HELP Evaluation Project, Spring 2008:
Evaluation Report

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(http://helpeval.uni.cc/)
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Hawaii English Language Program (HELP) Evaluation Project has endeavored to gather information regarding (1) why students generally choose to come to HELP; (2) why students specifically choose to come to HELP relative to other programs; and (3) whether student expectations are met. Findings are offered to assist HELP identify attractive aspects of the program, as well as areas needing improvement, inform recruitment efforts and guide development of the program.

1. Why students choose to come to HELP.
   1. Strength of reputation – Overall quality of the program communicated via word of mouth
   2. TOEFL/TOEIC instruction – High quality test-prep instruction and availability of courses
   3. Academically oriented reputation – Many academic courses
   4. Affiliation to UH – A direct route to UH undergraduate and graduate study
   5. Website coming up first in web searches – Quickly locatable from internet searches
   6. Opportunities to learn about American/Hawaiian culture – Exposure to US culture
   7. Small classes

2. Why students specifically choose to come to HELP relative to other programs.
   1. HELP’s affiliation to UH – Lacking at other programs
   2. Content-based curriculum at HELP – Diverse, interesting classes
   3. Academically oriented classes at HELP – Less academics at other institutions
   4. Strong TOEFL/TOEIC instruction at HELP – Perceived as being stronger than elsewhere
   5. Freedom to choose different classes at HELP – Other institutions offer less student choice
   6. More serious learning environment at HELP – Students elsewhere are less dedicated
   7. Ease of access to HELP webpage – Quickly located from internet searches; website is easy to use
3a. Expectations being met.

1. Teacher performance – Enthusiasm, motivation, teaching capability, effective class organization, humor, “warmth,” friendliness
2. Improved general English ability – General comments about increases in proficiency
3. TOEFL/TOEIC instruction – Satisfaction with quality test-prep instruction
4. Improved academic skills – Satisfaction from improved academic writing

3b. Expectations not being met.

1. Lacking clarity of course and class goals – “Purposelessness” of instruction
2. Desire for more English conversation – Too infrequent; excessive student L1 use
3. Lacking “strictness” with lateness – Lax rules; no consistently applied lateness policy
4. Too few courses to choose from – Narrow selections, especially for 400 level students
5. Teaching quality challenges - Teacher inexperience: challenges in lesson preparation, class organization, time management, and lacking area-expertise.
6. Classes selection on the basis of teachers – Unpredictability of course content
7. Poor learning environment – Noisy facilities; cleanliness; equipment in disrepair

An additional project focus was to conduct evaluation in as collaborative and democratic a manner as possible, with the dual (and related) aims of increasing the likelihood of findings use, and laying the foundation for the facilitation of future evaluation efforts.

To these ends, an important feature of the project was the creation of a dedicated project website/portal (http://helpeval.uni.cc/). The addition of the portal was to enable increased communication and transparency of project processes, and by so doing generate a greater sense of project ownership for interested parties. The portal was a focal point of information gathering and dissemination, as well as a node of communication by which stakeholder input and opinions could be voiced. Such communication was thought to enhance the possibility of HELP stakeholders shaping the project in their own interests.
Further, with the hope of sustaining future evaluations, the portal was used to record the project’s progress such that steps, procedures, research instruments, past reports, etc. would be available should a future project occur.

Finally, an additional hoped for outcome of the project – one for which we foresee the portal playing an important role – was to make utilization-focused evaluation an ongoing part of HELP’s institutional culture. We hope this project is the first step in creating a longer-term commitment to using utilization-focused evaluation methods for meaningful and sustained program development.


INTRODUCTION
Program context

In the last decade, HELP has transformed from a skills-based approach to content-based instruction (CBI). The transition was initiated by former HELP director Kate Wolfe-Quintero, in an effort to shift towards a more progressive approach to ELT methodology. A CBI framework was intended to stimulate more motivating course content brought about by innovative material development. The content was envisioned to act as a vehicle to enhance motivation, engagement, and consequently language learning. Steve Jacques took over as director in 2007 as the CBI curriculum continued to solidify. Under the new leadership of Joel Weaver, and given the program's current developmental phase, the HELP evaluation project is hoped to be a timely addition to program development efforts.

Students at HELP come mostly from Asian contexts. The largest populations are from South Korea and Japan. Other nationalities include Vietnam, Taiwan, China, Thailand, Laos and Cambodia. Non-Asian backgrounds are most recently represented by students from Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Brazil.

A prior needs analysis (conducted by Dan Brown and John Davis, 2007) discovered that approximately 50-60% of students attend HELP for academic purposes with plans to study at US Universities. Roughly 30% have employment-related, business English needs. Remaining students do not seem to exhibit clear, identifiable purposes for English language study (e.g. mothers coming with their children to Hawaii, from abroad, to study English while their children attend school).

Given the variance in student interests, HELP offers a diversity of courses. These include a range of content in (among others) academic skills, business, literature, media, Hawaiian culture and history, and TOEFL/TOEIC preparation. Courses are offered at four proficiency
levels: 100, beginning/elementary; 200, low-intermediate; 300, high-intermediate; 400, advanced.

Courses are offered in eight-week terms, two in the spring and two in the fall, roughly corresponding to the University of Hawaii academic calendar. HELP also offers a summer session comprised of two four-week terms.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

*Purpose*

The current evaluation project was initiated as a course requirement for SLS 631 (Language Program Evaluation) under the guidance of Dr. John Norris. With support from Dr. Graham Crookes acting as the interim director in January 2008, evaluation efforts began, adopting a utilization-focused evaluation approach (Patton, 1996). Such an approach is derived from the notion that evaluation conducted in a democratic and participatory manner engenders investment, care and commitment to evaluation findings and related outcomes thereby increasing the likelihood of findings-use and meaningful program change. The evaluators chose to initiate the project at HELP to assist the program in its development (as a form of formative/improvement-oriented evaluation). Again, an additional aim was to build on past evaluation work and to introduce a framework that can serve as an example for future evaluation efforts.

*Evaluators*

The evaluation team was comprised of three members: Dan Brown, Ky Nguyen, and John Davis (the authors of the report). Evaluators are HELP instructors as well as a students
enrolled in the SLS Department at the University of Hawaii (Ky Nguyen, MA; Dan Brown, MA; John Davis, PhD).

**Intended users**

Primary intended users (PIUs) are those particular individuals or groups who are affected by the outcome of the evaluation, are in a position to make decisions about the evaluation, and intend to use the evaluation process or findings to inform their decisions or actions (IDRC, 2004). At the start of the project, we identified the acting director – Dr. Graham Crookes – to be the PIU of evaluation findings. Although Dr. Crookes no longer retains the position of acting director, as Executive Director of ESL Programs, he remains a primary intended user. As we welcome Joel Weaver to HELP, we hope that the findings of this evaluation come at an opportune time as Joel is becoming familiar with the program after recently taking on the directorship.

**Evaluation Use Committee (EUC)**

A committee of HELP stakeholders (the Evaluation Use Committee, or EUC) was formed with the dual aims of making the evaluation project more participatory and democratic, as well as increasing the likelihood of evaluation findings-use (a recommendation from Dr. John Norris, informal advisor for the project).

It was thought from the outset that EUC should reflect a diverse representation of HELP interests, such diversity important in democratically shaping the project focus. Members were chosen on this basis. The EUC included ten individuals established to represent different groups of stakeholders: HELP administrators, SLS faculty, HELP teachers (both experienced and new), and HELP students. Initially, selections were made by the evaluation team (with advice from Dr.
Norris). Specifically, the final group included Dr. Graham Crookes, included to represent the interests of the HELP directorship; Dr. Richard Day to represent SLS Department interests beyond the role of the director; Director of the English Language Institute, Kenton Harsch, for his experience with similar projects conducted at the ELI and also to represent the wider interests of SLS Department ESL programs; the current HELP Curriculum Coordinator, Murad Khaliev (for his experience and familiarity with the program); two past HELP Curriculum Coordinators and current instructors, David Faulhaber and Jake Barber (similarly for their experience and program knowledge); two teachers, Jaynie Estermann (for her many years of teaching experience) and Aya Watanabe (to represent the interests of new teachers); and two students, Mikiko Yamagishi and Akiko Yoshiide, to give voice to student concerns.

The primary purpose of the EUC was to focus, expand, critique and eventually prioritize project evaluation questions. Specifically this meant convening an initial meeting, at the start of the project, to explain the project scope and the EUC’s role, and to get feedback, opinions and/or ideas about the future plan for the project. One important outcome of the meeting was to expand the initial group and bring in needed additional members; the new members included Dr. Richard Day, Jaynie Easterman and Aya Watanabe.

Beyond the initial meeting, members were asked to access the HELP Evaluation Project Website on various occasions to complete certain tasks. These included (first) reviewing, commenting on and contributing various evaluation questions (i.e. project foci) at the portal discussion threads. Next, members were asked to visit the site again to complete a web-based survey, rating all questions (contributed by EUC members) for importance. Members also received periodic updates, via email, about project developments (e.g. the outcome of the rating task; information about which questions were selected; project plan for data collection, etc.).
A final notification was sent out via email asking committee members to review the final report posted at the portal.

*Help Evaluation Project Web Portal (http://helpeval.uni.cc/)*

Again, a dedicated project website was created to facilitate prosecution of the evaluation in various ways. The website had two major purposes: (1) to increase the participatory dimension of the evaluation; (2) to provide a repository of information for facilitating future evaluation efforts.

The webpage was designed early in the project and, after the initial EUC meeting, was the primary means of communication for EUC and evaluation team members. The page was comprised of information about the EUC (member identities); information about the evaluation team members; a project mission statement; links to other evaluation-related sites; links to project-related discussion threads and chat rooms; archived reports from past evaluation HELP projects; and an “events” section describing the various activities/steps taken in the project as it progressed.

As stated above, two important tasks were undertaken at the portal, both designed to increase and enhance participation and ownership of the project focus. Both tasks were to achieve the singular aim of democratically generating a project evaluand or focus; that is, a specific question or list of questions, about priority HELP program elements, for the evaluation team to investigate.

The first step in this process was to ask EUC members to visit the site, link to the discussion threads, and review, comment on and/or revise an initial list of evaluation foci/questions submitted by the evaluation team. EUC members were also strongly encouraged
to add their own questions to the initial list. Each new question was to be submitted as a new topic in a single discussion thread, which EUC members were again encouraged to comment on. A total of twenty-seven questions (and attendant comments) were collected by the evaluators for the second phase of generating the final project focus.

The second task involved EUC members going to the portal again and linking to an online survey (designed using Survey Monkey). All twenty-seven questions (as well as any accompanying comments) from task one were collected and members were asked to rate each question for importance/urgency (scale from 1-4; 1 = not important/urgent; 2 = somewhat important/urgent; 3 = important/urgent; 4 = very important/urgent). These data were collated by the evaluation team, ranked (based on mean importance/urgency ratings, from highest to lowest), and posted at the website in the “Events” section; also, an email was sent to the EUC informing them of the final results of the rating task.

Further, in addition to these specific tasks, the portal was designed to be a point of information collection, for the project itself and beyond – a resource and possible template for future HELP evaluations. The site contained information about the progress of the project in the form of periodic news updates. In addition, records of instruments and procedures (e.g. the formation of the EUC and related tasks) are also available at the site. The portal also has an archive component for past evaluation projects, as well HELP evaluation-related public presentations. We foresee these functions as assisting future evaluations and hope that such a focal point aids projects to be utilization-focused, participatory, as well making evaluation an important programmatic element within HELP’s institutional culture.

*Evaluation questions*
Again, at the end of the response/submission period, a total of twenty-seven questions were compiled, with minor changes made based on member comments. The EUC then ranked the questions through an online survey, leaving a list of the highest priority questions. With approval from Dr. Crookes, the highest ranked evaluation question was selected and broken down into three parts, as follows:

1. Why do students choose to come to HELP?
2. If students compare ESL programs, what aspects of the programs (both HELP and others) cause students to choose HELP?
3. Are student expectations met?

*Intended uses*

The following intended uses were presented to and agreed upon by Dr. Graham Crookes:

1. Identify attractive aspects of the program (core competencies, strengths, etc.).
2. Identify areas needing improvement.
3. Inform recruitment purposes.
4. Guide development of the program in general.

*Methods*

Table A summarizes the data sources and data collection methods. The primary source of data came from students directly (both past and current HELP students), but an effort was made to gather data from a wide variety of stakeholders, program experts, clients and institutional
Methodology was selected with feasibility in mind, given the limited timeframe for this cycle of evaluation.

Table A: Data collection methods.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information sources</th>
<th>Key informant(s)</th>
<th>Data collection Methodology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Knowledge from administration/office staff</td>
<td>Former director HELP employees</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Past institutional documentation</td>
<td>Student evaluations from the past 3 terms</td>
<td>Document analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Former student opinions</td>
<td>Former HELP students, representing mixed levels (N=12)</td>
<td>Open response questions via email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Knowledge from clients</td>
<td>East West Center, Ford Foundation Scholarships coordinator</td>
<td>Phone interview; open response questions via email</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Current and continuing student/clients opinions</td>
<td>Continuing students (3rd term or longer) New students (1st or 2nd term) N=22</td>
<td>Focus group interviews</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Knowledge from experienced administration/office staff was thought to reveal information for all three evaluation questions ((1) why students come to HELP; (2) why students come to HELP versus other programs; (3) the degree to which student expectations are met). Data were gathered via informal interviews conducted by the evaluators. Specific interviewees included HELP front office staff, one senior, experienced instructor and a former director. Interviewees were asked simply to respond to and expand upon the three evaluation questions. Evaluators took notes during interviews. Notes were later analyzed by looking for common, recurring themes that matched with other themes from different data sources.

Data were also sought in past institutional documentation, specifically end-of-term evaluations, which all students complete for each of their classes at the end of each eight-week
term. Student evaluations were thought to reveal information about the degree to which student expectations are being met. Relevant aspects of the evaluation form included (1) prompts for students to make general comments about a specific course (e.g. *The best thing about this class*..., *The worst thing about this class was*...); and (2) a section asking students to make suggestions for the program as a whole (*What do you like about the HELP schedule of courses. What are your suggestions for improving the schedule? For example, tell us about the course offerings, time of classes, or anything else you would like to know.* See *HEP 2008 Data collection instruments* at http://helpeval.uni.cc/ for an example of student evaluations). Evaluators collected data from all student evaluations for the three most recent HELP terms: fall 1, 2007, fall 2, 2007, and spring 1 2008 (the HELP Evaluation Project was undertaken during spring 2, 2008). HELP administrators first collated student evaluation data, taking care to eliminate identifying information referencing specific classes or teachers. The evaluation team then analyzed data by simply grouping together comments that referenced similar issues.

An important student population at HELP are students from the East West Center, Ford Foundation, International Fellowship Program (IFP), a group with specific academic needs. These particular clients are graduate students from various East, Southeast, and South Asian countries who attend HELP for additional university preparation (including improved language skills, increased TOEFL scores, pre-academic prep, or coursework deficiencies) before moving on to the University of Hawaii or Hawaii Pacific University graduate degree programs. The IFP scholarship coordinator was seen as a useful source of information about why EWC sends students to HELP (as opposed to NICE) and the degree to which EWC expectations are met. An interview was conducted, via telephone, asking the IFP coordinator to elaborate on each of the evaluation questions (specific interview questions can be found at *HEP 2008 Data collection*
Instruments at http://helpeval.uni.cc/). The interview was summarized and emailed to the IFP coordinator for commentary, which he revised and returned to the evaluator.

Data were also sought from current and continuing student/clients (N=34) based on their opinions on/responses to each of the three evaluation questions. Twenty-two (N=22) current students participated in focus group interviews. Twelve (N=12) former students provided open-ended questionnaire responses via email.

The focus group interviews were conducted with the largest first language (L1) constituencies (Japan, Korea, and Vietnam) in the students' native languages. Data derived from L1 discussions were thought to be richer as students could be more expansive when expressing opinions. Focus group interviewers were fluent in students’ first languages. The Vietnamese focus group interview was conducted by one of the evaluators (fluent in Vietnamese); the Japanese focus group was conducted by a HELP teacher and EUC member (fluent in Japanese); the Korean focus group was conducted by a HELP administrator (fluent in Korean). An attempt was made to include students representing levels 200-400, with both continuing and new students from each level. Interviews were digitally recorded by evaluators/interviewers, and then interpreted/paraphrased to evaluators at a later time (Specific focus group questions can be found at HEP 2008 Data collection instruments at http://helpeval.uni.cc/). The structure/format of the interviews themselves was in the form of an informal, open discussion, which the moderator steered toward topics relating to the three evaluation questions noted above. Again, data was analyzed on the basis of recurring themes and/or issues that related to the evaluation questions.

Finally, former students (N=12) were sent, via email, an open-response questionnaire relating to each of the evaluation questions. The questionnaire also asked for brief biographical information. Respondents were students evaluators had taught in the past. Such relationships
present the problem of potential bias (i.e. former students inclined to make complimentary remarks); however, in the opinions of the evaluators, disadvantages of such biases were offset by the likelihood of this particular student-group completing and returning the questionnaires. Further, it was made clear, and strongly emphasized, that critical remarks were welcome (See *HEP 2008 Data collection instruments* at http://helpeval.uni.cc/ for an example of the questionnaire).

Evaluation Data

Data reported in the *Evaluation Findings* section below reflect comments arising from two or more individuals that related to a similar theme. Single instances of comments or opinions are not included or discussed in this report.

Themes are discussed below in order of comment-frequency: the theme with the greatest number of similar comments (respondents whose comments could be construed as discussing a similar topic) is discussed first, the next most frequent theme as per comment-frequency is discussed second, and so on. Values in parentheses indicate how many individuals made comments relating to a given theme and the source from which data were taken. Sources are denoted by the following acronyms: HS = Help staff interviews (including front office staff, an experienced teacher and the former director); SFG = Student focus groups (Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese combined); C = Client interviews (East West Center, Ford Foundation IFP coordinator); FS = Former student questionnaires; SE = Student evaluations. A single acronym with no following parenthetical numerical value indicates 1 respondent from the given data source. Select respondent quotes are included to give a sense of representative views for a given theme.
Data represented in tables 1, 2, 3a, and 3b are grouped into the same themes discussed in the text and similarly ranked by order of comment frequency from most frequently noted to least frequently noted. Selected, representative quotes related to a given theme are listed in the middle column entitled “Respondent Quotes.” The number of individuals who made comments and their data source are noted in the far right column entitled “Sources.”

EVALUATION FINDINGS

Question 1: Why do students choose to come to HELP?

The first evaluation question focuses on the reasons why students are attracted to HELP and ultimately decide to enroll in the program. It should be noted that Miki Nagahira, a recent SLS graduate, conducted an evaluation on a similar topic, which can be cross-referenced with these findings.

The most frequent theme that emerged in the data (see Table 1) indicates that HELP students generally discover the program as a result of its (1) strong reputation (SFG (5), FS (3), HS (2)) through family, friends, past students, and agencies (“Several years ago, my friend studied English at HELP. She told me that HELP was a good school. She recommended it to me.”; “HELP … has a good reputation for instructors and curriculum.”). Without a substantial budget for advertising in the recent past, HELP relies on word-of-mouth to attract new students.

More specifically, HELP’s reputation for being (3) academically oriented (FS (3), SFG (2), and many others) is a deciding factor for many students since they plan to enter the University of Hawai‘i (UH) after their language study (“To use English in University study”; “To use English at graduate school”). Along these lines, (2) TOEFL/TOEIC preparatory courses (SFG (4), FS (2), HS (2), C) appear to be sought after by prospective students, and many
commented that TOEFL instruction led them to choose HELP (“I could improve my TOEFL scores…”).

HELP’s (4) affiliation with UH (FS (3), HS (3), SFG) was a frequently noted attractive aspect of the program as well (“HELP [is] attached to UH.”). If students are interested in entering a university in Hawaii, HELP appears to be a known avenue to reach that goal.

Another common theme that emerged from the data relates to the (5) accessibility of HELP’s website (SFG (3), HS: “Found it through the internet.”). The HELP website is ranked highest on Google for a query of "Hawaii English Language." Further, students commented that the website was "easy" (presumably easy to find). Less common themes that came up include the opportunity (6) to learn about American and Hawaiian culture (FS (2): “I could learn not only [the] language of English but also Hawaiian culture through Hula”), and the expectation of (7) small classes (HS, FS: “I prefer smaller group[s] in class so I can get individual attention from teachers.”).

Table 1: Why students choose to come to HELP.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Themes</th>
<th>Respondent Quotes</th>
<th>Sources*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(In order of number of comments frequency from highest to lowest)</td>
<td></td>
<td>HS = Help staff interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SFG = Student focus groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>C = Client interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>FS = Former student questionnaires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SE = Student evaluations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation Question 2: If students compare ESL programs, what aspects of the programs (both HELP and others) cause students to choose HELP?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **1. Good reputation**
  - “I chose HELP because my sister recommended it.”
  - “Several years ago, my friend studied English at HELP. She told me that HELP was a good school. She recommended it to me.”
  - “HELP … has a good reputation for instructors and curriculum.”
  - “[Students] find out about HELP from relatives, friends, word of mouth.”
  - SFG (5), FS (3), HS (2),

- **2. TOEFL/TOEIC instruction**
  - “I could improve my TOEFL scores…”
  - “Improving [my] TOEFL score.”
  - “Strong TOEFL [instruction]”
  - SFG (4), FS (2), HS (2), C

- **3. Reputation academically oriented**
  - “To use English in University study”
  - “To use English at graduate school”
  - “I wanted to study more academic contents.”
  - “I wanted to improve my English academically and prepare for a future college life.”
  - FS (3), SFG (2), and many others

- **4. Affiliation to UH**
  - “HELP [is] attached to UH.”
  - “Because it’s a part of UH.”
  - FS (3), HS (3), SFG

- **5. Comes up in web searches**
  - “Found it through the internet”
  - “The website was ‘easy’”
  - SFG (3), HS

- **6. Learn about American/Hawaiian culture**
  - “I could learn not only [the] language of English but also Hawaiian culture through Hula”
  - FS (2)

- **7. Small classes**
  - “I prefer smaller group[s] in class so I can get individual attention from teachers”
  - HS, FS

*Parentheses indicate the number of individuals who expressed related views; no parentheses = 1.

Our data show that some students compare HELP with other ESL programs in Honolulu before they apply. Findings reported here overlap with the preceding section; however, we believe certain themes are worth noting with a view to better understanding why students opt to study at HELP instead of other programs in Honolulu. Data also illuminate attractive aspects of the program that might figure more prominently in recruitment efforts.
Again, students who make comparisons between programs favor HELP because of its (1) affiliation with the University of Hawai‘i (HS(3), FS, SFG), the primary reason why students choose HELP over other programs (“Because [it’s] a part of UH, compared to private schools in office buildings.”). In addition (and as noted above), data indicates students’ desire to study at UH in the future, in which case HELP is seen as a more direct route to UH as it is a part of the UH system.

Another major reason why some students choose HELP over other ESL programs in Honolulu has to do with its (2) content-based curriculum (SFG(2), FS), which offers a range of topic/subject area options every term (“I could learn English in different subjects ... which helped me improve English a lot”). Data reflects student opinions about content based courses as a more interesting and motivating curricular approach compared to other pedagogical methodologies (“[The] content based program is more interesting…”).

Data from our corpus show that participants believe the HELP curriculum (3) better prepares students for college education (SFG, FS, C) compared to other ESL programs in Honolulu (“HELP is more academic” [compared to Nice]; “More of a college-bound focus”). Academic classes meet the needs of certain groups of students such as the East-West Center fellows who are at HELP for only a few months before they move on to a graduate program either at UH or Hawaii Pacific University. The content-based curriculum is also appreciated by many students because it is similar to some college courses and they can learn integrated skills as well as enjoy various interesting topics in their ESL classes (“[Because of the] HELP content based integrated skills, [I] get a lot out of one class”; “[The] content based program … simulates real college courses.”).
Some participants observe that HELP offers (4) **high quality TOEFL/TOEIC instruction** compared to other programs, and that these test preparation classes are offered on a regular basis, which means they can take them throughout the terms.

An additional attractive program element is the (5) **freedom to choose from a variety of class offerings** (SFG, HS, C). Other programs do not allow students to select a variety of classes.

Data also indicate that HELP compares favorably to other Honolulu ESL programs since it offers a (6) **more serious learning environment** (SFG, FS). Students point out that compared to other schools, HELP students work harder and are more motivated, and HELP teachers take homework more seriously (“HELP has more motivated students … Teachers are serious … [some students at other schools] are girls that work at nightclubs.”).

Again, another point of comparison, though not mentioned as frequently as the above justifications, is the (7) **ease of access to HELP’s website**. Some students search for information about ESL programs in Hawaii and choose HELP because its website is the first to come up after a key-word search.

**Table 2: Program aspects that cause students to come to HELP compared to other ESL Institutions.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Themes</th>
<th>Respondent Quotes</th>
<th>Sources*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. HELP’s affiliation with UH</td>
<td>“[HELP’s] reputation is enhanced by its association to UH.” “Because [it’s] a part of UH, compared to private schools in office buildings.”</td>
<td>HS(3), FS, SFG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Content-based curriculum at HELP</td>
<td>“[Because of the] HELP content based integrated skills, [I] get a lot out of one class.” “[The] content based program is more interesting”</td>
<td>SFG(2), FS</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and … simulates real college courses.”
“I could learn English in different subjects ... which help[ed] me improve English a lot”

| 3. Academically oriented classes at HELP | “HELP is more academic” [compared to Nice] “More of a college-bound focus” | SFG, FS, C |
| 4. Strong TOEFL/TOEIC instruction at HELP | TOEFL classes are offered at HELP every term TOEFL courses meet EWC sts’ needs HELP is strong in TOEFL prep | SFG, HS, C |
| 5. More freedom to choose from different classes at HELP | “Students can choose their own classes at HELP; more options.” “[At] HELP you can choose classes.” “All proficiency levels can choose classes” | HS, SFG(2) |
| 6. More serious learning environment at HELP | “HELP has more motivated students … Teachers are serious … [students at other schools] are girls that work at nightclubs.” “Lower level students are not motivated”(at other schools) | SFG, FS |
| 7. Ease of access to HELP webpage | Sts find HELP through internet search Sts choose HELP because of easy access to homepage | SFG(2) |

*Parentheses indicate the number of individuals who expressed related views; no parentheses = 1.

**Evaluation Question 3: Are student expectations being met?**

Question three asks to what degree HELP program elements are meeting student expectations. Comments reveal positive aspects of HELP, as well as areas of challenge. In all, data reflect opinions about program elements that are perceived as positive, or in need of improvement, as students move through their educational tenure at HELP (opinions and comments indicating met and unmet expectations are collected in Tables 3a and 3b).

**Met Expectations**
Evaluation data in this area were sought to help identify attractive aspects of the HELP learning experience. Expectations that are currently being met (Table 3a) are evidenced in the following list of positive opinions and comments about current HELP program elements.

The most frequently arising theme taken from evaluation sources relates to (1) **positive perceptions of teachers’ professional performance** (SE (many), SFG(3)). Teacher “friendliness,” “warmth,” enthusiasm, motivation, humor, teaching capability, class organization and many other diverse themes arose frequently in student evaluations (these completed by students at the end of each of term) and to a lesser degree in the student focus group interviews. Many comments were general expressions of gratitude and general positivity (“I enjoyed this class”; “Thank you so much!”; “I like this teacher”; “I had a nice experience”). The overall picture is one of high student satisfaction. However, we are inclined to interpret such data with caution. Such sentiments came primarily from end-of-term evaluations. We suggest that if students know teachers will see student comments, there is the possibility of an inflated tendency to make positive remarks.

Data further suggest the general sense (from former students, and recent student evaluations) that (2) **overall English ability has improved** (FS(4), SE (many): “My English improved dramatically…”).

The third most frequently occurring theme was (3) **student satisfaction with TOEIC and TOEFL instruction** (SFG(2), HS, SE, FS(2), C: “These classes were very helpful to me…TOEFL…TOEIC”). Students commented on the quality of instruction from HELP teachers in these areas, as well as a desire for more of these ESL test-prep style courses.
Another less frequently arising theme of satisfied student expectations and positive aspects of HELP included (4) **improved academic English abilities** (FS (3): “…I learned a lot about academic skills.”).

**Table 3a: Met Expectations.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Themes</th>
<th>Respondent Quotes</th>
<th>Sources*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Teacher performance</strong></td>
<td>Many, many positive comments about teacher performance in end-of-term evaluations</td>
<td>SE (many), SFG(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. General English ability has improved</strong></td>
<td>“My English improved dramatically…”</td>
<td>FS(4), SE (many)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Satisfaction with TOEFL/TOEIC instruction</strong></td>
<td>“Students meet TOEFL targets.” “TOEFL is ok.” “These classes were very helpful to me…TOEFL…TOEIC.”</td>
<td>SFG(2), HS, SE, FS(2), C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Improved academic skills</strong></td>
<td>“I wanted to learn more academic English … I think HELP met my expectation.” “…I learned a lot about academic skills.” “These classes were very helpful to me…TOEFL…TOEIC”</td>
<td>FS (3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Parentheses indicate the number of individuals who expressed related views; no parentheses = 1.

**Expectation challenges**

The following responses indicate program elements that might need additional attention.

The information discussed below is also shown in Table 3b. Information derived from evaluation sources is put forward here to aid in identification of areas where additional program development might add to program effectiveness. Compared to evaluation questions one and two,
many themes arose. However we focus here on only high frequency themes. *High frequency* was defined as six or more comments from respondents (a more complete list of data relating to unmet needs can be found in Appendix A).

The most frequently noted area of challenge related to (1) **lacking clarity of overall course and individual class goals** (SFG(many), FS, HS(2)). While students are generally satisfied with individual teachers, data sources show that course and class goals could be clearer (“For content [classes], I’m not sure what the aim of the class is.”). Data show that students were often unclear about the purpose of instruction, at the class level, as well as at the overall course level. A further concern was though goals were made clear at the start of the term, subsequent instruction did not consistently and relevantly connect with the stated aims of the class.

The second most frequently cited area of challenge involved (2) **insufficient English conversation** (SFG(4), SE(4) FS, HS) in the classroom. Again, though overall feelings about classes were positive, data indicate that students want more opportunities to engage in English conversation. Remarks regarding desires for more conversation were often paired with remarks suggesting first language speech in HELP classrooms should be reduced.

Third, lacking (3) **strictness with lateness** (SFG(2), SE(6), FS) seems to be a concern (“I think teachers should be more strict with [the] start time.”). Data indicate that students want (1) teachers to be more vigilant with respect to lateness, as well as (2) have a more transparent and consistently enforced lateness policy.

The fourth most frequently occurring area of challenge involves (4) **too few courses for students to choose from** (SE(8), FS). Comments about the dearth of course selection were especially prevalent from students at the 400 level (“Please design more courses for 400 level.”). Data further indicate that students want **more academic content courses**. This is in line with one
of the primary reasons students are choosing to attend HELP: for future academic study (“I wanted more academic contents, but there were few classes at HELP.”)

The fifth most frequently occurring theme relates to a (5) **perceived variance in teaching quality** (SFG(5), HS, SE, FS). Data in this area is clearly at odds with student evaluations, which are almost uniformly positive. Thus we feel that the general sentiment regarding teaching performance is positive, though there are certain class-contexts that might benefit from teacher training or mentoring. Data show issues with teacher experience, and point out challenges in areas of lesson preparation, class organization, time management, and lacking expertise in specific areas (e.g. in grammar, writing, and TOEFL).

The sixth most frequently occurring area of challenge involved (6) **students choosing classes on the basis of teachers** (SFG(3), FS, HS, SE) and ignoring other criteria. (“When we get the new schedule for next term, we need to know the teachers … mostly the teacher we’re choosing.”). Content in the same class from one term to the next is highly variable, depending very much on the teacher for a given term. Students perceive little consistency in content courses (though course descriptions are static) and often choose on the basis of teachers they know in order to make reasonable guesses as what to expect in their classes.

The final area in need of improvement related to perceptions of a generally (7) **adverse physical learning environment** (SFG(4), SE(2)). Data in this area included comments on noisy facilities, lacking cleanliness, excessive construction, and dilapidated equipment (e.g. broken and excessively small chairs, and outdated audio-visual technology: “I expected a much better learning environment than in my home country…”).
Table 3b: Unmet Expectations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Themes</th>
<th>Respondent Quotes</th>
<th>Sources*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>(In order of number of comments frequency from highest to lowest)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>HS = Help staff interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SFG = Student focus groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>C = Client interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>FS = Former student questionnaires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SE = Student evaluations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1. Lacking clarity of course and class goals          | “For content [classes], I’m not sure what the aim of the class is.”  
“Weird atmosphere when students and teachers don’t know what’s going on.”  
“The goal seemed clear, but as the term went on the class wasn’t organized.”  
“[Students] are not sure of what they are learning.”  
“The purpose of classes was sometimes not clear.” | SFG(many), FS, HS(2)                              |
| 2. Desire for more English conversation               | “Not enough opportunities to speak.”  
“[Students leave HELP due to] not enough conversation.”  
“No speaking classes available.”                                                                                                                  | SFG(4), SE(4) FS, HS                              |
| 3. Lacking “strictness” with lateness                 | “I think teachers should be more strict with [the] start time.”                                                                                                                                                   | SFG(2), SE(6), FS                                 |
| 4. Too few courses to choose from                     | “Not enough selection.”  
“Please design more courses for 400 level.”  
“I wanted more academic contents, but there were few classes at HELP.”                                                                             | SE(8), FS                                        |
| 5. Teaching quality challenges                        | “Inexperienced teachers are put into the classroom without training/preparation.”  
“Many courses are taught by teachers who are assigned to courses at the last minute, sometimes even after the term has begun. Frequently, these teachers are new to HELP, have limited teaching experience, and get little supervision.”  
“I hope that you will hire teachers who are veterans and have skill [for] next term”  
“Teacher quality varies a lot…”  
“Experienced teachers are obviously planned.”  
“Some teachers put a lot of thought into class, some don’t.”                                                                                   | SFG(5), HS, SE, FS                                |
| 6. Students choose classes on the basis of teachers   | “I can’t know next teachers’ classes. I want to decide [on] classes after I know [the] class teachers.”  
“Students have to be wise and choose enough to find who’s a good teacher and choose them.”  
“When we get the new schedule for next term, we need to know the teachers … mostly the teacher we’re choosing.” | SFG(3), FS, HS, SE                                |
| 7. Poor learning environment; noisy facilities; cleanliness | “I expected a much better learning environment than in my home country…”  
“The room was too noisy most of the time.”                                                                                                           | SFG(4), SE(2)                                     |
“Sometimes classes are not very clean.”
“Facilities are really bad compared to other schools.”

*Parentheses indicate the number of individuals who expressed related views; no parentheses = 1.

CONCLUSION

We want to stress, again, that part of the project purpose was to undertake evaluation in such a way as to ensure the likelihood of using evaluation findings. Our participatory, utilization-focused approach was adopted with this goal in mind. Such an approach is based on the notion that if evaluation is conducted democratically, care and commitment are increased as well as the likelihood of findings-use and meaningful program change.

An additional hoped for use was that the HELP Evaluation Project might facilitate and serve as a model for future evaluation efforts. Certain evaluation elements were designed to further this aim. These elements are listed below and serve as methodological possibilities put forward to aid upcoming projects:

- **Evaluation Use Committee (EUC):** We feel future evaluation at HELP would benefit from a group similar to the EUC since it was a useful and productive evaluation mechanism, increasing participation and ownership, these elements known to increase the likelihood of findings-use.

- **HELP Evaluation Portal:** Evaluators designed and maintained a website dedicated to evaluation efforts. The site was a point of communication and information dissemination, used to conduct evaluation activities (involving EUC members) and to inform audiences about project progress. We feel it can be used to enhance future evaluation efforts in the following areas:
o **Evaluation Template:** Access to a completed, utilization-focused evaluation model – replete with the project history, data collection instruments, project communications, etc. – which can be used as a template for future projects.

o **Evaluation Archiving:** Past and future evaluation projects are collected at one location, streamlining future efforts, avoiding repetition. Such an archive might also raise the profile of evaluation findings such that past work is not lost from institutional memory.

o **Evaluation Participation and Involvement:** A wider use of the communicative aspect of the portal (discussion threads and chat rooms). We propose that future evaluation projects can use the portal to more efficiently involve a wider audience, to discuss, debate and ultimately shape evaluation in stakeholders’ best interests, participation being a known factor in increasing the probability of using evaluation findings and effecting program change.

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**References**


APPENDIX A:

Complete Data for Eval Ques. 3: Unmet Expectations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response Themes</th>
<th>Respondent Quotes</th>
<th>Sources*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **1. Lacking clarity of course and class goals** | “For content [classes], I’m not sure what the aim of the class is.”  
“Weird atmosphere when students and teachers don’t know what’s going on.”  
“The goal seemed clear, but as the term went on the class wasn’t organized.”  
“[Students] are not sure of what they are learning.”  
“The purpose of classes was sometimes not clear.” | SFG(many), FS, HS(2) |
| **2. Desire for more English conversation** | “Not enough opportunities to speak.”  
“[Students leave HELP due to] not enough conversation.”  
“No speaking classed available.” | SFG(4), SE(4) FS, HS |
| **3. Lacking “strictness” with lateness** | “I think teachers should be more strict with [the] start time.” | SFG(2), SE(6), FS |
| **4. Too few courses to choose from** | “Not enough selection.”  
“Please design more courses for 400 level.”  
“I wanted more academic contents, but there were few classes at HELP.” | SE(8), FS |
| **5. Teaching quality challenges** | “Inexperienced teachers are put into the classroom without training/preparation.”  
“Many courses are taught by teachers who are assigned to courses at the last minute, sometimes even after the term has begun. Frequently, these teachers are new to HELP, have limited teaching experience, and get little supervision.”  
“I hope that you will hire teachers who are veterans and have skill [for] next term”  
“Mostly MA students – some with experience and some without.”  
“Teacher quality varies a lot. Some are not really specialists in writing.”  
“Experienced teachers are obviously planned.”  
“Some teachers put a lot of thought into class, some don’t.”  
“Inexperienced teachers waste time looking for things and are unplanned, it’s obvious” | SFG(5), HS, SE, FS |
<p>| <strong>6. Students choose classes on the basis of teachers</strong> | “I can’t know next teachers’ classes. I want to decide [on] classes after I know [the] class teachers.” | SFG(3), FS, HS, SE |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7. Poor learning environment; noisy facilities; cleanliness</th>
<th>“Students have to be wise and choose enough to find who’s a good teacher and choose them.” “When we get the new schedule for next term, we need to know the teachers … mostly the teacher we’re choosing.”</th>
<th>SFG(4), SE(2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8. Wasted class time: exercises; reading; movies</td>
<td>“I expected a much better learning environment than in my home country…” “The room was too noisy most of the time.” “Sometimes classes are not very clean.” “Facilities are really bad compared to other schools.”</td>
<td>SFG(3), HS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Insufficient feedback on class work (presentations, class exercises, homework)</td>
<td>“[Teachers] should give feedback to us to help us understand our strengths and weaknesses.”</td>
<td>SFG(2), FS, SE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Lacking “rigor”/”not hardcore”/”solidness”</td>
<td>“HELP teachers aren’t hard.” “Courses are not solid. [There is a] lacking skills and grammar focus.”</td>
<td>SE, SFG, HS, C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Too much L1 use allowed</td>
<td>“That you can use so much [L1] in classrooms makes it feel like [L1 country]” “Feels like studying in [L1 country] language schools” “Too lenient in terms of enforcing English only” “complaints had to do with … the use of [L1] in class.”</td>
<td>SFG(2), FS, HS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Lacking motivation of other students</td>
<td>“Students occasionally remark about other HELP (non-scholarship) students not being sufficiently serious.”</td>
<td>SFG, FS(2), C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Lacking grammar instruction</td>
<td>“I wanted more conversation and grammar.” “Students have repeatedly mentioned that they want to learn grammar. The content-based classes do not have enough grammar. The only grammar class available is at the basic level.”</td>
<td>SE, HS, SFG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Level movement arbitrary or unfair</td>
<td>“Not fair how students are moved up to the next level.”</td>
<td>SFG(2), FS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Length of classes is too long</td>
<td>“Sometimes the class time [is] so long. So I feel a little bit boring.”</td>
<td>FS, SE, HS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Size of classes is too big</td>
<td>“In spring 1, 2008 the class size limit was 18, instead of 15. One class had 22 students. On the first day of school 5 Koreans had complaints. Two of the complaints had to do with class size…”</td>
<td>SE(2), HS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Not enough academic-style classes</td>
<td>“I wanted more academic contents at HELP but there were few classes at HELP.” “I wanted to study more academic style classes.”</td>
<td>FS(2), C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Homework not returned</td>
<td>“…sometimes it takes two weeks to get homework back…”</td>
<td>SFG, SE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 19. Lack of student diversity: too many Korean students | “Didn’t think there would be so many Korean students.”
| | “Too many Koreans; not diverse enough.” |
| | SFG, HS |

*Parentheses indicate the number of individuals who expressed related views; no parentheses = 1.*