Introduction:

Now that the English Language Academy is just one year into the commitments stated in its 2002 Memorandum of Agreement (MOA), it is time to take stock of our progress in relation to those commitments. However, it would be impossible to do so without commenting first on the larger international context in which our program operates. Our world has been transformed in the post-9/11 period, with major repercussions on international education; and during the past year, the ELA has been primarily involved in adjusting to this “new world”. We have been forced to deal with circumstances which were unforeseen at the time our unit prepared its self-study for the Academic Program Review Committee (APRC). In particular, the necessity of completely restructuring our applications/admissions/enrollment processes has forced the faculty and staff of the ELA to set certain intentions and commitments aside temporarily, as we deal with other, more pressing matters. On the other hand, this transformation and these necessities bring with them reminders as to the wisdom of several of the points of conclusion in our self-study, specifically, a desire to continue to diversify our programming and student body.

As suggested, in this follow-up report, we will proceed through the commitments expressed in our MOA, item by item, and comment on them. The sections that follow are referenced in brackets to the “actions agreed upon” for 2002-2003, as stated in our June 2002 MOA, and a copy of the MOA is appended below.

Discussion of points from actions agreed upon for 2002-2003

Diversity

[Reference: “Students”, section 1 of the MOA: “Diversify program participant base through recruitment and marketing.”]

- The ELA needs to be realistic about its international “mix” of students, and from where in the world it is currently possible to attract students. New visa restrictions and increased levels of security clearances make it virtually impossible in the short-term for us to admit students from Africa and the Middle East, particularly male students between the ages of 17 and 35.
• Other international markets have been adversely affected by anti-American sentiment growing out of the involvement of the United States in the recent and ongoing war in Iraq. Our enrollment has also been affected, either directly or indirectly, by SARS. Consequently, although we would very much like to boost our numbers of students from, for instance, France, Germany, China and Taiwan, it is unlikely that we will do this successfully in the short term.

• Although we have acted during the past year on a commitment to do outreach to Chicago’s immigrant populations (as opposed to overseas non-immigrant populations), we find that we have learned useful lessons from trying to incorporate such students into the ELA. Our conclusion now is that we need to be realistic about the appropriateness of the ELA’s full-time intensive program to the immigrant population. In fact, we find that at present there is not a good “fit” between such students and the ELA, suggesting the need to develop a different kind of program or programs (probably semi-intensive, perhaps evening, and definitely lower-cost programs) to serve such students, and during the coming year we intend to develop an Adult Literacy ESL course that could be offered both at the Loop Campus and suburban locations.

• A new and revised marketing plan for the ELA, which will be created during the summer of 2003, will address the above points.

[Reference: “Students”, section 2 of the MOA: “Assist with admission to degree programs.”]

• The ELA can boast a number of modest successes at diversifying programming during the past year: A “Writing Boot Camp”, developed and delivered this year for the Master of Public Service program; the piloting of integrated-skills ESL classes (with immigrants) at the Barat Campus; and corporate ESL classes at CNA and Citadel Investment Group. Corporate classes do not have as a primary goal assisting students with admission to DePaul degree programs, although as we have seen in the past they do function as a means of external marketing and visibility for DePaul.

• A notable success has been that students continue to articulate from the ELA to DePaul degree programs, with at least five students that we know of who began their studies in the ELA receiving DePaul University degrees in June, 2003. Our relations with the International Student Office remain strong. Relations with international admissions have been strengthened, and growing out of this, Russell Clark and Saskia Hofman are currently working with the Dept. of Commerce/Trade Export Center on the development of a new “Study Illinois” consortium, which is designed to sell Illinois higher education opportunities – including those at DePaul – overseas. A decision has been made by StudyIllinois.com (with Russell Clark serving on its steering committee) to accept only institutional memberships, so that it is DePaul which will join, with
undergraduate admissions, CTI, and ELA (etc.) all being on the same page – selling DePaul.

Programs

[Reference: “Programs”, section 3 of the MOA: “Expand to Barat College.”]

• During 2002-2003, as mentioned, we offered courses taught by ELA instructor Sherry Rasmussen to small numbers of students at Barat College. This was a rewarding experience for the students and our personnel, but we learned from it the difficulty currently with finding a student base in Lake County; problems with the downturn in the economy hurting the “show up” rate of self-paying students; the decline of investment by employers in training; and competition in Lake County by institutions such as the College of Lake County, which are already firmly established. Cooperation between Barat and the ELA, on the other hand, was excellent (Kathryn Delaney, Jessica Horowitz), and relationships have been built which we may be able to use again during the coming year. The plan during 2003-2004 is to restrategize in relation to our Barat initiative, with details to be decided in the revised marketing plan referred to above. Although it is premature to provide specifics at this point, our sense is that we need to (1) build out at Barat in tandem with other DePaul units, as they enter and grow at Barat, (2) continue to follow up on a few corporate contacts made this year in Lake County, and (3) locate, hire and train local Lake County part-time instructors to teach our ELA classes at Barat. Item (3) should not be difficult, as there are well-qualified applicants, with whom we are in touch.

[Reference: “Programs”, section 4 of the MOA: “Collaborate with other units within DePaul.”]

• As stated above, in terms of process, we now feel that we need first to develop focused “products”, such as Adult Literacy ESL, Multi-Skill ESL, and then transfer them to Barat (and possibly to other campuses, such as Naperville). At Barat specifically, we have begun discussions with CTI and SNL concerning their second-language needs, and these discussions will continue during the coming year.

• Also during the past year we have successfully recommitted to and recast our joint admission programs with CTI, Music, and are piloting joint admission inside LA&S with graduate Chemistry. (International enrollment is down in both CTI and Music, however, although we anticipate three new joint-program Music students at the ELA during Fall 2003.) We have discussed and made many enrollment initiatives with DePaul schools and departments, not yet realized (Economics, CTI, Writing Centers), and laid the groundwork for stronger relations with Kellstadt. Much of the latter has been pursued by ELA instructor, Paul Thomas, who has expanded our GMAT course
into a full GMAT/MBA introduction and developed another oral-skills course in business English for non-native speakers.

- Although not a “program”, as such, the ELA has engaged in an enormous university-wide collaboration this year to make DePaul SEVIS-compliant (SEVIS is the Department of Homeland Security’s new Student and Exchange Visitor Information System), by the required deadlines. Russell Clark has served, and continues to serve, with Russ Patterson, Tom Paetsch, Carol Damron, Mark Elsen, Cindy Summers, Lindsay Mitchell and Hiwote Tamrat on DePaul’s SEVIS task force, a group which was initially convened by Jim Doyle. After a full year of very hard work by this group, the PeopleSoft-SEVIS-F-1 visa “patch” is “going live” as of July 1, 2003.

Assessment and Evaluation

[Reference: “Assessment and Evaluation”, section 5 of the MOA: “Continue to refine assessment of student learning.”]

- Work in the area of analysis of our enrollment and particularly testing/placement data is ongoing, albeit with some frustrations due to time constraints on the ELA director and the need for him to pursue other projects, such as SEVIS. However, the ELA faculty and administration have conducted during the past year, a new and significant dialogue related to assessment, specifically the tightening up of standards for passing from level to level and completion of the University Bridge (top) level of the ELA. Although it is premature to announce specific outcomes related to our test scores, we have some preliminary evidence that TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) gain scores – an indication both of the quality of the program and individual students’ “progress” in the ELA program remain strong. We note also, preliminarily, that our entering TOEFL scores have on average declined somewhat during the past year and a half, perhaps indicating that without knowing why, we have attracted and enrolled a slightly less proficient student. This fact has been one of the reasons that our gate-keeping discussions, and the need for us to tighten up out standards and procedures for continuous assessment, have been so important.

[Reference: “Assessment and Evaluation”, section 6 of the MOA: “Seek accreditation.”]

- Accreditation of the ELA by CEA (TESOL’s Commission on English Language Program Accreditation) remains of great interest, but had of necessity to be put on hold during 2002-2003 due to need to address other more immediate challenges. We feel now that we are in position to return to and reconsider CEA. The ELA director intends to discuss with Lifelong Learning (David Justice, Tracey Dorian) the budgeting of money and time for the CEA effort in the Fall 2003 budgeting cycle, when we are planning 2004-2005. An ELA instructor, Claudia Kupiec, has identified herself during her
immediately past performance appraisal as one who is motivated to take on coordinating this enormous project. [Accreditation by CEA is becoming, and will continue to be, an issue of competition, in that our principal local competitor, the Tutorium in Intensive English at U.I.C., has now received CEA accreditation.]

• The issuance of student visas is directly and indirectly related to the question of accreditation, in that over the past few years there has been the suggestion by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (recently renamed the Bureau of Immigration and Citizenship Services) that non-accredited programs would lose the privilege of issuing I-20 forms, and consequently of admitting international students. This fear seems to have passed for us in that we would not need programmatic accreditation as long as our host institution, DePaul University, was accredited. Even so, the ELA made major strides in this area during the past year with the ELA director becoming a DePaul DSO (Designated School Official) and issuing I-20 forms for ELA students, which had previously been done for us by the International Student Office. The upside of this is efficiency and faster turn-around for ELA applicants, strengthening of relations with the International Student Office and DePaul’s SEVIS team, who fulfill a consultative and advisory role for us; the downside has been time constraints on the ELA director. This situation will probably worsen in the near future, with the re-emergence of the need to collect postponed “SEVIS fees” – a fee which will be paid to the U.S. government by international students applying for visas. The ELA director has made a proposal to restore and fill the position of Registrar at the ELA (currently vacant), in order to deal with this growing volume of essential work. This matter of the need for a full-time registrar is relevant to this section in that it represents a form of student service which would be essential, when/if we seek CEA accreditation – and on a practical level, it is essential now.

Faculty

[Reference: “Faculty”, section 7 of the MOA: “Propose new faculty designation with HR.”]

• At the time of our self-study, the desire for a new designation of ELA “faculty” (for full-time ELA instructors) was a very hot issue in our unit, and some discussions had taken place and work was done in this area. The effort has by agreement been put on hold this past year, with discussions scheduled to resume in 2003-2004. The new ELA director feels strongly – since this urge has not gone away, and the interested parties graciously agreed to suspend the discussion while external conditions for the ELA were changing so rapidly – that it is the instructors themselves who should further this effort, if their current status is considered inappropriate. They will be encouraged to do so, to continue their research, and to make a formal proposal, once the new fiscal year (2003-2004) has begun. The ELA director also feels that the resumption of this research and
these discussions will be informed by the ongoing HR effort, under the leadership of Marty Martin, to move towards a competency-based job/performance model.

[Reference: “Faculty”, section 8 of the MOA: “Support part-time faculty.”]

- Support for both part-time and full-time “faculty” has been a commitment which the ELA acted upon this year. Professional development has remained consistent and strong, with a shift towards more “in house” training (with more thorough observation and supervision of new hires by the ELA director; revision of our new instructor orientation process by Claudia Kupiec; revision and extension of the performance appraisal process for all employees; inauguration of a very successful 2-day ELA fall faculty retreat); support for 6 PT instructors to attend the Illinois TESOL convention at Navy Pier (4 presenting at the meeting); support for 7 PT/FT instructors and the ELA director to attend the International TESOL convention in Baltimore (all 7 presenting); support for one PT instructor to attend a regional conference on writing in Indianapolis; support for additional necessary technology training for the ELA’s office assistant; and involvement – with stipends – primarily of PT instructors in developing courses for MPS (Heather Girdhar, Anna Varley); re-developing/assessing University Bridge courses (Dzidra Rodins and Diane Worobec-Serratos) and for a new corporate client, CITADEL Investment Group (William Wolf). In the coming year, we intend to utilize the expertise of two of our PT instructors (Renee Pinchero and Diane Worobec-Serratos) in development of an Adult Literacy ESL course, and two others (Nick Hilmers and Jennifer Eick-Magan) in teacher-training projects.

- Another issue raised previously has been the balance of course offerings by part-time vs. full-time ELA instructors, and this issue is still there, but with no possibility of change in the status quo at present. (As enrollment declined by 17% during 2002-2003 compared to 2001-2002, an unintended consequence was that the ratio of courses taught by FT instructors went up in comparison to that of PT, with a smaller need to hire part-time instructors for additional courses/sections.) As much as one would enjoy hiring an additional FT instructor or instructors, until our enrollment returns to its pre-9/11 level, this is unrealistic, and thankfully the availability of well-qualified PT instructors in the Chicagoland area does not adversely affect our quality of instruction at the ELA.

[Reference: “Faculty”, section 9 of the MOA: “Complete faculty handbook.”]

- Faculty handbook: The commitment to a faculty handbook in our MOA was realized, completed by Linda Hillman prior to her retirement, but since that time the ELA has been living out and revising many of the policies and procedures stated therein. One significant change at the ELA this year is greater involvement of ELA instructors in a process of formally making policy (standards for passing from level to level, changes in attendance policy, input to procedures for performance appraisal, etc.). One key policy which as a faculty we legislated early on during the past year was a re-allotment of the
number of contact hours for Reading and Grammar classes – shortening Reading to 5.0 hours/week, lengthening Grammar classes to 4.5 hours/week, with a net increase of 0.0 contact hours for our students, who study 19.5 hours/week. Quite recently we have strengthened and clarified our standards and procedures in relation to attendance by moving towards an absence policy that is based on a number of hours, rather than a number of classes missed. (Recording of attendance is required in a program such as the ELA, and F-1 students must maintain attendance at the 85% level, or they are administratively dropped and subsequently lose their legal status as students in the U.S.)

Visibility

[Reference: “Visibility”, section 10 of the MOA: “Increase visibility within the university.”]

- The ELA’s visibility as been increased out of necessity this year, and in ways that we might not have anticipated or wanted, as such. Specifically, the need for SEVIS-driven compliance with U.S. law that our students be formally “enrolled” or lose their legal status and face deportation drove our extensive work with DePaul’s SEVIS task force and took us to the next stage of PeopleSoft integration. PeopleSoft forced us to build a completely new infrastructure of ELA enrollment with the Academic Resource Center (ELA courses in the course catalogue, students formally enrolled in courses, students with access to Campus Connection, grading done by instructors in Campus Connection, classrooms reserved through PeopleSoft, etc.) – all of this new during 2002-2003.

- Still, this is not what our MOA meant by “visibility”. Other, real visibility: ELA director’s service on Staff Council, Human Resources committee of Staff Council, Fr. Minogue’s new (May 2003) ad-hoc Benefits Committee; University Committee on International Programs;

- (already mentioned) Barat; MPS; joint enrollment programs – new and recommitted;

- Clearly, there is room for and a need for more visibility inside DePaul.

Issues on which there is joint commitment to continue working

[Reference: “Issues on which there is joint commitment to continue working”, a new section 1 of the MOA: “Identify housing for ELA students.”]

- Housing: In the past we have constantly expressed an interest in greater access to university housing for ELA students, which is limited currently to access at the Lincoln
Park Campus during summer term only. The new University Center at the Loop is coming, and we are enthusiastic about truly being able to make the ELA experience a residential one. New this year, we established a successful track record of working with an external homestay coordinator (a private vendor), who arranged 20 homestays for us, to accommodate a group from a Japanese car-parts company in Fall 2002, and a handful of interested individuals subsequently. We are planning some major initiatives for Summer 2004, and looking forward to Barat College residence halls to leverage these programs.

[Reference: “Issues on which there is joint commitment to continue working”, a new section 2 of the MOA: “Full access to the data in PeopleSoft system.”]

• PeopleSoft integration: We made major strides in this area this year, as mentioned. There is a need for additional PS training for the ELA director and other (new) staff, particularly as (if?) we proceed with the final stage of PeopleSoft integration, so that it would handle our financials, which we currently do entirely “in-house”. The impetus of this section is a desire to be able to better track the numbers of students who move from ELA to degree programs at DePaul, and difficulties and losses in our ability to do this, comparing AIMS to PS were noted, as well as a “gap” between the end of AIMS and the beginning of PS. The ELA director is committed to being able to more fully use PeopleSoft, and possibly devise or acquire another system, which will enable us better to demonstrate our contribution of students to DePaul degree programs. Of interest currently is the service of a company called “English Baby” (seriously), which would allow us to build a section of our web site to track former program participants and also to use our ELA “alumni” as a marketing tool.

[Reference: “Issues on which there is joint commitment to continue working”, a new section 3 of the MOA: “Identify professional development opportunities for ELA faculty.”]

• Professional development opportunities for faculty: This is an ongoing need, and one which is directly tied to the quality and past success of the ELA; financial resources are needed to continue to support ELA faculty, who tend primarily to think of this – rightly or wrongly – in terms of attendance at conferences. (In the past year, we used some revenue from our SIT/TESOL certificate program to fund travel to International TESOL conference, and having now scheduled three repetitions of this certificate program for 2003-2004, we hope to continue to do so.) Other types of support may be identified, and should be funded, as appropriate and affordable.

[Reference: “Issues on which there is joint commitment to continue working”, a new section 4 of the MOA: “Identify and pursue resources and support from external sources.”]
• Grants: We have built a successful relationship with Tom Hansen in Sponsored Programs and Research; applied for one grant (IIE Fulbrighters, which we did not get), and passed for now on the possibility of applying for a second (training English teachers from Morocco and Jordan). Such opportunities arise, and there may be more of them, especially focusing on Middle-Eastern educators, in the immediate post-war environment. The ELA director is committed to trying to bring in a grant or grants during the coming year, and some type of professional training in the area of grant-writing would be worthwhile.

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Russell Clark, ELA Director
Date

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David Justice, Vice President,  
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Date