	4243
4	254	518	448	389	329	449	463	122	2972
5	173	343	272	254	225	333	308	66	1974
6	103	259	215	173	172	256	268	31	1477
7	84	195	163	140	144	214	241	20	1201
8	47	145	97	121	98	206	205	12	931
9	54	98	103	94	81	182	166	10	788
10	40	84	87	70	72	141	163	7	664
11	23	56	61	55	58	112	128	9	502
12	11	43	29	43	40	96	101	6	369
13	15	31	21	48	42	94	83	2	336
14	9	29	23	22	25	70	86	4	268
15	4	19	14	20	26	75	52	5	215
16-21	8	27	27	32	47	131	138	7	417
Total	2663	6444	5773	4807	3871	5616	5636	3285	38095

-Percents are rounded to the nearest whole number.

5. <u>Students with Fewer than Eight Hours of Attendance</u>

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, students with fewer than eight hours of ESLN and/or ESLF attendance were excluded from the cohort of non-credit ESL students examined by this study. However, it is of interest to know who these students were. Table 4.6 describes some characteristics of students who enrolled in non-credit ESL classes but attended fewer than eight hours over the seven years that the cohort was studied. There were 5,500 students with fewer than eight hours of attendance. If these students had been included in the cohort, the cohort would have totaled 43,595 students. So nearly 13% of the students who first enrolled in non-credit ESL in 1998, 1999, or 2000 (5,500 of 43,595) had fewer than eight total hours of ESLN and/or ESLF attendance.

Of the two largest ethnic groups in non-credit ESL, 13% (2,067) of Hispanics were enrolled for fewer than eight hours compared to 7% (1,002) of Asians. Twenty-one percent (2,081) of students whose ethnic group was unknown (represented as "Unknown/No Response" in the Table) attended for fewer than eight hours. Thus, it is possible that these percentages of ethnicity would be altered if information were available on these students. However, this finding about students with fewer than eight hours of attendance is consistent with the finding that Asians in the cohort had higher persistence rates than Hispanics.

Students in the 25-29 year old age group were most likely to have fewer than eight hours of attendance (13% or 839 students). Those students who were 50+ were least likely to have fewer than eight hours of attendance (8% or 526 students.) Those who were age 16-19 and 40-49 were the second least likely to have fewer than eight hours of attendance. Age was unknown (Unknown/No Response) for 31% (1,454). Thus, it is possible that these percentages would be altered if information were available on these students. However, this finding about students with fewer than eight hours of attendance is consistent with the finding that students in the cohort who were at the age extremes (younger and older) had higher persistence rates than those who in the age groups in between.

Students whose first level was Literacy were least likely to have fewer than eight hours of attendance (7% or 395students). For the other levels, the percentages of those with fewer than eight hours of attendance ranged from 12-14% with the exception of those whose first level was Level 6 (9% or 104 students).

Table 4.6 Students Enrolled In Non-Credit ESL from 1998-2000
With Fewer than 8 Hours of Attendance

	Percent of Students With Fewer than 8 Hours	Number of Students With Fewer Than 8 Hours	Total of Students Enrolled in Non-Credit ESLN and/or ESLF in 1998, 1999, 2000
Ethnicity	Percent	Number	
African American/Non Hispanic	14%	31	222
American Indian/Alaskan Native	7%	2	27
Asian/Pacific Islander	7%	1002	14364
Filipino	17%	37	221
Hispanic/Latino	13%	2067	16097
Other Non White	14%	35	252
Unknown/No Response	21%	2081	10079
White Non Hispanic	11%	245	2333
Grand Total	13%	5500	43595
Age			
16 - 19	9%	278	2941
20 - 24	11%	837	7281
25 - 29	13%	839	6612
30 - 34	10%	548	5355
35 - 39	10%	439	4310
40 - 49	9%	589	6205
50+	8%	516	6152
Unknown/No Response	31%	1454	4739
Grand Total	13%	5500	43595
First Level of ESLN and/or ESLF			
0	7%	395	5575
1	12%	2194	18905
2	12%	530	4380
3	13%	556	4187
4	14%	254	1771
5	12%	191	1554
6	9%	104	1113
7	12%	143	1203
8	14%	52	362
9	6%	2	32
No Level	24%	1079	4513
Grand Total	13%	5500	43595

D. DISCUSSION

1. Cause for Concern

Low persistence rates in ESL programs are a cause for concern, because (as Chapters 5 and 6 will show) low persistence has an adverse effect on level advancement and transfer to credit. Thirty-eight percent of non-credit ESL students in the cohort of students examined by this report persisted for only one term over a period of seven years. As Chapter 5 will explain, most students at CCSF cannot advance a level until the end of each term in which they are enrolled. *This means almost all of the students who were enrolled for only one term did not advance to a higher level*.

There is additional cause for concern because most of the students in the cohort first enrolled at the lowest levels of English proficiency. The majority (68% or 25,741) of students in the cohort started at the Literacy or Beginning Low levels (Levels 1 and 2), as defined by the California Model Standards for ESL. [38] Although students who first enrolled at these levels persisted at higher rates than students who began at the higher levels, 47% of students who began at the Literacy Level, 64% who started at Level 1, and 67% who began at Level 2 persisted for three or fewer terms.

Because level advancement at CCSF is largely related to terms taken, 47% of Literacy Level students would *at most* be able to progress to the Beginning Low level (Level 2) in three terms, and the 67% Beginning Low level (Level 2) students would at most be able to progress to the Beginning High Level (Level 4), if they advanced a level for every term in which they were enrolled. Students entering the Beginning High Level have "limited ability to read and write in English; they function in the use of English in a very limited way, speaking English in situations related to their immediate needs."[39] In total, Literacy and Beginning Low Level students who persisted for three or fewer terms comprised 42% of the cohort. Thus, *at least 42% of the cohort did not persist long enough at CCSF to improve their English beyond the Beginning levels*.

2. Why Are Persistence Rates Low?

It is difficult for most programs to learn a great deal about why students do not persist longer. Often students drop out without notice and cannot be located. Most programs do not have the resources to contact students who have stopped attending classes to determine their reasons. But people who work in the ESL field believe there are a variety of reasons why many do not continue their non-credit ESL classes, and evidence from this study supports some of these reasons.

According to anecdotal reports from instructors, some students drop out due to family and work obligations, or health issues. The lower persistence rates for younger, working

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[38] "ESL Model Standards For Adult Education Programs," 1992. Sacramento: California Department of Education.

[39] See Chapter 1.

age students, age 20-34 (47% of the cohort studied) may be evidence that many of these students need to make work, not school, their first priority. Also, students in this age range may be more likely to have family responsibilities than are younger or older students.

Students at the Intermediate levels may not see a need to continue their ESL studies, perhaps believing they have learned enough English to function in their jobs and in most familiar situations. Also, Intermediate and Advanced Level students may have enough English to pursue other educational opportunities in vocational training or academic programs.

A variety of other factors may also affect persistence. Some students may feel they have achieved their personal goal of attaining the level of English they need to live and work in the United States. As a result, they may not see a need for further studies. Other students may be dissatisfied with their classes and/or teacher. Some of these students may find it difficult to navigate the process of changing the classes in which they are enrolled. Still others may believe they are able to improve their level of English by using it on the job.

Another reason that some students may not persist in their ESL studies is that in San Francisco, like many other large cities in the United States, it is possible to live comfortably in many ethnic neighborhoods without needing to use much English.

3. Geographic Mobility

As noted in the Introduction of this report, one inherent limitation of any research based on student record data is that it cannot account for the effect of geographic mobility on enrollment, persistence, or other student characteristics. Chapter 1 indicated that Census figures show a net decrease in the number of immigrants living in CCSF's service area (largely the city of San Francisco) since the 1990s. Thus, one possible reason that students in the cohort examined did not enroll for more terms is that some of them moved to other areas. If they had remained in the San Francisco area, their persistence rates might have been higher.

Although geographic mobility may have had some effect on the number of students that enrolled for various numbers of terms, there is no evidence to indicate that it had an effect on the relative percentage of students who did so. That is, there is no evidence to indicate that students who enrolled for a smaller number of terms were immigrants who were more geographically mobile than students who enrolled for a greater number of terms.

Moreover, census data on the decrease in San Francisco's immigrant population do not describe a mass exodus. Rather, they describe a net decrease on the order of 1% per year (depending on how the numbers are represented). As a result, while out-migration of immigrants may have reduced the persistence of CCSF's ESL students somewhat, there is no reason to believe that the effect was large. It seems likely that most of the students

who first enrolled in the College's ESL program in 1998-2000 were still living in its service area in 2006. And regardless of the number of students who left the service area, the low persistence rates of a large percentage of students in the cohort who fell into every category analyzed by this report are cause for concern about those who remained.

4. **Program Design**

The nature of CCSF's non-credit ESL program could also have some effect on persistence. Classes are free. If students drop out, they do not lose any money, as they would if they dropped out from a fee-based credit ESL class. As noted in Chapter 1, CCSF (like many other adult ESL programs in the country) has adopted an "open-entry/ open-exit" enrollment policy. This policy could possibly contribute to low persistence. Students can be added to a class at almost any time in the term up until the last few weeks. Some students may drop out because they find it difficult to learn in a class that is already underway. They may feel that they will not be able to "catch up" and/or they may have difficulty working together with other students who already know each other.

The major plus of an open-entry/open-exit policy is that students do not have to wait for a period of weeks or months to begin their studies. Like many programs, CCSF keeps waiting lists of students for its non-credit classes and adds students to classes from these waiting lists. The wait was often long when enrollment was high, but as enrollment has declined in recent years, the waiting lists have become smaller or non-existent.

CCSF's ESL program, like many other adult education programs, is dependent on student enrollment for funding. The College has believed it necessary to maintain an open-entry policy to ensure that new students throughout the term fill seats left open by students who drop out. Adult ESL instructors adapt to this continuing influx of new students by constantly recycling instructional material and making special efforts to incorporate new students.

5. **Facing the Challenge**

Non-credit ESL programs have recognized that improving persistence is a challenge that needs to be faced. This study confirms this challenge and provides further evidence to support the nature of the challenge. What can programs do?

ESL professionals from many programs are discussing learner persistence at conferences and sharing ideas for increasing persistence. For example, this problem was featured in a session on "Supporting Adult Student Retention" at CATESOL, 2006.[40] Many programs, including CCSF, have been inspired by NCSALL's Learner Persistence Study Circle Guide,[41] and are experimenting with a variety of efforts to increase persistence.

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[40] ce.sbcc.edu/SanFranciscoCATESOL4_8_06.doc
[41] www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/teach/lp.pdf

CCSF decided to develop a welcome guide that instructors can give to students and use as the basis for instruction during the first week of each term. The guide orients students to their campus and their classes. It is also distributed to students who enter throughout the term, and teachers are provided with instructions about how new students can use it. One suggested use is for teachers to assign continuing students as buddies to help new students complete the activities in the welcome guide. CCSF also conducted a survey of Non-Credit ESL students to ask what they liked and did not like about studying at the College. Poorly maintained facilities were a major concern for many students, and improvements were made in that regard.

Some colleges have adopted a "managed enrollment" approach to improve persistence and other educational outcomes. Unlike the "open-entry/open-exit" program at CCSF, managed enrollment programs usually admit students only at the beginning of each term and terminate them if their attendance rates are not high. Two recent reports by the Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy on ESL instruction at community colleges (based on research at five colleges) explain various forms of managed enrollment, and show that this approach to program design has proved to be highly effective in improving virtually all educational outcomes.[42] In addition, other colleges, such as Mira Costa Community College in California, have found success in improving non-credit student persistence by adopting a managed enrollment program.[43]

Creative scheduling of classes may also help programs serve students who cannot attend during the week due to work schedules. CCSF has scheduled Saturday- and Sunday-only classes at several campuses. It has also tried early morning classes during the week at one campus and is considering Monday-only classes for those who work and have only Monday off.

In the State of Washington, all non-credit ESL students must pay a $25 fee (which can be waived in case of hardship). This token fee may give students in open-entry programs a sense that they have something to lose by not attending classes. A small fee that would be refundable at the end of each term if students have good attendance records could create a greater incentive for persistence than the Washington system does. *Although state policy in California prohibits charging fees for adult education classes, both policymakers and programs may wish to reconsider this possibility as a way of increasing persistence.*

Finally, Chapter 5 shows that a number of features of CCSF's program may make both persistence and advancement more difficult for non-credit students, and the chapter discusses how some of those features might be modified. It also discusses the importance of enhanced guidance and counseling services. Chapters 8 and 9 discuss several

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[42] Forrest P. Chisman and JoAnn Crandall, Passing the Torch: Strategies for Innovation in Community College ESL (New York: Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2007). Elizabeth Zachry & Emily Dibble, Sharon Seymour, Suzanne Leibman, Sandy Ares & Beth Larson, and Pam Ferguson, Torchlights in ESL (New York: Council for the Advancement of Adult Literacy 2007). Both reports are available at the CAAL website: www.caalusa.org.

[43] www.miracosta.edu/Instruction/CommunityEducation/ESL/managedenrollment.html.

important features of CCSF's program – including appropriate matriculation services, accelerated classes, and allowing ESL students to enroll in other non-credit programs – that may also increase persistence. Expanding the availability and quality of these features would seem to be important steps other colleges can take to increase persistence.

CHAPTER 5

LEVEL ADVANCEMENT OF NON-CREDIT ESL STUDENTS

A. FOCUS OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter describes the rate at which students in the cohort examined by this study advanced levels in CCSF's ESL program. For the sake of brevity, the chapter discusses the level advancement of *only* the 38,095 non-credit students in the cohort, and omits a discussion of the learning gains of the 6,666 credit students, and it restricts its focus to courses that the College designates as either a single level or two levels.

Level advancement can be considered a proxy for learning gains, although it is not a precise measure of them. It can be considered a proxy, because students can only advance from one level to the next in CCSF's ESL program if they meet the objectives for English proficiency (as specified in course outlines) of each level in which they are enrolled. Because a student would not be placed in any given level if they could meet the objectives of that level, advancing to the next level indicates that the student's proficiency has increased enough to meet the objectives of the level in which they were placed. That is, the student has achieved some learning gains.

1. CCSF Policy And Level Advancement

With rare exceptions, students are only advanced a level at the end of each term. As noted in the Chapter 1, instructors make decisions on whether to advance a student to the next level by using a variety of evaluation tools to determine if the student has achieved the objectives specified in the course outline. These evaluation tools include on-going observations of performance in class activities, as well as exercises, quizzes, and tests. As explained in Chapter 1, to evaluate whether students have met the objectives of Levels 2, 4, and 6, instructors also use the results of student performance on department-wide tests in Listening and Reading. The Level 4 test battery was expanded in 2006 to include an oral interview and a writing sample. As a result, all four core ESL skills are evaluated to help determine whether a student is ready to advance from the Beginning levels (Levels 1-4) to the lowest Intermediate level (Level 5). In addition, if a student takes more than one class during a term (for example a 10-hour/week ESLN class and a 5 hour/week ESLF class), instructors normally consult at the end of the term to discuss that student's readiness for the next level.

If a student does not attend class for the last few weeks at the end of a term, the teacher will usually remove the student from the class attendance list. These "dropped" students are usually not eligible to be promoted, because teachers do not believe they have sufficient evidence to make promotion decisions. Nevertheless, dropped students probably have achieved some learning gains from the hours they attended. Teachers have discretion about when to drop a student. Because attendance is taken every two weeks, most students are dropped if they are not attending four weeks before the end of the term. If these students return at a later date, they are placed in the same level at which they

were enrolled when they left, or if considerable time has passed, students may re-take the placement test to determine if their level has changed.

It should be noted that, except for a small number of cases, students who attend the summer term are not advanced to the next level when they enroll in that term, whether or not they are eligible for advancement. For example, a student who was enrolled in Level 1 during the spring and then enrolled in the summer term would receive Level 1 instruction during the summer. This would be the case whether or not he/she had been approved for promotion to Level 2. The student would only be promoted to Level 2 at the beginning of the fall term.

This policy of not promoting students during the summer has been adopted by CCSF because the summer term is shorter than the 17.5-week fall and spring terms. Instructional hours are only 25% - 35% of the full term since the summer term is only 6-8 weeks, and classes meet for eight hours a week instead of 10. Also the number of classes offered is considerably reduced, so the number of students served over the summer is only about one quarter the number served in other terms. Summer is considered a time for review and consolidation, even though most students who enroll in the summer term probably achieve learning gains.

Nevertheless, in this study, the summer term is counted in the same way as other terms. Thus, there are 21 terms (3 terms per year) in the seven years over which the cohort was studied.

B. MAJOR FINDINGS

- Overall, this chapter shows that a significant number of students who began at all levels of English proficiency advanced levels, and hence achieved learning gains. Importantly, it shows that students who began at the lowest levels advanced the most. But only a small percentage of students who began at any level advanced very far. In part, this is because a large percentage of students attended for only a small number of hours and thus did not gain the skills they needed to advance.

- A majority of non-credit ESL students (56%) in the cohort studied did not advance even one level during the seven-year period in which their performance was examined. The percentage that did not advance one level varied depending on the first level in which they were enrolled and increased as the level of first enrollment increased. The only level from which a majority of students advanced even one level was the Literacy Level (Level 0).

- Half of the students who did not advance attended fewer than 50 hours of instruction over the seven-year period, and another 30% attended 150 or fewer hours. Thus, students who did not advance were primarily those who attended very few class hours. Ninety-five percent of the 44% of students who did advance received 50 or more hours of instruction.

- Of the 44% of students who did advance, 39% advanced only one level, and 26% advanced only two levels. Hence, of those who did advance, 65% advanced no more than two levels.

- Sixty-seven percent of non-credit students in the cohort first enrolled at the lowest levels – the Literacy or Low Beginning levels (0-2). Students who first enrolled at lower levels were more likely to advance than students who first enrolled at higher levels. However, only about 19% of students who first enrolled at the Literacy or Beginning Levels advanced to the Intermediate Level (Level 5).

- Students who enrolled for more terms advanced more levels than did students who enrolled for fewer terms. The low rates of persistence discussed in Chapter 4 are a major reason that level advancement was so limited.

- Students who advanced more levels attended more hours of instruction than students who advanced fewer levels.

- On average, it took those students who advanced levels about 100 hours to advance each level, although many of these students advanced in fewer hours and many attended for more hours before they advanced. Not only must students enroll in more terms if they wish to advance in levels of English proficiency, but they must also attend enough hours in the terms during which they are enrolled.

- Students who started at each successively higher level required fewer hours to advance each level. That is, students who initially enrolled at higher levels advanced more quickly than students who initially enrolled at lower levels. However, both the percentage and number of students at lower levels who advanced was greater than the percentage and number of students at higher levels who advanced. It appears that students at lower levels were more willing and able to devote the extra hours required to advance levels.

- Asians attended more hours before they advanced than did Hispanics, but a greater percentage and number of Asians than Hispanics advanced each level. Apparently Asians were more willing or able than Hispanics to attend the hours it took them to advance, even though the number of hours required was greater for them than it was for Hispanics.

- There was no systematic relationship between age and the number of levels taken or advanced. Students in different age groups advanced at different rates, but there was no systematic pattern to these differences, except that students in the 16-19 year old age group advanced at a slightly faster rate than students in other age groups.

Overall, these findings suggest that a major challenge for CCSF's ESL program, and for other programs, is to find ways to help students who do not advance very many levels ascend higher on the ladder of English proficiency. If some students can accomplish this, many more should be able to do so.

It is significant that some categories of students (such as those who began at the lowest levels and Asians) advanced more levels than others did, despite the fact that it took them more hours and terms to advance. This suggests that student motivation and goals were among the key factors affecting learning gains. And it suggests that anything colleges can do to increase motivation and expand student goals (such as increased guidance, counseling, and other support services) will increase level advancement.

Also, certain aspects of CCSF's ESL program structure (such as long terms and a policy of promoting students only at the end of terms) may slow both the rate at which students advance and how far they advance. CCSF and other colleges should examine their program structures to determine whether they create barriers to student advancement. In particular, they should try to ensure that students can advance levels as quickly as they master the skills taught at each level. For these purposes, they may wish to consider dividing their programs into fairly short instructional units and/or assessing the readiness of students to advance at frequent intervals. They may also wish to consider instituting accelerated high-intensity tracks for students who wish to advance as rapidly as possible. Likewise, colleges should consider augmenting their programs with features that may increase level advancement. Several features of this sort adopted by CCSF are discussed in Chapters 9 and 10.

C. ANALYSIS

1. Level Advancement of Non-Credit ESL Students

Table 5.1 presents the number of non-credit students in the cohort by their starting level (the level at which they first enrolled) and the total number of levels they took (were enrolled in) during the seven years over which they were studied. While the Table presents levels taken, the primary focus of this analysis is on how many levels students advanced. Students who advanced one or more levels are those who took two or more levels (the level in which they initially enrolled plus the level or levels to which they advanced). This is, level advancement can be determined by subtracting one level from the number of levels taken. For example, students who took only one level did not advance any levels at all, and students who took two levels advanced one level (from their level of first enrollment to the next higher level).[44]

Students who did not advance or advanced few levels. The most important thing Table 5.1 shows is that a majority of non-credit students (56%, 18,937 students) did not

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[44] This way of counting students' 'levels taken' leads to some irregularities in the data set. Not all students advanced in a linear fashion. In some cases, their last level was lower than their first. These students were removed from the analysis of level advancement. Other students may have taken levels out of sequence. They could have started at Level 2 and finished at Level 2, but have enrolled in Level 1 and Level 3 classes at some point during their seven years of study. The jumping around levels does not invalidate this approach to the assessment of learning. It merely introduces 'noise' into the numbers that appear in the tables. This noise will be apparent to the observant reader. It will be pointed out as it occurs throughout the rest of this chapter. If anything, if it were possible to rid the noise from the analysis, the relationships described here would be stronger.

advance even one level during the seven years over which they were studied. The percentage of students who did not advance differed depending on the level at which they were first enrolled. For example, the percentage of students who did not advance was 54% for students initially enrolled in Level 1 (Beginning Low) and 74% for those first enrolled in Level 5 (Low Intermediate). The only level from which a majority of students advanced at least one level was the Literacy Level (Level 0). Of these students, 44% took only one level. Thus, 56% advanced at least one level.

Table 5.1 also shows that the percentage of students who did not advance was greater for students who began at the higher levels than for students who began at the lower levels. However, because the number of students at higher levels was much smaller than the number at lower levels, the vast majority of the students who did not advance were at the Literacy or Low Beginning levels (Level 0 and Levels 1-2). Students who were initially enrolled at these levels comprised 69% of the 18,937 students who did not advance even one level over the seven-year time period.

Finally, Table 5.1 indicates that, of those students who did advance, 38% advanced only one level, and 26% advanced two levels.[45] Hence, 64% of the students who *did* advance advanced only one or two levels. Seventy-three percent of students did not advance at all or advanced only one level, and 84% of students (28,382 students) did not advance at all or advanced only one or two levels.

Levels advanced and first level taken. Table 5.1 also shows that lower-level students were more likely than higher-level students to advance more than one level. For example, 30% of students who began at the Literacy Level or Levels 1-3 advanced two or more levels, whereas this was the case with only 18% who began at Levels 4, 15% who began at Level 5, 6% who began at Level 6, and 2% who began at Level 7. No students who began at Levels 8 and 9 did so. Overall, the percentage of students initially enrolled at the lowest levels (Literacy and Levels 1-3) that advanced more than one level was about the same, but the percentage was smaller for students initially enrolled at higher levels who advanced more than one level.

This finding is most pronounced for students who advanced three or more levels. For example, 17% of students who started at the Literacy Level did so, contrasted to 19% who started at Level 1, 16% who started at Level 2, and 18% who started at Level 3. Only 3% of students who began at Level 5 advanced three or more levels.[46]

Moreover, the percentage of higher-level students who took more than one level decreased at each successively higher level. Because of the larger numbers of students at lower levels, the number of students at those levels who advanced multiple levels was also much greater than the number at higher levels.

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[45] These percentages are calculated from the section of Table 5.1 that gives numbers of students, rather than the section that gives percentages. The percentages would be slightly different if the section that gives percentages was used, due to rounding of the percentages.

[46] This can be seen by adding the percentages of students at each level who took four levels or more.

Of course, one reason why a lower percentage of high-level students took multiple levels was probably that there were fewer levels for them to take. For example, students who began at Levels 8 or 9 could not have taken two or more levels, because there is only one more level available to Level 8 students, and no more levels available to Level 9 students. Still, the fact that students initially enrolled in the Literacy Level and Levels 1-3 were much more likely to advance two or more levels, than were students initially enrolled in Levels 4-6 (all of whom had two more levels available to them, and all of whom except Level 6 students had 4 more levels available to them) indicates that lower level students were, in fact, more likely to advance multiple levels.

In a sense, this is good news. It is distressing that so many students who began at all levels failed to advance at all, and that so many advanced only one level. However, the fact that non-trivial percentages and numbers of students who began at the Literacy and Beginning Levels 1-3 advanced two to four levels shows that significant progress for students with very limited English proficiency is possible. Although the numbers are not as large as might be desired, these, too, are impressive in some cases. For example, the fact that 7,626 students who began at Levels 1-3 advanced two or more levels, and 4,549 advanced three or more levels shows that at least some Beginning Level students can achieve a great deal.

Advance to the Intermediate or Advanced levels. Table 5.1 can also be used to calculate the percentage of students who advanced to the Intermediate Level (Levels 5-8), which is often regarded as an important benchmark in discussing ESL programs. This can be accomplished by adding the percentages of students beginning at each level who advance to the first Intermediate level. The percentage of students initially enrolled at the Literacy Level who advanced to the first Intermediate Level (Level 5) or beyond was only 4%. Two percent of students who began at the Literacy Level advanced to level 5 (took 6 levels) and 1% advanced to Levels 6 and 7. For the Beginning Levels 1-3, 10% of students who began at Level 1 advanced to the first Intermediate Level (Level 5) or beyond, in contrast to 16% who began at Level 2, and 29% who began at Level 3.

Movement to the Advanced Level is also an important benchmark for ESL programs. Unfortunately, this study cannot analyze this advancement because CCSF only offers two levels of Low Advanced 9 at one campus. Students at other campuses who are ready to advance to Level 9 sometimes re-enroll in Level 8, or they may enroll in multi-level classes, other non-credit courses (such as ABE courses offered by the Transitional Studies Department), or credit ESL.

Table 5.1 Levels Taken by First Level in Non-Credit ESL

Percent

Levels Taken	First Non-Credit ESL Level										All Levels
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
1	44%	54%	52%	56%	71%	74%	78%	95%	100%	100%	56%
2	27%	16%	17%	15%	11%	11%	16%	3%	0%	0%	17%
3	13%	11%	14%	11%	9%	12%	5%	2%	0%	0%	11%
4	8%	9%	7%	9%	6%	2%	1%	0%	0%	0%	8%
5	5%	4%	5%	6%	2%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	4%
6	2%	3%	3%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	2%
7	1%	2%	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	1%
8	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
9	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
10	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Grand Total	5180	16497	3663	3490	1392	1270	925	988	271	29	33705

Number

Levels Taken	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Grand Total
1	2271	8901	1912	1969	984	938	726	937	270	29	18937
2	1402	2615	613	531	155	139	144	31	1		5631
3	662	1886	529	392	126	156	43	20			3814
4	398	1444	269	315	89	21	12				2548
5	239	711	190	207	33	16					1396
6	88	545	107	56	5						801
7	63	257	37	20							377
8	42	114	6								162
9	14	24									38
10	1										1
Grand Total	5180	16497	3663	3490	1392	1270	925	988	271	29	33705

- Includes all students first enrolled in ESLN and/or ESLF in 1998, 1999, 2000, except that 4,390 students have been removed from the analysis. Of these students, 956 had a higher first level than last, and an additional 3,434 had no level designation because they were in a multi-level class. It was necessary to remove these students from the analysis in this chapter, because the chapter is concerned with level advancement, and no reliable first or subsequent level could be assigned to them. Because they are removed from the analysis, the number of students in the cohort described in this and all other tables in this chapter, except 5.2, is 33,705, rather than the full 38,095 members of the cohort defined in Chapter 3.

2. Level Advancement Related to Terms Taken

Table 5.2 shows the relationship between the number of ESLN and ESLF terms in which students were enrolled and the number of levels they took over the seven-year period. The first column lists the total number of terms in which students were enrolled. The second presents the mean (average) number of levels they took. For example, the Table shows that students who were enrolled for only one term took only one level during that term, and students who were enrolled for two terms took an average of 1.55 levels. Only 16 terms are listed because no student in the cohort enrolled for more than 16 of the 21 terms available to them during the seven-year period studied, and only 2,092 members of the cohort enrolled in more than 10 of the 21 terms available to them over the seven year period.

Persistence and level advancement. The Table shows that persistence (terms taken) is strongly related to level advancement. Students who were enrolled for more terms enrolled in more levels, and hence achieved greater level advancement. For example, students who were enrolled for three terms took 1.97 levels, on average, whereas students who were enrolled for ten terms took 3.71 levels on average. Importantly, the numbers of levels taken increased with each successive term taken. *The relationship between terms taken and levels taken is, thus, both positive and strong.*

Of course, this relationship makes common sense. It is not surprising to find that the more students study (measured by terms taken), the more levels they advance. This is especially true at CCSF where, as explained above, students are usually advanced a level only at the end of each term. As a result, most students cannot possibly advance more than one level for each term in which they are enrolled. Table 5.2 confirms this common-sense expectation. Persistence pays off in terms of level advancement.

Terms to advance a level. Table 5.2 also shows that, on average, it took students more than one term to advance a level. For example, students who enrolled for three terms had taken 1.97 levels on average by the beginning of their third term. That means that in two terms they had taken 1.97 levels – and hence advanced close to one level.[47] Likewise, students who enrolled for six terms had taken on average 2.93 levels by the beginning of their sixth term. That means that in five terms, they had taken an average of 2.93 levels – and hence advanced about two levels.

It is important to bear in mind that the numbers in Table 5.2 are averages. As a result, in the examples just given, some students who enrolled for three terms advanced more than two levels, and some advanced fewer levels. Likewise, some students who enrolled for six terms advanced more than two levels, and some advanced fewer levels. But Table 5.2 demonstrates that, on average, students did not advance a level for each term in which they were enrolled.

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[47] Strictly speaking, only students who took two levels would have advanced one level.

Relationship to persistence rates. Finally, Table 5.2 confirms the Chapter 4 findings that persistence is very low. Thirty-five percent of students enrolled for only one term and, thus, enrolled in only one level. And, almost two-thirds of students enrolled for three terms or less during the seven-year period studied. These low persistence levels clearly have a negative effect on level advancement. On average, students who enrolled for one, two, and three terms took 1.0, 1.55, and 1.97 levels, respectively. But students who enrolled for more terms achieved far greater level advancement – as measured by the number of levels in which they were enrolled. For example, students who enrolled for 10 terms took 3.71 levels, on average. Regrettably only small numbers of students persisted for large numbers of terms and achieved these greater rates of level advancement. For example only 662 students were enrolled for 10 terms.

Table 5.2 Mean Levels Taken by Total Terms Taken[48]

ESLN&ESLF Terms Taken	Mean ESLN&ESLF Levels Taken	Number
1	1	12035
2	1.55	6566
3	1.97	4076
4	2.39	2914
5	2.72	1949
6	2.93	1461
7	5.21	1193
8	5.29	928
9	5.5	785
10	3.71	662
11	3.82	499
12	3.87	366
13	3.96	334
14	4.06	267
15	4.09	213
16	4.39	413
Total	2.11	34661

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[48] The total number of students in this table is 34.661, rather than 33,705 as it is in other tables in this chapter because this table includes 956 students whose last level was higher than their first level. These students are included in this table, because the software program used to generate the tables, SAS, does not exclude records with zero or negative numbers. The 956 students had zero or negative numbers as part of their "levels taken" field and hence these numbers were used in the computation of the means in this table. In other tables zero or negative levels taken were manually removed from the analysis.

3. Level Advancement Related to Hours of Study

Hours and terms. Table 5.2 shows that persistence (from the standpoint of taking more terms) pays off in level advancement, and that low rates of persistence are a major reason why CCSF's ESL students do not advance very many levels. But there are other factors at work. One of these is the number of hours that students attend.

Not surprisingly, the number of hours students attend and the number of terms during which they are enrolled are closely related. It is probable that the major way in which students accumulate larger numbers of hours of instruction is by taking more terms, although some students undoubtedly enroll for multiple terms but fail to attend very many hours.

In fact, this study found that hours of instruction have a .57 correlation with the number of levels students take (and hence advance), and that the number of terms taken has a .59 correlation. There was a .85 correlation between hours of instruction and terms enrolled. When both of the factors are taken together, terms account for 35% of the variance in levels taken. In short, *those students who advanced levels enrolled in more terms and attended for more hours.*[49]

This section explains the attendance hours on which these regressions are based. More importantly, it examines aspects of the relationship between hours of instruction and level advancement that are not apparent from regression analysis.

The effect of hours of instruction. Consistent with the correlations just mentioned, Table 5.31 demonstrates that hours of instruction have a strong effect on level advancement.[50] The table shows how the number of levels taken is related to the number of hours of non-credit instruction ESL students attended. The numbers of hours shown in the table are the total number of hours students attended at any time in the seven-year period during which they were studied. The numbers of hours students attended are shown in 100-hour

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[49] The SAS correlation protocol was used to calculate the zero order correlations and the SAS regression protocol was used to calculate the multiple regression coefficients.

[50] This and the following tables in this chapter often state the number of levels or hours that students advance in terms of "median" numbers of levels or hours. In other chapters, and in Table 5.2 "mean" values were used. "Median" was selected for use in this and the following tables in this chapter to help the reader understand complex relationships more easily. In particular, the following tables in this chapter primarily refer to median values, because calculations in terms of medians lead to round numbers, rather than fractional numbers. Both median and mean are measures of central tendency. When the distribution of the underlying variable is normal they are the same. However, when the distribution is skewed they can differ - sometimes markedly. The difference is that the mean is the sum of all the values (such as the number of hours) divided by the number of cases (such as levels enrolled). For the median, it is the number (such as number of hours) above and below which 50% of the cases fall. Calculations in terms of both median and mean represent the common sense notion of "average." All the tables in this chapter were calculated using both the median and the mean, and it was discovered that, the relationships discussed in this chapter, and hence the conclusions that could be drawn, did not differ. However, these relationships and conclusions are often easier to see and explain using median values, rather than mean values.

increments after the first 8-49 hours (represented by "0"). These increments are rounded off to even numbers (such as 100 and 200) for presentation purposes. Thus, "100" represents the range of 50-149 hours of attendance, "200" represents the range of 150-249 hours of attendance, and so forth.

The cells of Table 5.31 show the number of students in each combination of hours of attendance and levels taken. For example, there were 9,406 students in the 0 hours of attendance category (8-49 hours represented as "0") who took only one level. In the next to last columns at the right side of the Table are the median and mean levels taken by all students in each attendance hour category. The last column at the right side of the Table is the total number of students in each hour category. At the bottom of the Table is the summed total number of students in each 'Levels Taken' category.

The most important finding of Table 5.31 is that the number of hours students attended is positively related to the number of levels in which they were enrolled, and hence the number of levels they advanced. That is, *students who attended more hours took (and advanced) more levels*.

This can be seen most clearly by comparing the "ESLN and ESLF Hours Attended" column at the far left side of the Table with the "Median Levels Taken" and "Mean Levels Taken" columns at the right side of the Table. Overall, as the number of hours increased, the number of levels taken (and hence advanced) increased. For example, students who attended 200 hours took a median number of two levels (and thus advanced one level), whereas, students who attended 600 hours took a median number of three levels (and thus advanced two levels). *The number of hours students attended as well as the number of terms in which they were enrolled (Table 5.2) influenced their level advancement*.

Hours taken explain why students did not advance even one level. Unfortunately, the vast majority of students in the cohort studied did not attend classes for very many hours. The first row in Table 5.31 shows that 10,175 of the students in the cohort attended less than 50 hours of instruction (represented by "0") over the seven-year time period. Not surprisingly, the median number of levels taken by these students was one level – representing no level advancement or learning gain. Because this number is a median, however, the same row shows that some students (a total of 769) who attended less than 50 hours did, in fact, advance levels. The vast majority (9,406 or 92%) students who attended less than 50 hours did not advance a level.

The "Grand Total" row at the bottom of Table 5.31 indicates that 18,937 students took only one level, and hence did not advance a level – the same number indicated in Table 5.1. Thus, the 9,406 students who took fewer than 50 hours comprised 49.7% (9,406 of 18,937) of all students in the cohort who did not advance even one level.

Table 5.31 also indicates that 5,871 students who attended at most 100 hours of instruction (representing 50-149 hours) took only one level of instruction. Like the students who attended less than 50 hours, their median number of levels taken was also

one level. The majority of students who attended for at most 100 hours (72%) took only one 1evel, and hence did not advance a level. These 5,871 students who attended 100 hours comprised 31% of the students in the cohort who did not advance even one level.

As a result, Table 5.31 shows that 81% of the students in the cohort who did not advance one level attended fewer than 150 hours of instruction.[51] This means that, descriptively at least, the major reason that so large a number and percentage of CCSF's students did not advance is that these students attended only a very small number of hours over the seven-year time period during which they were studied. In short, *the major reason 56% of CCSF's non-credit students did not advance levels was that they did not attend enough hours of instruction.*

Median number of hours to advance a level. Because Table 5.31 presents the total number of hours that students attended over the seven-year period during which they were studied, it cannot be used to calculate how many hours it took students to advance levels. To estimate how many hours it took to advance, it is necessary to calculate how many hours students attended *prior to* the last level in which they were enrolled. This is because the last level in which students were enrolled is not necessarily a level that they completed. However, in order to enroll in that last level, they must have completed the levels below it. As a result, calculating the number of hours students who took any given number of levels attended prior to their last level indicates how many hours it took them to complete various numbers of levels.

The results of this calculation are presented in Table 5.32, "Hours of Attendance Prior to Last Level By Levels Taken." This Table shows the median number of levels attended by students who took 1-9 levels, respectively, prior to the last level in which they were enrolled.

The Table indicates that the median number of prior hours attended by students who were enrolled for only one level was 0. This is because of the way hours of attendance are defined for purposes of Table 5.32. If students enrolled for only one level, that level was both their first and last level, and there is no way to know if they completed it. As a result, there is no way in which they could have accumulated "hours of attendance prior to [their] last level taken" – which is what Table 5.32 shows – because they did not enroll in any other level where they could have accumulated hours of attendance prior to their last level. Thus, for purposes of the calculations in Table 5.32, their hours of attendance were 0, although they undoubtedly attended classes for at least some hours.

More interestingly, Table 5.32 shows that the median number of hours attended by students who completed two levels (and hence advanced one level) was108 hours, and the median number of hours it took students to complete three levels (and advance two levels) was 216 hours. The median number of hours it took students who attended two levels to advance *an additional level* can be determined by subtracting the median

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[51] The 100-hour category is the rounded number for all hours from 50-149. The 81% figure is the sum of the percent of students in the cohort who attended fewer than 50 hours and did not advance a level (49.7%) plus the percent of students in the cohort who attended 50-149 hours and did not advance a level (31%).

number of hours it took them to advance two levels from the number of hours it took students to advance three levels.[52] If this subtraction is performed, it shows that it took students who advanced three levels 108 hours to advance a second level.

A similar calculation can be performed to determine the number of hours it took for students to advance from any number of "Levels Taken" to the next number of "Levels Taken." In all cases, these calculations show that it took students approximately 100 hours or slightly less time to advance one level. In fact, after five levels taken, the median number of hours it took students to advance one additional level was in the range of 50-70 median hours – although only 19% of students who advanced levels advanced five or more levels.

For the vast majority of students who advanced levels, therefore, it took approximately 100 hours to complete a level. It is interesting, however, that the small number of students who took a very large number of levels took significantly fewer hours to complete each of the higher levels.

Hours taken do not necessarily result in level advancement. Of course, this finding was true only of those students who *did* attend for 100 hours or more and *did* advance a level. And the 100-hour number represents median hours. That is, it cannot be said that if students are enrolled for 100 hours they will always advance a level, because many students did not advance at all regardless of the number of hours in which they were enrolled, and some students took more than 100 hours to advance a level, while others took fewer.

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[52] By definition, this must be the case, because in order to advance three levels, students must at some point have advanced two levels.

Table 5.31 Total Number of Hours Attended
by Levels Taken and Number of Students

ESLN &ESLF Hours	Levels Taken									Median Levels Taken	Mean Levels Taken	Grand Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9			
0	9406	449	169	90	35	18	4	4		1	1.1	10175
100	5871	1346	505	220	96	36	22	9	3	1	1.39	8108
200	1803	1153	544	259	82	53	16	6		2	1.86	3916
300	725	851	526	251	84	43	18	11	2	2	2.25	2511
400	383	483	415	255	112	40	10	5	5	2	2.57	1708
500	226	316	330	257	115	50	22	11	1	3	2.94	1328
600	131	248	264	187	109	58	19	15	1	3	5.13	1032
700	99	206	189	178	88	46	19	7	2	3	5.16	834
800	68	153	177	140	91	58	22	13	3	3	3.46	725
900	56	88	131	118	78	41	20	5	5	3	5.52	542
1000	32	71	118	106	60	43	22	10	1	4	5.69	463
1100	31	64	79	72	68	48	23	11	3	4	3.95	399
1200	19	39	66	65	66	35	19	7	1	4	3.92	317
1300	26	38	49	65	50	28	20	5	2	4	3.9	283
1400	13	33	51	50	40	24	19	2	1	4	4.01	233
1500	9	22	42	37	29	29	17	8	1	4	4.32	194
1600+	39	71	159	198	193	151	85	33	7	4	4.5	937
Grand Total	18937	5631	3814	2548	1396	801	377	162	38			33705

-Includes all students first enrolled in ESLN and/or ESLF in 1998, 9999, 2000, except that. 4390 students have been removed from the analysis. Of these students, 956 had a higher first level than last, and an additional 3434 had no level designation because they were in a multi-level class

**Table 5.32 Hours of Attendance Prior to Last
Level by Number of Levels Taken**

Levels Taken	Median Hours Enrolled	Number
1	0	18937
2	108	5631
3	216	3814
4	320	2548
5	377	1396
6	418	801
7	472	377
8	539	162
9	589	38
Total		33704

- 4,390 students have been removed from the analysis.
956 had a higher first level than last. An additional 3,434
had no level designation because they were in a multi-level class.

4. Level Advancement by First Level Taken

Table 5.4 shows the median numbers of hours attended by non-credit ESL students in the cohort by the first level in which they were enrolled and total number of levels in which they were enrolled. The hours listed are the total number of hours attended prior to each successive level in which students enrolled. For example, students who initially enrolled in Level 1 attended 114 median hours before they enrolled in Level 2 (and hence advanced one level), and 230 median hours before they enrolled in Level 3 (and hence advanced two levels).

Because the Table shows the median number of hours students attended *prior* to each level in which they were enrolled, it shows only the hours attended by students who advanced levels, *not* the hours attended by students who did not advance. This is because only students who advanced levels could have accumulated hours of attendance prior to their last level of enrollment. Thus, the number of hours given for students who took only one level is 0, for the same reason as it is 0 in Table 5.32: these students did not advance a level.

Hours to advance a level. Overall, the major conclusion that can be drawn from this Table is that it took students who initially enrolled at higher levels fewer hours to advance one or more levels than it took students who initially enrolled at lower levels.

One way to see differences in the number of hours it took students to complete levels is to read across any of the rows in Table 5.4 that indicate the total number of levels taken.

For each total number of levels taken, the median numbers of hours that students attended decreases as the first level of enrollment ("First Level Taken") increases.

For example, those students who began at the Literacy Level (Level 0) and took two levels attended a median number of 156 hours. Those students who began at Level 1 and took two levels attended a median number of 114 hours; and those who began at each successively higher level attended progressively fewer numbers of hours to advance two levels.[53] The same pattern can be seen for students who took three or more levels.

The conclusion that can be drawn from this pattern is that it took students at lower levels more hours to advance than it took students at higher levels. The likely reason for this is that students who began at lower levels had fewer skills – both literacy skills in any language and initial acquaintance with English – to build on. Because CCSF does not have comprehensive information on the prior educational level of its non-credit students, it is not possible to determine whether students who began at lower levels took more hours to advance because they had lower literacy skills (defined by educational level) or less initial acquaintance with English. Whichever is the case, CCSF assumes that lower level students have limited foundation skills in both language and literacy, and the ESL Department has designed lower level classes to focus on developing those skills.[54]

Percent advanced. This finding about the number of hours it takes lower level students to advance may appear to be troubling, because the vast majority of CCSF's ESL students began at the lowest levels. If it took lower level students more hours to advance, they may have become discouraged. They may not have advanced levels as a result of the longer time it takes students with limited foundation skills to do so. But as the discussion of Table 5.1 (above) shows, this concern is unfounded. *The percentage and number of students who began at the lowest levels and advanced any levels at all (and advanced multiple levels) was greater than the percentage and number of students who began at higher levels.*

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[53] The only category for which this relationship does not hold is students in Levels 0-7 who enrolled in the maximum number of levels available to them. Because there are nine levels to which students can advance, these are all students who eventually enrolled in Level 9. This aberration is probably due to the fact that very few sections of Level 9 are offered and very few students in the cohort (only 105 over the seven year period) enrolled in this level. Because of these small numbers, generalizations based on data about Level 9 are unreliable.

[54] It is important to bear in mind that the same cautionary note that was mentioned with regard to the findings of Table 5.3 applies to all the findings based on Table 5.4. The number of hours it took students who began at different levels are median numbers of hours. This means that half the number of students who began at each level took that number of hours or more to advance a level and half took that number of hours or fewer. Table 5.4 displays only the relative trends in the number of hours attended.

**Table 5.4 Median Hours Enrolled Prior to Last Level Taken
by number Non-Credit ESL Levels Taken and First Level Taken**

Levels Taken	First Level Taken										Grand Total
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	156	114	85	70	72	45	39	30	0		108
3	360	230	168	135	109	69	48	54			216
4	582	322	280	203	72	83	142				320
5	695	414	259	126	185	248					377
6	762	448	304	182	672						418
7	1000	394	430	537							472
8	625	529	224								539
9	412	601									589

5. Non-Credit ESL Advancement by Hours and Ethnicity

The number of hours it took members of the cohort to advance one or more levels varied by ethnicity. As noted above, the two ethnic groups that make up the vast majority of CCSF's ESL non-credit enrollment are Asians and Hispanics. Table 5.5 shows that Hispanics advanced levels more quickly than Asians. At least one major reason for this difference is probably that Asian languages, such as Chinese, differ much more from English in alphabet, phonemes, cognates, and other characteristics than Spanish does.

The greater number of hours required by Asians to advance a level can be seen by interpreting the top portion of Table 5.5 in the same way as Table 5.4 was interpreted. For any of the "Levels Taken" the median number of hours attended by Asians is greater than the median number of hours attended by Hispanics. For example, Asians who took two levels (and hence advanced one level) attended classes for 152 median hours, whereas Hispanics attended for 86 median hours. The same differential can be seen for any number of "Levels Taken."

However, Table 5.5 indicates that both the percentage and number of Asians who advanced one or more levels was greater than the percentage and number of Hispanics. This difference between the two groups can be seen in the percentage and number portions of the table. The percent and number of Asians who took only one level (and hence did not advance a level) was smaller than the percent and number of Hispanics. The percent of Asians who took only one level was 46% (5,501 students), while the percent of Hispanics was 59% (7,520 students). This means that the percent and number of Asians who advanced at least one level was greater than the percentage and number of Hispanics. And this is the case at every number of "Levels Taken." For example, 21% of Asians (2,493 students) compared to 16% of Hispanics (2,042 students) took two levels and 14% of Asians (1,691 students) compared to 10% of Hispanics (1,284 students) took three levels.

This differential appears at all "Levels Taken" except 7-10 levels. But very few students took those large numbers of levels. In total, the number of Asians who advanced one or more levels was 6,520 students and the number of Hispanics was 5,177 students. This difference in the numbers who advanced was entirely due to the greater percentage of Asians who advanced, because the number of Asians represented in Table 5.5 was slightly smaller than the number of Hispanics, as it was in the non-credit portion of the cohort as a whole (see Chapter 3).

These percentage and numerical differences indicate that Asians were more willing or able than Hispanics to devote the hours required to advance levels, despite the fact that it took them more hours to advance each level. This finding is consistent with the finding in Chapter 4, that the persistence rate of Asians was higher than the persistence rate of Hispanics.

Table 5.5 Median Prior ESLNF Hours by Non-Credit ESL Levels Taken and Ethnicity[55]

Median Hours

Levels Taken	Ethnicity Median								
	African American	American Indian	Asian Pacific Islander	Filipino	Hispanic Latino	Other Non White	Unknown No Response	White Non Hispanic	Median Hours All
1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	50	110	152	127	86	77	64	104	108
3	223	214	316	63	167	190	140	136	216
4	126	116	487	58	246	89	200	249	320
5	145	387	500	176	244	348	348	305	377
6	296	359	639	136	330	18	282	304	418
7	395		738		385	644	215	84	472
8	738		876		487		326	462	539
9			597		397		604	904	589

-Table 5.5, cont'd on next page-

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[55] Includes all students first enrolled in ESLN and/or ESLF in 1998, 1999, 2000, except that. 4,390 students have been removed from the analysis. Of these students, 956 had a higher first level than last, and an additional 3,434 had no level designation because they were in a multi-level class

Number of Students

Levels Taken	African American	American Indian	Asian Pacific Islander	Filipino	Hispanic Latino	Other Non White	Unknown No Response	White Non Hispanic	Grand Total
1	86	11	5501	92	7520	124	4634	969	18937
2	24	2	2493	22	2042	20	802	226	5631
3	16	2	1691	10	1284	16	544	251	3814
4	18	3	1117	4	871	18	361	156	2548
5	7	2	688	5	413	9	176	96	1396
6	9	2	316	2	316	4	97	55	801
7	2		165		137	6	46	21	377
8	2		40		94		21	5	162
9			9		20		5	4	38
Grand Total	164	22	12021	135	12697	197	6686	1783	33704

Percent of Students

Levels Taken	African American	American Indian	Asian Pacific Islander	Filipino	Hispanic Latino	Other Non White	Unknown No Response	White Non Hispanic	Grand Total
1	52%	50%	46%	68%	59%	63%	69%	54%	56%
2	15%	9%	21%	16%	16%	10%	12%	13%	17%
3	10%	9%	14%	7%	10%	8%	8%	14%	11%
4	11%	14%	9%	3%	7%	9%	5%	9%	8%
5	4%	9%	6%	4%	3%	5%	3%	5%	4%
6	5%	9%	3%	1%	2%	2%	1%	3%	2%
7	1%	0%	1%	0%	1%	3%	1%	1%	1%
8	1%	0%	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%
9	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%

6. Non-Credit ESL Advancement by Hours and Age

Regression analysis shows that there is a very weak relationship between age and hours attended as well as levels advanced. The most accurate conclusion is that there is little or no systematic relationship between age and these other variables.

Table 5.6 illustrates this conclusion. This Table shows advancement of non-credit ESL students by hours and age. Overall, the Table shows no systematic relationship between age and the number of hours taken or levels advanced, except that 16-19 year old students

attended fewer hours for each level they took or advanced than members of other age groups. Although there are differences in the numbers of hours taken and advanced by different age groups, the pattern is erratic.

The lack of a systematic relationship can be seen in examining the percentage of each age group who took various numbers of levels. The differences are very small. About the same percentage of students in each age group took each of the "ESLN and ESLF Levels" and advanced a corresponding number of levels.

**Table 5.6 Median Prior Non-Credit ESL Hours
by Non-Credit ESL Levels Taken and Age[56]**

Median Prior Hours

Levels ESLN and ESLF	Age Group Median								
	16 - 19	20 - 24	25 - 29	30 - 34	35 - 39	40 - 49	50+	Unknown No Response	Median Hours
1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2	58	70	70	56	106	153	88	24	108
3	116	124	112	145	153	181	266	60	216
4	215	253	182	246	367	388	310	57	320
5	300	267	335	284	303	462	415	226	377
6	390	361	322	254	499	461	828	320	418
7	421	443	444	693	798	783	399	525	472
8	254	361	385	927	872	648	600	763	539
9	601	467	204	465	232	665	1218	1245	589

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[56] Includes all students first enrolled in ESLN and/or ESLF in 1998, 1999, 2000, except that 4,390 students have been removed from the analysis. Of these students, 956 had a higher first level than last, and an additional 3,434 had no level designation because they were in a multi-level class

Table 5.6 cont'd

Percent of Students

Levels Taken	Age Group								All Age Groups
	16 - 19	20 - 24	25 - 29	30 - 34	35 - 39	40 - 49	50+	Unknown	
1	52%	55%	58%	55%	54%	51%	54%	80%	56%
2	16%	16%	14%	16%	17%	20%	23%	8%	17%
3	11%	11%	11%	12%	12%	14%	12%	5%	11%
4	9%	8%	8%	9%	8%	8%	6%	4%	8%
5	5%	5%	5%	5%	4%	4%	3%	1%	4%
6	4%	3%	3%	3%	3%	2%	1%	1%	2%
7	1%	2%	2%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%	1%
8	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
9	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Total Number	2663	6444	5773	4807	3871	5616	5636	3285	38095

D. DISCUSSION

1. Low Advancement Rates

This study found that most of CCSF's ESL students in the cohort examined did not advance very many levels of English proficiency. This is cause for concern, because the study used level advancement as a proxy for learning gains. Fifty-six percent of the students in the cohort did not advance even one level of proficiency, and 84% did not advance at all or advanced, at most, two levels during the seven-year period over which they were studied.[57]

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[57] Broadly speaking, these findings are consistent with the findings about ESL level advancement by the U.S. Department of Education's National Reporting System for Adult Education (NRS). NRS reports for recent years show that about 36% of ESL students advance one level in a year. That means that 63% do not advance a level – a somewhat higher percentage than reported for CCSF. However, as explained in Chapter 1, the CCSF levels do not equate with NRS levels, and the figure for CCSF is for the number of students who did not advance over a seven-year time period, rather than only a single year. Also, for various reasons, some (perhaps many) programs do assess the levels of all their students using the standardized ESL tests approved by the NRS. As a result, they do not include either the initial level or level advancement of all students to their reports to the NRS. It appears that students at the lowest levels are least likely to be assessed with NRS tests, in part because many programs (and some of the companies that produce the tests) do not believe they are a very accurate means of assessing very low-level students. As a result, NRS reports on ESL level advancement can at best be considered an approximation, and they may overstate the percent of students that advance a level each year.

This finding is particularly distressing, because the vast majority of CCSF's ESL students start at very low levels of English language proficiency. Most begin their study of English at the Literacy or Low Beginning levels. Because most of these students did not advance very many levels (or any levels at all), their proficiency was very low when they stop attending classes. Importantly, only 19% of students who began at these low levels reached the Intermediate levels of proficiency. This is important, because reaching the Intermediate levels greatly expands the opportunities of ESL students. As Chapter 1 indicated (and subsequent chapters will explain in more detail), one of the most important opportunities it provides is the ability to enroll in the wide range of vocational courses offered by CCSF, as well as to make transitions to credit ESL and other types of postsecondary education, from which students can reap large economic and personal gains.

More fundamentally, one of the major goals of any ESL program is to help students climb the ladder of English language learning as high as they can go. Regrettably, the vast majority of students examined by this study did not climb very far, regardless of the level of proficiency at which they began.

2. <u>Achievement in ESL</u>

But there is another side to this coin. Half of the students who did not advance a level were students who attended fewer than 50 hours of instruction, and another 30% attended 150 or fewer hours over seven years. In a way, these students (especially those who attended fewer than 50 hours) were only nominally enrolled. They might have been excluded from this study and from the College's enrollment numbers – as were the students who attended fewer than eight hours of instruction. In fact, students who attend fewer than 12 hours of instruction are excluded from reports to the federal Reporting System for Adult Education (NRS). The major reasons for including students who attended fewer than 50 hours in this study were that they make up a large percentage of CCSF's enrollment and that a small percentage of them advanced one or more levels.[58]

In a sense, including these students in the study distorts findings about level advancement and learning gains. If students who enrolled fewer than 50 hours are removed from the analysis of level advancement, the learning gains of CCSF's students appear to be greater than if those students are included. About 70% of the students who comprised the cohort (23,530 students) attended classes for 50 hours or more over the seven-year period. Sixty percent (13.998) of these students advanced one or more levels, and thirty-five percent advanced more than two levels. Significant percentages and numbers of students who attended 50 hours or more advanced three or more levels. A very small number and percent even climbed to the top of the ESL ladder, and some of these students began at the very lowest levels of proficiency. Although even students who attended for more than

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[58] The fact that a small number of these students advanced more than one level was probably due to instructor determinations that they were placed in too low a level when initially enrolled and thus moved to a higher level.

50 hours may not have advanced as many levels as might be desired, their level advancement was far more substantial than that of students who attended for fewer than 50 hours.

In short, if an assessment of level advancement focuses on the 70% of CCSF's ESL students who attended classes for more than a very small number of hours, the findings are more encouraging than if it focuses on the cohort as a whole.

As a result, just as this study found cause for concern, it found cause for hope. ESL instruction at CCSF pays off for students who attend classes for a significant number of hours. In particular, it pays off for students who begin at the very lowest levels of proficiency – those who comprise the vast majority of the college's ESL students. These low level students were more likely than other students to advance multiple levels, even though it took them more hours of instruction to do so.

These findings provide reassurance that there is nothing fundamentally flawed in non-credit ESL instruction. It can and does accomplish a great deal. But these same findings present a challenge to CCSF and other ESL programs. Even if students who did not attend very many hours of instruction are excluded from the analysis, most students in the cohort examined did not advance very many levels or cross important thresholds such as reaching the Intermediate levels. The challenge for the College's ESL program, and for other programs, is to find ways to help students who do not advance very many levels ascend higher on the ladder of English proficiency. If some students can accomplish this, many more should be able to do so.

To meet that challenge, the first step is to consider why so many students do not advance at all and why those students who do advance are not achieving more.

3. Reasons for Low Level Advancement

This study shows that major reasons most ESL students did not advance very far are that they did not enroll for enough terms or attend enough hours of instruction, and that these two reasons were closely related. Anything that can be done to increase persistence (the number of terms for which students enroll) and hours of attendance will be of enormous benefit.

But what measures would be effective? To answer this question it is necessary to understand the reasons why students do not attend more instruction. This study could not provide a definitive explanation for low levels of attendance, but its findings provide the basis for some informed speculation about what those reasons might be. Many of these were mentioned in the discussion of persistence in Chapter 4. That is to be expected, because this chapter shows that persistence, attendance, and level advancement are closely linked. Thus, the findings of this chapter reinforce the explanation of low persistence rates in Chapter 4 and extend that explanation to low rates of attendance and level advancement.

Time and responsibilities. It is probable that, like all adult education students, the two major reasons that many ESL students attend so few hours of instruction and advance so few levels are (a) the amount of time it takes to achieve significant learning gains, and (b) the need to deal with adult responsibilities, which makes it difficult for them devote that amount of time to attending classes.

This chapter shows that the median number of hours attended by students who advanced each level of proficiency was about 100 hours, and the median number of hours to advance even higher was significantly less for students who began at higher levels. This is consistent with the conclusions of the most widely cited research on ESL learning rates – the Mainstream English Training (MELT) project, which developed ESL curriculum and assessment standards for Southeast Asian refugees in the early 1980s and has subsequently been updated.[59] It is also consistent with the observations of many practitioners and researchers in the ESL field.

But at the rate of 100 hours per level it would take most of CCSF's students a long time to advance very many levels. In fact, the time required to advance at CCSF is even longer, because most of the College's general ESL courses (ESLN) meet for 175 hours during the fall and spring terms, and most students cannot advance levels until the end of each term. Many students may be intimidated by how many hours, terms, and even years of instruction it will take them to advance very many levels. Because the majority of students begin at very low levels of proficiency, they may believe that advancement to the Intermediate levels or beyond is an unobtainable goal. This may be why so few students in the cohort who began at the Literacy or Low Beginning levels advanced to even the lowest Intermediate level.

Even if they are not intimidated by how long it takes to climb very high on the ESL ladder, many students may find that the demands of work, family, and other responsibilities of adult life make it very difficult for them to continue attending classes for more than a few terms, And even if they enroll for multiple terms, they may find that these same demands make it difficult for them to attend enough hours per term to improve their proficiency by very many levels.

Motivation and goals. In these circumstances, those students in the cohort studied who persisted for a great many terms and hours must have been more motivated than others to learn English and/or more able to rearrange their priorities so that they could attend classes. *Motivation appears to be one of the major keys to level advancement*.

An important clue to what motivated students to advance may be the finding that students who began at lower levels attended more terms and advanced more levels than did students who began at higher levels. A related clue is the finding that lower level students attended more hours, on average, before they advanced a level. A final clue is the finding that few students advanced more than two or three levels.

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[59] See: Allene G. Grognet, Performance-based Curricula and Outcomes: The MELT Updated for the 1990's (Denver: the Spring Institute for Intercultural Learning, 1997). Available at: www.spring-institude.org.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the goals of students at different levels may not be the same. That is, most students at lower levels may have the goal of becoming at least minimally functional in English to meet the everyday demands of life and work in America – to acquire the foundation skills in English that lower levels teach.[60] In fact, given limited time and other demands, they may believe this is their only achievable goal in attending ESL classes. As a result, they may be motivated to devote the amount of time it takes (to enroll in as many terms and attend as many hours as necessary) to achieve that goal. Once they have achieved it by advancing levels within the Beginning range, they may find that they no longer have the time or motivation to climb higher up the ESL ladder. They may feel that they have acquired sufficient English to function satisfactorily at work and/or in their community. As Chapter 4 pointed out, many students with low levels of English proficiency live in communities or work in jobs where little English is required.

In contrast, students who begin at higher levels already have at least a minimal level of English proficiency. Their goal in attending ESL classes may be to improve their English incrementally for special purposes – for example, to increase their job prospects, or to prepare for vocational training or postsecondary education. For these purposes, they may be seeking to improve their reading and writing skills – skills that are more strongly emphasized at higher levels. Many of these students may believe that "brushing up" their English for one or two terms is enough to achieve these goals. Alternatively, some of these students may be "trying out" ESL, and they may conclude that, because their English proficiency is already fairly high, they do not wish to devote the time and effort required to increase it by a few more levels.

In short, one reason why more students do not advance very many levels may be that the personal goals that motivate them to enroll in ESL classes may not be to advance very far up the ESL ladder from the point at which they began. Rather, the personal goals of most students may be more modest, and it may be possible for them to achieve those goals by fairly limited learning gains. Sixty-four percent of those who advanced any levels at all advanced only two levels.

Difficulty of levels. The findings of this study are *not* consistent with the notion that students did not advance because some levels of ESL are "more difficult" in their content. The fact that students who began at lower levels took more hours to advance a level than students who began at higher levels might be interpreted to indicate that lower level students found level advancement in some sense more difficult. However, this apparently did not affect their rate of level advancement, because a greater percentage and number of students who began at lower levels advanced multiple levels than did students who began at higher levels. Likewise, the finding that a smaller percentage and

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[60] The importance of these foundation skills for students who begin with very low levels of proficiency is demonstrated by the finding that Asians attend more terms and advanced more levels than did Hispanics, despite the fact that it took them more hours to advance a level. For Asians two of the foundation skills taught at the lowest levels are the English alphabet and sounds not found in their native languages. These are both more difficult for them than for Hispanics to master, but also essential to functioning in everyday American life.

number of higher-level students advanced multiple levels might be interpreted to indicate that higher levels are more difficult. But if this was the case, it is hard to explain why students who began at higher levels took fewer hours to advance levels.

More fundamentally, difficulty of instructional content is relative to the skills and knowledge students bring to it. As a result, it is hard to say in what sense it is "harder" or "easier" for a Literacy Level student who has little or no English or literacy skills to advance a level than it is for a student who begins at the Intermediate Level and already has some English and literacy skills. Although there may be some sense in which some ESL levels are more difficult, this study found no evidence that any differences in difficulty affected level advancement.

Prior education. As noted in Chapter 1, CCSF does not have comprehensive data on the prior education of its ESL students. As a result, it is not possible to determine the effect of prior education on persistence or level advancement. It is probably safe to assume that students who begin at lower levels are more likely to have limited prior education than students who begin at higher levels. And it may be safe to assume that this is one reason why they take more hours, on average, to advance levels. However, even if these assumptions are correct, the finding that students who began at lower levels were more likely to advance suggests that limited prior education did not affect learning gains at CCSF. This may be because the lower level courses in CCSF's ESL program (and in virtually all ESL Programs) are specifically designed to meet the special needs of students with limited education and exposure to English.

This study also found little evidence that students who have not attended school for a long time have a harder time orienting themselves to the routines and expectations of attending courses. If this were the case, then older students (who have presumably been out of school longer) would have advanced at a lower rate than younger students. But this study found practically no relationship between age and either hours of attendance or level advancement. The only relationship it found was that 16-19 year olds advanced at a somewhat faster rate than other students. However, in large part, this may have been because these teenagers had not yet formed families or found steady work and could, therefore, devote more time to ESL classes.

Certainly, all new students need services to orient them to the expectations and routines of attending ESL courses at a college, regardless of their prior education. Chapter 4 described the welcome guide CCSF has developed to meet this need. Chapter 9 will discuss other services the College provides to new students.

Limits. Overall, the findings of this study about level advancement suggest that there may be limits to the amount of time most students are willing or able to devote to ESL instruction. Members of the cohort studied had 21 terms available to them over the seven-years during which they were examined, and all except the summer terms provided more than enough hours of instruction to help them advance a level. But very few students took enough of these terms or attended enough hours to advance many levels.

4. __What Can Be Done?__

Increasing motivation and support. If motivation, limited goals, and life circumstances are the major reasons why most students do not advance very many levels, then anything that can be done to overcome these barriers should be attempted. This almost certainly includes increased guidance, counseling, mentoring, coaching and any other measures that will help ESL students to recognize the importance of attending more terms and hours as well as encourage them to do so.

All students should be encouraged to increase their motivation and expand their goals. They should be fully aware of the benefits they can derive from ascending ESL levels. Importantly, they should be aware that they can do so. They should know that non-trivial numbers of students beginning at the lowest levels advance well into the Intermediate Level and beyond. At least some students move on to obtain the benefits of postsecondary education. They should be encouraged to believe that if other students can do this, they can, too, if they "get with the program" and attend hours and terms on a regular basis. They should understand that the program works if they do their part, and that they have an enormous amount to gain by doing so.

This message should be conveyed to all students from the time of their first enrollment and repeatedly reinforced by all means possible. Students should be exposed to concrete examples of what can be achieved, as well as findings such as those in this report, that show greater learning gains are possible and what it takes to make those gains.

In addition, a survey of students should be undertaken to determine what the College might do, either by itself or in collaboration with other organizations, to help overcome barriers to attendance posed by personal responsibilities. For example, at least some colleges provide on-site daycare, and many adult education teachers nationwide report that they spend a significant amount of time helping students solve personal problems – often by helping them obtain assistance from social service agencies. It may be that a more systematic approach to providing supportive services can be devised, if the need for those services is better understood. Such a survey should ask questions about issues such as transportation, day, time and location of classes, financial aid, and child care.

Based on the findings of this study, it may be particularly important to focus efforts on increasing motivation and overcoming barriers of students who succeed in advancing at least one level. This study found that students who have "done the right thing" by advancing one or two levels often do not advance any further. These students have shown that they have motivation and potential. Special efforts should be made to help and encourage them to continue their studies.

Removing possible program barriers. Beyond these measures for increasing motivation, CCSF should examine aspects of its program structure that may be making it harder for some students to advance as quickly as possible. If students do not advance as quickly as they can, some may become discouraged. Conversely, if students can advance as quickly as possible, they may advance more levels during the time they are able to attend ESL

classes, and they may gain in motivation with each level they advance. In short, if students can advance more quickly, the percentage and number of students who advance multiple levels may increase. More students may climb higher up the ESL ladder.

Several aspects of CCSF's program design may make it harder for students to advance as quickly as they are capable of doing so. Most of these were mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. The College should review them, and make appropriate adjustments in its program design. Briefly, these possible program barriers are as follows.

- <u>Length of term and promotion decisions</u>. The terms at CCSF are 17.5 weeks long, and most ESLN classes meet for 10 hours a week for a total of 175 hours per term. For the most part, promotion decisions are made only at the end of each term. Yet the median number of hours it takes those students who advance a level is 100 hours or less. As a result, some students may be held back from advancing by the length of the term and the College's promotion policy.

  If this is the case, there are at least three possible solutions to the problem. In all three cases, some students might advance in a shorter period of time, and those students could advance more levels during the course of a year.

  o *Students might be assessed for advancement at mid-term or more frequently.*

  o *The College might shorten the length of instructional units for ESLN students. The fall and spring terms might be divided into two half-term length ESLN terms. Students would be eligible for advancement at the end of each term.*

  o *Rather than change its program structure for all ESLN students, the College might create intensive, accelerated tracks within its existing program. For example, it might create a "pathways to college" track. The purpose of this track would be to help non-credit students gain college-level English skills as quickly as possible.*

    A "pathways to college" track might combine half-term length ESL terms with a curriculum that emphasizes college-level English and study skills (rather than life skills), articulation with high school completion courses (for students who need additional preparation in skills not taught by ESL courses), pre-collegiate guidance, counseling, and mentoring, and possibly more than 10 hours of instruction per week. Courses in "pathways to college" might also be two-level courses (combining, for example, Levels 1 and 2).[61] Similar special tracks might be created for

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[61] See Chapter 10 for a discussion of CCSF's existing two-level courses.

students who wish to pursue vocational programs or other goals, or for students who simply wish to increase their life skills English more quickly.

- Summer term: At CCSF, ESL students enrolled during the summer term acquire hours of instruction, but they are not promoted to the next level until the fall. Over the summer, they receive instruction at the last level in which they were enrolled during the spring, whether or not they completed that level. If CCSF adopted the option of dividing the fall and spring terms into two half-term length ESL terms (mentioned above), the summer term could become a fifth full term, and students could be promoted at the end of any of these five terms.

- Students who stop attending: At CCSF, students not in class at or near the end of the term are considered to have terminated their studies. If one of these students returns the following term, the student is usually placed in the level at which they were enrolled when they stopped attending, unless they are re-tested. Unfortunately, many re-entry students are not re-tested. But some of these students may have stopped attending because of other demands on their time, and they may have mastered the material taught at the level in which they were enrolled. It is possible that if all re-entry students were re-tested, or if instructors could make decisions about whether to promote them with or without test results, some of them might re-place at higher levels.

- Open-entry/open-exit program: As noted in Chapter 4, CCSF's ESL program has adopted an "open-entry/open-exit" policy. As a result, students probably have lapses in attendance more often than would be the case if the College adopted a "managed enrollment" policy, as discussed in Chapter 4. In fact, College enrollment data indicates that most students attend only about 100 of the 175 hours presently offered each term. If the College adopted a managed enrollment policy, or created a managed enrollment track within its existing program, with (for example) 90 or100 hour terms, some students might accumulate the hours they need to advance more quickly and advance more levels over the course of a year or multiple years.

- Matriculation services. A managed enrollment policy might screen out many of the students who presently attend fewer than 50 hours, and who do not advance even one level. On the other hand, it might challenge some of them to improve their attendance by setting high expectations. It is an open question whether these students should be screened out, because at least some of them can advance levels. Others may have the potential to do so if they are challenged. At the very least, CCSF should review its matriculation services to ensure that students who may have very low motivation or great barriers to attendance fully understand the challenges, expectations and opportunities of ESL instruction, and receive the support they need. The benefits of a full range of matriculation services are discussed in Chapter 9.

This study lacked the resources to determine whether, or to what extent, any of these aspects of CCSF's program are barriers to students' advancing levels. But one of the values of longitudinal analysis is that it raises questions that might not otherwise be so carefully examined. By highlighting the facts that few ESL students advance very many levels and that the length of CCSF's terms are greater than the median level of hours students attend to advance a level, this study may help both CCSF and other colleges to focus on program improvements that could increase learning gains.

Program enhancements. In addition to removing possible barriers to advancement, CCSF should also consider program enhancements that will increase learning gains. In fact, it has already adopted some of these, and they will be discussed in Chapters 9-10.