MIC English Program Report

January 2013
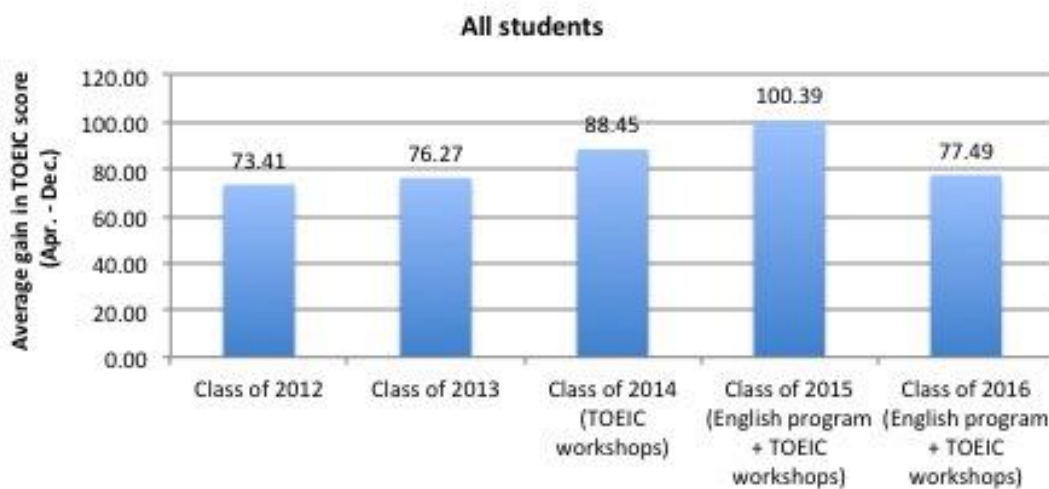
Tim Stoeckel & Phil Bennett, on behalf of the English faculty

1. English Courses
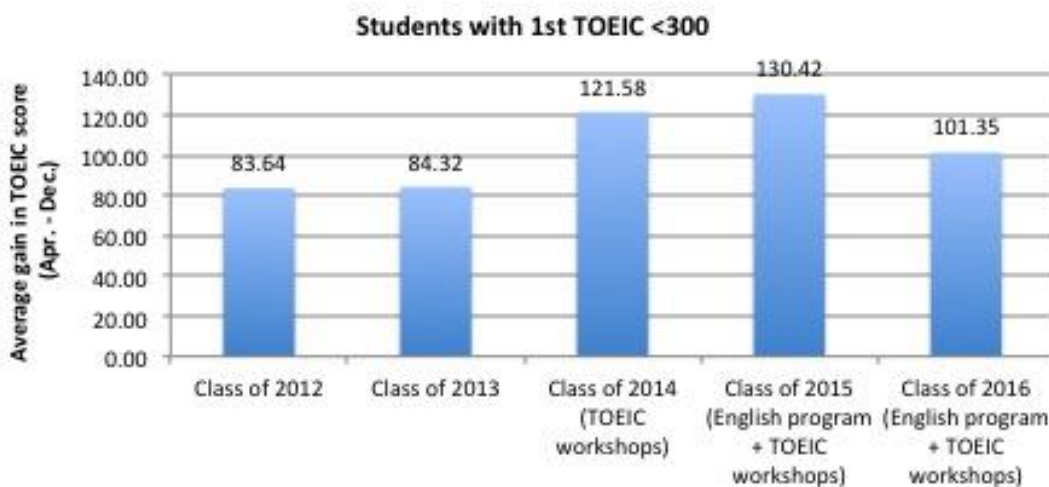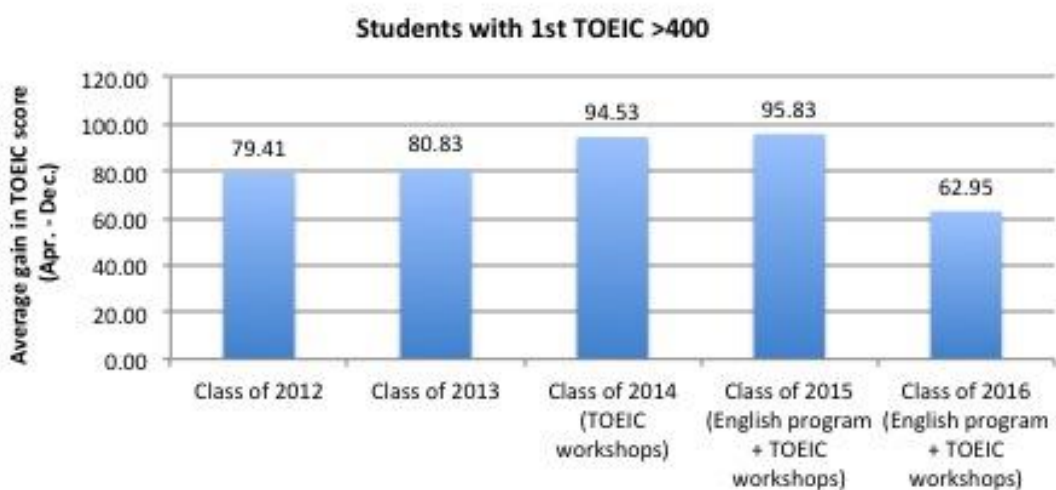
1.1 TOEIC results

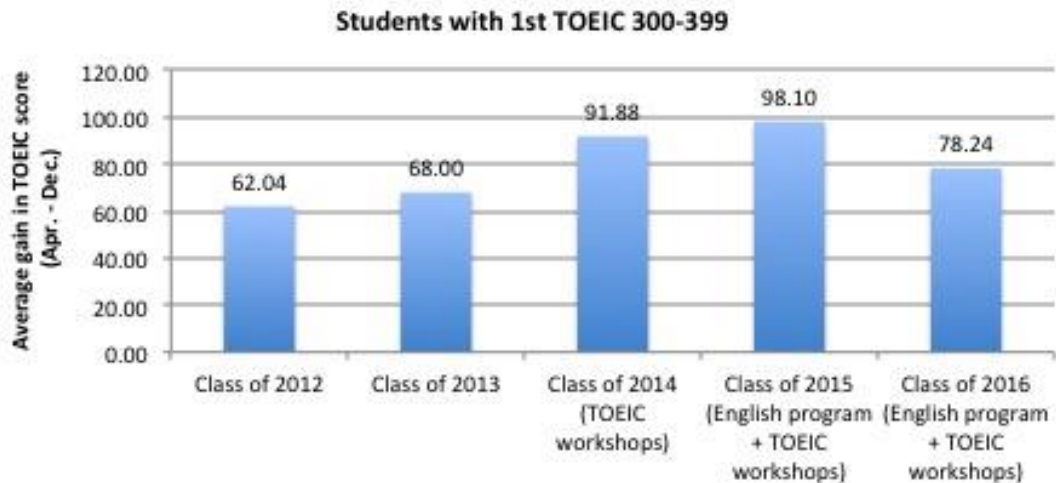*1.1.1 Gains in TOEIC scores in the first two semesters*

Overall, the current first year students' TOEIC scores improved by 77 points on average during the first two semesters, somewhat less than in the past two years and more on a par with earlier years.

By dividing the students into three groups according to the TOEIC score they achieve in April of their first year, we can see how different ability groups develop.

Students with 1st TOEIC 300-399

Students with 1st TOEIC >400

In the last three years, we have seen students with low (<300) and average (300-399) initial TOEIC scores improve more than in the past. The current first years have not gained as much as the previous two cohorts, but have performed better than in years prior.

For students with high (>400) initial TOEIC scores, the current first-year cohort has gained less than in other recent cohorts.

1.2 Student progress
In 2011, *English I, II,* and *III* were reconfigured into a six-level, streamed program. Incoming students were placed into different program levels according to the results of a placement exam, and the successful completion of all six levels of the program became a graduation requirement.

1.2.1 Class of 2015
Table 1 summarizes the progress of the class of 2015 through the English program. A total of 15 students have not yet completed the program; the mean high-TOEIC for these students is about 375. Fifty-one students have finished the program; their mean high-TOEIC is 512.

Table 1
Progress of the Class of 2015 through the English program.

Status April 2011 ⇩	Status in Spring of 2013								Total	4/2011 TOEIC mean
	L1	L2	L3	L4	L5	L6	out	W/LOA		
L1	0	0	0	4	5	1	5	3	18	284
L2	0	0	0	0	2	3	27	1	33	344
L3	0	0	0	0	0	0	19	4	23	413
Total	0	0	0	4	7	4	51	8	**74**	
%	0	0	0	5.4%	9.5%	5.4%	68.9%	10.8%		
April 2011 TOEIC, mean:				276	264	273	375			
Highest TOEIC, mean:				375	372	380	512			

notes: *L1-L6* refer to levels 1 through 6 of the English program; *out* refers to students who have completed the program; *W/LOW* refers to students who have either withdrawn or are on a leave of absence.

1.2.2 Class of 2016

For the class of 2016, 21 students remain in levels 2-4 of the program after the first two semesters (Table 2). These students are 'behind' in the program but are able to make up ground by studying for and passing special tests which are offered twice each semester and twice during each break.

Table 2
Progress of the class of 2016 through the English program

Status April 2012 ⇩	Status in Spring of 2013								Total	4/2012 TOEIC mean
	L1	L2	L3	L4	L5	L6	L7	W/LOA		
L1	0	4	11	3	11	1	0	2	32	268
L2	0	0	0	3	4	8	2	0	17	341
L3	0	0	0	0	1	1	3	0	5	436
L4	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	0	7	465
L5	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	0	8	606
L7	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	2	690
Total	0	4	11	6	16	10	22	2	**71**	
%	0	5.6%	15.5%	8.5%	22.5%	14.1%	31.0%	2.8%		
4/2012 TOEIC, mean:		262	256	258	293	350	531			
High TOEIC, mean:		288	313	323	400	441	600			

notes: *L1-L6* refer to levels 1 through 6 of the English program; *out* refers to students who have completed the program; *W/LOW* refers to students who have either withdrawn or are on a leave of absence.

1.2.3 Discussion

The data in the far right column of Tables 1 and 2 suggest that the placement test does a satisfactory job sorting students into groups according to English proficiency; those with lower TOEIC scores upon entry into MIC are placed into the lower streams, and vice versa.

Likewise, the data in the bottom row of both tables suggest that students progress through the program at an appropriate pace, when they are linguistically ready to do so.

By far, the highest proportion of students who failed to complete the program on time (2015 cohort) or are behind in the program (2016 cohort) were those who began in Level 1 of the

program. One reason for this is that these students are required to pass one level each eight weeks without fail; they have no extra time to recover from failing a level. However, another important reason is that the proficiencies of students placed into Level 1 ranges widely, from low intermediate to near beginner. It should not be surprising that the near beginners require more time to learn what their higher proficiency peers already know.

1.3. Moodle reader

We have been using the Moodle Reader system in English classes for two years. The purpose of this is to encourage students to read more widely so as to improve reading fluency and to reinforce vocabulary knowledge of words they have already encountered. Faculty set goals for the number of words students should read. Typically, these goals might be 20,000 words over a semester for lower level classes up to 40,000 words or more for higher levels. There are a few students who read very few or even no words, but it is also not uncommon for students to read beyond their goals.

Faculty have discussed revisions that could be made to the present system that would promote regular reading over the semester rather than at the last minute, and that would provide greater evidence of students' having understood the readings they complete. These discussions are ongoing, and we hope to continue to improve the extensive reading program in the future.

2. Student Vocabularies

We have now carried out vocabulary tests on five occasions and we have data for the first three semesters for the class of 2015, and for the first year for the class of 2016. The vocabulary test covers three word groups:
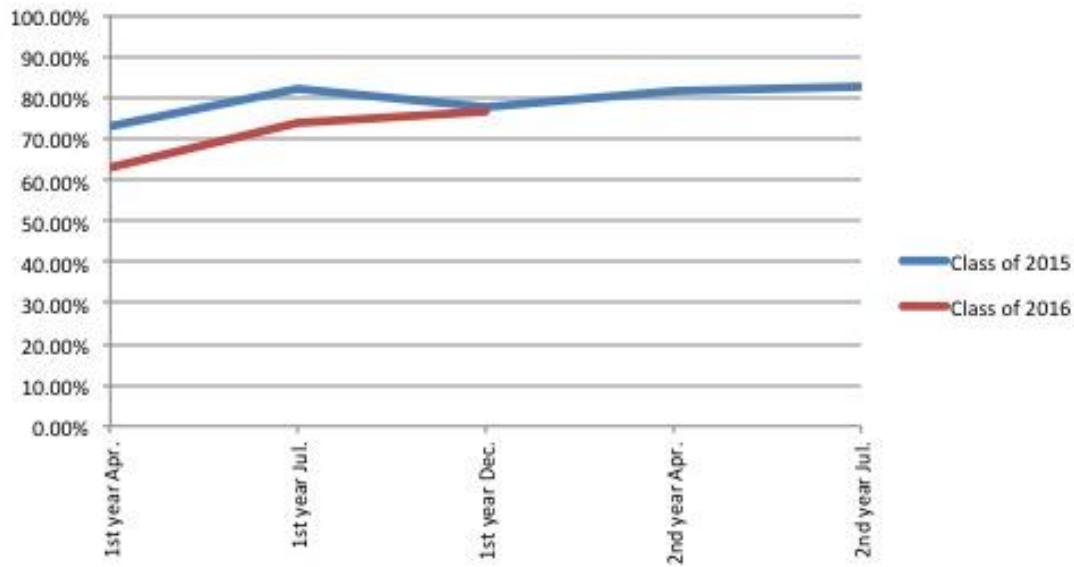
First 1,000 words (e.g. *include*, *limit*)	These words are very highly frequent in all genres of English. They are essential for our students.
Second 1,000 words (e.g. *behave*, *arrange*)	These words are also frequent in all genres of English. Our students need to understand and be able to use most of these words.
Academic words (570 words) (e.g. *establish*, *adjust*)	After the first and second 1,000 words, these words are the most frequent in academic writing. Many of these words will be unknown to our students when they enter MIC, but they do appear regularly in our class texts, and students should understand as many as possible.

These three word groups comprise 2,570 word families. A word family is a headword and its related forms (e.g. *establish* + *established, establishing, establishment* etc). These 2,570 word families might be seen as a 'core' vocabulary that are necessary for students to perform effectively in academic settings using English.
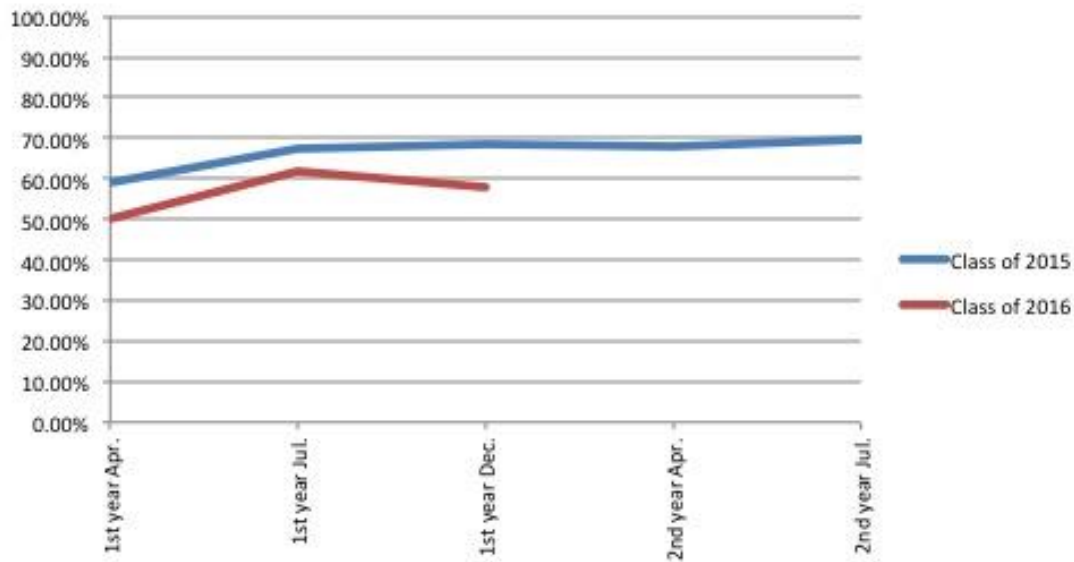
2.1 Cohort averages

Below are the average scores for the classes of 2015 and 2016 in each word group. Overall, they show vocabulary growth, but only at a very slow rate. An average student enters MIC with a vocabulary of 1,350 word families, and finishes the third semester with around 1,800 word families, a gain of around 2 words per day.
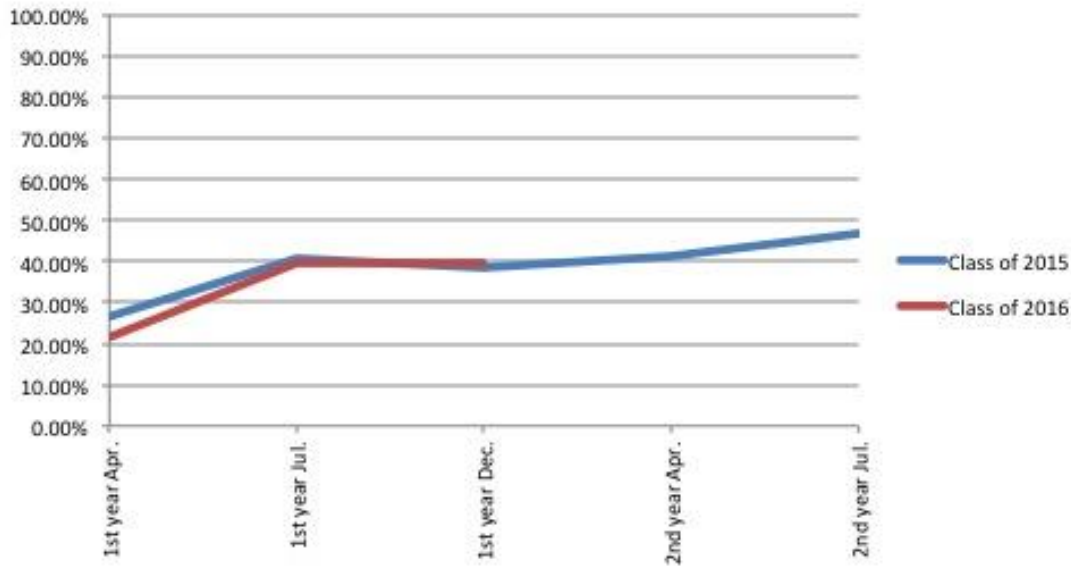
First 1,000 words - average scores

Second 1,000 words - average scores
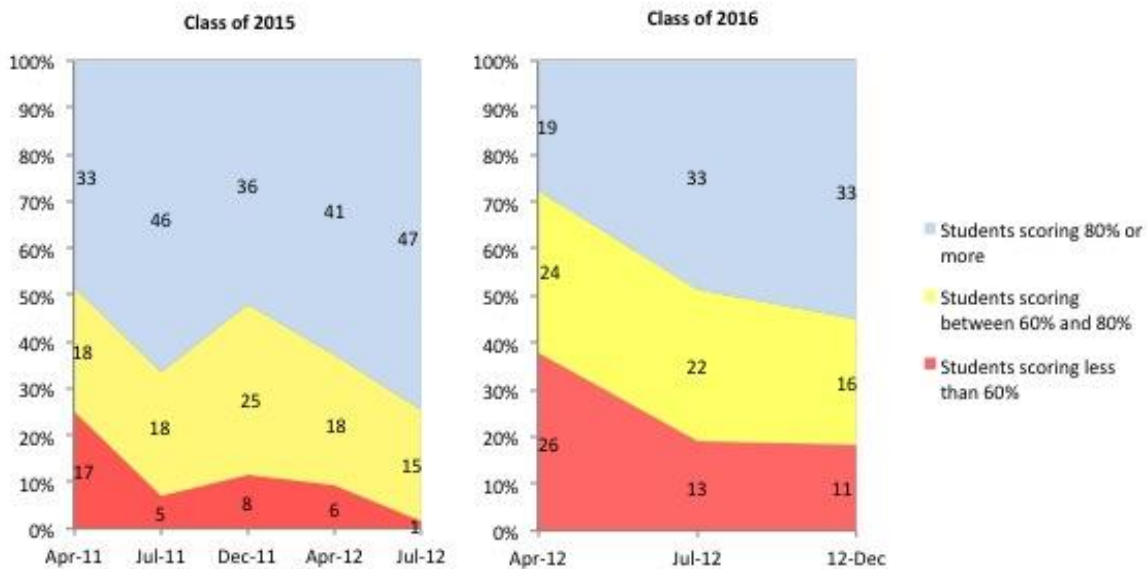
Academic words - average scores
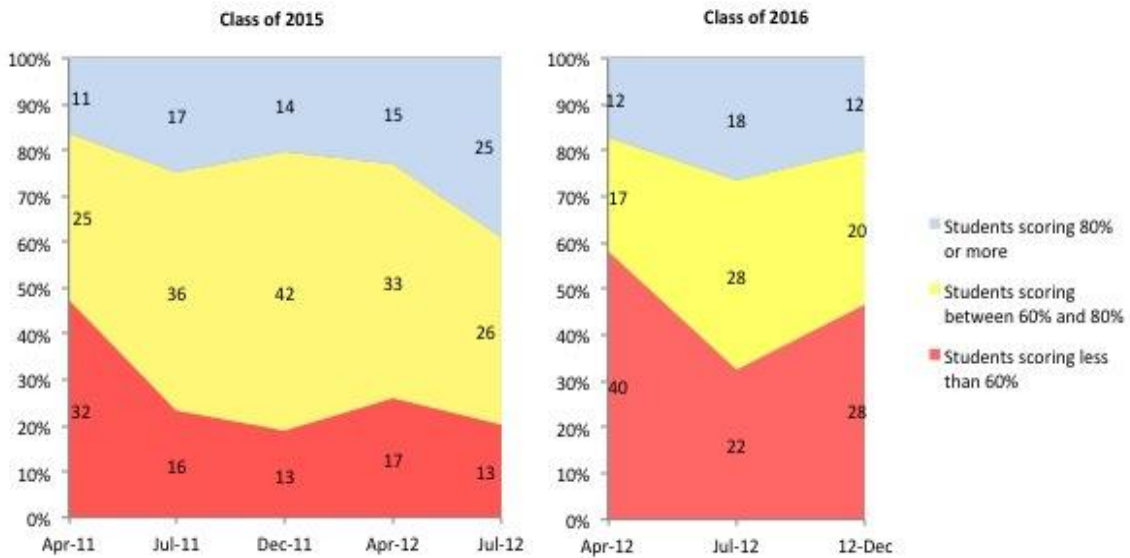
2.2 Individuals

To consider individuals, the charts below show the number of students showing good (>80%), average (60%-80%), or poor (<60%) knowledge of the three word bands each time the test was given.

For example, when the class of 2015 finished their third semester in July 2012, 47 students showed good knowledge of the first 1,000 words, 15 had average scores, and 1 had a poor score.
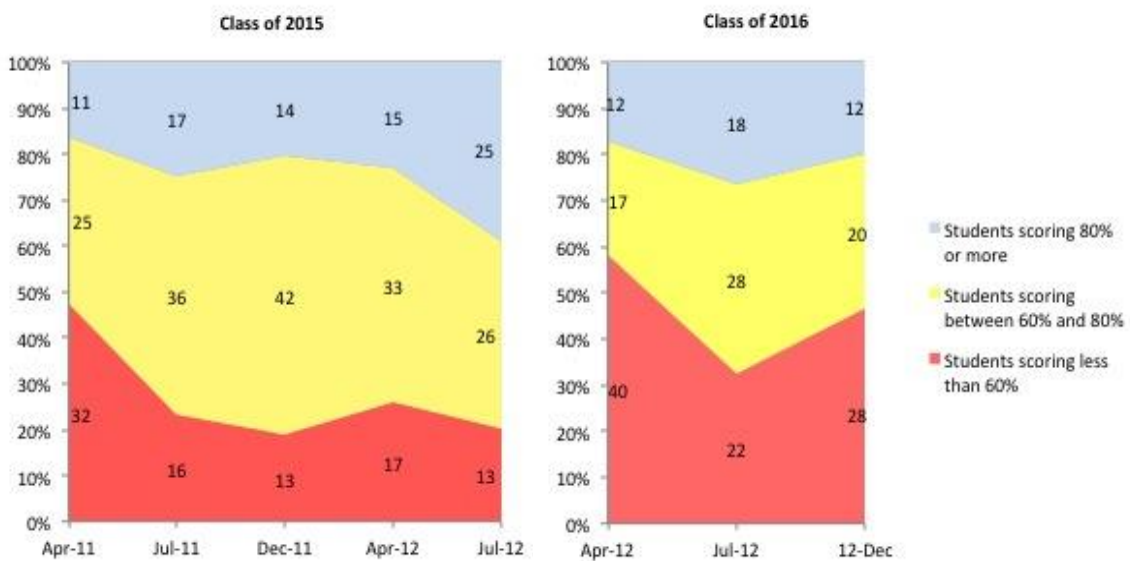
First thousand words

6

Second thousand words

Academic words

2.3 Conclusion

The general conclusion is that many students complete the first three semesters lacking the basic 'core' vocabulary that they will require for academic study in English.

Vocabulary has been shown to have a strong effect on the four broad language skills, and reading ability in particular.

3. Academic Writing

Two academic writing courses were added to the curriculum in 2012, one in each of the first two semesters. This is a brief account of the development of these courses, the placing of these courses within a broader framework of academic writing instruction at MIC, and future development of these courses.

3.1 Program development

In the months prior to the 2012 academic year, three members of the English faculty developed a framework for the instruction of academic writing at MIC, which includes but is not limited to objectives for the new courses, *Academic Writing I* and *II*.

The development of academic writing skills in a second language is a long process. For undergraduate students of intensive English in American colleges, programs of five hours per week for two semesters are common for students to learn basic paragraph, short essay, and reference and citation procedures. Students who enter such programs with low English proficiency sometimes require three or more semesters.

Because the two new academic writing courses at MIC are of comparatively shorter duration than those described in the preceding paragraph, and because a significant portion of our student body enters MIC with somewhat low English proficiency, the committee looked for ways to extend the instruction of academic writing beyond the first year.

The committee consulted with the teachers of the second-year cultures courses, and it was agreed that the portion of those courses which had already been dedicated to the development of academic writing skills could be aligned with the objectives of the new first-year classes so as to create a three-semester progression of coursework in academic writing. We also consulted with Mick Stetson regarding the objectives of the new third-year course dedicated to the writing of the senior thesis and tried to include those in our framework.

We distributed a needs-analysis survey to all members of faculty (14 returned; 7 content, 7 language) and to a small number of students. Results of this survey were a primary source for determining course objectives, which are summarized in Table 3[1].

3.2 Academic Writing I and II

The following section focuses on the two new first-year courses, *Academic Writing I* and *II.*

3.2.1. Student placement

Students were placed into four streamed sections of *Academic Writing I* based on a writing sample produced during the first class session. At the end of the first semester, students produced a second sample of writing which was used to decide placement into *Academic Writing II.* About 25% of students changed streams between semesters.

3.2.2. Student assessment

Student assessment was based on a combination of class work and a sample of writing

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[1] For complete documentation of course objectives, ask Tim Stoeckel or Iain Stanley.

produced during the final exam period each semester. The classroom teacher determined each student's final grade, and because the course is streamed, students in the higher streams were held to higher standards than students in the lower streams.

Table 3. Overview of academic writing course objectives

Course	Yr	Objectives
AW I	*1*	- *differentiate between academic and non-academic writing styles* - *develop and use a process approach to writing* - *produce well-structured paragraphs on personal and simple academic topics*
AW II	*1*	- *continue development in earlier objectives* - *produce well-structured essays of up to five paragraphs in length* - *use simple citations*
Cultures Courses	*2*	- *continue development in earlier objectives* - *use references*
Senior Thesis	*3*	- *continue development in earlier objectives* - *produce well-structured research papers up to xx pages in length* - *(find out what ideas Mick has for this class)*

3.2.3. Efficacy
There is no data on first-year students' proficiency in academic writing prior to 2012, so it is not possible to assess the efficacy of the program through direct comparison of student data. However, anecdotal feedback from several teachers in the first-year suggests that as a trend, the current first-year cohort is better able to produce paragraph and essay-length discourse than previous cohorts. There is, of course, wide variation.

3.2.4. Future development
Because 2012 was the first year of organized instruction in academic writing at MIC, a thorough review of the program is scheduled for the current winter break.