

# The Impact of a College EAP Writing Program: Former Students' Perspectives

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*This article reports the findings of a small-scale qualitative study aimed at exploring the academic experiences of college students ( $n = 11$ ) who had previously engaged in the EAP program at a mid-sized college in Ontario. The primary objective was to unveil student perspectives on the effectiveness of the EAP writing program and to determine which skills acquired from EAP were most helpful in their subsequent academic pursuits. Thematic analysis of focus group data reveals three major skills: conducting online research (citing sources and paraphrasing), paragraph writing and grammar, and one genre (reports) as most efficacious in preparing students for their programs of study (POS). Three areas of perceived need are: stronger connections to POS via vocabulary and referencing systems, more summarizing, and more collaborative writing. A final emergent theme, "Value of EAP," comprises students' descriptions of being empowered and successful in their POS as a result of EAP participation. The implications of these findings for future research on EAP and college-level writing are discussed.*

*Cet article présente les résultats d'une étude qualitative à petite échelle visant à explorer les expériences universitaires d'étudiants de niveau collégial ( $n = 11$ ) qui avaient déjà participé à un programme d'anglais sur objectifs académiques (AOA) dans un collège de taille moyenne en Ontario. L'objectif principal était d'explorer les opinions des étudiants quant à l'efficacité du programme de rédaction de l'AOA et de déterminer quelles compétences acquises dans le cadre du programme leur ont été les plus utiles dans leurs études subséquentes. L'analyse thématique des données des groupes de discussion révèle que trois compétences principales : la recherche en ligne (citation des sources et paraphrase), la rédaction de paragraphes et la grammaire, ainsi qu'un genre textuel (les rapports) seraient les plus efficaces pour préparer les étudiants à leur programme d'études. Les trois domaines dans lesquels des besoins ont été perçus sont : des liens plus étroits avec les programmes d'études par le biais du lexique et des styles bibliographiques, davantage de rédaction de résumés et d'écriture collaborative. Un dernier thème émergent, « valeur de l'AOA », comprend la description par les étudiants de leur autonomisation et de leur réussite dans leur programme d'études grâce à leur participation au programme d'AOA. Les implications de ces résultats pour les recherches futures sur l'AOA et l'écriture au niveau collégial sont discutées.*

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**Keywords:** Canadian colleges, collaborative writing, English for Academic Purposes, student perceptions, vocabulary acquisition, writing

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English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs have been operating for more than 50 years (Anthony, 2018) for the purpose of helping English as an additional language (EAL) students enter and succeed in English-medium postsecondary academic disciplines. Since its inception, EAP has become increasingly prevalent in both ESL and EFL settings, and in colleges as well as universities, due to the ever-increasing “internationalization of education” (Alfattal, 2016; Bruce, 2022; Mittelmeier & Zhang, 2022) and the concomitant growth of English as a lingua franca in business and research (Chen et al., 2020; Roshid et al., 2022). Canada is no exception to these trends, as the number of international students attending colleges and universities doubled from approximately 200,000 to almost 400,000 between 2013 and 2021 (Statistics Canada, 2023), and an estimated 236 EAP programs, ranging in size from 100 to more than 1,000 students annually, now operate within Canadian colleges, universities, and other institutions (Corcoran et al., 2022).

The proliferation of EAP programming has prompted a substantial body of research into the effectiveness of these programs and the extent to which the skills cultivated in EAP classrooms contribute to success in postsecondary endeavours (e.g., Agostinelli, 2021; Anwar & Wardhono, 2019; Caplan & Stevens, 2017; Dippold et al., 2022; Douglas & Landry, 2021; Douglas et al., 2022; Feng et al., 2019; Jiang & Chen, 2019). While this research has undoubtedly proved valuable in refining EAP programs, a review of the literature reveals a concentration of research within the university context with limited attention afforded to the college setting. It is possible that the academic offerings in these two settings differ in the Canadian setting, given that colleges specialize in diplomas, trades programs, technical education, and a restricted number of degree programs, whereas universities primarily emphasize undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs (Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities, 2023).

Against this backdrop, the present study aims to fill a notable gap in knowledge by investigating the academic experiences of former EAP students engaged in college-level studies. Our particular interest, as EAP writing professors, is in discerning the perceived utility of the writing skills and genres in our college EAP program. Our deliberate selection of student participants stems from an extensive review of EAP studies, which reveals the need for more research representing students’ perspectives and experiences, “especially since they are central to this body of research” (Agostinelli, 2021, p. 129). Moreover, given that this study spans two contexts, we believe that students possess the expert knowledge that we seek, since only *they* have the “lived experience” (Van Manen, 1997) of both the EAP program *and* a college program of study (POS). As we will discuss, the results illuminate students’ experiences with college-level writing and raise questions about the extent to which the EAP objectives are congruent with college program writing requirements.

## Literature Review

### *EAP Studies: Canadian Universities*

Two notable, large-scale, quantitative studies in Canada have revealed that, overall, EAP programs have been effective in fostering success at university. Fox et al. (2014) examined a large sample of 641 to determine the impact of English language programs as EAL students transitioned to their academic majors in 26 universities across Canada. After employing structural equation modeling with the survey data, the researchers concluded that “the direct effects of EAP programs on academic engagement are significant, strong, and positive” (p. 12). Another study aimed at determining factors leading to academic success compared the predictive power of nine different measures of English language proficiency on postsecondary student achievement at a Canadian university over a seven-year admission period (Johnson & Tweedie, 2021). Results showed that several standardized tests of English, including IELTS and TOEFL, had weak or insignificant predictive ability of achievement in students’ first and final semesters of study, while EAP programming was a significant predictor with moderate association. The main conclusion of

these quantitative investigations was that EAP programs are effectual in preparing students for disciplinary studies.

### *Students' Perceptions of EAP: Canadian Universities*

Smaller-scale studies in Canada that solicit students' perceptions offer a further breakdown of the EAP program components considered to be beneficial and those viewed as unhelpful or lacking. To illustrate, Tweedie and Kim (2015) conducted interviews with seven former EAP students who subsequently pursued undergraduate studies across diverse academic disciplines at the university level. Their findings suggest that students valued the writing skills and group work acquired in their EAP classrooms. However, participants also perceived a lack of opportunity to interact with local students, insufficient preparation for undergraduate-level reading and assessment, and a lack of explicit vocabulary building in their target fields of study. The concern with subject-specific vocabulary also emerged from Keefe and Shi's (2017) interviews with eight former EAP students in their first term of university study. At the same time, "all 8 students reported improvements and increased confidence in speaking and writing" as they began university and explained that challenges such as vocabulary would have been greater without the EAP (p. 1).

Douglas et al. (2022) administered open-ended qualitative questionnaires to 17 students at the end of their EAP program. Respondents' reflections indicated improvement in several writing domains: essay writing, APA referencing, and grammar, as well as increased confidence in writing and speaking. Yet there was a perceived lack of opportunity to develop social communication and intercultural skills, a finding that matches those of Van Viegen and Russell's (2019) mixed-methods study of an English Bridging Program (EBP). While their main finding was that the program insufficiently prepared students for interpersonal and intercultural communication, a secondary theme emerging from focus groups with 25 current and former students was the perception that the EBP had given them a "step up" in preparing for postsecondary study, particularly with writing and research skills.

### *Students' Perceptions of EAP Writing: International Studies*

Examining the literature globally enables us to target and isolate students' perceptions of EAP writing. For instance, Deng et al. (2010) surveyed graduate students enrolled in an EAP writing course at a Singaporean university. Of the 31 respondents, 94% agreed or strongly agreed that the course helped with general characteristics of academic writing, and 80% indicated strong or very strong agreement with feeling confident in writing research papers in their respective disciplines. At the same time, the most frequently cited difficulty was vocabulary; that is, in response to the open-ended question "What difficulties do you still encounter in writing academic assignments?," 18 (58%) identified vocabulary. Vocabulary challenges also surfaced in Wubalem's (2021) evaluation of writing transfer from an EAP course into undergraduate studies at an Ethiopian university. Based on interviews with 38 EFL students and seven writing teachers, minimal transfer to writing across academic disciplines was reported: "While surface level knowledge of grammatical features show better transfer, skills of discourse level writing processes, thinking strategies and vocabulary showed very poor transfer" (p. 1).

One possible explanation put forth by Wubalem (2021) for the low transfer of writing skills was that students may have failed to adapt the writing processes and thinking strategies to new situations. Similarly, Counsell's (2011) small-scale investigation in Australia concluded that transfer of writing skills was minimal for the four participants who had completed the generic EAP and entered their disciplinary studies. The researcher concluded that while the participants acknowledged being aware of strategies

learned in the EAP, they had not employed them in their majors. Based on interviews with 30 former EAP writing students at an American university, Jiang and Chen (2019) reported that 21 (70%) believed the EAP writing course had helped them overcome such writing difficulties as summarizing, structuring papers, and citing and referencing sources. Increased confidence was listed as another important benefit. Unlike other studies reporting the lack of opportunity for intercultural skill development, participants perceived that the EAP writing courses had afforded opportunities for intercultural communication and for experiencing “American style class culture” (p. 15)—opportunities that the researchers classified as cultural adaptation. One perceived insufficiency was instruction on diverse writing formats; in other words, the EAP focused on APA referencing, whereas the use of formats such as MLA and Chicago was required in some participants’ majors.

Taken together, research in Canada and abroad reveals certain elements of the EAP program that align well with student needs (grammar, writing, writing confidence, improved writing overall) alongside other academic (subject-specific vocabulary) and sociocultural dimensions (e.g., intercultural communication) that require improvement. Such findings often lead to discussions around discipline-specific and general EAP.

### *EGAP and ESAP*

EAP can be further subdivided into English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP), which helps students with *any* program of study, and English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP), which prepares students for success in a *specific* academic discipline (Anthony, 2018). Some researchers (e.g., Keefe & Shi, 2017; Van Viegen & Russell, 2019) claim that an ESAP program has obvious advantages since it can facilitate awareness of and exposure to discipline-specific vocabulary, writing conventions, and modes of knowledge production. In fact, a study by Song (2006) aimed to test this contention. Comparing students who had taken a general EAP course to those who had received context-specific instruction in their EAP studies, the results showed that the latter group had higher academic achievement as measured by GPAs and graduation rates. Nonetheless, there seems to be a consensus that the impracticality of the ESAP ideal due to numerous practical constraints (e.g., time, resources, logistics) warrants compromise, namely a shift along the continuum from EGAP *toward* an ESAP orientation (Van Viegen & Russell, 2019). For example, Jiang and Chen (2019) recommend a combination of EGAP and ESAP: “After the EGAP writing sessions, students can have a few weeks of ESAP classes based on their fields” (p. 19). Wubalem (2021) also proposed a consecutive EGAP–ESAP approach in which the first course (EGAP) would focus on grammar and the second one, taken later in an undergraduate program, would follow an ESAP orientation wherein “the content would mainly target identification of academic writing genres, practices of academic vocabulary, writing process and strategies” (p. 20). Regardless of the chosen instructional approach, research underscores the imperative of incorporating an awareness of the target academic situation in EAP programs.

In summary, this brief literature review has highlighted those aspects of EAP programs that students perceive as beneficial and lacking, within Canada and abroad. Taken together, they suggest a possible link between the efficacy of these programs and the provision of opportunities to cultivate discipline-specific skills and vocabulary. While this research is relevant for EAP practitioners and developers endeavouring to refine program offerings and cater to the needs of students, it is imperative to acknowledge that all these studies took place in the university context. The present research focuses specifically on the college environment and further narrows the lens of investigation to the role of writing within this context.

## Research Questions

The research questions are as follows:

1. What EAP writing skills and assignments do former EAP students perceive as essential for success in their college programs of study (POS)?
2. In what ways can EAP writing courses better prepare additional language (AL) students for their college POS?

## Methodology

### *Context*

#### The college

This research was conducted at a mid-sized public college situated in Ontario, Canada. Within the Canadian educational landscape, students have the option to pursue postsecondary studies at either universities or colleges. Universities provide a spectrum of academic offerings, including undergraduate, graduate, and professional programs. In comparison, colleges confer certificates, diplomas, apprenticeships, and certain applied bachelor's degrees. In the realm of colleges, a distinction is made between public and private institutions. Within the province of Ontario, the public college system comprises 24 community colleges, subject to stringent governmental regulations dictating the standards that must be upheld for the conferral of diplomas and degrees (Ontario Ministry of Colleges and Universities, 2022).

#### The EAP program

At the public college under investigation, an EAP program serves as a preparatory avenue for AL learners aspiring to pursue college-level studies. Students electing to enroll in the EAP program may utilize their resulting certificate and grades as evidence of language proficiency for their chosen program of study. Alternatively, they may secure conditional acceptance into their intended program, contingent upon the successful fulfillment of the EAP program. When students enter the EAP program, an initial placement test positions students between Levels 1 and 6 of the EAP program. Each level contains three core courses: reading, writing, and listening and speaking. Two seven-week courses are offered in a 15-week term, with a one-week break in between. Students who complete the EAP program earn a certificate from the college. EAP courses do not bear credit toward graduation from a POS, and during EAP study, students are not eligible to take credit courses at the college.

### *Procedure*

#### Participants

The target population comprised all students who had completed the EAP program and had transitioned into a POS in the previous five years. From this list, purposive sampling was employed to create a list of potential participants from all major schools at the college. One pilot interview was conducted with a

student volunteer, and 10 other students participated in the focus groups. Three student focus groups were conducted with two, four, and four participants, respectively. Given that the numbers were not as high as anticipated, the pilot interview data were also used, for a total of 11 participants. There were four Advanced Technology students, two from Business and Hospitality, two from Health and Community Studies, two Media and Design students, and one from Construction Excellence (Table 1, column 2).

## Survey of course outlines

To gain a general view of college writing requirements across schools and programs, we examined 10 Level 1 and five Level 2 Communications (COMMS) course outlines, since every student, regardless of POS, must take these two courses. While writing assignments are not explained in course outlines, we examined course descriptions, course learning requirements (CLRs), and the embedded knowledge and skills (EKS) that fall under each CLR. The first observation was that almost all the Level 1 COMMS courses have the same course description, which emphasizes the necessity of communication skills for employment. COMMS 1 CLRs are consistent across programs, with CLR 1 identifying writing requirements. Variation and details of skills and assignment genres appear in the more specific EKS, for example, “write e-mail messages using correct formatting and structure; write messages using the direct and indirect message pattern; edit and proofread documents to eliminate errors” (Hospitality and Tourism). In all COMMS 1 courses, EKS under CLR 6 refer to the integration and documentation of information using commonly accepted citation guidelines. Level 2 COMMS course descriptions, CLRs and EKS are more varied as they become more narrowly oriented to the POS and employment in the specific field, requiring the creation of not only workplace documents and reports but also job-search documents like cover letters and résumés.

Table 1  
Participants

ID code	School	Program	Term in program	Country of origin
P1 <sup>a</sup>	Business and Hospitality	Human Resource Management	1	Algeria
P2	Advanced Technology	Computer Programming	3	China
P3	Advanced Technology	Computer Systems Technician Networking	4	Algeria
P4	Advanced Technology	Computer Systems Technician Networking	2	Tunisia
P5	Advanced Technology	Computer Programming	2	Tunisia
P6	Media and Design	Interior Decorating	1	China
P7	Construction Excellence	Electrical Engineering Technician	1	Turkey
P8	Business and Hospitality	Food and Nutrition Management	1	Libya
P9	Media and Design	Public Relations	3	Iran
P10	Health and Community Studies	Diagnostic Medical Sonography	3	Iraq
P11	Health and Community Studies	Child and Youth Care	1	Iraq

<sup>a</sup> P refers to “participant,” and the number is the code randomly assigned as an identifier and to maintain confidentiality.

## Data collection

Based on our examination of course outlines, and an extensive literature review, a series of open-ended questions were composed to elicit students' perspectives on the writing requirements in their college POS and the EAP writing program (Appendix A). This focus-group questionnaire was piloted with an EAP graduate in an online (Zoom) interview. After the pilot administration, four questions were adjusted for clarity, and two that appeared to be redundant were combined with others. The three student focus-group interviews took place on Zoom and were recorded with audio and video. For each group, one researcher acted as the lead moderator who guided the discussion, while another researcher assisted by posting the questions in the chat box, resolving technical issues, and responding to participants' chat-box messages. Questions were asked verbally and textually (through the chat-box function of Zoom). Each interview lasted 60–90 minutes.

## Data analysis

### Content analysis: Open (conceptual) and in-vivo coding

Audio transcripts of the focus groups, provided by Zoom, were the main data source. After downloading the audio transcripts into an Excel file, the researchers prepared the data for analysis by listening to the focus-group interview audio while reading the text transcription, in order to check for accuracy. Errors were corrected, for example, wrong words, misspelled words, and instances where the wrong speaker was identified. After the transcripts were “cleaned,” thematic content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) began.

All three researchers read the pilot interview transcripts again (familiarization) and then began “open” or “conceptual” coding, which involved describing “chunks” of data that the researcher identified as significant, in a word or phrase (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Concurrently, in a separate column, if an utterance seemed to have rich and particular meaning, researchers also identified “in vivo” codes, i.e., labels “that are phrased in the exact words of participants, rather than in the words of the researcher” (Creswell, 2002, p. 448). Some of these in vivo codes were used as titles for sections of the results.

### Categorizing

After conducting data analysis separately on the pilot interview transcript, the research team met to discuss categories into which the conceptual codes fell most naturally. Once consensus on the categories was reached, the team collaboratively composed a definition of each. Based on these categories, the research team coded the focus-group interview transcripts, while remaining open-minded to adding new categories that might emerge. After initial coding was completed on all interview transcripts, the team met again to discuss general findings, which led to the construction of preliminary themes.

### Synthesis

The research team met regularly to discuss and “make sense of” the data. While organizing the coded student interview data to ensure a “good fit” (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the researchers removed categories with insufficient data. The lengthy process of synthesizing led to the creation of themes and sub-categories.

## Results

Ultimately, the data fell under three main themes: transferred skills and assignments, EAP recommendations, and the value of EAP. The first two themes address the main research questions, and the third, while not answering the research questions directly, clearly qualified as a major “emergent” theme. Transcription conventions used below are contained in Appendix B.

### *1. Transferred Skills, Assignments: “APA referencing has been a great help”*

To ascertain which parts of the EAP writing curriculum were most efficacious in preparing students for their POS, a general, open-ended question was asked: “Do you recall learning anything about writing in the EAP program that is helpful now, in your program of study?” Four categories surfaced: three skills and one genre (reports), as follows.

#### (a) Conducting online research

Ten of the 11 participants explicitly identified citing sources as something learned in the EAP that was helping in their POS. This skill was most often mentioned in combination with paraphrasing, as the excerpts below illustrate. At other times, online research appeared within larger contexts of summarizing articles or writing reports, for example. Several participants felt that the EAP had given them an advantage with these fundamental academic writing skills that are required across the college.

P1: They [the essays] did help me in my research. The citation APA, it’s very important, this part how to paraphrase how to [pause] everything we took, it did help me *really*.

P2: I learned citation in EAP. It’s not same thing [as IEEE<sup>1</sup>] but helped me to understand. Some students did not learn citation or not take program for EAP so for them it’s hard to start.

P3: I guess in each program in (name of college) or in university we need to know how to do research, how to do reports and how I can extract information from articles and how I can get a good article to know if it’s like academic article or not. This stuff, I learned it in my EAP program, so it was so useful, and all my marks were like A+ in these courses.

P4: Paraphrasing is, super helpful for me [pause] especially when we’re working with statistics and technical information, environmental information, it’s helpful to know how to paraphrase.

P10: Before, I didn’t know anything about that like when I get sites and quotation, and how I should cite. This information I learned from the EAP program. I apply a lot of knowledge now.

#### (b) Reports

The only writing *genre* mentioned frequently enough to warrant the creation of a category was “reports.” It may be worthwhile to note that the five participants who elaborated on reports during the focus groups

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<sup>1</sup> IEEE stands for Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers, the world’s largest technical professional organization. In this context, the participant is referring to the IEEE citation and referencing system, which is used primarily in the fields of electronics, engineering, computer science, and related disciplines. The referencing style, written as “IEEE,” is also referred to as “I triple E.”



came from Advanced Technology (P2, P3, P4, P5) and Construction Excellence (P7). Below is a small sample of students' perceptions of the value of reports.

P2: Last semester in communication skills we have to write a report, so I remember I used what I learned in the EAP program ... I learned how to write academic report, and the assignments it's very help in my current program and I think in workplace, maybe in future.

P3: I guess how to write academic report. I guess it was the last level, level three. This one is very very *very* useful.

P7: Of course, the report structure by overview and the paragraphs next, and the recommendation at the end. So, it's very important. That's what really helps in my assignments now.

### (c) Paragraphs

Paragraph writing was also frequently mentioned as something learned in the EAP that is helpful in POS. Its usefulness appeared not only in assignments but also in test writing, as indicated by P1. Three of the following four excerpts identify the structure or organization of paragraphs, while P4 identifies a certain type of paragraph (reflection) learned in the EAP.

P1: This is why I said writing a paragraph helped me. That means, because sometimes, when they said short answer, they mean a paragraph not one sentence [pause] and it should be organized the way we did it in EAP.

P4: The reflection paragraphs and reading are helpful.

P5: I just started to my program and so far, we wrote paragraphs and [pause] I was not good at paragraph structure before, and so I can say that I learned it at EAP, writing a good paragraph.

P7: The paragraph outline is very important in writing assignments.

### (d) Grammar

Learning grammar was also identified, directly and indirectly, as essential.

P1: I forget to tell you also, grammar, in writing also, it is very important in those projects.

P4: Also in grammar, we worked with adjective clauses. They help to build a better structure of the sentence, look better, and this structure is rich, and it gives an insight to the reader that the writer is [pause] competent and can write complex sentences.

P9: You know the grammar passive, active, the sentences ... how to organize and plan ... it's very useful.

What was not helpful? “I don’t think so. Everything was useful.”

The inquiry also sought to determine if there were parts of the EAP curriculum that were superfluous and could possibly be eliminated. Since this question was regularly met with a simple “no” or silence, we adjusted the question and asked it in numerous different ways, but regardless the phraseology, the answers were consistent, as illustrated here:

P5: I don’t think so. Everything was useful.

P7: No, no, everything is important.

P9: Everything that we we learned in EAP is very beneficial for us now, because you know the paragraph structure, and also the APA side, and in-text citation. So the organization also of the paragraph, so ya, it’s very beneficial for us.

### Summary: Transferred skills, assignments

The skills most frequently identified in the interviews fall under the sub-theme of conducting online research; most notably, citing sources and paraphrasing. Not lost on students was the importance of accurate grammar and well-structured paragraphs as means to the end of composing high quality written assignments. The fact that all the skills appear consistently on the COMMS course outlines, as well as participants’ statements that nothing in the EAP was not helpful, suggests that the current EAP curriculum is lean and well aligned with POS writing requirements. Yet, there is always room for improvement, and the next section contains participants’ suggestions.

### *2. Recommendations to the EAP: “I wish I learned a lot of synonyms”*

Most recommendations for improving the EAP program fell into the following three sub-categories: connections to future fields of study, including vocabulary and referencing; summarizing; and group writing.

#### Connections to future field of study

##### Vocabulary

When asked about what they found challenging when writing in their POS, seven of eleven participants identified vocabulary in specific contexts, for example, writing a report, creating a game manual, and writing in a science-based course. Responses indicate a need for more discipline-specific vocabulary and, specifically, more synonyms for the same concepts within a single assignment, which is to say, to facilitate paraphrasing. Thus, although paraphrasing is considered an asset acquired in the EAP, it still represents a challenge for some participants.

P2: I didn’t learn how to use another [sic] words to explain some sentence, same meaning.

P3: The vocabulary for each field should be learned. [pause] In your field, I mean when you are in the program you will learn more. It was so difficult for me at the beginning.

P3: Yeah, maybe because report there is a beginning, middle and final. Maybe we have to repeat something ... I don't want to repeat the word, the same word, so this is difficult for me.

P4: It was a little bit challenging because we don't know a lot of words that are related to that game.

P8: I think the terms related to science are hard for me to understand and require a lot of research.

### Referencing styles, topics

These recommendations relate to helping participants prepare more effectively for their future fields of study with respect to topics (P1, P3) and referencing style (P4, P7).

P1: Maybe you can check with the team which field they will study. Maybe the essays can related [sic] to their future fields. If you have, for example, a big number who are going to business, or some members who are going to X or Y.

P3: I believe that if the students have a choice to choose a topic in his field in which he wants to study, he will learn more about his vocabulary. If you give freedom to take a topic which I want to desire to improve my vocabulary and my writing, it will be better.

P4: Maybe about citation, they can learn more than one type of citation. Maybe I triple E because we need it in our program.

P7: I don't know. Maybe maybe you should focus on I triple E instead of APA seven. I don't know your plans, but I mean we only use I triple E.

### Summarizing

Although summarizing is taught in the EAP program, more specific types of summarizing assignments were suggested. Also noteworthy is that while P7's primary suggestion is for more summarizing, part of the rationale is "to know new words, new vocabulary." This observation underlines the constitutive function of vocabulary in all writing tasks.

P1: For example, with the research, we need to know how to summarize a paragraph, or how to summarize an article to include it to be [pause] to support it. I think you can add something how to write an abstract or something like that. It is really highly required in the program.

P7: Maybe to improve the EAP writing program, students should read more and summarize. Maybe summarizing articles can help because I mean, reading can help students to know new words, new vocabulary.

## Group writing

When describing assignments in their POS, seven interviewees mentioned that most of their POS writing assignments were done in groups. Below are explicit recommendations for more group writing in the EAP.

P4: Yeah, maybe assigned work that is work that is done in groups, because sometimes even the writing assignments, we have to work with the group.

P4: For the game manual was a group of four. So, it helps to coordinate between the team members. ... So maybe being familiar with that will be helpful to manage the conflicts and to write the assignments in groups.

P7: As (P4) said, they will face it. I mean they would work in a group, and they should like, practice, and learn how to work in group.

## Summary: Recommendations to the EAP

Participants' recommendations centred on subject-specific vocabulary knowledge, summarizing, group writing, and connections to field of study regarding referencing systems and topics studied. Thus, simply because summarizing is taught in the EAP, it does not mean that students can easily and flawlessly carry out this complex writing task immediately upon entering their POS. Moreover, considering the expressed challenges associated with new and advanced subject-specific vocabulary, one could anticipate that the difficulty level of summarizing is greatly amplified in the POS, especially at the outset. Regarding different referencing styles, it is immediately beneficial for the researchers, as EAP instructors, to know that students in Advanced Technology and Construction Excellence use IEEE and not APA, and to realize that group writing is much more prevalent in POS writing than we expected.

## *3. Value of EAP: "It's not to give you flowers"*

This theme was wholly emergent in that the interview questions did not inquire after participants' perspectives on the "value" of the EAP program. Due to the frequency of mentions, as well as the fervour with which participants expressed these views, it was clear that in the interest of privileging students' voices, this finding could not be dismissed.

## Writing success in POS

Some interviewees acknowledged their POS writing successes and attributed those successes to EAP experiences.

P3: So I guess it's not to give you flowers. I guess program of EAP was very useful. ... If I find someone newcomer, this is what I tell people: "If you want to take program in English, just go to the EAP. Even though you think that you are good in English, but it's another thing. It's academic."

P5: I always go back and look at my notes, and so this really helps me. For example, what we did with (EAP Professor).

P6: My writing has been praised by the teacher many times in the current project, which is the benefit of EAP learning.

P9: All the time, when I'm writing, the professors give me a letter (A / A+) and say, "You, really! How did you know that? How you did that, [sic] how did you understand?" And it's really interesting for me, because I know what they want. I know how to summarize an article, I know what is the paraphrasing ... for me, one hundred percent this program was help [sic].

P11: So I'm doing well, and I got yeah great marks because ... I finished the EAP successfully, so now I don't have any problem in writing.

## Empowerment

This sub-category contains descriptions of how improving their writing through the EAP empowered participants in diverse ways in their POS. P1 describes being "rewarded" in the POS for being able to write academically at an advanced level. P3 expresses pride in their grades and appears also to have gained social capital (Nakhaie, 2006) with classmates because "they know that I can write." P8 is similarly empowered by the possession of APA knowledge that others do not have, while P9 describes themselves as "successful."

P1: I will be very honest because the EAP it is supportive, because the college program they need academic writing. They will not need like simple writing ... the more we master the English writing, means academically or advanced level, the more we are rewarded.

P3: It wasn't scary for me honestly so, and um almost person who I know. Uh, they know that I can write, so they want to work in group with me. ... I know so many people ... who were with me, they didn't get the marks that me, personally, I got, and I was like proud of myself honestly.

P8: I was the only student in my class who knew APA. I actually helped my classmates with APA assignment.

P9: Now, everything is clear as they want and really useful and I'm successful with that.

## Summary: Value of EAP

The two sub-categories of EAP value could be summarized as academic (success in POS) and socioemotional (increased confidence, pride, recognition). Taken together, they make a strong case not only for affirming the legitimacy of the EAP program at this institution, but also for contesting the deficit perspective of EAL students in postsecondary settings (Agostinelli, 2021).

## Discussion

### *Value of EAP*

One noteworthy aspect of our research pertains to the perceived value accorded to EAP by college students. Our findings match those of the many university-level EAP investigations in reporting that, overall,

participants perceived the EAP as having been effective in preparing them for their subsequent postsecondary study (Feng et al., 2019; Gaskaree, 2020; Grosik & Kanno, 2021; Jiang & Chen, 2019; Keefe & Shi, 2017). Interestingly, however, one group of participants in Cheng and Fox's (2008) survey perceived English not as valuable, but as a barrier to postsecondary study. This group was composed of pre-university ESL learners. In contrast, participants in the same study who had transitioned into undergraduate programs subsequently acknowledged that EAP had significantly contributed to their academic success. The alignment of the post-EAP learners' perceptions with our own results underscores the enduring positive impact of EAP, wherein students, upon reflection, recognize the program's instrumental role in cultivating academic skills, thereby enhancing their efficacy and confidence. These findings assume heightened significance in the contemporary context of fiscal constraints, wherein EAP programs may confront potential discontinuation at postsecondary institutions (Johnson & Tweedie, 2021). The question of the prudence of such cancellations is underscored by the consistently reported merits of EAP. It is indeed arguable that the demonstrable improvement in student skills, as illuminated by these investigations, confers benefits not only to individual learners but also to the collective educational milieu which stands to benefit from greater participation and success from all students.

### *Connection to Future Field of Study: Vocabulary and Referencing Systems*

Our study corroborates a finding that is consistent in the literature: that EAP students have a need for discipline-specific vocabulary (Caplan & Stevens, 2017; Deng et al., 2010; Jiang & Chen, 2019; Keefe & Shi, 2017; Tweedie & Kim, 2015; Wubalem, 2021). One suggestion for meeting this need at the present college would be through the creation of online, stand-alone, discipline-specific vocabulary courses that EAP students would take before entering their POS. Furthermore, we contend that the creation of such courses would be ideally accomplished through collaboration between EAP and POS professors, as recommended by Agostinelli (2021). In addition to the prime purpose of serving students more effectively, such initiatives could also serve to reduce the marginal positioning of EAP programs in postsecondary institutions (Grosik & Kanno, 2021). Based on this, future research should be directed toward the vocabulary needs of students.

Some participants in the present study also expressed having difficulty with technical or scientific language specific to their POS. Considering Corcoran and Williams's (2021) survey of the Canadian EAP landscape, one sees that 89% of EAP practitioners had an educational background in the humanities, social sciences, or education, with only 11% in science, technology, engineering, or math (STEM). This presents an item for speculation regarding vocabulary instruction: the possible bias of EAP instructors toward humanities topics and, by corollary, away from STEM content. This potential bias is something that could be investigated in future research, since, if confirmed, it could have implications for practitioners and administrators.

Aside from vocabulary, the other discipline-specific recommendation was to offer access to referencing systems other than APA, a finding also reported by Jiang and Chen (2019), whose respondents wished they had learned formats such as MLA and Chicago. In the current study, several participants recommended inclusion of the IEEE referencing system. This finding was unexpected, since when conducting the preliminary survey of 15 COMMS course outlines at the college, we observed that most outlines contained general requirements such as "cite sources correctly," and some specified the use of APA, but none, including course outlines for science and technology programs, identified IEEE referencing. These findings have caused us to question whether our EAP program offers a sufficiently broad choice of referencing styles and to conjecture that it might be worthwhile for EAP programs to collect data on which programs of study their students are entering and target referencing lessons toward future needs, when feasible. Lastly, as more research in the college context is shared, it would be interesting to examine the

predominant referencing styles required, as there may be a difference between the college and university requirements in this regard.

Since our second research question sought ways to better prepare students for POS writing through the EAP program, in order to more closely align with college programs regarding vocabulary, referencing styles and topic selection, we are considering the EAP-centred suggestions that represent a shift from EGAP toward ESAP (e.g., Jiang & Chen, 2019; Kandidatov, 2019; Keefe & Shi, 2017; Wubalem, 2021). At the same time, we would be misguided in believing that EGAP programs can be all things to all people. That is, it may not be feasible to fully prepare students for disciplinary studies solely through the general EAP, in which case it would prove useful for institutions to accept the inherent limitations of EGAP programs and consider providing supplementary and subject-specific support to AL students during their POS.

### *Group Writing*

One finding that could realize direct application to the current context is collaborative writing. Given that POS group writing was identified by all schools represented in this sample, the researchers recommend incorporating more group writing in the current EAP program as a means of better preparing students for their POS. This curricular change might be feasible in that it would not add assignments to an already full curriculum but would instead require students to engage collaboratively on existing assignments. To inform the creation of group writing assignments, existing research could be leveraged. In fact, one study presents promising findings of particular relevance to the current study due to its context, participants, and group-writing focus. Findings from Li and Mak's (2022) experimental design with 69 Ontario students provides evidence that first-year college students can benefit from a well-structured, online intervention that supports collaborative academic writing. In addition, numerous studies seeking to evaluate and improve the efficacy of collaborative writing in the university setting offer valuable suggestions, including five common group-writing strategies (Lingard, 2021), the use of scripts (Heinonen et al., 2020) and writing circles (Alhazmi & Elamin, 2023), the assignment of roles to group members (Ramani et al., 2022), and the application of specific technologies (Irshad, 2022; Zhang et al., 2022) to enhance online collaboration. While it more effectively prepares students for group writing in their POS, we extrapolate that more collaborative writing in the EAP would increase students' opportunities to engage in the informal discursive practices they will encounter in college POS. This change might also, in some small way, provide EAP students with much-needed opportunities to learn how to navigate the many discourses of the postsecondary world (Agostinelli, 2021; Caplan & Stevens, 2017; Grosik & Kanno, 2021; Jabeen et al., 2019; Tweedie & Kim, 2015; Van Viegan & Russell, 2019; Zhu & Flaitz, 2005).

### *Essays: Undue Prominence?*

The focus-group data affirm the importance of three writing skills (paraphrasing, paragraphs, and grammar) and one genre (reports) learned in the EAP, as well as the perception that nothing ought to be removed from the EAP writing curriculum. However, conspicuously absent from the "Transferred Skills" theme was essay writing. What made its absence "conspicuous" to the authors is the fact that much of the EAP writing curriculum is geared toward essays. Specifically, writing-course objectives progress from sentences to paragraphs in Levels 1 and 2, from multiple paragraphs to essays in Levels 3 and 4, and ultimately, to a research essay in Levels 5 and 6. The researchers anticipated that essays would be a common assignment in POS; however, only four of 11 participants mentioned essays as a typical POS assignment, and only one identified essays as something from the EAP that was helpful in their POS. This led the

research team to question the legitimacy of the strong emphasis placed on essay writing in the EAP, which, in turn, prompted a search for other relevant data.

Re-examination of the data revealed that while the essay genre received little mention, essay components were frequently mentioned, that is, the transferred skills of paragraph writing, online research, and grammar. Next, by examining EAP curriculum documents, we noted that grammar and paragraph writing are taught and evaluated at all levels. Also, at Level 4, paraphrasing and citing sources are taught for the first time, and students ultimately incorporate references into a four-paragraph cause-and-effect essay. In Levels 5 and 6, these skills are further developed, and APA conventions are added when they complete a research-supported persuasive essay. Given that most of the online research skills were learned through the essay assignments in Levels 4–6 of the EAP, it is evident that although the essay itself may not transfer into all POS, the componential skills acquired through the essay learning process do. For instance, the use of persuasive language is required in some POS like Business Administration, where students must “Apply persuasive techniques for documents, such as reports, proposals and employment correspondence” (course outline). Further, some participants indicated that in their POS, they were required to do projects and reports that included an introduction, body, and conclusion. It is likely that the organizational framework for these assignments was made more accessible through prior experiences with essay construction.

With that said, it would also be prudent to acknowledge that essays are not the only vehicle for teaching the skills and components identified as essential. For instance, several participants mentioned reports and discussion board writing as required elements of POS writing. In both these genres, paraphrasing, summarizing, referencing, and grammar could be taught. Relatedly, Cheng et al. (2004) found in their follow-up survey with EAP graduate students that short reports (one to five pages) and long reports (15–30 pages) were perceived as the most crucial genres for coverage within the EAP domain. Based on these results, the authors recommended including report writing in their EAP program which provided targeted English-language support for graduate students. Our research corroborates this finding, suggesting that a broader spectrum of genres, including report writing, may benefit students in college and graduate programs.

## **Limitations and Future Research**

One limitation of this study was the number of students in focus groups; that is, 11 students may not have represented the target population. Future studies with more participants in the college setting are recommended. Second, because participation was voluntary, respondents may have been more motivated than “average” EAP graduates and thus more biased toward positivity. Another limitation was the presence of EAP professor-researchers during the focus-group interviews, which may have similarly affected students’ responses. Further, the data captured students’ perceptions at a single point in time. In light of Cheng and Fox’s (2008) results, one wonders if participants in the present study, who valued the EAP so highly, would have had those same views before and during EAP participation. Perhaps, as Cheng and Fox (2008) found, participants’ perceptions of the EAP before they entered their POS might have been different (i.e., EAP as barrier) at that point in their educational journey. Long-term studies that follow students from the EAP into their POS could enable documentation of changing perceptions over time. Such studies would also minimize the inaccuracies inherent in recall, which may have affected responses in the present study. Finally, this exploration relied solely on students’ perceptions. A study that also included quantitative measures of English writing ability pre- and post-EAP, and then one year into their POS, would provide more objective measures of ability, which could strengthen evidence-based decision making.



## Conclusion

The present study contributes a new voice, from the college context, to the substantive university-based literature affirming the importance of EAP programs in postsecondary institutions. Our results indicate that AL students not only value EAP programs but are also empowered by them. Consequently, we add our voices to those who have expressed the paramount importance of comprehensive language support within the context of educational internationalization (e.g., Bruce, 2022; Caplan & Stevens, 2017; Tweedie & Kim, 2015).

The contemporary landscape of higher education thus presents a paradoxical situation for colleges and universities. On the one hand, there is a desire to expand international student enrolment due to the financial advantages associated with such diversification. On the other hand, institutions face the challenge of maintaining an optimal learning environment that may be compromised when AL students struggle to fully participate in courses or meet the required standards. This predicament poses difficulty not only for AL students who are paying high tuition fees but also for the broader academic community, which relies on their contributions for a rich learning and interactive experience. Neglecting this imperative carries the potential risk of eroding the academic integrity and efficacy of our institutions.

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#### *Appendix A: Student Focus Group Interview Questions*

##### A: Warm-up and Biographical Information

Interviewer will post the following biographical / academic questions in the Chat Box and ask each participant to answer them orally, as a way of introduction to the group:

1. What is your first language?
2. What is your country of origin?
3. When did you come to Canada?
4. What is your major (program of study) at the college?
5. When did you begin your major at the college?
6. How long is your program (how many years or how many terms)?

##### B: Open-ended Questions

Interviewer will ask the following questions, in a semi-structured format, with possible impromptu follow-up questions based on their responses, to seek clarification or elaboration. Each time the interviewer asks the question orally, they will also post the question in text format in the Chat Box.

*“Now, think about your current program of study.”*

7. Can you tell us about a required writing assignment in your program of study (POS), that you found difficult? (follow-up: can you tell us anything else about it?)
8. Tell us about a writing assignment in your program of study that you found easy to do.
9. What are common types of writing assignments have you done in your programs of study?
10. Do you need to do research for your writing assignments?
  - a. What citation format do you have to use?
  - b. What types of resources/articles are required?

11. Where do you do your writing evaluations such as tests and assignments (in-class or outside of class)?

*“Now, think about your time in the EAP (English for Academic Purposes) Program, and specifically think about the writing courses.”*

12. Do you recall learning anything about writing in the EAP Program that is helpful now, in your program of study? (Please explain what it was and how it is helping you now.)

13. Looking back, are there things you learned in the EAP Writing that you are NOT using in your program of study? (Please explain briefly.)

Was there anything you learned in EAP Writing that was taught differently in your program of study?

14. We are trying to improve our EAP Writing Program. What advice would you give us?

### *Appendix B: Transcription Conventions*

Symbol	Meaning
Px	P refers to participant; X represents the random number assigned to the participant
,	brief pause
...	some material has been left out for brevity
(    )	participant’s words have been replaced with a general term to ensure confidentiality
<i>italics</i>	emphasis
[pause]	pause of three seconds or more
[sic]	follows a grammatical error
[information]	information inserted by the authors, provided by the participant at another point during the interview

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