CHAPTER 6

TRANSITIONS TO CREDIT

This chapter discusses the transition of non-credit ESL students to credit courses. Transition to credit has been a subject of interest to both ESL professionals and other educators because of the increasing need to raise the education and literacy levels of adults in the U.S.[62] To date, little data about transitions of non-credit ESL students to credit programs has been available. This chapter and Chapter 7 attempt to rectify that deficit by providing longitudinal data about transition to credit for the 38,095 non-credit ESL students in the cohort studied.

A. BACKGROUND

To understand how non-credit ESL students make the transition to credit at CCSF, it is important to recall the elements of the College's credit intake (matriculation) process and some other basic facts about credit ESL described in Chapter 1. As that chapter indicates, there is no formal articulation between non-credit and credit ESL. Anyone who wishes to enroll in credit courses of any kind must complete a five-step process: application, placement testing, orientation, counseling and registration. For placement, students who wish to enroll in credit ESL must take the credit ESL placement test[63].

Credit courses are of three types – transfer, degree-applicable, and non-degree applicable. Academic *transfer* courses are those for which students receive credit if they transfer to any of the colleges in the California State University system. If students pass one of these courses at CCSF and subsequently transfer to any of the colleges in the California State system, they will receive credit counting toward a degree at the college to which they transfer. *Degree applicable* courses fulfill requirements for an associate degree at CCSF. They are considered baccalaureate in nature, and they usually, but not always, carry transfer credit. *Non-degree applicable* courses are foundation courses that prepare students to complete college level courses. Credit for these courses is not accepted for associate degrees. Seven of the credit ESL courses offered by CCSF are degree applicable and transferable and thirteen are non-degree applicable.

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[62] See, for example: Dennis Jones and Patrick Kelley., "Mounting Pressures Facing the U.S. Workforce and the Increasing need for Adult Education and Literacy." Prepared for the National Commission on Adult Literacy. (New York: Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2007). Available at: www.caalusa.org. For a synopsis of labor market research related to adult education see: To Ensure America's Future: Building A National Opportunity System For Adults (New York: Council for the Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2005) pp. 13-15.

[63] See Chapter 1 for more information on the matriculation process and the exemption from assessment policies. Further information about matriculation is provided in Chapter 9, which is devoted to explaining the effects of certain matriculation services.

ESL students at CCSF do not have to complete the ESL credit sequence before enrolling in other credit courses. In fact, studies conducted by the CCSF Research Office indicate that most students who are enrolled in credit ESL also take other credit courses, and most take those courses concurrently with ESL. Some credit courses have ESL or English pre-requisites but others do not. Counselors advise ESL students about which credit courses they can probably complete at their level of English proficiency.

The credit departments that have the highest enrollments of ESL students include English, Physical Education, Math, Social Science, Foreign Languages, Business, Behavioral Sciences and Learning Assistance (which offers college success and tutoring courses). Physical Education courses and tutoring courses offered by the Learning Assistance Department are excluded from the analysis in this chapter. Thus, the chapter focuses on enrollment in credit ESL and enrollment in core academic courses.

B. MAJOR FINDINGS

- Only 8% (3,232 students) of the non-credit ESL cohort examined by this study transitioned to credit courses of some kind (transfer, degree applicable, or non-degree applicable) during the years in which they were studied.

- Most of the students who transitioned to credit (88% -- 2,855 students) took academic transfer courses, and slightly fewer (74% of those who transitioned – 2.377 students) took credit ESL courses of some kind (transfer, degree applicable or non-degree applicable).

- Only a small number of students in the cohort (478) who took academic transfer courses did not enroll in credit ESL. Thus, credit ESL was part of the pathway to enrollment in academic transfer courses for most non-credit students who took those courses. Students may have followed this pathway by co-enrollment in credit ESL and transfer courses, or by enrollment in transfer courses prior to or subsequent to taking credit ESL.

- By far the strongest predictor of whether students would make the transition to credit was the last level of non-credit ESL in which they were enrolled. The higher the last level of non-credit ESL in which they were enrolled, the more likely they were to transition to credit, regardless of the first level of non-credit in which they enrolled. A majority of students who made transitions were last enrolled in one of CCSF's Intermediate Level courses (Levels 5-8).

- The more non-credit ESL levels students completed, the more likely they were to transition to credit, but the number of levels completed was less strongly related to transitions than was the last level of non-credit enrollment. Nevertheless, a majority of students who made transitions "worked their way up" to the Intermediate levels by completing multiple levels of non-credit ESL.

- Transition to credit was positively related to the number of hours of attendance in non-credit ESL for most students, but the increase in transition rates for each additional 100 hours of attendance was modest.

- Of the two largest ethnic groups in Non-Credit ESL, Asians transitioned to credit at a higher rate than Hispanics (16% compared to 5%).

- Students age 16-19, transitioned to credit at the highest rate (17%) of any age group. Transition rates were about the same for other age groups (8%-11%) but declined to 3% of students aged 50 years or older.

- It is encouraging that significant numbers of non-credit students are willing and able to make transitions to credit studies, and it is even more encouraging that many are prepared to devote the effort required to advance multiple levels in order to do so. However, labor market studies indicate that it is in the national interest, as well as that of students and colleges, to greatly increase transition rates.

- To increase transitions rates, colleges must establish transitions as a high priority. In particular, they must establish the goal of ensuring that as many students as possible attain the Intermediate levels of English proficiency (CCSF Levels 5-8) that prepare most students for transitions. Because transition rates are so closely linked to the advancement of students to the Intermediate levels, most of the measures colleges must take to increase these rates are similar to the measures discussed in Chapter 5 to increase level advancement.

- These measures include enhanced guidance and counseling with a strong emphasis on expanding the goals of non-credit students, program re-designs (such as shorter terms, increased opportunities for promotion, and accelerated tracks) that will allow students to advance more levels more quickly, and targeting assistance to those types of students most likely to make transitions – such as those in the 16-19 year old age group.

C. ANALYSIS

1. Transition Rates

Data definitions. Table 6.1 describes the transition of non-credit ESL students in the cohort examined by this study to credit courses by their last non-credit ESL level. It divides transitions into three categories – all credit, transfer credit, and ESL credit.

In this Table 6.1 the "All Credit" columns include all credit courses (ESL and non-ESL, transfer, degree applicable, and non-degree applicable). The "Transfer Credit" columns are a sub-set of "All Credit" that include enrollment in any course accepted for transfer to the colleges in the California State University system. The data in these columns exclude enrollment in credit ESL, Physical Education, and Learning Assistance. As a result, the

columns present information solely on students who took academic credit courses outside credit ESL. The data in the "ESL Credit" columns include enrollment in all credit ESL.

The transition data in Table 6.1 is duplicative. All students transitioning to credit are counted in the "All Credit" column, and they are counted again in the "Transfer Credit" and "ESL Credit" columns if they took those kinds of courses.

In other chapters of this report, the analysis of non-credit course work by students in the cohort was limited to seven years after each student first enrolled in non-credit ESL. In this chapter, the academic history of all students in the cohort through spring 2007 was examined to determine whether students transitioned to credit.

Transition rates. Table 6.1 shows that 8% (3,323) of the non-credit students in the cohort took at least one credit course of some type during the time period examined. The Table shows that most of these students – 88% (2,855 of 3,232) – took at least one transfer credit course other than credit ESL. They comprised 7.4% of the total cohort of 38,095. Most, but not all, non-credit students who transitioned to credit, 74% (2,377 of 3,232) took credit ESL. They comprised 6.2% of the total cohort.

This means that a few students (478) took academic transfer courses, but did not take credit ESL courses. These students may have enrolled in English Department courses rather than ESL courses to satisfy the written composition requirement for graduation. Alternatively, they may have delayed taking credit ESL courses until they completed transfer courses they could pass at their level of English proficiency. Or they may have wished to take only certain individual transfer courses.

Table 6.1 shows, however, that a substantial majority of non-credit ESL students who made the transition to academic transfer courses also took credit ESL. They may have taken academic transfer courses concurrently with, prior to, or subsequent to enrollment in credit ESL. As mentioned above, CCSF research indicates that most enrollments in academic transfer and credit ESL were concurrent. Regardless of when they enrolled in credit ESL courses, these courses were clearly part of the pathway to academic credit for most non-credit ESL students who made the transition to credit studies.

Transitions by last non-credit ESL level. Table 6.1 also describes transition to credit by the last level in which members of the cohort were enrolled before transitioning to credit. The most important finding from table 6.1 is that the higher the last level of non-credit ESL, the higher the percentage of students who transitioned to credit. Only 1% (24) of those whose last level was Literacy and 2% (162 students) of those whose last level was Level 1 transitioned to credit. In comparison, 28% (550 students) of those whose last level was Level 7 transitioned to credit.

An equally interesting finding that can be derived from Table 6.1 is that most, but not all, students who transitioned to credit had a last non-credit level in the Intermediate range. The "All Credit" section of the table shows that 11% of students whose last level was the highest Beginning Level (Level 4) made transitions, and the transition rates of students

with lower last levels (all other Beginning Level students and Literacy Level students) were between 1% and 7%. At Level 5 (the lowest Intermediate Level) the transition rate almost doubled (compared to Level 4) to 21%, and it rose to 28% at Levels 7 and 8. The 40% transition rate for Level 9 students may be an unreliable number, because so few students (134) had this as their last level.

In total, 53% of all students (1,700 students) who made transitions had a last level in the Intermediate range (Levels 5-8), and 23% (766 students) had a last level in the Beginning High (Levels 3-4) range. The large percentage of students who made transitions from the Intermediate range cannot be explained by the percentage of students who had a last level in that range. Only 19% of the cohort had a last level in the Intermediate range, but 53% of the cohort who made transitions had a last level in that range.

In short, more than half the students who made transitions had a last level in the Intermediate range, and students in this range were far more likely to make transitions than students at the Beginning Level or Literacy Level. However, a non-trivial number and percentage of students with a last level in the Beginning High range, some in the Beginning Low range, and a few (24) at the Literacy Level made transitions.

This data suggests that a majority of non-credit ESL students may have believed (perhaps based on the advice of teachers and counselors) that their English proficiency would not be high enough to succeed in credit courses until they had attained an Intermediate Level. It may also suggest that those who wished to enroll in credit ESL could not score high enough on the credit ESL placement test to place into a credit ESL course until they had attained the levels of English proficiency associated with Levels 5-8.

The fact that some Beginning Level students were able to make the transition to transfer credit courses may be explained in several ways. Some of these students may have been judicious in choosing transfer courses in which they could succeed at fairly low levels of English proficiency. For example, students with high skills and prior education in certain subjects (such as math or business) may have been able to succeed in transfer courses in those subjects even if their English level was at the Beginning Level. Also, Beginning Level students may have chosen foreign language or other transfer courses that do not require much English capability and/or do not have a language prerequisite.[64] Chapter 7 explains the credit course selection of non-credit students in greater detail.

[64] A previous CCSF study that showed the transfer courses most often chosen by students enrolled in ESL 110 (a low-level credit ESL course) differed markedly from the transfer courses chosen by students enrolled in ESL 82 (a much higher level credit ESL course). The courses most often chosen by ESL 110 students were Math (Basic Arithmetic and Elementary Algebra,) Chinese, and Physical Education. In comparison, students in ESL 82 enrolled in English 94, Economics 1, Psychology 1, Political Science 1, and Math 110 A (Calculus.)

Table 6.1 Number and Percent of Non-Credit ESL Students Transitioning to Credit by Last Non-Credit ESL Level

	All Credit			Transfer Credit		ESL Credit	
Last Non-Credit ESL Level Taken	Total Number Of Students In The Cohort	Percent of Students in The Cohort Who Transitioned To Credit From Each Last Level	Number of Students In The Cohort Who Transitioned To Credit From Each Last Level	Percent Of "All Credit" Students Who Transitioned To Credit From Each Last Level	Number Of Students Who Transitioned To Transfer Credit From Each Last Level	Percent of "All Credit" Students Who Transitioned To ESL Credit From Each Last Level	Number Of Students Who Transitioned To ESL Credit From Each Last Level
0	2542	1%	24	96%	23	50%	12
1	10588	2%	162	88%	143	52%	84
2	5292	2%	125	86%	108	53%	66
3	5000	7%	351	84%	296	65%	229
4	3773	11%	415	83%	345	71%	293
5	2626	21%	539	89%	480	79%	428
6	2130	21%	438	85%	372	78%	342
7	1957	28%	550	92%	506	83%	455
8	619	28%	173	91%	157	82%	142
9	134	40%	54	96%	52	81%	44
No Level	3434	12%	401	93%	373	70%	282
Total	38095	8%	3232	88%	2855	74%	2377

-The transfer credit column excludes transfer ESL and Physical Education and tutoring courses in Learning Assistance.
-The ESL credit column includes enrollment in all types of ESL courses: degree applicable, non-degree applicable and transfer.

2. Transition to Credit by Levels of Non-Credit ESL Taken

Table 6.2 shows the total number of students in the cohort who transitioned to credit by the number of levels of non-credit ESL in which they were enrolled (levels taken). In the interest of brevity, this and subsequent tables only show transition to *any* credit course. That is, they do not include separate figures for transitions to transfer credit and credit ESL. Separate analyses show that transitions to transfer and credit ESL courses are very similar to these figures for transfer to any credit course.

Table 6.2 shows that students who took more levels of non-credit ESL transitioned to credit in greater percentages. For example, 11% (419 students) transitioned after taking three levels of non-credit ESL, but 22% (313 students) transitioned after taking six levels.

The number of students who made transitions after taking each number of levels varies depending on the number of students who took that number of levels. For example, the

largest category of students who made transitions to credit was comprised of students who took only one level (1033). This is because, by far, the largest number of students in the cohort (18,937) *took* only one level. Although only 5% of these single level students made transitions, their greater total number resulted in a large number making transitions. It is important to note, however, that 67% of students who made transitions (2,086 of 3,119 students) took two or more levels.

Thus, although it may appear that the number and percentage of students making transitions tell somewhat different stories, this is not the case when Table 6.2 is examined as a whole. Not only did the percentage of students who made transitions increase as the number of levels taken increased, but more students who took multiple levels made transitions than did students who took a single level. Nevertheless, the next section will show that the "single level effect" – the fact that the smallest percentage but the largest number of students in any category "levels taken" took only one level – can be problematic for some analyses of transition. It will be more fully discussed in that section.

Because some of the students in the cohort were in multi-level classes this and subsequent tables include information for these multi-level students. These are designated as "no level." Table 6.1 shows that 12% (401) of the non-credit students who were in multi-level classes transitioned to credit, but as explained in previous chapters, data about how many levels these students took is unavailable because level advancement data is only available for single level classes.

Table 6.2 Transition to Credit By Non-Credit ESL Levels Taken

Levels Taken	Total Number	Percent Transitioning to Credit	Number Transitioning To Credit
1	18937	5%	1033
2	5631	5%	271
3	3814	11%	419
4	2548	14%	351
5	1396	22%	313
6	801	22%	180
7	377	28%	105
8	162	20%	32
9	38	34%	13
10	1	100%	1
No Level	3434	12%	401
Total	37139	8%	3119

-956 students with a negative level movement in the total cohort of 38,095 have been removed from the analysis.

3. Transition to Credit by Last Level in Non-Credit ESL and Levels Taken

Transition rates. Table 6.3 shows the percentage and number of students who transitioned to credit by the last level they were enrolled in non-credit ESL and the total number of levels in which they were enrolled. Like Table 6.1, it shows that the percentage of students transitioning to credit systematically increased with last level taken. More significantly, it shows that students who enrolled in the same last level transitioned to credit at the about same rate regardless of the number of previous levels in which they were enrolled (the number of "Levels Taken"). From this it can be inferred that students with the same last level transition to credit at about the same rate regardless of the level at which they first enrolled in non-credit ESL. This is because students who advanced levels to reach each last level must have begun at lower levels than that last level. The level at which they enrolled can be determined by subtracting the number of levels they took before reaching their last level from whatever that last level was. Hence, if the number of levels taken by students who enrolled in the same last level did not affect the rates at which they made transitions, then the level at which they first enrolled did not affect their transition rates either.

In short, Table 6.3 shows that the most important factor that determined whether students made transitions to credit was the last level they attained, rather than the number of levels they advanced or the level at which they began. Students who began at very low levels made transitions at the same rate as students who began at higher levels if (*but only if*) they progressed to the higher levels from which most students made transitions. As Table 6.1 shows, a majority of students made transitions from the Intermediate Level (Levels 5-8).

Take, for example, students whose last level was level 6. Students who started at level 6 took only one level, and they transitioned to credit at a 15% rate. Students who started at Level 5 would have had to take two levels to advance to Level 6. (The two levels would be Level 5 and Level 6.) Reading down the Level 6 column in Table 6.5, it is apparent that the transition rate for students who took two levels and had a last level of Level 6 (students who began at Level 5) was 20% – only slightly higher than the rate of those who began at Level 6. Likewise, students who began at Level 1 and had a last level of Level 6 would have had to take six levels (Levels 1-6) to reach Level 6. Reading down the Level 6 column, it is apparent that the transition rate for students who took six levels and had a last level of Level 6 (students who began at Level 1) was also 20% – the same as the rate for students who began at Level 5 and progressed to Level 6. In fact, the transition rates for all students whose last level was Level six was about the same (20-27%), regardless of the number of levels they took, and hence regardless of the levels at which they began.

An examination of all of the "last level" columns in Table 6.3 shows the same thing as these examples from Level 6 show. With a few aberrations, the transition rates of students who reached the same last level were about the same, regardless of the number of levels they took before reaching that last level, and hence regardless of the first non-credit level in which they enrolled.

Single level students. The major exception to this finding is students who made transitions after taking only one level – that is, students whose first level was the same as their last level. As Table 6.2 showed, the transition rates of single-level students was lower than that of students who took multiple levels, but the number of single-level students who made transitions was greater than the number who made transitions after taking two levels, three levels, or any number of additional levels. Table 6.3 also shows this "single level effect."

For example, in Table 6.3 the transition rates of single level students whose last level was Level 5-8 was substantially lower than the transition rates of most other students at the same last level – students who had taken two or more levels to advance to that last level. But the number of single level students who made transitions from Levels 5-8 was greater than the number of students who took two, three, or almost any other number of levels before they reached each of these levels. This is noteworthy, because, as Table 6.1 showed, a majority of students who made transitions did so from Levels 5-8.

As the discussion of Table 6.2 indicated, this "single level effect" was primarily due to the fact that the number of students who took only one level was greater than the number who took each additional level, and the total number of single-level students who made transitions was much smaller than the total number of students who took multiple levels.

However, this does not explain why a smaller percentage of single-level students than students who advanced levels made transitions. This fact is an exception to the major finding that can be derived from Table 6.3 – that the transition rates of students with the same last level were usually about the same, regardless of the number of levels in which they enrolled.

The data gathered by this study cannot fully explain this exception. But because single-level students did not advance levels, it appears that the reasons they did not make transitions to credit at a higher rate are probably the same as why students did not advance levels discussed in Chapter 5. These reasons and their relevance to transition rates are reviewed at the end of this chapter. Here it is only important to note that the reasons why more members of the cohort as a whole did not make transitions discussed at the end of this chapter appear to have been particularly salient for single-level students.

Whatever the reasons for "the single level effect," it is a minor exception to the most important findings that can be derived from Table 6.3. If that Table is viewed as a whole, it shows that the total number and percent of students who "worked their way up" to each last level by taking two or more levels far exceeded the number of students who began at that last level. For example, although 110 single-level students made transitions from Level 6, 317 students who made transitions from Level 6 took two or more levels. Moreover, the number of students who took six levels and made transitions from Level 6 (students who began at Level 1) was about the same (111 students) as the number of single-level students who made transitions from that level.

In short, if Table 6.3 is viewed as a whole, it shows the vast majority of students who made transitions "worked their way up" to the last level from which they moved on to credit studies. For these students the last level they attained had a much stronger relationship to whether they made transitions than did the number of levels in which they enrolled or the level at which they began.

Table 6.3 Transition to Credit by Last Level in Non-Credit ESL and Levels Taken

	Last Non-Credit ESL											
	Percent Transitioning											
Levels Taken	Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8	Level 9	No Level	
1	1%	1%	2%	8%	10%	19%	15%	25%	22%	34%		
2		1%	2%	5%	12%	14%	20%	33%	42%	0%		
3			3%	6%	12%	25%	25%	40%	44%	60%		
4				6%	10%	21%	27%	31%	48%	17%		
5					12%	22%	25%	30%	39%	50%		
6						15%	20%	31%	41%	0%		
7							25%	26%	30%	50%		
8								24%	18%	17%		
9									21%	42%		
10										100%		
No Levels											12%	

	Number Transitioning											
Levels Taken	Level 0	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8	Level 9	No Level	Grand Total
1	17	122	47	157	103	176	110	231	60	10		1033
2		17	49	31	64	22	28	47	13	0		271
3			23	109	66	97	31	62	19	12		419
4				25	146	56	84	28	10	2		351
5					28	155	47	62	13	8		313
6						13	111	33	23	0		180
7							16	68	11	10		105
8								10	21	1		32
9									3	10		13
10										1		1
No Levels											401	401
Grand Total	17	139	119	322	407	519	427	541	173	54	401	3119

-Removed at 956 students who had a negative level movement

4. Transition to Credit Related to Hours of Attendance in Non-Credit ESL

Chapter 5 showed that that the number of hours of ESL instruction students attended was strongly related to the number of levels they advanced. Because, as shown above, the number of levels taken was related to the transition rates of students, it should be expected that the number of hours they attended would be related to transition rates as well.

Table 6.4 shows how transition rates were related to the number of hours students attended non-credit ESL classes. It shows that there was a positive relationship between hours of attendance and the likelihood of transitioning to credit. The more hours of study in non-credit ESL, up to 500 hours, the higher the likelihood of transitioning to credit, although the percentage increases in transition rates for each additional 100 hours of attendance were not great. Only 4% of those who attended 8-49 hours of non-credit instruction transferred to credit, compared to 15% of those who attended 500 hours.

After 500 hours of attendance, the percent of students who made transitions was erratic. For example, the percent of students who made transitions after attending 800, 1100, 1200, and 1400-1500 hours was higher than 15%, but the percentage in all other hour categories was 15% or slightly less. A separate analysis (not presented) shows that this erratic relationship between hours of attendance and transition rates beyond 500 hours occurred regardless of the last level from which students made transitions.

This study cannot explain this erratic relationship. It can only note that a similar relationship can be seen in Table 5.31 of Chapter 5 where the relationship between hours of attendance and levels taken for the cohort as a whole is described. In that Table, the relationship becomes erratic after 700 hours of attendance. Hence, the findings of Chapter 5 about the relationship between hours of attendance and levels taken are primarily based on students who took 700 or fewer hours.

It is also important to note that this erratic relationship was relevant to only a small number and percentage of non-credit ESL students. Only 16% of members of the cohort described in Table 6.4 (6,105 of 38,095 students) attended for more than 500 hours, and 71% of students who made transitions (2309 of 3232 students) attended for 500 hours or less. Thus, there was a positive relationship between hours taken and transition rates for 84% of the students in the cohort and for 71% of students who made transitions.

Thus, the major finding that can be derived from combining Tables 6.3 and 6.4 is that the students most likely to make transitions were those who took enough hours of instruction to advance multiple levels, and especially those who took enough hours to advance as many levels as required from their first level of enrollment to the Intermediate range.

Table 6.4 Transition to Credit by Hours of Study in Non-Credit ESL

ESLN and ESLF Non-Credit Hours	Percent Transition	Number Transition	Total Number
0	4%	516	12327
100	6%	611	9446
200	10%	412	4327
300	11%	311	2705
400	14%	248	1809
500	15%	211	1376
600	13%	143	1067
700	14%	119	859
800	18%	131	744
900	15%	84	557
1000	14%	68	477
1100	16%	65	402
1200	19%	62	331
1300	15%	43	291
1400	17%	39	233
1500	18%	34	194
1600+	14%	135	950
Total	8%	3232	38095

-Students with fewer than eight hours of attendance were excluded from this analysis. 0 hours=8-49 hours. All other numbers of hours represent a range of hours in 100-hour increments. Thus, 100 hours=50-149 hours, 200 hours=150-249 hours, and so forth.

5. Demographics of Non-Credit ESL Students Who Transition to Credit

Transition by ethnicity. Table 6.5 describes the ethnicity of the students who transitioned to credit. A majority of the students who transitioned were Asian. They made up 59% (1,912 of the 3,232 students) of those who transitioned to any credit courses, 60% (1,720 of 2,855) of those who transitioned to transfer credit, and 62% (1,489 of 2,377) of those who transitioned to ESL credit. In comparison, even though Hispanics were a majority of the cohort, they comprised only 20% (657 of 3,232) of those who transitioned to any credit courses.

Asians also transitioned to credit at a significantly higher rate relative to their numbers in the cohort (14% or 1,912 of 13,362 students) than did Hispanics (5% or 657 of 14,030 students). White Non-Hispanics (16% or 329 of 2,088 students) and Filipinos (16% or 30 of 184 students) transitioned at the highest rates, although their total numbers in the cohort were small.

Of those transitioning, all ethnic groups enrolled in academic transfer courses at a high rate but transitioned to credit ESL courses at a lower rate. This mirrors the fact that members of the cohort as a whole who made transitions were somewhat more likely to enroll in academic credit than in credit ESL.

Table 6.5 Transition to Credit by Ethnicity

		All Credit		Transfer Credit		ESL Credit	
Ethnic Group	Total Students in the cohort	Percent of Students Who Transitioned to Credit	Number of Students Who Transitioned to Credit	Percent Of Transitioning Students Who Took Transfer Credit	Number of Students Who Took Transfer Credit	Percent Of Transitioning Students Who Took ESL Credit	Number of Students Who Took ESL Credit
African American / Non-Hispanic	191	16%	30	93%	28	60%	18
American Indian / Alaskan Native	25	0%					
Asian / Pacific Islander	13362	14%	1912	90%	1720	78%	1489
Filipino	184	16%	30	93%	28	60%	18
Hispanic	14030	5%	657	84%	549	65%	428
Other Non White	217	11%	24	92%	22	75%	18
Unknown / No Response	7998	3%	250	84%	209	67%	168
White / Non-Hispanic	2088	16%	329	91%	299	72%	238
Grand Total	38095	8%	3232	88%	2855	74%	2377

Transition by age. Table 6.6 describes transition to credit by the age of students when they first enrolled in non-credit ESL. Although the transition rates progressively decreased as the age of the student increased, the differences were minor. Students in most age groups made transitions to credit at about the same rate, 8-11%. There were two exceptions: students in the 16-19 and 50+ age groups.

Students in the 16-19 age group were significantly more likely to make transitions than students in other age groups. Seventeen percent of students in this age group (457 of 2,663 students) made transitions. These young students accounted for 14% of all students who made transitions, although they comprised only 7% of the cohort as a whole. They were also more likely than students in other age groups to make transitions to transfer credit and credit ESL. Fifteen percent of 16-19 year old students enrolled in transfer credit and 14% enrolled in credit ESL.

In contrast, only 3% of students in the 50+ age group (196 of 5636 students) made transitions to credit. Students in this age group accounted for only 6% of students who made transitions, although they comprised 15% of the cohort as a whole. About 3% of these students enrolled in transfer credit and about 1.5% enrolled in credit ESL.

Because students in the 50+ age group make up such a large percent of the cohort, their low transition rates skew findings about transition rates for the cohort as a whole. If they were removed from the analysis, the transition rate of the remaining students in the cohort studied would be 9.4%. Because students in this age group may be well-established in their line of work, and some may be retired, they may pose a special challenge to any efforts to increase transition rates. On the other hand, a great many older Americans have made inadequate financial provisions for retirement, and longevity has increased. These two factors may keep a larger percentage of older Americans in the workforce until they reach at least their late 60's or early 70's. If older immigrants are affected by these factors in the same way, the number of them seeking retraining or "retooling" to remain employable and maintain their standard of living may increase dramatically in coming years, and increasing numbers may turn to some form of postsecondary education for help.

Table 6.6 Transition to Credit by Age

Age Group	Total Students in the cohort	Percent of Students Who Transitioned to Credit	Number of Students Who Transitioned to Credit	Percent Of Transitioning Students Who Took Transfer Credit	Number of Students Who Took Transfer Credit	Percent Of Transitioning Students Who Took ESL Credit	Number of Students Who Took ESL Credit
16 - 19	2663	17%	457	90%	412	84%	386
20 - 24	6444	11%	689	89%	615	84%	582
25 - 29	5773	10%	573	88%	504	81%	463
30 - 34	4807	10%	485	88%	425	74%	357
35 - 39	3871	9%	364	87%	318	66%	239
40 - 49	5616	8%	444	88%	390	57%	252
50+	5636	3%	196	88%	173	42%	83
Unknown / No Response	3285	1%	24	75%	18	63%	15
Grand Total	38095	8%	3232	88%	2855	74%	2377

D. DISCUSSION

1. Percentage of Non-Credit ESL Students Transitioning to Credit

Achievements. It is encouraging to find that some non-credit ESL students made the transition to credit courses, although the total percentage of students in the cohort studied who did so was fairly small (8%). It is also encouraging that most students who made transitions eventually enrolled in academic transfer courses, and that credit ESL appears to have been part of their pathway to those courses. These students took at least the first steps toward obtaining a college degree and the economic benefits that come from postsecondary education.

It is even more encouraging to find that some categories of students had much higher transition rates than those of the cohort as a whole. In demographic terms, these were Asian and younger (aged 16-19) students. In terms of their experiences in non-credit ESL, students who made transitions were most likely to be those who advanced multiple levels and took fairly large numbers of hours of instruction until they reached the Intermediate levels (Levels 5-8) of English proficiency. It was from these levels that a majority of CCSF's non-credit students made transitions, and the transition rates of students who attained these levels were in the 20%-30% range (depending on how far they advanced into the Intermediate levels).

Because the overwhelming percentage of the College's non-credit ESL students first enrolled at the Literacy or Beginning Levels, most students had to be willing and able to devote the time and energy required to advance multiple levels before they reach the Intermediate levels. It is, therefore, encouraging that so many did so. Most of the students in the cohort studied who made transitions began at fairly low levels of English proficiency and worked their way up through the non-credit sequence of courses to reach levels from which they could make transitions. This is a tribute to their persistence and to the College's program that helps students advance up the ESL ladder if they are determined to do so.

Concerns. Although there is no comprehensive data on the percentage of non-credit ESL students nationwide who make transitions to credit, the limited data available indicates that the transition rates at CCSF are typical, at least of the better community college ESL programs.[65] This should be cause for concern. Not only do the 92% of non-credit students who *do not* make transitions miss the opportunity to better themselves economically, but they also pose a problem in terms of national and local workforce needs.

The labor market research cited at the beginning of this Chapter shows that immigrants will constitute an increasing portion of the American workforce in the decades to come and that an increasing percentage of American jobs will require at least some college education. Putting these two facts together, *it is an inescapable conclusion that it is in the*

[65] See the transition rates reported for five community colleges in: Elizabeth M. Zachry, et. al., Torchlights in ESL: Five Community College Programs (New York: Council for the Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2007)

national interest for a much larger number of immigrants to attend college. And because a large percentage of today's immigrant population has limited English proficiency, it is in the national interest for far more ESL students, and other immigrants with limited English, to make the transition to credit programs at postsecondary institutions.

As a result, it should be a high priority for community colleges, such as CCSF, that provide non-credit ESL service to greatly increase the rates at which non-credit students make the transition to credit. Not only is it in the interest of students and the national economy for them to do so, but it is also in the parochial interest of colleges. In many states (including California) colleges gain more revenues from a combination of state reimbursements and tuition by enrolling credit students than they do from enrolling non-credit students. And in virtually all states they gain more revenues if students persist longer in a combination of non-credit and credit studies. As a result, colleges will be rewarded financially for doing what is in the personal interest of students and the national interest: increasing the transition rates of non-credit ESL students.

In fact, it is in the national interest and the interest of students for all adult education programs to increase the transition rates of ESL students, both through their own efforts and through partnerships with colleges. Because this study focuses on a community college ESL program, its recommendations are framed in terms of what colleges can do to increase transitions. But many of the same measures can and should be adopted by ESL programs that operate under other auspices – such as local school systems. For the same reasons that increasing transition rates should be a high priority for colleges, it should also be a high priority for them, and they should adopt whatever measures are necessary to ensure that far more of their ESL students enroll in college.

2. Why Students Do Not Make Transitions

This study did not gather any direct evidence about why more non-credit ESL students do not make transitions to credit courses. Certainly CCSF has the rudiments of a transition pipeline in place. That is, it offers the courses that allow students to advance up the ladder of English language proficiency. It provides information and workshops to students who have an interest in making transitions. It has a policy of allowing students to attempt credit studies at any time. And it has a credit ESL program to help them obtain college-level English skills. As a result, any ideas this report can offer about why more students do not make transitions can be only informed speculation.

Based on the findings of the CCSF study and the professional judgment of the authors and others, it seems likely that the reasons students do not make transitions are very much the same as the reasons they do not advance levels discussed in Chapter 5. Too many students lack the time and motivation to advance the non-credit levels required to gain enough English proficiency to make transitions. Too many are unable to attend ESL classes for very long because of their personal circumstances.

For the majority of non-credit students who begin at very low levels of ESL, transitions to college may seem an unobtainable goal. In many cases, few of their family members or

friends have attended college, and this may mean that they do not consider the possibility of doing so. Many come from countries where attending college is understood to be the privilege of a small elite. Moreover, the ladder from the low levels of proficiency at which most students begin non-credit studies to completing a postsecondary degree or diploma is very long. It would take many years for most non-credit ESL students to advance to college and complete a postsecondary program. Many students are probably unwilling to begin such a long-term project, regardless of its possible benefits.

Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 5, students appear to have different goals in enrolling in non-credit ESL. Many simply wish to improve their English for life skills purposes. After a few terms of non-credit study they may believe they have met this goal and have no further interest in advancing further. Other students may wish to improve their English enough to gain the threshold levels of proficiency required to improve their employment prospects somewhat.

Finally, students who reach the Intermediate levels from which most students make transitions face an abundance of options. At those levels of proficiency, they may realistically believe that the primary goal of further ESL instruction should be to improve their employment prospects, rather than to advance to college. This may be particularly true of older students who have established themselves in a certain type of employment. Improving their English may help these students advance in their present type of employment – for example to move from being a frontline worker to being a supervisor. It may be a rational decision for them to select this near-term gain in income, rather than the longer-term prospects of college education. Or, if they wish to improve their employment skills beyond the study of ESL, they may enroll in non-credit vocational courses, rather than credit courses leading to degrees.

As Chapter 10 will discuss, CCSF offers a wide range of vocational courses in which students at the Intermediate levels can probably succeed. Many non-credit ESL students take advantage of these opportunities, although many also continue their ESL studies. Short-term vocational training is doubtless available from many other institutions in the San Francisco area as well.

In short, there are a great many reasons why non-credit ESL students may not be willing or able to make transitions to credit courses, and many of these reasons are fairly compelling – in the short term at least. For all of these reasons, transitioning to credit is probably a "hard sell" to many non-credit students.

Realistically, then, increasing the percentage of students who transition to credit can be only one of the goals colleges should pursue to improve the service provided by their ESL programs. Simply transitioning from the Beginning to the Intermediate levels is an important benchmark for many students. Chapter 5 showed that colleges have a great deal of work to do if they wish to significantly increase the number of students who advance to the Intermediate levels. Enrolling in non-credit programs to obtain job training and perhaps a certificate is another important benchmark. Regrettably, it was not within the scope of this study to measure the success of colleges in achieving that benchmark.

3. What Can Be Done?

In large part, the measures any college must adopt to increase transition rates to credit are very much the same as those discussed in Chapter 5 to increase the number of levels students advance. This is not surprising, because the more levels non-credit ESL students advance, the more likely they are to make transitions. Briefly, the measures are as follows.

First, colleges must make a top-down commitment to increase transition rates and to take whatever measures are necessary. It is not clear that most colleges have adopted increasing transition rates as a high priority – or any priority at all. To a remarkable extent, it is not accepted that a major purpose of non-credit ESL should be to prepare students for college. In many respects, non-credit and credit ESL programs are understood as having different goals for different students, and they are often managed separately.

Non-credit ESL is too often seen as primarily a means of improving life skills English for its own sake, and it is largely intended to serve low-skilled, low-income students who have limited potential for educational or economic advancement. Credit ESL is too often seen as primarily an means of assisting students with limited English who have already made the commitment to college when they first enroll. Its primary goal is to help them succeed in academic studies.

Unless and until colleges come to see significantly more non-credit students as potential credit students, devise programs that will more closely integrate the two services, and hold ESL departments and others accountable for increasing transitions, it is unlikely that transition rates will increase.

Second, colleges must implement guidance and counseling programs that encourage non-credit students to aspire to college education and support them in climbing the ESL ladder toward that goal. CCSF already has some programs of this sort in place. For example, it offers "Steps to Credit" workshops, distributes information about opportunities for credit study to non-credit students, and facilitates the matriculation process to credit in a variety of ways. In addition, the ESL Department is developing career ladder charts that will show students the steps they need to take to prepare for specific careers. The charts will show the level of ESL needed to enter a particular career program, the courses that must be taken to complete certificate or degree requirements, and the number of terms of study it will take.

This study did not examine how effective these measures are or might be, nor did it examine how many students they reach. But other colleges should consider the efforts to enhance transitions that CCSF has in place or in the pipeline.

Whatever the effectiveness of existing guidance and counseling efforts at CCSF and elsewhere, the ideas just discussed about why students do not make transitions suggest a number of guidelines for such efforts. For example, they suggest that guidance and

counseling to increase transition rates should begin at the time students first enroll in non-credit ESL and should continue throughout their non-credit careers. Moreover, it would appear to be particularly important to encourage students who begin at very low levels (and hence have to advance farther to make transitions) that enrollment in college is both a highly beneficial and achievable goal. This study showed that non-trivial numbers of students advanced from the lowest levels of non-credit ESL to academic credit courses. All non-credit students should be aware of these examples and encouraged to emulate them.

Ideally, guidance and counseling to encourage level advancement and transitions should be mandatory for all students in each term or year during which they are enrolled, rather than left to the initiative of the students. That is, non-credit students should have advisors and should be required to devote time to meeting with them, just as credit students do. Realistically, this level of guidance and counseling would be very expensive and could probably only be offered to those students most likely to make transitions (see below). But colleges that make a top-down commitment to increasing transition rates must be prepared to make much greater investments in enhanced services of this kind.

Third, because the pathway to credit enrollment is very long for many students, any of the aspects of program design that Chapter 5 suggested may increase the number of levels students advance, and how fast they advance those levels will help to increase transitions. In fact, *because this study showed that the last level of non-credit enrollment was the strongest predictor of transitions, adopting program designs that may increase level advancement is probably the most important measure any college can take to increase transitions.* The measures discussed in Chapter 5 included shorter terms, more frequent opportunities for advancement, and accelerated "pathways to college" tracks that place a strong emphasis on college-level English and college readiness. Chapter 10 will discuss other aspects of CCSF's program that might be expanded to increase transitions.

Fourth, because resources for any of these initiatives are certain to be limited, colleges should consider targeting their efforts on students who are most likely to make transitions. Generically, these are students who express an interest in credit studies and those who have already shown that they have the motivation and ability to advance multiple levels. Three more narrowly defined groups are suggested by this study: younger students, students who have already advanced multiple levels of proficiency, and students at higher levels of proficiency.

Younger students. This study showed that students who were 16-19 years old when they entered non-credit ESL made transitions at more than twice the rate (17%) as other students. These teenagers probably included many students who have not completed high school (either in their native country or in the United States) and "Generation 1.5" students (students who began their schooling in their native country and eventually completed high school in the United States). In either case, many of them may be young enough to have high aspirations – in part because their plans for the future have not been formed. And they may be more able to devote time to attending ESL classes than other students, because they may be less likely to be encumbered by family, work, and other

responsibilities. Equally important, they may have more time to devote to climbing the ESL ladder than other students simply because they are younger.

Colleges may wish to focus on recruiting these teenaged students for college via ESL programs in many of the same ways and for many of the same reasons that they are increasingly targeting native-born high school dropouts. These include efforts to recruit them through stronger relationships with schools and social service agencies, individualized counseling and career plans, and special accelerated programs that provide them with peer support by treating them as a special cohort.

Students who advance. This study showed that most students who made transitions advanced multiple levels of proficiency before they reached the Intermediate levels. But only about 20-30% of students who reached Levels 5-7 and about 30-40% who reached Level 8 made transitions. Because many of these students advanced from very low levels, they must have been highly motivated. Colleges should consider targeting efforts to increase transitions on encouraging more of these students to enroll in credit studies.

Recruiting higher level students. The idea of recruiting higher level students may seem alien to many ESL programs. Most programs in the United States lack the resources to serve the large number of students who are already seeking admission. Thus, recruiting additional students of any kind may appear to be out of the question. But enrollment in CCSF's ESL programs has been falling in recent years, and this may be the case in other areas as well. Whether or not it is, colleges should consider that the effect of "open-door" ESL programs is almost invariably a non-credit population that consists predominantly of students with very low levels of English proficiency. These students have a long ladder to climb before they can make transitions to credit. Even in the best of circumstances many will not be able to climb that ladder. In contrast, students who begin at higher levels can reach the ESL levels required for transitions more quickly.

Because immigrants whose English proficiency is already fairly high may not believe they need non-credit ESL to achieve their personal and economic goals, many of them may not consider enrolling in ESL programs. However, if increasing transition rates is a priority for colleges, they may wish to consider marketing non-credit ESL to this population as a pathway to college and the benefits that can be derived from postsecondary education. Moreover, it may be possible to persuade state and national funders of ESL programs to increase their support if some of the additional support is used to recruit and accommodate these students. Colleges might argue that recruiting more high-level students is an efficient way to meet state and national workforce needs.

CHAPTER 7

SUCCESS IN CREDIT

A. BACKGROUND

Chapter 6 examined the transition rates of non-credit students to credit ESL as well as various factors affecting those rates. This chapter examines the success in credit courses of non-credit students who made transitions.

This chapter *does not,* however, follow the progress through credit studies of the 3,232 non-credit students who made transitions identified in Chapter 6. This is because most of those students enrolled in credit courses only after several years of enrollment in non-credit ESL. Because their academic history was tracked for only seven years, most of them were not enrolled in credit courses long enough to allow a very extensive assessment of their performance in those courses. Instead, this chapter examines the success of the 6,666 students who comprised the *credit portion of the cohort* defined and described in Chapter 3. These were students *who first enrolled in credit ESL in 1998-2000*, and they are a different group of students from the 38,095 members of the non-credit portion of the cohort who have been the primary focus of the preceding chapters.

The success in credit studies of the 6666 members of the credit portion of the cohort was determined by reviewing their academic history from the year in which they first enrolled in credit studies until the fall of 2007. To determine which of these students had previously enrolled in non-credit ESL and various aspects of their non-credit careers, their academic history was traced back to 1985 (13-15 years before they first enrolled in credit ESL). This "backward look" at the credit portion of the cohort resulted in four categories of students that will be examined in this chapter.

1. Transition students – students who had been enrolled in General Non-Credit ESL courses (ESLF) and/or in ESL Focus courses (ESLF) prior to enrolling in credit ESL. They are designated as "transition" students in this chapter because they had been enrolled in the same types of non-credit courses in which the transition students examined in Chapter 6 were enrolled.
2. Credit origin students – students who had never enrolled in any non-credit course at CCSF prior to the time they first enrolled in credit ESL. Some of these students may, however, have enrolled in other credit courses at the College prior to their first enrollment in credit ESL.
3. Other Non-Credit students – students who had been enrolled in other non-credit courses (including ESL courses other than ESLN and ESLF) prior to enrolling in credit ESL.
4. Credit + Non-Credit students – students who first enrolled in credit ESL and some non-credit course at the same time.

This chapter compares the success in credit of these four categories of students in terms of their grade point averages (GPAs) in credit ESL and academic credit courses, the

number of credit hours in which they enrolled (units taken), the number of credit courses they passed, their attainment of degrees and certificates, their transfer to other two-year and four-year institutions, and other variables. Because transition and credit origin students far outnumbered students in the other two categories, the primary focus of the chapter will be on them.

This method of assessing the success of non-credit ESL students in credit studies was adopted because the authors believed it was the most feasible approach available to them. Ideally, the success of all non-credit ESL students who first enrolled in credit from 1998-2000 would have been compared with the success of all other credit students who first enrolled at CCSF during those years. But this would have required analyzing the academic histories of hundreds of thousands of students who first enrolled in credit studies at CCSF from 1998-2000 to determine which of them had at some time been non-credit ESL students. It would have also have required calculating the grade point averages and other measures of success of these hundreds of thousands of students. The resources available to this study were not adequate to conduct an analysis of such magnitude. In addition, this is a study of ESL. As a result, the success of credit ESL students, and possible effects on success of differences in their academic backgrounds, is of special interest.

This chapter is, therefore, almost exclusively an analysis of the success rates of different categories of the 6666 students who first enrolled in credit ESL (rather than all students who first enrolled in credit at CCSF) from 1998-2000. With a few exceptions, it compares students who made transitions from non-credit ESL only to other students who first enrolled in credit ESL during those years.

However, various analyses of student performance conducted by CCSF suggest that the findings in this chapter about the relative success rates of the students examined in this chapter are about the same as the relative success rates of all non-credit ESL students and all other students who first enrolled in credit during this period. In the interests of brevity, these analyses are not presented here.

In comparing the success of different categories of credit ESL students, it is important to recall some aspects of CCSF's policies with regard to credit ESL that are explained in Chapter 1. In particular, it should be recalled that credit ESL students at CCSF are not required to complete the sequence of credit ESL courses before enrolling in other credit courses. ESL students commonly take credit ESL courses and other credit courses concurrently. ESL students are free to take any credit courses that do not have an ESL or English prerequisite. Some departments have established ESL prerequisites for some of their courses, although many have not. In practice, counselors have lists of courses that they recommend to ESL students depending on their language level. Also, students often learn from others which credit courses offer a reasonable chance of success.

B. MAJOR FINDINGS

- Almost half (45% or 2,978) of the students in the credit ESL cohort examined had previously been enrolled in non-credit ESL at some time. These students had made the transition to credit.

- Most credit ESL students in the cohort (80%) enrolled in academic transfer classes at some time, and more that three quarters of their credit hours, on average, were in those courses. *Credit ESL was, therefore, part of the pathway to academic credit for the overwhelming majority of students who enrolled in it*.

- Transition students were as successful in both credit ESL and academic credit courses as were credit-origin students in terms of GPAs and credit hours passed.

- Transition students placed at lower levels in credit ESL than credit origin students did. But transition students took the same number of levels of credit ESL as credit origin students took.

- The success of most transition students in credit courses did not vary significantly depending on the number of non-credit ESL levels taken or the last non-credit level taken. Chapter 6 showed that both of these factors were predictors of whether students would make transitions to credit. The probable reason that the prior history of transition students in non-credit ESL did not affect their success in credit studies is that most students made transitions from the Intermediate Level of non-credit ESL, whatever their first level of enrollment may have been. They therefore began credit studies with about the same level of English proficiency regardless of their prior history in non-credit ESL.

- However, students who made transitions from the Intermediate High levels of non-credit ESL (Levels 7 and 8) were slightly more successful than other transition students, although their numbers were very small.

- Most credit ESL students did not complete the full credit ESL sequence during the period over which they were studied. It is unclear whether this had any adverse effect on their academic performance outside ESL, except that it may have reduced somewhat the number of transition students who transferred to other two-year and four-year institutions.

- About 25% of the students who first enrolled in credit ESL from 1998-2000 attained a degree, certificate, or both by the fall of 2007, and the percentage was about the same for transition and credit-origin students. In comparison, only about 8% of all students who first enrolled in credit courses at CCSF from 1998-2000 received a degree, certificate, or both over this time period. Credit ESL students attained 29% of all certificates and 48% of all degrees awarded to students who first enrolled in credit during the 1998-2000 time period.

- Between 1998-2000 and the fall of 2007, credit-origin credit ESL students transferred to two-year and four-year institutions at about the same rate as all students who first enrolled in credit studies in 1998-2000. Transition credit ESL students transferred at about 70% of this rate.

- Overall, this chapter shows that students who made the transition from non-credit were as successful in both credit ESL and academic transfer courses as other credit ESL students. They were also as successful in obtaining degrees and certificates, although somewhat less successful in transferring to two-year or four-year institutions.

- This is a tribute to the students themselves, because many of them devoted long periods of time to non-credit ESL before they made the transitions to credit. Yet even after making that transition they took as many units of credit studies and were as successful as other credit ESL students by almost all measures. Their success is also a tribute to the effectiveness of CCSF's ESL credit placement system in selecting students who can succeed in credit and placing them in courses where they can succeed. Finally, it is a tribute to credit ESL as an effective pathway to college for a great many students.

- To increase credit enrollments, extend the benefits of postsecondary education, and meet national workforce needs, colleges should encourage and equip far more non-credit ESL students to make transitions. By all indications transition students can do well in college.

- In particular, if CCSF and other colleges wish to increase both their transfer rates and their completion rates of degrees and certificates, they may wish to focus on expanding their credit ESL programs. If CCSF's experience is typical, a large percentage of credit ESL students begin in non-credit ESL. This means that if colleges wish to increase their transfer and completion rates they may wish to focus on increasing their transition rates from non-credit ESL and on assuring that transition students are well-equipped for credit studies. One possible approach colleges should consider to assure that non-credit students are well-equipped for credit is the creation of "Pathways to College" tracks, such as those discussed in Chapter 5.

- Other colleges also should be aware of CCSF's policy of allowing credit ESL students to enroll in other credit courses before they complete the credit ESL sequence and of the benefits of that policy in terms of broadening student options and shortening the time it takes students to complete credit programs.

C. ANALYSIS

1. Enrollment and Placement

Enrollment. Table 7.1 shows the number of students with various prior academic histories who first enrolled in credit ESL from 1998-2000. The total numbers can be

found in the bottom row of the right side of the table. These figures indicate that 2,978 (45%) members of the credit cohort examined were students who had made the transition from non-credit ESL. Slightly more members of the credit cohort (3,269 students, or 49% of the cohort) were "credit origin" students – students who had not previously been enrolled in any non-credit course at CCSF. There were a total of 415 students in the "credit + non-credit" and "other Non-Credit" categories, and they accounted for 6% of the cohort.

This pattern of enrollment shows that non-credit ESL was a major source of enrollment in credit ESL. Students who made transitions from non-credit ESL comprised almost half of the new enrollments in credit ESL during the period studied. Because, as Chapter 2 indicated, enrollment in credit ESL at CCSF has been falling in recent years, this finding is important. It suggests that one means of increasing credit enrollment is to increase transition rates from ESLN/ESLF.

Placement. Table 7.1 also indicates the credit ESL courses in which students with various prior academic histories were initially placed by CCSF's credit ESL placement system.[66] The courses are listed in ascending levels of difficulty (from 0-6).

In 1998-2000, the lowest credit ESL course that was offered was Level 0 (ESL 22, now discontinued). Students were referred to non-credit ESL if their score on the credit ESL placement test was below the cut-off for placement into ESL 22. The highest ESL credit course that was offered was Level 6 (ESL 82).[67] A few students placed into English 94, "Intermediate Training in Expository and Argumentative Reading and Composition", a course in the English Department sequence that is two levels below Freshman Composition and one level above ESL 82 (level 6).[68]

Table 7.1 shows that a larger percent of transition students than credit-origin students were first placed at lower levels of credit ESL. Sixty-seven percent (1,946) of students who made the transition from non-credit ESL were first placed in credit levels ESL 0-3, compared to 33% (1,069) of credit origin ESL students.

The most common first level of placement for transition students was Level 3. Twenty-six percent 26% (763) of transition students were placed at that level. In contrast, the most common first level of placement for credit origin students was Level 4. Twenty-four percent of credit origin students (743) were first placed at that level. Only 22 students in

[66] See Chapter 1 for a description of that system.

[67] See Chapter 1 for more information about these and other credit ESL courses and a description of the differences between the curricula in non-credit and credit ESL courses. A more complete discussion of curricular differences can be found in: Sharon Seymour, "City College of San Francisco" in Torchlights in ESL (New York: Council for Advancement of Adult Literacy, 2007). This report is available at www.caalusa.org. Information about the matriculation process for enrolling in credit courses can be found in the Chapter 1 and in Background section of Chapter 6.

[68] See Chapter 1 for a discussion of the relationship between the credit ESL and English Department sequences of courses.

the credit cohort were placed in English 94, and only 12 students were initially referred to non-credit courses – indicating that these placement options were rarely used by the ESL Department.

These differences in placement levels indicate that transition students began their careers in credit ESL at lower levels than did credit origin students. Subsequent sections will show whether this made any difference in their performance in credit studies.

Table 7.1 Placement in Credit ESL by Origin

	Percent				Number				Total	
ESL Credit Placement	Credit +Non-Credit	Credit-Origin	Transition from ESLN/F	Other Non-Credit	Other Non-Credit	Credit-Origin	Transition from ESLN/F	Other Non-Credit	%	#
22 (0)	0%	1%	6%	1%		35	165	2	3%	202
110 (1)	1%	3%	11%	1%	1	87	314	5	6%	407
120 (2)	6%	8%	24%	8%	5	248	704	28	15%	985
130 (3)	14%	21%	26%	21%	12	699	763	72	23%	1546
140 (4)	21%	23%	15%	21%	18	743	442	70	19%	1273
150 (5)	24%	20%	8%	18%	20	653	246	60	15%	979
160 (6)	7%	11%	3%	11%	6	355	103	38	8%	502
English 94	1%	0%	0%	1%	1	15	4	2	0%	22
Non-Credit	0%	0%	0%	0%		2	10		0%	12
No Placement	25%	13%	8%	17%	21	432	227	58	11%	738
Grand Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	84	3269	2978	335	100%	6666

-"NCR" indicates students who were initially referred to non-credit courses before they enrolled in credit ESL from 1998-2000.
-"No Placement" indicates students who did not take the credit ESL placement test and whose first level of enrollment in credit ESL could not be determined.

2. Success in Credit Studies

Success in all credit courses. Table 7.2 shows the success of members of the credit ESL cohort in credit courses by their origin. The Table shows success rates in all credit courses taken by members of the cohort – both credit ESL and academic transfer courses, as well as degree-applicable and non-degree applicable courses.[69]

The Table shows that students who made transitions from ESLN/ESLF (transition students) succeeded at the same rates as credit-origin students, as measured by average GPA and units (credit hours) passed. By these measures, students were equally successful in credit studies, on average, whether they made transitions from ESLN/ESLF or whether they started in credit. In fact, the average success rates of all students enrolled in credit were about the same. Prior academic background did not appear to affect success.

Table 7.2 also shows, however, that transition students took slightly fewer credit hours (units) than credit origin students did. That is, their persistence rates in credit studies were slightly lower, although the difference is not great, given the fairly small number of students in each category.

Equally important are the large total number of credit hours in which credit ESL students enrolled, on average. Clearly most of these students were not just dabbling in credit studies. They took substantial numbers of courses for a substantial number of hours.

Success in credit ESL. Table 7.3 examines the success of members of the credit cohort in credit ESL separately from their success in other credit courses. Like Table 7.2, it shows that the average GPA and percent of units passed was almost the same for credit-origin and transition students, and they did not differ greatly for other categories of credit ESL students. Prior academic background did not affect success in credit ESL, just as it did not affect success in all credit courses.

Table 7.3 also shows, however, that transition students took slightly more credit ESL units, on average, than did credit-origin students – 17.79 units compared to 12.08. This is probably due to the fact that, as Table 7.1 shows, they placed at lower levels in credit ESL. As a result, they had to take more ESL credit courses, on average, to ascend the ESL ladder to the point where they could focus primarily on academic transfer courses or achieve their other goals.

Success in transfer courses. Table 7.4 examines the success of members of the credit cohort in academic transfer courses separately from their success in other courses. Like the previous tables, it shows that success rates in these courses were about the same for transition students as for credit-origin students. In fact, the success rates for all categories of credit ESL students were about the same, regardless of their prior academic background. The only difference that may be significant is the fact that the GPAs of

[69] See Chapter 6 for a description of the types of credit courses.

transition students (2.88) were slightly higher than those of other categories of students, although the small number of students in any category diminishes the significance of this difference.

Table 7.4 shows that 86% of all students who enrolled in credit ESL also enrolled in academic transfer courses at some time and that all categories of credit ESL students took large numbers of academic transfer units during the time period studied. In fact, comparing the number of transfer units taken in Table 7.4 with the total number of units taken in Table 7.1, it appears that, on average, 77% of the units taken by credit-origin students and 76% of the units taken by transition students were in academic transfer courses.

In short, based on the types of courses in which they enrolled, students in the credit ESL cohort were primarily academic transfer students. This confirms the finding in Chapter 6 that most students who enrolled in credit ESL courses also enrolled in transfer credit courses. Table 7.4 is also consistent with another finding of Chapter 6. Eighty-eight percent of the students in the non-credit cohort examined in that chapter who made transitions enrolled in transfer credit courses. Table 7.4 shows that 80% of transition students (2384 of 2978) enrolled in transfer courses. The 8% difference may be due to the fact that Chapter 6 examined the transfer credit enrollment of all non-credit students who made transitions – including those who made transitions directly from non-credit ESL to transfer credit courses. In contrast, this chapter examines the transfer credit enrollment of only those students who enrolled in credit ESL.

Conclusion. In sum, this series of tables shows that, on average, *prior academic background made little or no difference in the success rates of credit ESL students, either in all the courses they took, or in credit ESL and academic transfer courses*, considered separately. Transition students succeeded at the same rates as credit-origin students, and all categories of credit ESL students took the overwhelming majority of their credit hours in academic transfer courses. Credit ESL was part of the pathway to academic courses for the overwhelming majority of students enrolled in it.

Table 7.2 Success of ESL Students in All Credit by Origin[70]

Division of Origin	GPA	Percent of Units Passed	Units Taken	Number of Students
Both Credit + Non-Credit	2.66	67%	54.65	84
Credit-Origin	2.62	69%	57.33	3269
Transition From ESLN/ESLF	2.66	68%	50.41	2978
Other Non-Credit	2.53	63%	45.53	335
Grand Total	2.63	69%	53.62	6666

-"Both" includes students who enrolled in both credit and non-credit ESL in their first term of enrollment.

Table 7.3 Success in Credit ESL Courses of Credit ESL Students by Origin

Division of Origin	GPA ESL	Percent of Units Passed ESL	ESL Units Taken	Number of Students
Credit + Non-Credit	2.62	69%	11.29	84
Credit-Origin	2.52	71%	12.08	3269
Transition From ESLN/ESLF	2.49	69%	17.79	2978
Other Non-Credit	2.52	65%	10.08	335
Grand Total	2.54	69%	12.81	6666

Table 7.4 ESL Student Success in Credit Transfer by Origin

Origin	GPA Transfer	% of Units Passed Transfer	Units Taken Transfer	Number of Students
Credit + Non-Credit	2.80	69%	44.89	76
Credit-Origin	2.71	71%	47.03	2992
Non-Credit ESLNF	2.88	72%	38.47	2384
Other Non-Credit	2.61	68%	39.05	281
Grand Total	2.78	71%	43.05	5733

-The total of 5,733 excludes 933 students of the 6666 in the cohort that did not take transfer credit courses.

[70] Excluded in this and all following tables in this chapter are enrollments in Physical Education and tutoring classes in Learning Assistance courses.

3. Success In Credit ESL By Credit Levels Taken

Findings. Table 7.5 compares the success in credit ESL of all credit ESL students, transition students, and credit-origin students in terms of the mean number of credit ESL levels in which they enrolled. It compares these mean levels taken by the first level of credit ESL in which students were enrolled. This Table provides the basis for four important findings.

First, it shows that the number of mean levels taken was about the same for credit-origin and transition students who began at the same credit ESL level. For example, of students whose first credit level was Level 3, the mean number of levels taken was 2.62 for all categories of credit ESL students and 2.64 for both credit-origin and transition students. This shows that *students who began at the same credit ESL level advanced levels at the same rate, regardless of their prior academic background*.

Second, *students who began at lower levels of credit ESL took more levels, on average, than did students who began at higher levels*. For example, the columns representing all categories of credit ESL students (the "All" category) indicate that students who began at Level 0 took 3.22 levels on average, and those who began at Level 1 took 3.21 levels on average. But those who began at Level 4 took 2.26 levels on average, and those who began at level 5 took 1.72 levels on average.

Third, Table 7.5 shows that, *on average, credit ESL students who first enrolled at low levels did not complete the six-level ESL credit sequence*. For example, students first enrolled at level 0 would have had to take six levels to complete the sequence, but the "All" category indicates that, on average, they took only 3.22 levels – reaching Level 2 or slightly higher. (That is, on average, they took Levels 0, 1, and 2 – three levels – plus a fractional number of additional levels). Students who began at Level 1 would have had to take 5 levels to complete the sequence, but on average, they took only 3.21 levels – reaching Level 3 or slightly higher. Only students who began at Levels 5 and 6, and possibly some who began at Level 4, completed the sequence. If only Level 5 and 6 students are counted, only 32% of students (1,857 students) completed the sequence, and if Level 4 students are counted 53% of students (3,123 students) did so.

Fourth, *transition students were less likely to complete the credit sequence than were credit-origin students*. Based on mean levels taken, if students who began at levels 4-6 are counted, 35% of transition students (928 students) completed the sequence compared to 68% of credit-origin students (1,959). If only Levels 5-6 are counted, 17% of transition students (440 students) completed the sequence compared to 44% of credit-origin students (1,262 students). But because the numbers of levels taken in Table 7.5 are averages, the exact number of students who completed the sequence cannot be determined from that Table. On the whole, it seems fair to estimate that about half of the students in the credit ESL cohort finished the sequence. *Finishing the sequence is important, because the last course in the sequence, ESL 82 (Level 6) was the course*

required for degree attainment at CCSF, or for enrollment in English 94, which many students who planned to transfer to a four-year university took next to satisfy transfer requirements.

Significance. This study cannot fully explain these findings. However, the probable explanations that can be offered indicate that they were all significant in different ways.

The first finding – that *prior academic background did not affect the number of levels taken by students who began at the same first level in credit ESL* – speaks for itself. Many factors may have determined the number of credit ESL levels taken, but prior academic background was not one of them. Apparently transition students and credit-origin students who began at the same credit ESL levels had not only the same skills (as determined by the credit placement process), but they also had (on average) the same motivation, time, goals, ability to deal with personal responsibilities, and other characteristics that affect progress in ESL. This finding is significant because it indicates that *non-credit students who make the transition to credit were as successful as other students placed at the same level in credit ESL*, *if success is measured by levels taken.* This reflects well on transition students, but it does not appear to have any larger significance, taken by itself.

The second finding – that *the number of levels taken diminished as the level of first enrollment increased* – is significant in a different way. This finding is similar to the finding in Chapter 5 that students who began at lower levels of non-credit ESL were more likely to advance multiple levels than were students who began at higher levels, and it probably has a similar explanation.

The most likely explanation is that students who started at lower levels in either program realized they had to advance multiple levels if they were to improve their proficiency enough to benefit very much from either non-credit or credit ESL. In the case of non-credit students, those who began at very low levels had to improve their proficiency by multiple levels in order to significantly increase their ability to function in American life. In the case of credit ESL students, those who began at very low levels had to improve their proficiency by multiple levels if they were to either complete the credit ESL sequence or enroll in transfer credit courses that required a fairly high level of English ability.

The third finding – that, *on average, students who began at lower levels did not complete the credit ESL sequence, whereas students who began at Levels 4-6 did* – can be explained in part by the fact that students who began at higher levels had to advance fewer levels than did students who began at lower levels to complete the sequence. As a result, *it took students who began at higher levels less time and effort to reach the highest level of credit ESL*, and this may have been one reason why whey were more likely to do so. Moreover, some students who did not complete the credit ESL sequence during the time period over which they were studied (1998 to fall 2007) may do so in subsequent years.

It may be, too, that finishing the credit ESL sequence was not, by itself, a goal for a great many students, regardless of their first level of enrollment. As tables 7.2-7.4 show, credit ESL students took large numbers of academic transfer units. In fact, they took far more transfer units than credit ESL units. Thus, *it may be that many credit ESL students who began at any level were primarily interested in improving their college-level English only to the point where they could succeed in transfer courses of interest to them*.

This may also be a partial explanation of the second finding – that the number of levels taken diminished as the level of first enrollment increased. Completing the credit ESL sequence may have been valuable to some students as a means of satisfying the English requirements for receiving certificates and degrees from CCSF or transferring to other institutions. But many students may have been more interested in taking courses, rather than in further academic advancement (at least within the time period over which they were studied). Others may have deferred satisfying the English requirements for CCSF degrees and transfer. And still others may have been able to satisfy the English requirement by enrolling in courses in the English Department without completing the credit ESL sequence. Chapter 1 discusses alternative means of satisfying CCSF's English requirements in greater detail. For any and all of these reasons, many credit ESL students may not have considered completing the credit sequence a priority.

It is easier to explain the fourth finding – that transition students were less likely to complete the credit ESL sequence than were credit-origin students. As the discussion of Table 7.1 noted, transition students were initially placed at lower levels than were credit origin students. As a result, like other students who began at lower levels, they were less likely to complete the credit sequence. *Lower placement rates for transition students translated into lower levels of credit ESL taken* – at least in the time period examined.

Because there appear to be several possible reasons why students did not complete the credit ESL sequence, it is hard to know whether findings about non-completion are cause for concern. As noted above, non-completion probably reduces the chances that students will be able to receive degrees or certificates from CCSF or transfer to other institutions. From this perspective, findings about non-completion and speculation about the probable reasons for it are significant and should be of concern, because non-completion limits the academic options of students.

However, insofar as non-completion, as well as the limited number of levels completed by credit students, reflects student goals other than academic advancement and/or students took advantage of the variety of options available to them for satisfying degree and transfer requirements, these findings are significant in a different way and may be less of a concern. From the perspective of student goals, non-completion and the limited number of levels taken may signify that credit ESL helps students to achieve goals other than academic advancement, and that it is a valuable service for many students whether or not they complete the sequence or advance a large number of levels. From the perspective of CCSF's program structure, non-completion of the credit ESL sequence may mask the variety of pathways to academic advancement provided by the College.

Table 7.5 Mean Credit ESL Levels Taken
Credit-Origin and Transition Students By First Credit Level Taken

	All		Credit origin		Transition From ESLN/ESLF	
First Credit Level	Mean Levels Taken	N	Mean Levels Taken	N	Mean Levels Taken	N
0	3.22	156	3.34	29	3.17	126
1	3.21	372	3.23	75	3.23	293
2	2.66	806	2.64	203	2.68	570
3	2.62	1373	2.64	597	2.64	702
4	2.26	1266	2.26	697	2.29	488
5	1.72	1300	1.72	859	1.71	336
6	1.00	557	1.00	403	0.99	104
All	2.25	5830	2.06	2863	2.49	2619

-Removed from the analysis were 836 students for whom no level designation data was available.

4. Components of Success – Last Level Taken

Chapter 6 showed that the last level taken by non-credit ESL students was the major predictor of whether they would make transitions to credit studies. Table 7.6 examines whether the last non-credit level taken by transition students was also a predictor of their success in credit. Table 7.6 shows the success of transition students in all credit courses (both credit ESL and transfer courses) by the last level of non-credit ESL in which they were enrolled. Separate analyses were conducted of the success of transition students in academic transfer and credit ESL courses, respectively. For the sake of brevity, they are not presented here because, except where noted, they showed the same pattern as Table 7.6.

Findings. Overall, Table 7.6 shows that success rates of transition students in credit courses were about the same, regardless of the last level of non-credit ESL in which they were enrolled, with the exception of the five students whose last level was Level 0.

The average GPAs of most transition students with different last levels of enrollment in non-credit ESL were all in the same range – about 2.5 – with the exception of those who were last enrolled in Levels 7 and 8. The GPAs of those students were in the 2.8 range. This is not a very significant difference, but it suggests that transition students with higher last non-credit levels may have received slightly higher grades. Likewise, the percent of units passed was slightly higher for transition students last enrolled in Levels 7 and 8, but the difference was only between pass rates in the high 60% range and pass rates of 72%.

The number of units taken by transition students showed no consistent pattern relative to their last level of enrollment in non-credit ESL, but in all cases it varied from the average number of units taken (51.37) by 10% (5 units) or less. It is curious to find that the 87 transition students whose last non-credit level was Level 1 took the largest number of units and had fairly high GPAs and numbers of units passed, but their small number probably means that their success by these measures is not significant.

Separate analyses (not presented) of the success of transition students in academic transfer and credit ESL courses show that the GPAs of transition students in transfer credit courses were slightly higher, on average, than their GPAs in credit ESL, although the difference was only between an average of 2.85 in academic transfer and 2.45 in credit ESL. Likewise, the percent of units passed was slightly higher in academic transfer courses, but the difference was only between 71% of units completed in academic transfer and 67% of units completed in credit ESL. As discussed above, transition students (and all credit ESL students) took far more units in academic transfer courses than in credit ESL courses.

Significance. The most important conclusion that can be drawn from these findings is that the success rates of transition students in credit courses was about the same whether they made transitions from the Beginning levels of non-credit ESL (Levels 1-4) or the Intermediate levels (Levels 5-8). Chapter 6 showed that most students who made transitions had last levels in the Intermediate range, and Table 7.6 shows this was the case for 66% of the transition students (1,357 students) examined in this chapter for whom the last level of non-credit enrollment could be determined.

It might be expected that students who made transitions from the Intermediate levels would be more successful than students who made transitions from the Beginning levels, because students at the Intermediate levels had higher levels of English skills (at least as measured by teachers and tests in the Non-Credit Division) when they began credit studies. However Table 7.6 shows that, on average, the success rates of these two groups of students were about the same.

In part, these findings can be explained by the fact that most beginning level students who made transitions had last levels in the Beginning High range – close to the Intermediate range. In part, it may also be that Beginning level students were placed in credit ESL courses that required less initial ability in English (lower level courses) and selected academic transfer courses that also required less English ability – at least until their proficiency in college-level English increased through credit ESL courses.

But, on the whole, the most satisfying explanation is that CCSF's system of assessment and placement for credit ESL is fairly effective. Regardless of the Non-Credit level at which students were enrolled, if those students applied to enroll in credit ESL courses, the College's assessment and placement system was able to screen out most students who could not succeed in credit, and admit those who could. And this gatekeeper system managed to place non-credit students who were admitted to credit ESL in levels where they could succeed.

Although most students made transitions from the Intermediate level, at least some Beginning level students obviously had characteristics that allowed them to succeed in credit studies. For example, they may have had fairly high levels of prior education. Or they may have improved their English by attending other non-credit classes at CCSF (including ESLC, ESLB, and ESLV) or by taking ESL classes at another college or organization. In addition, they may have gained English proficiency in their work life. Whatever the sources of their abilities to succeed in credit studies, *CCSF's credit assessment and placement system appears to have done a good job in identifying those abilities and in placing transition students for success*.

Table 7.6 Success of Transition Students in Credit Courses By Last Non-Credit ESL Levels Taken

Last Non-Credit ESL Level	GPA	Percent of Units Passed	Units Taken	Number of Students
0	2.17	43%	43.80	5
1	2.53	67%	56.14	87
2	2.59	59%	47.13	71
3	2.58	62%	48.98	196
4	2.51	63%	55.21	333
5	2.52	65%	50.95	383
6	2.58	67%	49.98	399
7	2.78	72%	52.14	434
8	2.80	72%	48.25	141
9	2.52	65%	46.81	13
Grand Total	2.62	67%	51.37	2062

- Missing from the analysis are 916 students for whom there was no academic history available about their last level in non-credit ESLN/ESLF.

5. Components of Success – Number of Non-Credit Levels Taken

Chapter 6 showed that the number of non-credit levels taken was a predictor of the likelihood that students would make transitions to credit studies. Table 7.7 examines whether this was a predictor of success in credit studies as well. This Table shows the success of transition students in all credit courses (both credit ESL and academic transfer courses) by the number of non-credit levels in which they were enrolled. Separate analyses were conducted of the success of transition students by number of non-credit levels in academic credit ESL and transfer courses, respectively. For the sake of brevity, they are not presented here, because they show the same pattern as Table 7.7.

Table 7.7 shows that students who took any number of levels of non-credit ESL, beginning with those who took one level and extending to those who took six levels, succeeded at approximately the same rate as measured by GPA and percent of credit units passed. The Table also shows that there was no systematic relationship between the

number of non-credit ESL levels taken and the number of credit units taken. The number of units taken did not differ significantly as the number of Non-Credit ESL levels taken increased.

Students who took seven and eight levels of non-credit ESL had slightly higher GPAs and percents of units passed than those who took between one and six levels of no-credit ESL. This finding is consistent with the findings about success in credit by last level taken in Table 7.6, because the last non-credit level taken by students who took seven and eight levels was probably Level 7 or 8. However, because the number of students who took such large numbers of levels is very small, this finding may not be significant.

Table 7.7 is also consistent with the findings in Chapter 6 that the largest single group of students who made transitions was those who took only one non-credit level (410 students in this Table). But single-level students comprised only 27% of transition students in the credit ESL cohort for whom the number of non-credit levels taken could be determined. Chapter 6 noted that the percent of single-level students who made transitions was smaller than the percent of students who took multiple levels of non-credit ESL and it speculated about some of the reasons why this may have been the case. Whatever those reasons, it appears that those single-level students who succeeded in making transitions had about the same success rates in credit studies as did students who took multiple levels of non-credit ESL.

In short, Table 7.7 shows that the greater likelihood that students who took multiple levels would make transitions to credit discovered in Chapter 6 did not translate into higher (or lower) rates of success after students who took multiple levels had made the transition. It appears that taking multiple levels in non-credit primarily had a threshold effect for transitions. That is *students who took multiple levels had a greater chance of making transitions, because most students began at very low levels and had to take multiple levels to attain the Intermediate levels of proficiency required by most students to pass the credit ESL placement requirements and succeed in credit courses*. Once they had taken enough levels to get to the Intermediate range, they were on an equal footing with other credit ESL students, and their success rates were about the same.

Apparently the transition process at CCSF, and the decisions of students themselves, identified the non-credit students who had the skills and motivation to succeed in credit studies, regardless of how many levels of non-credit levels they had taken. Of course, the measures of success in this and other tables are averages, and that means some students were not very successful. However, the overall pattern of success is impressive.

Table 7.7 Success of Transition Students in All Credit Courses

By Number of Non-Credit ESL Levels Taken

Non-Credit ESL Levels Taken	GPA	Percent of Units Passed	Units Taken	Number of Students
1	2.53	63%	48.59	410
2	2.62	69%	50.66	176
3	2.56	63%	49.84	218
4	2.58	65%	51.31	259
5	2.54	66%	53.06	169
6	2.53	67%	50.83	158
7	2.71	69%	50.76	72
8	2.79	75%	60.97	15
9	2.20	61%	37.40	5
Grand Total	2.57	65%	50.59	1527

- The total is 1,527 (rather than the 2,978 transition students in the cohort) because 916 students without a level designation and 535 students with a negative level movement have been removed from the analysis. Negative level movement may occur when instructors recommend that students should be moved to a lower-level course or counselors determine that their levels should be adjusted due to initial misplacement or because gaps in enrollment or health reasons have made it difficult for students to continue in the level where they were previously placed.

6. Academic Credentials

The previous sections of this chapter have focused on the success of transition students and other credit ESL students in credit courses. This section examines their success in terms of more traditional measures of academic achievement at community colleges – the completion of academic programs and the attainment of academic credentials (degrees and certificates) those programs confer.

Table 7.8 shows the degree and certificate attainment of credit ESL students by their academic origin. The most important findings that can be derived from this Table are based on the percentages in the "Award Total" column. That column shows that 24% of transition students and 26% of credit origin students who first enrolled in credit ESL in 1998-2000 had received a degree, certificate, or both from CCSF prior to the fall of 2007. The other columns in the Table show that both transition and credit-origin students were more likely to receive degrees than certificates. Twelve percent of credit ESL students received degrees and 7% received certificates. For credit-origin students, the corresponding percentages were 14% and 5%.

Although only about one quarter of these and other categories of credit ESL students received degrees, certificates, or both, this was an impressive achievement, compared to the rate at which other students who first enrolled in credit studies attained degrees and certificates over the period studied. The "Award Total" column shows that only 8% of all students who were new to credit in 1998-2000 received degrees, certificates, or both. The "All New Credit" category includes credit ESL students, but they comprised only 14%

(6666 of 46,196) of "All New Credit" students. As a result, all categories of credit ESL students attained degrees, certificates, or both at about three times the rate of credit students – a rate that was greatly disproportionate to the number of credit ESL students in the total population of students who first enrolled in credit from 1998-2000.

Moreover, the bottom row of Table 7.8 shows that credit ESL students accounted for 29% of the students first enrolled in credit studies in 1998-2000 who received certificates, 48% of the students who received degrees, and 52% of the students who received both degrees and certificates.

Importantly, Table 7.8 shows that transition students were as successful as other credit ESL students in attaining these measures of academic success, despite the fact (discussed above) that they were less likely than credit-origin students to complete the credit ESL sequence. Apparently, their lower completion rate in this respect did not translate to a lower completion rate in terms of degree and certificate attainment. This may have been because, as suggested above, many transition students made use of another pathway CCSF provides for credit ESL students to fulfill the requirements for degrees – enrollment in English Department classes before they completed credit ESL.

Table 7.8 Degree and Certificate Attainment of the Credit ESL Cohort Compared to all New Credit Students 1998-2000

Origin of ESL Credit Students	Certificate	Degree	Degree + Certificate	Award Total	Certificate	Degree	Degree + Certificate	Award Total	Total Number
Credit + Non-Credit	7%	10%	8%	25%	6	8	7	21	84
Credit-Origin	5%	14%	7%	26%	147	460	241	848	3266
Transition From ESLN/ESLF	7%	12%	6%	24%	206	349	170	725	2981
Other Non-Credit	7%	7%	6%	21%	24	25	20	69	335
ESL Cohort Total	6%	13%	7%	25%	383	842	438	1663	6666
All New Credit Students	3%	4%	2%	8%	1310	1764	835	3909	46196
ESL Cohort Award Percent of Total					29%	48%	52%	43%	14%

7. Transfer Rates

At CCSF, as at most community colleges, the attainment of degrees and certificates is only one academic outcome that is considered important for credit students. The other academic outcome to which colleges usually attach great significance is transfer to other academic institutions – particularly to four-year colleges and universities. In fact, at most colleges, a larger number of credit students transfer than complete degrees or certificates.

Table 7.9 shows the transfer rates of various categories of credit ESL students and of all students who first enrolled in credit studies at CCSF from 1998-2000. The Table shows that far more students who first enrolled in credit studies from 1998-2000 (39% or 18,295 students) transferred to two-year or four-year institutions than took degrees or certificates at CCSF (8% or 3909 students, as indicated by Table 7.8). It also shows that 59% of these students (10,754) transferred to four-year institutions.

But Table 7.9 shows that credit-origin credit ESL students were also more likely to transfer than to take degrees or certificates. Thirty-eight percent of credit origin students transferred – about the same percentage as all credit students who were first enrolled in credit in 1998-2000. Moreover, the percent of credit-origin students who transferred to four-year institutions was slightly higher than the percent of all new credit students who did so (25% of credit-origin students compared to 23% of "All New Credit" students). And it was higher than the percentage of credit-origin students who took degrees and certificates (26%).

However, Table 7.9 shows that transition students were less likely than credit-origin ESL students or other credit students to transfer and to transfer to four-year institutions. Twenty-five percent of transition students (745 students) transferred – compared to 39% of all credit students and 38% of credit origin students. Thus, transition students transferred at about the same rate as they completed degrees and certificates. These percentages are not additive, because some transition students may have transferred after they attained degrees or certificates. Sixteen percent of transition students (489 students) transferred to four-year institutions – compared to 23% of all credit students and 25% of credit origin students. Although this transfer rate was lower, it was still impressive. Transition students transferred to four-year institutions at 70% the rate that all credit students at CCSF did.

One reason that transition students may have been less likely to transfer was that, as mentioned above, they were less likely to complete the credit ESL sequence than were credit-origin students (probably due to their lower rates placement in credit ESL). These lower completion rates may have made it less likely that transition students would complete Freshman English (English 1-A), which Chapter 1 explains is required for transfer to four-year colleges and universities in California.

Overall, Table 7.9 shows that credit ESL made a respectable contribution to the number of students who transferred from CCSF, and that transition students comprised a substantial portion of that total. Because the number of all credit students who transferred

was much larger than the number who took degrees or certificates, credit ESL students did not account for as large a percentage of transfers as they did of degrees and certificates. Nevertheless, relative to their numbers, *all categories of credit ESL students had a high rate of success in transferring to other institutions*. Credit ESL was clearly a viable method for helping credit students to transfer, as it was for helping them to obtain degrees and certificates.

Moreover, it would be wrong to think that the major goal and academic outcome of credit ESL students was to attain degrees and certificates, rather than to transfer. In fact, a higher percentage of credit ESL students (31%) transferred than attained degrees or certificates (25%). And transition students transferred at the same rate as they attained degrees and certificates. The major difference between credit ESL students and other credit students in this regard was not that credit ESL students were less interested in transferring, but that other credit students appear to have been less interested in taking degrees and certificates.

Table 7.9 Two- and Four-Year Educational Institution Transfer of the ESL Cohort Compared to All New Credit Students 1998-2000

	Institution Type (College or University)						
Origin of ESL Credit Students	2-Year	4-year	Transfer Total Percent	2-Year	4-year	Transfer Total	Total Number
Credit + Non-Credit	13%	17%	30%	11	14	25	84
Credit-Origin	13%	25%	38%	416	827	1243	3265
Transition From ESLN/ESLF	9%	16%	25%	256	489	745	2980
Other Non-Credit	10%	14%	24%	33	47	80	335
ESL Cohort Total	11%	21%	31%	718	1377	2095	6666
All New Credit Students	16%	23%	39%	7541	10754	18295	46196
ESL Cohort Percent of Total				10%	13%	11%	14%

D. DISCUSSION

1. Transition Students Do As Well in Credit as Credit-Origin ESL Students

In this examination of the success of non-credit students who transitioned to credit ESL, it is good news to find that these students were as successful in both credit ESL and transfer credit courses as were other credit ESL students. Students from all levels of non-credit ESL succeeded in credit studies, but students who reached the Intermediate High levels (Levels 7 and 8) before transferring were slightly more successful than those who transferred from lower levels. *This confirms the view of many members of CCSF's ESL Department that non-credit students should be encouraged to reach at least an*

Intermediate level of English before considering credit studies. In addition, if students reach the Intermediate non-credit levels, they will be more likely to succeed in transfer credit courses that require a relatively high level of English.

Also, there may be financial limits on the number of units of credit ESL that students can take, due to limits on their eligibility for financial support and their own resources. As a result, it makes sense for them to increase their level of English proficiency to fairly high levels in free non-credit courses. This is because transition students who have reached higher non-credit levels are more likely to place higher in the credit ESL sequence of courses and thereby need to take fewer fee-based credit courses to complete that sequence.

2. <u>Spreading the Word</u>

CCSF's faculty has found that non-credit ESL students are often reluctant to consider credit studies because they think credit courses will be too difficult. They need to know that their chances of success are good if they work their way up to the Intermediate level. In fact, students who began at fairly low non-credit levels and advanced multiple levels were more likely to make transitions than were students who began at higher levels, and they were equally successful in credit studies. *An important part of the guidance and counseling of non-credit students should be to encourage them to consider making transitions to credit*. *And an important part of that encouragement should be making them aware that both transition to credit programs and success those programs are within their reach.* For example, information of this type should be included in CCSF's "Steps to Credit" workshops, in the initial meetings with counselors that are part of the college's matriculation process (see Chapter 9), and in other counseling sessions. *It is also important for ESL instructors to be aware of the prospects of non-credit student success in credit courses, so that they can use this information to encourage students to consider credit studies.*

In addition, both students and teachers should understand that most credit ESL students take transfer credit courses in the same time period that they are taking credit ESL courses, and that they succeed in these transfer courses. Thus, credit ESL students are completing at least some of the requirements for degrees, certificates, and transfer to four-year institutions, as well as gaining valuable skills from individual transfer courses, at the same time they are enrolled in credit ESL. *This shortens the time it takes for ESL students to complete academic programs or transfer*. If students and teachers were more aware of this, they might understand that transitions from non-credit ESL to credit studies have short-term benefits beyond simply taking more English courses, and that the road to degrees, certificates, and transfer is not as long as they might imagine.

Moreover, other ESL programs should be aware of CCSF's policy of allowing credit ESL students to co-enroll in transfer credit courses and the benefits of that policy. Based on the findings in this chapter, there appears to be no reason to restrict ESL students from taking other credit courses until they complete the credit ESL sequence. Allowing them to co-enroll in other courses appears to have many benefits. Many ESL programs

(especially those at community colleges) are concerned about the length of time it takes ESL students to complete credit programs – to attain degrees and certificates or to transfer. They should be aware that *allowing credit ESL students to take other courses before completing the ESL sequence can shorten the time required to attain these goals*.

3. Transition Students Place at Lower Levels of Credit ESL Than Credit-Origin Students

Perhaps the primary reason why transition students place at lower levels in credit ESL than credit-origin students do is because of the difference in content of credit and non-credit ESL courses.[71] A major difference is that the credit program focuses on teaching academic reading and writing, whereas the non-credit program does not. Students may have achieved a High Intermediate Level of proficiency in listening and speaking in non-credit, but they may have lower reading and writing proficiency and/or may not have much experience reading and writing academic material.

Because students are placed in the credit ESL program based in part on a writing sample, those with less experience in writing may place lower in the reading/writing/grammar courses than they do in the listening/speaking courses in credit.[72] Perhaps, too, the lower placement levels of transition students in credit ESL can partially be explained by differences in student characteristics that affect language acquisition. Although the educational background data on non-credit ESL students is not available for a large percentage of students, the information that is available indicates that credit-origin ESL students have a higher educational level on average. Higher educational levels increase the rate at which students acquire a second language. Credit-origin students may have placed higher than transition students because they were more likely to bring a higher level of academic skills to credit ESL than were transition students.

Content instruction also contributes to language development. *Anecdotal reports from CCSF instructors indicate that students who have completed some high school in the United States are more likely to enroll in credit courses, and they are most likely to enroll as credit-origin students*. These students have already spent some time studying English, studying other subjects taught in English, and interacting with English-speaking students, and they have acquired substantial cultural background knowledge from their high school experiences. Credit-origin students who have this background may place at slightly higher levels in credit ESL than other students.

Finally, some students who have the personal goals of obtaining a college degree or certificate (or at least of taking selected credit courses they need to advance vocationally)

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[71] See Chapter 1 and Sharon Seymour, "City College of San Francisco" op. cit. for a discussion of differences in the content and English skill levels of credit and Non-credit courses at CCSF.

[72] See Chapter 1 for a more complete description of the differences between curricula in the non-credit and credit ESL programs.

may have arrived in the United States with fairly high levels of English proficiency. Because of their goals and their higher levels of proficiency, they may be more likely to enter credit studies as credit-origin students.

4. Transition Students Are as Successful as Credit-Origin Students in Credit ESL

Although transition students initially place lower in the credit ESL sequence than credit origin students, an important finding of this chapter is that transition students succeed at the same or slightly higher rates than credit-origin students in credit ESL. Transition students take the same number of credit ESL levels, on average, and have the same GPAs and percent of units passed in credit ESL courses as do comparable credit-origin students. In addition, they attain degrees and certificates at the same rate as credit-origin ESL students. As the Analysis section of this chapter indicates, this is a tribute to the motivation and perseverance of transition students. It is also a tribute to the effectiveness of CCSF's credit ESL placement system. Apparently that system selects students for credit ESL who can also succeed not only in ESL courses but also in academic transfer courses. And it places them in courses where they are most likely to succeed.

5. Attainment of Degrees, Certificates, and Transfer

The degree and certificate attainment of credit ESL students is a testimony to how much students can achieve who make transitions from non-credit ESL and the credit ESL program taken as a whole. Both transition and credit-origin students enrolled in credit ESL attained degrees and certificates at three times the rate of the other credit students at CCSF. One reason for that is that credit ESL students were apparently more interested in obtaining degrees and certificates than other credit students at the College were. But this was not their only goal. ESL credit-origin students transferred to two-year and four-year institutions at the same rate as other credit students. And transition students transferred to four-year institutions at 70% of that rate.

It appears that transition students transferred at a somewhat lower rate because they were less likely than credit-origin students to complete the credit ESL sequence. This was partly because their initial placement in credit ESL was somewhat lower than the initial placement of credit-origin students. Nonetheless, their degree and certificate attainment combined with their transfer rate was quite impressive.

Overall, it appears that credit ESL is a viable route to the attainment of community college degrees and certificates and to transfer. As a result, *if CCSF and other colleges wish to increase their transfer rates and their degree and certificate completion rates, they may wish to focus on expanding their credit ESL programs*. Moreover, if the experience of CCSF is typical, a large percent of credit ESL students begin in non-credit ESL. This means that if colleges want to improve their transfer and completion rates, they may wish to focus on increasing transition rates as well as the credit ESL completion rates of transition students. And colleges should consider instituting the types of "Pathways to College" courses discussed in Chapter 5 and 6 as way to increase credit ESL completion rates.

CHAPTER 8

STOP-OUTS

A. BACKGROUND

Chapters 5-6 analyzed the learning gains (indicated by levels taken) and transitions to credit courses of non-credit ESL students at CCSF. The analysis in those chapters showed that both learning gains and transitions are strongly influenced by two variables: terms taken and hours of attendance. This chapter addresses the question of how learning gains and transitions are related to patterns of student enrollment: whether these measures of student performance differ depending on whether students enroll in ESL courses continuously (if they enroll for each consecutive term available to them) or have breaks in their enrollment.

1. The Importance of Stop-Outs

Breaks in enrollment are matters of considerable interest to the ESL field, and to adult educators generally. ESL instructors have long been familiar with the pattern of students enrolling in classes, dropping out for a period of time, and then returning at a later date. But since these students have not totally dropped out, educators have coined a new term for them – "stop-outs." Educators have begun to study stop-outs to look for answers to various questions – who they are, how many stop-out, how frequently they stop-out, for how long, how many hours of instruction they take, the effects that stopping out has on their learning, and how many stop-out students transitions to credit. The National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy's (NCSALL) Study Circle Guide devoted one session for instructors and administrators to focus on stop-outs as one of the key concepts related to learner persistence.[73] The findings of this study contribute additional knowledge about stop-outs in adult education.

2. Definition

This study defines a stop-out as any student in the 1998-2000 non-credit cohort analyzed in other chapters who: (a) initially enrolled in a non-credit ESL class at any level during any term from 1988-2000, (b) subsequently re-enrolled in a non-credit ESL class, but (c) did not re-enroll until two terms or more after they had enrolled in the first class. That is, stop-outs are defined as students who did not re-enroll during the equivalent of an academic year (three terms) or longer. They enrolled for one term in the equivalent of an academic year, but did not enroll for the other two terms (or longer) before they re-enrolled. For example, a student who enrolled in the fall term of 1998 and who next enrolled in the fall term of 1999 (or later) is defined as a stop-out. But a student who enrolled in the fall term of 1998 and next enrolled in the spring or summer terms of 1999 is not defined as a stop-out.

[73] http:/www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/teach/lp.d.pdf

It might appear to make more sense to define a stop-out as a student who did not re-enroll for any consecutive term. This study did not adopt that definition primarily because (as noted in Chapter 1), all terms in CCSF's ESL program are not the same. In particular, the program includes a short summer term that offers fewer classes for fewer weeks and has a lower attendance than its fall and spring terms. Also, students usually cannot advance levels based on attending the summer term. That term is primarily used for review of course content taken in the spring term. Because the summer term differs from other terms in these and other ways, students who do not enroll in it are "missing" instruction that may affect their learning gains or prospects for making transitions, but the instruction they are missing is different in intensity, duration, and purpose than in other terms. Moreover, some students may not need or benefit from the "review" provided by the summer term, and others may not be able to attend during the summer because the number of classes offered is limited.

Because the summer term is so different from other terms at CCSF in these and other ways, this study adopted a definition of stopping out that effectively does not count the summer term in determining whether students stopped out. *Only students who missed the fall or spring terms in the equivalent of an academic year are considered stop-outs.*[74] This definition is to some extent arbitrary, but it appears to be the best way to determine what effect stopping out has on learning gains and transitions. Although missing only the summer term undoubtedly has some effect on students, this study did not have the resources to determine what that effect might be. If stop-outs were defined as students who missed *any* term, the number of stop-outs would increase, but the students assigned to this category would include students who had very different classroom experiences: those who did not, and possibly could not, attend the summer term.[75]

[74] For example, by the definition adopted in this study, a student who enrolled in the spring term, missed the summer term, and re-enrolled in the fall would not be counted as a stop-out. If stop-outs were defined as students who missed any consecutive term, they would be counted as a stop-out. A student who enrolled in the fall term and missed the spring and summer terms would be counted as a stop-out by either definition. Of course, students defined as stop-outs who did not re-enroll for more than one year may have missed one or more summer terms and multiple spring and/or fall terms.

[75] The definition also fails to fully capture the learning experiences of students who enrolled in the summer term and did not enroll again until the following summer. These students are categorized as stop-outs, although they missed both the fall and spring terms, whereas other students categorized as stop-outs missed only one of these terms in the equivalent of an academic year. Because of limits on summer enrollment and the greater opportunities offered during the fall and spring there are probably only a small number of these students. Nevertheless, one limit of this study is that it does not consider what difference their pattern of enrollment makes in an analysis of stop-outs.

B. MAJOR FINDINGS

- Stopping out was a fairly common practice for non-credit ESL students in the cohort studied. Nearly half (48%) of students in the cohort who logically could stop out (those who are enrolled for more than one term) did so. These stop-outs comprised 30% of all students in the cohort.

- Some students stopped out repeatedly, but most students (74%) who stopped out did so only once, and only a small number of students stopped out more than twice.

- The median length of stop-outs was remarkably long – the equivalent of two academic years for those students who stopped out once, and slightly less during each absence from the program for students who stopped out twice.

- Most stop-outs (80%) began their ESL studies at very low levels (the Literacy and Low Beginning Levels), and they were more likely to begin at these levels than were members of the cohort as a whole or students who were continuously enrolled for more than one term.

- An examination of the demographics of stop-outs indicates that Asians were somewhat less likely to stop-out than Hispanics, but age was not significantly related to stopping out.

- Students who stopped out enrolled for more terms, but attended about the same number of hours and advanced about the same number of levels (on average) as students who were continuously enrolled. Stop-outs arrived at the same goals in terms of learning gains as did students who were continuously enrolled. It simply took them longer to do so.

- This finding about the terms taken and levels advanced of stop-outs contradicts the notion that stopping out has a negative effect on persistence and learning gains.

- A significantly smaller percentage of students who stopped out (8%) made the transition to enrollment in credit classes than did students who were continuously enrolled (13%). One of the major reasons for this difference may have been that stop-outs began their studies at lower levels of English proficiency than did students who were continuously enrolled. As a result, they had to advance more levels to reach the levels of proficiency from which they could make transitions. Also, stop-outs may have been less likely to have the goal of enrolling in credit courses, and because they were absent from the program for such long periods of time, some of them may have made transitions after the seven-year period during which they were studied.

- This study discovered no strong evidence that stopping out, by itself, had a negative effect on persistence, learning gains, or transitions. It seems more probable that

stopping out – as well as the limited persistence, learning gains, and transition rates of both stop-outs and continuously enrolled students – was due to factors such as student goals, motivation, the demands of personal lives, and the features of ESL program design discussed in Chapter 5. If CCSF and other institutions that provide ESL service wish to address stop-outs' performance problems, they should probably adopt the same measures to assist these students that Chapter 5 and 6 suggests they should adopt to assist all non-credit students. And they should recognize that, because of their manifest willingness to persist in ESL studies, stop-outs may be among their most promising students. As a result targeting efforts to improve student outcomes on stop-outs may have especially good results.

C. ANALYSIS

1. Frequency of Stopping Out

Table 8.1 shows the number of students in the cohort studied who stopped out by the number of times they stopped out over a seven-year time period. The Table includes only those students who were enrolled for more than one term, because only students enrolled for more than one term can stop out. Only these students can enroll and re-enroll at some subsequent time – which is central to any definition of a stop-out.

The total number of non-credit ESL students in the cohort studied was 38,095 students. Table 8.1 shows that the number of these students who persisted for more than one term was 23,489, or 62% of the cohort.[76] Of those students who were enrolled for more than one term, slightly over half, 52% (12,142) did not stop-out during the seven-year period studied. This is indicated by the "0" Stop-Outs row in Table 8.1. These students were enrolled for one term and re-enrolled for one or more sequential terms (with the possible exception of the summer term) until they stopped attending non-credit ESL classes. The remaining 48% of those who enrolled for more than one term (11,347 students) were stop-outs. These stop-outs were 30% of the 38,095 students in the cohort.

Although a significant portion of students in the cohort stopped out, they did not do so very often. Almost three quarters of those who stopped out did so only once. Of the total number of stop-out students, 74% (8379 students) stopped out only once, and 21% (2308 students) stopped out twice. Only a negligible percentage and number (5% or 561 students) stopped out more than twice.

The fairly small percentage of students who stopped out more than once is impressive when compared to the persistence rates of students in the cohort as a whole reported in Chapter 4. For example, Table 4.1 in that chapter shows that 16,357 students enrolled for three or more terms. These students comprised 70% of those who enrolled for more than one term. It would have been possible for any of these students to have stopped out at least twice – once between the first and second term in which they were enrolled, and once between the second and third terms in which they were enrolled. But only 21% of students stopped out twice, less than one third of those who had the opportunity to do so.

[76] This is consistent with the finding about persistence in Chapter 4.

Moreover, students who stopped out twice had a higher persistence rate than most students in the cohort as a whole. By definition, all of the 2408 students who stopped out twice enrolled for three terms or longer. Only 43% of students in the cohort (the 16,357 just mentioned) persisted for this long.

Table 8.1 Students First Enrolled in Non-Credit ESL in 1998, 1999, 2000 and Persisted For More Than One Term by Number of Stop-Outs

	All Students		Students Enrolled more than 1 Term	
Stop-Outs	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
0	26748	70%	12142	52%
1	8378	22%	8378	36%
2	2408	6%	2408	10%
3	508	1%	508	2%
4	49	0%	49	0%
5	4	0%	4	0%
Grand Total	38095	100%	23489	100%

2. Demographics of Stop-Outs

Tables 8.2 and 8.3 answer the question "Who stopped out?" in demographic terms.

Ethnicity. Table 8.2 shows stop-outs by ethnicity. Of the two largest ethnic groups at CCSF, Hispanics were somewhat more likely to stop-out than were Asians. The Table shows that 55% of Asians had no stop-outs, compared to 46% of Hispanics. But the difference in the number of stop-outs between these two ethnic groups is fairly small. Table 8.3 shows that 33% of Asians had one stop-out compared to 38% of Hispanics, and 11% of Asians had three or more stop-outs compared to 15% of Hispanics. Thus, although Asians were less likely to stop-out than were Hispanics, most students in both groups who stopped out did so only once. Overall, these findings are consistent with the findings in Chapter 4 that Asians have a higher persistence rate.

The group with the lowest percentage of stop-outs was White Non-Hispanic. Of this group, 72% had no stop-outs. Although data on the background of these students is not available, a large percentage of them were most likely from the former Soviet Union, because in 1998-2000 CCSF served a sizeable number of students who emigrated from this region.

Age. Table 8.3 shows stop-outs by age. It appears that the percentage of students who stopped out did not vary significantly by age at the time of their first enrollment in non-credit ESL. The percentage of students with no stop-outs ranged between 50% and 53% for all age groups, except those who were 50 years of age or older. Fifty-eight percent of

students in this older age group had no stop-outs. This reflects the finding in Chapter 4 that students in this age group were somewhat more persistent than younger students. However, as Chapters 5 and 6 show, this increased persistence did not translate into higher learning gains or rates of transition to credit courses, on average.

Table 8.3 shows no major differences in the number of stop-outs among the groups it describes (except those 50 years of age or older). Most students in all age groups who stopped out did so only once.

Table 8.2 Percent of Stop-outs of Non-Credit ESL Students With More Than One Term – by Ethnicity

Stop-Outs	African American Non Hispanic	American Indian Alaskan Native	Asian Pacific Islander	Filipino	Hispanic Latino	Other Non White	Unknown No Response	White Non Hispanic
0	61%	36%	55%	71%	46%	54%	48%	72%
1	31%	43%	33%	23%	38%	36%	40%	24%
2	6%	7%	9%	5%	12%	9%	10%	3%
3	2%	7%	2%	0%	3%	1%	2%	1%
4	0%	7%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
5	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Number of Students	113	14	9808	77	8428	121	3757	1171

-Missing from this table are 14,606 students in the cohort who only enrolled for one term

Table 8.3 Percent of Stop-Outs of Non-Credit ESL Students With More Than One Term – by Age

Stop-Outs	16 - 19	20 - 24	25 - 29	30 - 34	35 - 39	40 - 49	50+	Unknown/ No Response
0	52%	50%	51%	53%	51%	52%	58%	37%
1	35%	35%	35%	35%	36%	37%	32%	49%
2	11%	11%	11%	9%	10%	10%	9%	12%
3	2%	3%	2%	3%	3%	2%	1%	3%
4	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
5	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	1711	3903	3347	2955	2509	3939	3926	1199

-Missing from this table are 14,606 students in the cohort who only enrolled for one term.

3. Stop-Outs by First Level of Enrollment

Table 8.4 shows the first level at which stop-outs enrolled in non-credit ESL. The Table shows that most stop-outs began at very low levels, and that they were more likely to begin at these low levels than members of the cohort as a whole. It shows that 2,131 students who first enrolled at the Literacy Level and 5,819 students who initially enrolled at Level 1 stopped out. Taken together, these students comprised 70% of the 11,347 students who stopped out. If the 1,173 stop-outs who initially enrolled at Level 2 are added to this total, the percentage of stop-outs initially enrolled at the Literacy Level or the two Beginning Low Levels is 80%. This is a higher percentage than the percent of all students in the cohort who were initially enrolled at these levels. Chapter 2 shows that 60% of all students in the cohort were initially enrolled at the Literacy or Beginning Low Levels. In short, *students who stopped out were somewhat more likely than other ESL students to begin at very low levels*.

More importantly, Table 8.4 shows that *students who stopped out were somewhat more likely than those who were continuously enrolled for more than one term to begin at low levels of non-credit ESL*. The Table shows that, whereas 80% of students who stopped out began at the three lowest levels of ESL, 70% of continuously-enrolled students (8,463 of 12,142 students) began at these levels. Although this difference is not great, it may be one reason why stop-outs differed from continuously-enrolled students in at least some of the performance measures discussed below.

Table 8.4 Number of Stop-Outs by First Non-Credit Level for Students Enrolled for More than One Term

	First ESL Non-Credit Level											
Stop-Outs	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	No Level	Total
0	1924	5246	1293	1327	438	458	335	376	88	9	648	12142
1	1537	4207	866	710	306	228	144	136	39	17	188	8378
2	489	1285	255	171	55	58	36	24	9	3	23	2408
3	97	294	47	36	15	9	3	3			4	508
4	8	30	4	3	2	2						49
5		3	1									4
Number Stopped Out	2131	5819	1173	920	378	297	183	163	48	20	215	11347
Grand Total	4055	11065	2466	2247	816	755	518	539	136	29	863	23489

-Students with "No Level" were students to whom a level could not be assigned because their final level that was lower than their beginning level.
-Missing are 14,606 students who were enrolled for only one term.

4. Length of Time Students Stopped Out

Table 8.5 shows the length of time that students stopped out. The Table shows that, on average, students who stopped out had fairly long breaks in enrollment. Students who stopped out once comprised 74% of all stop-outs. The Table shows that the mean length of time between enrollments for these students was 2.31 years, and the median length was two years. The mean and median lengths of time for students who stopped out twice were slightly less, about 1.75 years. However, the total amount of time these students were absent from the program between enrollments was twice as long: 3.5 years (twice the length of each stopping out). Because this study tracked students for only seven years, this means that students who stopped out twice were absent from the program between enrollments for half the time during the seven years that the cohort was studied.

Students who stopped out more than twice are not discussed in this analysis, because their numbers were so small (561 students), but it interesting that they stopped out for shorter periods of time during each stopping out period, but were absent from the program for even more total years.

Following the definition of stop-outs adopted by this study, the numbers in Table 8.5 are academic year equivalents that count three terms (including summer) as an academic year. As a result, students who stopped out once did not re-enroll again for two or more academic years, on average. For example (using the mean number of 2.31 years), a student who stopped out once might have first enrolled in the fall of 1998 and not re-enrolled again until the spring of 2001. A student who stopped out twice would have been absent from the program for one or two fewer terms before re-enrolling each time.

These long absences are all the more striking, because they were not unusual. As noted above, almost half the students enrolled for more than one term and 30% of the cohort studied stopped out over a period of seven years. As a result, quite long absences between enrollments were not uncommon in CCSF's ESL program.

It is important to bear in mind, however, that the durations of being stopped out in Table 8.5 are statistical averages. As a result, some students stopped out for only one year (the minimum amount of time that defines a stop-out), and some stopped out far longer.

5. Levels Taken and Their Components

Table 8.5 also shows how students who stopped out differed from other students enrolled for more than one term by the number of levels of ESL in which they were enrolled. As Chapter 5 points out, the number of levels in which students were enrolled is the best available measure of learning gains in CCSF's non-credit ESL program. In addition, Table 8.5 shows how stop-outs differed from other students in terms of two of the key factors that Chapter 5 showed were associated with advancing levels in CCSF's non-credit ESL program: terms taken and hours of attendance over the seven-year period studied. These factors will be examined first.

Terms taken. Table 8.5 shows how these fairly long absences were related to the number of terms in which students who stopped out were enrolled (terms taken). Judging from the *median* number of terms taken, over the seven-year period, students who stopped out once were enrolled for one more term, and students who stopped out twice were enrolled for three more terms than continuously-enrolled students. These are significant differences. Students who stopped out once were enrolled for 30% more terms than were continuously-enrolled students, and those who stopped out twice were enrolled for twice as many terms.

To some extent, the magnitude of these differences in median terms taken is a statistical artifact. Judging from the *mean* number of terms taken, students who stopped out once enrolled in only .6 more terms than did students who were continuously enrolled (a 13% difference). But the number of terms taken by students who stopped out twice was two terms longer than the number of terms taken by students who were continuously enrolled, whether this difference is calculated in terms of mean or median numbers of terms.

Nevertheless, these differences in measurement should not obscure the major finding in Table 8.5 about terms taken. No matter whether measurements by medians or means are used, it appears that stop-outs were likely to take somewhat more terms over the seven-year period than students who were continuously enrolled.

Of course, representing terms taken by averages (whether medians or means) does not do full justice to the attendance patterns of either stop-outs or students who were continuously enrolled. An examination of the enrollment patterns of both categories of students (not presented here) indicates that a non-trivial number of students in both categories enrolled for six, eight or even 12 terms. In other words, the distribution of both stop-outs and continuously-enrolled students was remarkably flat – no number of terms taken (including the mean and median numbers) accounted for a very large percentage of either category of students, or of students who stopped out various numbers of times. The mean and median numbers just discussed are, therefore, probabilities that summarize an extremely broad range of enrollment patterns by all students.

Hours of attendance. In Table 8.5, the total mean number of hours attended differs considerably from the total median number of hours. This is due to differences in how each type of measure is calculated.[77] For purposes of this discussion, the important consideration is the difference between stop-outs and continuously-enrolled students by either measure.

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[77] The differences in total numbers of hours taken are due to the fact (explained in Chapter 3) that some Non-credit students attend ESL classes for very long periods of time (1500 hours or more). This effect is partly captured by the finding that many of those students who enrolled for more than one term take large numbers of terms, whether they stop out or not. If students attend a significant number of hours in each term, the number of terms taken has a multiplier effect, resulting in large numbers of total hours. This effect is more likely to be captured by the number of mean hours taken (which divides the total number of hours each group of students took by the number of students in each group) than by median hours taken (which represents a number of hours that is equal to, or greater than, the number of hours attended by half of each group of students, and equal to, or greater than, the number attended by the other half) – although neither metric captures it very well.

Table 8.5 shows that stop-outs and students who were continuously enrolled attended about the same number of hours over the seven-year time period. Whether measured by mean or median hours, students who stopped out once attended about 20-30 *fewer* hours than did students who were continuously enrolled. Students who stopped out twice attended between 20 and 70 *more* hours than students who were continuously enrolled. Considering that total hours of enrollment by either measure is fairly large, these differences in hours of attendance probably do not have much effect on learning gains.

A more interesting comparison is between hours of attendance and terms taken. Chapter 5 showed that these two variables were closely related for students in the cohort as a whole. For the 30% of the cohort who were stop-outs, this relationship is not strong. For example, comparing students in terms of median terms and hours taken, Table 8.5 shows that although students who stopped out once attended one *more* term than students continuously enrolled, they attended 35 *fewer* hours. Although the difference in hours taken is not by itself significant, when combined with differences in the number of terms taken, it is. Based on the findings of Chapter 5, it might be expected that, because stop-outs enrolled in more terms, they would also have attended more hours of instruction. But, on average, this was not the case. It appears that stop-outs attended fewer hours than did continuously-enrolled students in one or more of the terms during which they were enrolled.

Although some categories of stop-outs (those who stopped out twice or three times) attended both a larger number of terms and hours than did continuously-enrolled students, the number of hours attended by any category of stop-outs did not increase very much as the number of terms in which they were enrolled increased. In sum, there was not a strong relationship between terms taken and hours of attendance for stop-outs, as there was for members of the cohort as a whole. In fact, there was practically no relationship between these two factors at all.

Levels taken. Chapter 5 showed that terms taken and hours of attendance both affect levels taken (and hence learning gains) for the cohort as a whole. As a result, if the number of terms taken by stop-outs was greater and the number of hours of attendance was about the same as the comparable values for students continuously enrolled, it is hard to predict whether the number of levels taken by stop-outs would be greater or about the same.

Table 8.5 shows that the median number of levels taken was about the same for students who stopped out once or twice as it was for students who were continuously enrolled. All three groups of students took a median number of two levels, and hence advanced one level (on average) over the seven-year time period. Measured by mean levels taken, students who stopped out once and twice took an average of slightly more than two levels, but the difference between the groups was very small. Students who stopped out once enrolled in .06 *fewer* levels than those who were continuously enrolled, and students who stopped out twice enrolled in .20 *more* levels.

These differences are well within the margin of error of these calculations. The most reasonable conclusion that can be drawn from Table 8.5 is that, on average, students who stopped out took and advanced about the same number of levels as did students who were continuously enrolled.

As a result, on average, the number of levels stop-outs took was much more strongly related to the number of hours they attended than to the number of terms in which they enrolled. This is because they took about the same number of levels as continuously-enrolled students who attended the same number of hours, but the number of terms in which they enrolled was greater than the number of terms taken by these continuously-enrolled students.

6. Portrait of a Stop-Out

Based on the findings presented in Table 8.5, stopping out is *not* associated with poor performance by students in terms of learning gains – at least compared to continuously-enrolled students. On average, stop-outs took and advanced about the same number of levels as other students who enrolled for more than one term. The long absences of stop-outs from CCSF's ESL program apparently did not have a significant effect on their learning gains. This may be due in part to the fact that they took somewhat more terms to make up for those absences, although they did not attend significantly more hours of instruction. As mentioned above, this suggests that stop-outs attended very few hours during some of the terms in which they enrolled. But whatever their attendance patterns may have been, students who stopped out and students who were continuously enrolled got to the same goal in terms of learning gains. It simply took students who stopped out more years, and slightly more terms to attain that goal.

Table 8.5 Stop-Outs by Levels Taken, Hours of Attendance, Terms of Enrollment, and Length Of Stopping Out

Stop-Outs	Mean Levels Taken	Median Levels Taken	Mean Hours ESLNF	Median Hours ESLNF	Mean Terms ESLNF	Median Terms ESLNF	Mean Length of Stop Out in Years	Median Length of Stop Out in Years	Number of Students
0	2.43	2	439.01	253.80	4.43	3.00			12142
1	2.37	2	413.19	218.13	5.03	4.00	2.31	2.00	8378
2	2.63	2	459.32	330.03	6.34	6.00	1.78	1.75	2408
3	2.87	3	456.80	383.32	7.04	7.00	1.48	1.50	508
4	2.69	2	402.91	332.50	7.49	7.00	1.27	1.25	49
5	3.25	4	428.16	372.30	8.25	8.00	1.09	1.08	4
Grand Total	2.44	2	432.19	254.00	4.90	4.00	2.16	1.75	23489

-Missing from this table are 14,606 students in the cohort who only enrolled for one term.

7. Transition to Credit

Table 8.6 shows the percentage of stop-outs and continuously-enrolled students ("0" stop-outs) who made the transition to enrollment in credit courses over the seven years studied. The Table shows that students who stopped out were considerably less likely to make this transition than were continuously-enrolled students. This is by far the greatest difference between stop-outs and other students who were enrolled for more than one term identified by this study.

Table 8.6 shows that 13% of students who were continuously enrolled (1,578 students) made the transition to credit. In contrast, only 8% of students who stopped out once or twice (670 and 192 students, respectively) enrolled in credit courses within seven years of the time they were first enrolled in CCSF's ESL program.

Chapter 6 showed that about 8% of the total cohort studied made the transition to credit courses. As a result, the transition rates of students who stopped out were about the same as the rates of all students in the cohort. The transition rates of students who were continuously enrolled were higher than the rates for the cohort as a whole.

This is a surprising finding. Chapter 5 showed that the number of levels taken is strongly related to the likelihood that students will transition to credit.[78] Because both stop-outs and students who were continuously enrolled took about the same number of levels (two levels) on average, it might be expected that they would have the same transition rates. The possible reasons for these differences are discussed below.

[78] Observant readers may notice that the percentage of both stop-outs and continuously-enrolled students who made transitions to credit was higher than the percentage of students who took the same number of levels and transitioned to credit reported in Chapter 5. That is, both stop-outs and continuously-enrolled students took two levels on average, and 8% and 13% of them, respectively, made transitions. Chapter 4 reports that only 5% of students who took only two levels made transitions to credit. The apparent difference is partly due to the fact that the number of levels taken discussed in this chapter are averages, whereas the numbers discussed in Chapter 5 are calculations of the total number of students enrolled in various levels who made transitions. Also, the students discussed in this chapter were only those who took more than one level, and as Chapter 5 shows, a significant number of non-credit students (particularly those first enrolled at higher levels) made transitions after enrolling in only one level.

Table 8.6 Transition to Credit for Stop-Outs

Stop-Outs	Enrolled More Than One Term	Percent Transitioning to Credit
0	12142	13%
1	8378	8%
2	2408	8%
3	508	7%
4	49	6%
5	4	0%
Grand Total	23489	11%

D. DISCUSSION

1. Is Stopping Out a Problem?

Stopping out was a fairly common practice for the cohort of CCSF's non-credit ESL students examined by this study. Thirty percent of students in the cohort stopped out, and on average their breaks in enrollment were quite long – two years or more. Most people in the ESL field would probably like to see as many students as possible continuously enrolled, because they believe that persistence, in the form of continuous enrollment, increases learning gains. From this perspective, stopping out is a problem – almost by definition. Stop-out students do not persist in ESL programs in the same way that other students enrolled for multiple terms persist.

But persistence is a relative matter. By virtue of the fact that they enrolled for two or more terms, stop-outs persisted for longer than almost half of CCSF's non-credit ESL students. About 74% of students who stopped out did so only once. And compared to students who were continuously enrolled, students who stopped out enrolled for more terms and about the same number of hours. From this perspective, stop-outs were a remarkably persistent group. Their persistence simply took a different form than the persistence of students who were continuously enrolled.

Did stop-outs pay a price for their form of persistence? In terms of learning gains, they apparently did not. On average, they took and advanced about the same number of ESL levels as students who were continuously enrolled took and advanced. As a result, *the findings of this study contradict the notion that continuous enrollment leads to both greater persistence and greater learning gains*.

The price stop-outs paid for their form of persistence was that it took them more years and somewhat more terms of enrollment to complete the same number of levels

continuously-enrolled students completed. But this was apparently a price they were willing and able to pay.

Of course, the learning gains of most stop-outs were fairly small. On average, they advanced only about one level. But, on average, their performance in this respect was no worse (although no better) than that of students who were continuously enrolled. As a result, the concerns that too many of CCSF's non-credit students had limited learning gains, and the prescriptions for what might be done to improve their persistence and advancement (discussed in 5), are the same for stop-outs as they are for other non-credit students.

In short, stopping out was in many ways no more, and no less, of a problem than any other pattern of limited persistence and limited learning gains at CCSF. Stop-outs arrived at the same goal as many of the College's highest performing ESL students. It just took them longer to get there. In fact, if a willingness to "keep trying" is an indicator of motivation, then stop-outs might be viewed as more motivated than many other ESL students. In this sense, they might be viewed as among the College's most promising students – students whose potential should be more fully realized. If so, CCSF and other institutions that manage ESL programs should take a special interest in encouraging stop-outs who return after prolonged absences and enroll for multiple terms to continue their progress up the ESL ladder. Stopping out might be regarded as a "flag" that indicates students who would benefit from the types of college services aimed at increasing persistence and learning gains discussed in Chapter 5.

In fact, the major reason that stopping out might be considered a special problem is that stop-outs appear to be promising students who have not achieved their full potential. Because stop-outs took more terms than students who were continuously enrolled, it might be expected that they would advance more levels. Moreover, stop-outs were more likely to begin their ESL studies at very low levels, and Chapter 5 showed that students who began at very low levels were more likely to advance multiple levels. But stop-outs did not advance more levels than did students who were continuously enrolled. Was stopping out, at least in part, the reason why these students did not advance further? Was it the cause of their limited learning gains? Or were both stopping out and limited learning gains effects of some other variables? Ultimately, conclusions about whether stopping out was, by itself, a special problem depend on conclusions about why students stopped out.

2. Why Did Students Stop Out?

Unfortunately, observational research of the sort conducted by this study is almost always inconclusive when it comes to distinguishing cause and effect. The best this study can offer is some informed speculation about why students stopped out.

The study's most telling findings about this subject are that most students who stopped out did so only once and that they were absent from the College's ESL program for fairly

long periods of time. That is, on average, stop-outs did not seem to fit the pattern of "intermittent students" – students who enroll in classes and then leave the program repeatedly over many years – that is familiar to most educators. On average, stop-outs enrolled, left the program for long periods, and then persisted until they terminated their studies.

There are quite a number of reasons why students might have followed this pattern of attendance. One might be that the stop-outs examined by this study were students who were unsure about their commitment to taking English classes when they first enrolled. They were students who were "trying out" ESL, and they discovered that they were not ready to devote the time and energy required to persist and advance on their first try. On their second try, they were both more willing and able persist in their studies and advance levels.

Alternatively, stop-outs may have been students who tried very hard to attend classes and advance when they first enrolled, and found it difficult to make progress. They may have become discouraged and taken a "leave" before trying ESL again.

Moreover, stop-outs may have been students who enrolled for two terms, advanced a level, left the program, and lacked the commitment or ability to persist very long when they re-enrolled.

This study did not generate data that would distinguish between these different scenarios because it did not determine when stop-outs took most of their hours, terms, and levels. Was it during their first, second, or (in the case of the small number of students who stopped out several times) subsequent enrollments? As a result, based on the findings of this study, it is possible that some students could have stopped out for any or all of these reasons.

But none of these scenarios suggest that stopping out was, by itself, a reason why students did not advance more levels. Rather, they point to the goals and motivations of students, as well as possibly to challenges posed by CCSF's ESL program design and curriculum, as the reasons why students both stopped out and did not advance more levels.

The same scenarios suggest that personal problems may have been a major reason why students stopped out and did not advance further. One of the most striking findings of this chapter is that students who stopped out were absent from the program for such long periods of time. Student goals, motivation, and program design may explain why students stopped out, but why did it take them so long to return to the College's ESL program? These long absences suggest that, for some students at least, events in their personal lives may have caused them to interrupt their studies. For example, students might have stopped out because of the arrival of a new child in the family, increased demands in their work life (such as the need to take a second job), or because they left the San Francisco area for a year or more.

ESL programs may be able to increase the persistence and learning gains of students who stop-out during either their first or subsequent enrollments due to limited commitment or difficulties with their studies. The means for doing so are probably the types of student services and curricular adjustments suggested in Chapter 5. But programs will have to make a special effort to help students who stopped out due to major challenges posed by their life circumstances. They should undoubtedly enhance their efforts to encourage and assist students who face these types of difficulties. But, in many situations, there may be very little that educational institutions can do in this regard. The most they may be able to do is to recognize that stop-outs who face difficulties with life circumstances may be strongly motivated students – students who are willing to try ESL classes after prolonged absences – and to help these students persist and achieve more on their second try.

3. Stop-Outs and Transitions

Difference between stop-outs and continuously-enrolled students. Among the most significant findings of this chapter was that students who stopped out were less likely than students who were continuously enrolled to make the transition to credit studies. This finding should not be overstated. That is, it was not the case that stop-outs did not make transitions at all, or that their transition rates were trivial. In fact, their transition rates were the same as the rates for the cohort as a whole. The significant finding was that those rates were considerably lower than the rates of continuously-enrolled students. Other findings of this study suggest three possible reasons for this.

First, the study showed that students who stopped out began their ESL studies at lower levels of English proficiency than did continuously-enrolled students[79]. Eighty percent of stop-outs were first enrolled at the Literacy Level or the Beginning Low levels (Levels 1-2), compared to 70% of students who were continuously enrolled. Therefore, one reason that students who stopped out were less likely to make transitions to credit may have been that they started at lower levels than did continuously-enrolled students. That means they had to advance farther up the ESL ladder before they could reach the levels of proficiency (the Intermediate Levels 5-8) from which most students make transitions.

As a result, even though both stop-outs and continuously-enrolled students advanced about one level on average, students who stopped out were less likely to make transitions. This is because, after advancing that one level, they were less likely to have attained the level of proficiency required to make transitions than continuously-enrolled students.

Second, continuously-enrolled students may have been more likely to have the personal goal of making the transition to credit studies. In fact, one of the reasons that at least some students enrolled continuously may have been that they wanted to advance as many levels as possible as quickly as possible so that they could gain the level of English proficiency required for credit classes. In contrast, stop-outs may have been more likely to be students whose goal was primarily to improve their English to meet the challenges of everyday life in a nation where English is the dominant language.

[79] See Table 8.4 above.

Moreover, because continuously-enrolled students began at higher ESL levels than stop-outs did, the goal of making transitions to credit may have seemed more realistic to them. For these non-credit students, continuous enrollment may have been a "sprint to credit," and it should not be surprising that more of them attained this goal than did non-credit students who may not have had aspired to credit studies.

Third, another possible reason why stop-outs may have been less likely to make transitions is that they were absent from the program for so many years between enrollments. If this pattern of attendance continued, it may be that some of these students returned, continued to advance, and eventually transitioned to credit after the end of seven year time period during which they were studied. This is most likely to have been the case for students who stopped out more than once. As noted, students who stopped out twice were absent from the program for about half of the seven years studied, and those who stopped out more than twice were absent for even longer.

This study could not determine whether, taken together, these reasons explain all of the difference in transition rates between stop-outs and students who were continuously enrolled. But they suggest that the levels at which stop-outs were initially enrolled and how long they interrupted their studies probably had as much or more of an effect on whether they made the transition to credit as did the fact that they stopped out.

Difference between continuously-enrolled students and the cohort as a whole. These same reasons can explain the other major finding about transitions in this chapter: that a greater percentage of continuously-enrolled students than of students in the cohort as a whole made the transition to credit classes.

The cohort as a whole contained students who enrolled for differing lengths of time – including many who were enrolled for only one term. Both the continuously-enrolled students and the stop-outs examined in this study were enrolled for at least two terms. Chapter 6 showed that students enrolled for multiple terms were more likely to make the transition to credit. For the reasons mentioned above, stop-outs did not exceed the transition rate of the cohort as a whole, but because they attended more terms than most members of the cohort, continuously-enrolled students exceeded that rate.

Chapter 6 also showed that the last level in which students were enrolled affected the chances that they would make transitions to credit. The higher their last level of enrollment, the more likely students were to make transitions. Because continuously-enrolled students not only enrolled for more terms but also began at higher levels, they were among the students in the cohort most likely to make transitions. As a result, it should not be surprising that their transition rates were higher than the rates of the cohort as a whole.