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Current practices: pre-admission assessment of American Sign Language and English language competency in interpreter education programs

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**Current Practices: Pre-Admission Assessment of American Sign Language and
English Language Competency in Interpreter Education Programs**

By

Cari A. Carter

A thesis submitted to

Western Oregon University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of:

Master of Arts in Interpreting Studies

February 2015

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**WE, THE UNDERSIGNED MEMBERS OF THE GRADUATE FACULTY OF
WESTERN OREGON UNIVERSITY HAVE EXAMINED THE ENCLOSED**

- Thesis
- Field Study
- Professional Project

Titled:

Current Practices: Pre-Admission Assessment of American Sign Language and English Language Competency
in Interpreter Education Programs.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank those who have helped me in researching and writing this thesis. In particular, I would like to thank my thesis committee members and editors for their hard work. Additionally I would like to thank my family and friends for their patience through the thesis writing process.

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ABSTRACT

Current Practices: Pre-Admission Assessment of American Sign Language and English Language Competency in Interpreter Education Programs

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February 2015

The purpose of this study is to ascertain what, if any, assessments of American Sign Language (ASL) and English language competency are currently used for admission to interpreter education programs (IEP). Research consisted of a mixed methodology discovery study conducted over two phases. Each phase sought to expound upon and clarify all facets of the pre-admission assessment process. Phase I, conducted through a nationwide survey was designed to discover what interpreter education programs are currently using—pre-admission—to assess ASL and English language competency. Information was collected about the presence of any pre-admission ASL and English language competency assessments as well as the components of those assessments. Phase II included semi-structured interviews with interpreter education program coordinators, assessment designers, faculty responsible for assessment administration, or any combination thereof. The interview was comprised of questions about pre-admission

ASL and English language assessment practices including but not limited to: theory to support assessment components, assessment design, progression of the assessment design, materials used during assessment, as well as perceived strengths and weaknesses of the assessment tool(s). Data were analyzed to identify the percent of interpreter education programs without a pre-admission ASL and English language competency assessment as well as similarities and differences in the assessments that are currently in use by interpreter education programs.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Interpreter education is once again coming to a crossroads, and the trends set now will determine the course of the profession for future generations. Interpreters were once fostered and vetted by socializing with the Deaf community they served. This allowed for interpreters to grow their skills and learn the habits and norms of Deaf culture. This model has been slowly shifting away from the Deaf community and more towards an academic trajectory (Monikowski & Peterson, 2005). Without the Deaf community to act as gatekeepers to the interpreting profession more and more students are entering and graduating from interpreter education programs without the necessary ASL and English competencies to become proficient ASL/English interpreters.

Statement of the Problem

Interpreter education programs face three problems when trying to graduate ASL and English language competent interpreters. First, according to available research (Ball, 2013; Godfrey, 2010; Russo, 2014) there is no industry-wide agreed upon standard of ASL and English language competency in interpreter education, nor is there an established means by which that competence should be assessed. Secondly, interpreter education programs are tasked by the Conference of Interpreter Trainers (CIT), the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID), and the Commission on Collegiate Interpreter Education (CCIE) to graduate competent interpreters, which includes ASL and English language competency, in a minimal amount of time. Thirdly, second-language learners of American Sign Language (ASL) are the predominant population in interpreter education

programs, and the large majority of them are graduating without the necessary ASL and English language competencies for interpreting (Godfrey, 2010).

Research Question

Each of the three problems as described above has led to the following research question: Is there a common method of assessment currently being utilized by interpreter education programs, pre-admission, to assess ASL and English language competency?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is not to propose standards of ASL and English competency but to discover what interpreter education programs are doing in spite of the lack of an agreed upon industry-wide standard of ASL and English competency in interpreter education. In 2005, Witter-Merithew and Johnson published the *Entry-to-Practice-Competencies*. These standards outline important competencies interpreters need to possess at the time of graduation from an interpreter education program, as established by the field of interpreting. Based on their research, Witter-Merithew and Johnson identified five competency domains that are further subdivided into specific skills students should be able to demonstrate at the time of graduation from an interpreter education program. Domain 3 specifically outlines the language skills competencies, which include the graduate's need to "demonstrate superior proficiency and flexibility in one's native language (L1) by effectively communicating in a wide range of situations" and "demonstrate near-native like communicative competence and flexibility in one's second language (L2) by effectively communicating in a variety of routine personal and professional situations" (Witter-Merithew & Johnson, 2005, p. 144).

With the goal of graduating competent interpreters in mind, this research focuses on the admission processes to see how much of the burden to achieve ASL and English language competency is being placed within the program curriculum and how much is being required prior to starting interpreting coursework. This study explores the nationwide assessment practices of ASL and English language competencies at the time of admission to interpreter education programs in the hopes of detecting common characteristics.

The purpose of this study is to ascertain the percentage of interpreter education programs that are assessing American Sign Language and English language competencies *before* admission to an ASL/English interpreter education program. This study also compares currently available standardized ASL and English language competency assessments to in-house institutional assessments for patterns of use, prevalence and perceived effectiveness. In addition, interpreter education program faculty were asked about requirements for entry into their interpreter education programs to illustrate any similarities or differences that address second language (L2) ASL learners coming into the profession.

Theoretical Bases and Organization

The research to date is minimal on the prescribed standards of an ASL or English language competency assessment prior to admission to an interpreter education program. There is data that suggests an assessment should exist, but nothing concrete to outline what that assessment should entail (Ball, 2013; Bernstein & Barbier, 2000). Each interpreter education program is housed within separate institutions; there is no single entity that regulates assessment of ASL and English language competency prior to

admission or during the course of an interpreter education program. This study is meant to explore the idea that without a pre-admission ASL and English language competency assessment the burden of graduating ASL and English language competent interpreters is falling to the interpreter education program curriculum. It also explores how the increased number of second-language learners to ASL has impacted the field of interpreter education and, as such, the field of ASL/English interpreting. If students do not possess the skills to communicate proficiently in both languages, then how can we expect them to become competent interpreters?

Limitations of the Study

This study focuses on the current practices in interpreter education programs. This study does not explore proposed standards or make recommendations outside of further research opportunities. Furthermore, this study, as a matter of scope, does not focus on the subjective versus objective nature of currently used pre-admission ASL and English language competency assessments.

Data collection was limited by the amount of responses to survey and interview invitations. The survey was made available for an extended amount of time to accommodate participants who may have been away from their offices for the summer term. The extended time allowed was designed to garner a higher response rate. Minimal responses to interview solicitations also limited the amount of data that could be collected.

The researcher also identified gaps in data caused by the design of the survey. Programs were asked about ASL and English competency assessments as a whole and did not, other than for a description of assessment methods, make separate distinctions

between the two individual assessments. Additionally programs were asked to list any and all pre-requisites to their interpreting program and were not given parameters that would narrow the data for this study.

The researcher also discloses a bias towards the need for nationwide standards in interpreter education, in particular, a standardized and commonly used pre-admission ASL and English language competency assessment for interpreter education programs.

Definition of Terms

The following terms will be used throughout this thesis.

Interpreter education program (IEP): Any program designed to teach ASL/English interpreting theory and practice. This includes programs also known as an interpreter training program (ITP) or an interpreter preparation program (IPP).

Readiness to Credential Gap: Refers to the time it takes for recent graduates of an interpreter education program to gain the skills and experience needed for them to obtain credentialing. Credentialing includes state licensure and national certification. (Also referred to as Readiness to Work Gap or the Graduation to Work Gap).

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The act of interpreting has existed for hundreds of years, however the profession of interpreting is comparatively new (Ball, 2013). This especially applies to signed language interpreting, which has only existed formally as a profession for 50 years (Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf, 2013). Within the past 50 years, the profession has shifted due to differing theories of practice, which has led to various pedagogical approaches within the field of interpreter education (Monikowski & Peterson, 2005).

Background

In years past, ASL/English interpreters were not required to have degrees or any formalized training (Ball, 2013). Ball writes those interpreters learned the language by socialization with native ASL users, at which point they were asked to apply those language skills to interpret communication as best they could. Ball further noted that ASL/English language interpreting was thought of only as a volunteer function and not as a profession until the late 1960s. At that time, the federal government began passing legislation such as Vocational Rehabilitation Act amendments (PL89-833) of 1965 and later in 1973 (PL 93-112), continuing with the Higher Education Act and the Education of the Handicapped Act of 1968. According to Ball (2013), with these new laws post-secondary institutions were now required to provide communication access (usually in the form of interpreters) to those Deaf students who qualified for vocational training. Where family and friends had been relied on to interpret only sparsely, now all people with knowledge of ASL were in high demand. Ball (2013) writes that with this higher demand a deficit in the number of qualified personnel available to interpret was created.

The deficit grew over time due to more legislation including the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (PL 90-142) of 1975 (Ball, 2013). Ball points to how this legislation allowed access to K-12 public education for Deaf children to attend their local mainstream schools as opposed to residential Deaf school, which in turn further increased the demand for more qualified interpreters. Close on the heels of that legislation, in 1990 the groundbreaking Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed, which continued to make facilities within the United States more accessible for Deaf people (Ball, 2013). Ball also detailed how to combat the shortage of interpreters; interpreter education programs were gradually established to train those who already had the required language competency.

Winston (2005) wrote that with the higher demand for ASL/English interpreters, post-secondary institutions took up the charge of educating those who had little to no experience performing the role. The shift from a Deaf community fostered and vetted interpreter to an academically trained interpreter has a direct correlation to the state of interpreters' ASL and English language competency today. Yet, as Monikowski and Peterson (2005) noted, "it is not clear that as we increase[d] the quantity of interpreter[s] that we have also maintained the quality of their training" (p. 1). Organizations have been created to discuss, analyze, and ratify standards of curriculum within interpreting programs. The Conference of Interpreter Trainers (CIT) as well as the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID) are two of the forerunners. At CIT conferences, held biannually, since its inception in 1979, interpreter educators have been working to identify what makes a good interpreter and what type of interpreter education program

(also referred to as ITP or IPP) curriculum is required to ensure interpreters are successful upon graduation (Ball, 2013).

During the 1980s, Godfrey (2010) explained that interpreting programs went from training based programs to more broad degree granting interpreter education programs. Godfrey (2010) goes on to describe emergence in the field of interpreter education of the idea that a two-year degree did not provide a sufficient amount of time to prepare interpreters for the field, and that the shift should be made exclusively to four-year institutions. Four years would enable students to have extended study in language and interpreting while earning their bachelor's degrees. Even armed with the knowledge that four-year degrees allowed students time to achieve better ASL and English language competency, in 2014 66% of interpreter education programs listed on the RID website (www.rid.org) are still housed within two-year institutions (often community colleges) that award associate's degrees or certificates of completion. It was not until 2003, at the national convention of the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID), that the membership passed—for the first time ever—an education requirement (Ball, 2013). The education requirement outlined the educational degree required to be eligible to sit for the performance portion of any national certification tests offered by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf. That requirement went into effect on July 1, 2012 and obligated hearing candidates to hold a bachelor's degree (regardless of major) and Deaf candidates to hold an associate's degree and be able to provide proof of degree completion before being able to register for the performance and interview certification exam (RID, 2013). The eligibility requirements seem to indicate value in obtaining higher education degrees, but as a whole, the field of interpreter education has not achieved standardization.

No Industry-Wide Standard for ASL and English Language Competency in Interpreter Education

Moser-Mercer (1994) contended that “a clear definition of linguistic competence ought to be developed to guide both potential students and trainers in their assessment” (p. 58). Godfrey (2010) succinctly stated “it is recognized that the fundamental requirements for students entering the profession are cultural and communicative competency in each language in which they work. What constitutes competency, however lacks clarity” (p. 15). Witter-Merithew and Johnson (2005) believe that the solution to graduating competent interpreters is in the consensus about what entry standards should be. Furthermore, ASL curriculum must be aligned with interpreting outcomes if the goal is to grow potential interpreting students through ASL programs.

Interpreter Education Programs as Gatekeepers

The Commission on Collegiate Interpreter Education (CCIE) published accreditation standards that outlined “benchmarks for assessing and enhancing student outcomes, evaluating and updating faculty, and improving curricula and related practices” (Commission On Collegiate Interpreter Education, 2014, p. 1). These standards frame what is being thought of as the benchmarks of a standardized interpreter education program. However, program accreditation is not yet mandatory and requires considerable resources on the part of the applying interpreter education program (CCIE, 2014). The Commission on Collegiate Interpreter Education standards (2014) task interpreter education programs with graduating language competent interpreters who are ready or near ready to pass credentialing or certification assessments. CCIE (2014) 5.3 states “The [accredited] program assures that students have a strong foundation in English and ASL

before entering into the interpreting skills classes.” Standard 5.3 goes on to detail evidence programs seeking accreditation must provide including how students are assessed for ASL and English to prove language competency (CCIE, 2014).

According to Hunt and Nicodemous (2014), “higher education gatekeeping refers to the process of assessing students to determine their fitness to practice in a profession” (p. 1). The authors write that before interpreter education became an academic pursuit, local Deaf community members would perform the function of gatekeeper by fostering newcomers who showed promise with the language. Today, interpreter education is firmly rooted in academia with varying amounts of Deaf community involvement (Monikowski & Peterson 2005). It now falls to the faculty or administrators of interpreter education programs to decide who is qualified to receive education in ASL/English interpreting and who needs remedial ASL or English language study (Ball 2013). Monikowski (1995) put it boldly when she said “knowingly accepting students into programs without requiring exemplary skills in both ASL and English fosters a linguistic façade which mars our professional standards and offends the intelligence of the Deaf community” (p. 33).

Witter-Merithew and Johnson (2005) published standards referred to as *Entry-to-Practice Competencies*. These standards represent the competencies students should possess at the time of graduation from an interpreter education program. Witter-Merithew and Johnson’s (2005) research identified five domains that interpreters should possess at the time of graduation to be considered competent. The competencies in Domain 3 focus on a student’s native language (L1) and second language (L2). Witter-Merithew and Johnson stated that students should be flexible enough to be competent communicating in

a variety of situations as is necessary to the ASL/English interpreting profession. Despite this directive, Shaw, Grbic, and Franklin (2004) contended that “although adequate active and passive language command is agreed upon as fundamental for starting interpreting classes, in reality, educators may not find such ideal conditions” (p. 74).

Campbell and Hale (2003) outlined research done by the Polytechnic of Central London. The research compared results of assessments, which focused on interpretation in consecutive and simultaneous modes, using three categories as measurement: text based (language skills), sub skill based (cognitive processing), and stress based (speed) taken at time of entry to a program and again assessed as part of a final exam at the conclusion of the program (Campbell & Hale, 2003). Campbell and Hale also reported that students who passed the rigorous final exams were those who had also passed the entrance exams with a higher overall score. While this study did not focus on ASL and English skills, it does speak to interpreter education overall.

When examining the statistics of graduates of interpreter education programs, available research illustrates a Readiness to Credential Gap (Godfrey, 2010; Maroney & Smith 2010; Patrie, 1994). The Readiness to Credential Gap refers to the amount of time it takes graduates from an interpreter education program to gain the skills necessary to achieve credentialing (either state licensure or national certification). If a student is not able to achieve credentialing after graduation it can lead to additional barriers for students including lack of resources or materials they had while attending a program, no available or less qualified interpreter mentors or supervisors, or students might lose motivation or skills if the gap is longer. Godfrey’s (2010) research identified 33 programs, 20 (60.6%) at Associate level and 13 (39.4%) at the Bachelor’s degree level, who self-reported that

they were not capable of graduating students at a certification ready level. In fact, Godfrey's (2010) research showed that on average the time needed to obtain national credentialing is 19-24 months after graduation and for state credentialing 7-12 months after graduation. Godfrey's (2010) research pointed out the primary reason for the readiness-to-credential gap in two-year interpreter education programs was the lack of prerequisite language skills. She went on to explain "within the structure of a two-year program students are rushed through language development and then hurried through the theoretical foundation" (p. 70). Additionally she asserted, "fluency in ASL cannot be achieved in two years" (p. 70). However, Godfrey (2010) discovered the programs that had the shortest readiness to work gap were all four-year institutions. Godfrey pointed out that "language fluency must be mastered prior to program entrance so focus during the course of the interpreting program can build on the pre-existing skills and lead to the development of more complex competence that the art of interpreting demands" (p. 22).

As part of their research, Quinto-Pozos (2005) and Bernstein and Barbier (2000) examined the parallel field of spoken language interpreting and note the requirements for native or near-native fluency in both target and source language before admission to an interpreting program. Language Fluency is yet to be a requirement in ASL/English interpreter education programs, and as a direct result, students and educators report that the main inhibitor of interpreting skill is language competency (Shaw et al., 2004). In addition to inhibition of interpreting skills, the range of language competency in a classroom can be increasingly challenging for teachers. If interpreter education programs continue to focus their instruction on assisting students to reach competency, not just refining pre-existing language skills, then content in interpreting theory and practice is

diminished (Roy, 2000; Shaw et al., 2004). Roy (2000) wrote, “Bringing students to adequate levels of fluency consumed so much [of the] program’s time that few instructors had [time] to consider what they would teach a student who was fluent in ASL” (p. 4). This is a challenge for Deaf-parented and Deaf students to find peers and equal learning opportunities to those offered to second language learners (Williamson, 2014). Interpreter education programs in general are designed to train second language learners and not those students who already possess ASL fluency (Roy, 2000).

Second Language Learners and Competency

Quinto-Pozos (2005) asserted a student cannot be considered fluent on the basis of only having an expansive ASL vocabulary because ASL fluency incorporates other linguistic features such as use of classifiers, referential shifts, and use of space and non-manual markers. Only then, when taken as a whole picture of language competency, can a student be referred to as fluent (Quinto-Pozos, 2005). There needs to be a clear distinction between communicative competence and passive competence (Moser-Mercer, 1994). Students need not reach fluency before entering an interpreter education program, although that would be ideal, but they must be competent users of their working languages. Anderson and Stauffer (1990) contended that students need to be so competent with the language that their language use is flexible enough to encompass all parts of ASL as well as English.

In times past, interpreter education programs would recruit students who already had, if not fluency, at least competency in ASL (Ball, 2013). This is no longer a viable option because the demand for interpreters is so great that interpreter education programs recruit from both American Sign Language programs housed within their same institution

or elsewhere (Quinto-Pozos, 2005). Quinto-Pozos also reported that American Sign Language is the fifth most common language offered in colleges. Students who have no familiarity with Deaf people or their culture take ASL to fulfill credit for foreign language, humanities, or general education requirements. A problem has been created where students are coming to learn ASL through an institution with no prior experience with the language or the culture, and those same students are being expected to matriculate into an interpreter education program after two years (four semesters) of language instruction. According to Quinto-Pozos (2005), an adult learner who is not native to ASL will require six to 15 years to become proficient in the language. Monikowski and Peterson (2005) reported that it takes at least 720 hours for students to reach competency, but the standard ASL curriculum (four semesters) is typically only 90-240 hours at best. As Quinto-Pozos (2005) stated, "The expectation that interpreting students will possess proficiency in the language after four years or less of classroom instruction to [then] perform appropriately as interpreter[s] should be re-examined" (p. 159). Few students graduate from a two-year interpreter education program with the language competency befitting a beginning interpreting student (Quinto-Pozos, 2005). However, Anderson and Stauffer (1990) stated, "proficiency in ASL was the most important characteristic of an ideal interpreter, as viewed by a sample of Deaf respondents" (p. 44). The responsibility and burden of achieving language competency should lie with ASL education and a student's own assertiveness to seek out opportunities to converse with native Deaf sign language users.

A considerable percentage of literature is focused on the fact that interpreters do not possess the needed ASL skills while taking courses or upon graduation from an

interpreter education program (Anderson & Stauffer, 1990; Ball, 2013; Godfrey, 2010; Monikowski, 1995; Quinto-Pozos, 2005; Roy, 2000; Shaw et al., 2004). However, interpreters work between two languages, namely ASL and English. Anderson and Stauffer (1990) clearly explained the importance of bi-lingual competency when they said, “to interpret accurately between spoken and signed languages, interpreters should not only possess proficient sign language skills but also possess competency in written and spoken English” (p. 68). Interpreter education programs are housed within either a two-year or four-year degree granting institution and according to general education requirements for two and four-year institutions, students will have taken at least one English composition class at the time of graduation (Cheney, 1989). Cheney (1989) pointed out that four-year institutions require 52 semester hours of general education requirements of which English composition is one. He also goes on to write that all disciplines have composition requirements that “clear and graceful expression is universally valuable, not merely an arbitrary preoccupation of English departments” (Cheney 1989, p. 13). Interpreter education programs may rely on admission essays and placement tests as a way to assess a student’s English language competency. If a student is felt to be below college level, the institution will require students to take developmental (remedial) classes until they are able to matriculate into a basic college level English composition class. According to Humphrey and Alcorn (2001), to interpret from ASL into English is a difficult and complex skill ASL/English interpreters face. Not only must they comprehend the signed message, but they must also incorporate the nuances of English, which include appropriate pacing, volume, register, use of idioms, and correct sentence structure. In fact, Taylor (2002) said, “first and foremost,

interpreters must be fluent in ASL and English” (p. 6) and “the better the command of English at both the lexical and discourse levels, the better the final product [the interpretation]” (p. 7). Taylor described the nature of American Sign Language to English interpreting by highlighting the differences in structure between languages. She points to the fact that there is not often a direct equivalency between ASL and English. She contended, “To achieve this [language equivalency while interpreting] interpreters need a strong grasp of English word and structure choices” (p. 87). Additionally, Taylor (2002) speaks to the need for competency in English by saying “skilled speakers can easily handle a vast range of speech situations by drawing on the richness and flexibility of the language” (p. 107). Moreover, Taylor highlighted the importance of public speaking skills, stating, “[public speaking] skills such as choosing effective pitch, pace, pauses and projection are vital for conveying meaning to an audience” (p. 143). Taylor refers to her research data as showing that audiences pay attention more to how something is said rather than the words used to say it. An interpreter’s ability to understand written and spoken English affects their ability to correctly interpret into ASL as well as produce a spoken interpretation of ASL concepts. Each of which are critical functions to the job of interpreting accurately and with all the nuances of the message.

According to McIntyre, Noels, and Clément (1997) students’ perceptions of their ASL and English language competencies impact their learning. McIntyre et al. studied students’ perceived and actual competency and language anxiety in French and English (native French speakers of Canada). Their results show that actual competence (as assessed by observers), perceived competence (as reported by the student’s pretest), and language anxiety are interrelated. While actual competency and perceived competency

showed no significant difference, the study showed when experience and proficiency in the language increased, the levels of student's anxiety decreased (McIntyre et al., 1997). According to Shaw et al. (2004), ASL/English interpreting students have reported low self-confidence in their language competency and wanted further or extended study to increase language competency. It can be assumed that with further language study, students are able to decrease their anxiety of language competency allowing them to focus on acquiring the theory and to practice the skills necessary to become a competent interpreter.

Unfortunately, little research has been conducted on the implications of students entering an interpreter education program without the necessary ASL and English competency. To date, the available research focused on the lack of an industry-wide agreed upon standard of ASL and English language competency in interpreter education; the results and repercussions of interpreter education programs admitting students without adequate ASL and English language competency; and the increased numbers of second language learners (L2) to ASL and their impact on interpreter education. With this study, the researcher hopes to provide evidence about whether or not interpreter education programs are assessing ASL and English language competency and to identify the methods being used to conduct the assessments.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

This study explores the admissions process of interpreter education programs to see how much of the charge to achieve ASL and English language competencies is placed within the interpreter education program's curriculum and how much is being required prior to the start of interpreting coursework. The assessment practices of ASL and English language competency prior to admission to interpreter education programs nationwide were examined in the hopes of detecting common characteristics. Research consisted of an explanatory sequential mixed methodology study conducted over two phases (Creswell, 2014). Each phase sought to expound upon and clarify all facets of the ASL and English language assessment process.

Design of the Research: Phase I

To capture as much qualitative and quantitative data as possible, the research was conducted in two phases. The objective of each phase is to further explore what, if anything, is being used to assess ASL and English language competency prior to admission into interpreter education programs.

Phase I was designed to discover the percentage of interpreter education programs that are currently using an ASL and English language competency assessment prior to admission. Additional objectives during the first phase were to discover the reason or reasons for not having an assessment as well as to find out more about what methods are being used to assess ASL and English language competency. To reach a wide audience, a survey was comprised of multiple choice and short answer questions to make responding about program practices as easy as possible for interpreter education program

representatives. The survey contained questions about the type of program each respondent represented and an additional set of questions focusing on their pre-admission ASL and English language competency assessment practices (see Appendix A). After the initial questions eliciting program information, the survey respondents were asked to report on whether they did or did not have a pre-admission ASL and English language competency assessment. Based on the answer given, survey presented the respondents different sets of questions. Thus, the interpreter education programs were divided into two categories: 1) interpreter education programs that have a pre-admission ASL and/or English language competency assessment or 2) interpreter education programs that do not have a pre-admission ASL and/or English language competency assessment.

For those interpreter education programs with an assessment, participants were asked to describe the design and content of their assessment and whether it was modeled after or based on other standardized language competency testing. The survey also gathered information on the history of the assessment process and possible iterations of their assessment. For those interpreter education programs that did not currently have an assessment, the remaining questions focused on alternative methods of assessment, reasoning for not having an assessment, and/or plans for future assessment implementation.

To develop a list of the interpreter education programs, program names were gathered from the databases listed on websites such as the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID), discoverinterpreting.com, and the Conference of Interpreter Trainers (CIT). Further interpreter education program names and contact information were collected with the use of Internet searches, institutions' own websites, and word of mouth. The compiled

list of interpreting programs in the United States, Canada, and Puerto Rico provided 180 possible ASL/English interpreting programs. Upon further research, it was determined that 15 programs were either no longer in existence or did not have any contact information. An email blast was sent to the contacts of the remaining 165 programs. Through means of undeliverable email messages it was determined that 151 viable programs existed with accurate contact information in the form of an email address. A population of 165 interpreter education programs resulting in a possible sample size of 151 programs with discoverable email contact information comprised the basis for the research that follows.

An email was sent to the director or coordinator of self-designated ASL/English interpreter programs nationwide. The email explained the purpose and scope of the research, notified participants of the informed consent (see Appendix B), provided contact information for the principal investigator, and contained a direct link to the survey. Participants were able to click on the link embedded in the email, which directed them to a Google forms survey. The survey was designed to take no longer than 30 minutes.

The survey was made available to the 151 viable programs on July 27; it remained open until September 20, 2014. The survey was kept open for an extended period of time, almost two months, to accommodate programs that did not have any faculty available during the summer or those faculty members who were returning from vacation. In total, three emails were sent to each contact email address of the 151 programs. The first email explained the purpose and scope of the research, explained informed consent, provided contact information for the principal investigator, faculty advisor and IRB committee,

and contained a direct link to the survey. The final two emails reminded participants of the purpose of the research and encouraged them to participate with updated information by the survey close date.

On the date the survey closed, of the 151 programs that were asked to participate, 45 responses were recorded. After reviewing the responses it was determined that one response was a duplicate entry. The total number of viable answers was tallied at 44 of the possible 151 programs represented (response rate 29%).

Data were exported from the Google form survey in an Excel spreadsheet. Data were then separated into qualitative and quantitative categories for statistical analysis. Quantitative data was populated into a separate Excel spreadsheet and color-coded to differentiate between programs that did and those that did not have pre-admission assessments. That data were populated into charts and graphs to illustrate the differences in the programs. Much like the quantitative data, the qualitative data was first sorted into categories of programs that do and those that do not have a pre-admission assessment. Data was then compared to find patterns in the operation of programs in regard to pre-admission assessment such as assessment content and administration. Since the focus of data collection on programs without a pre-admission assessment was to find a percentage of the total programs as well as their reasoning for not conducting an assessment, little qualitative data was collected outside of that scope.

Design of the Research: Phase II

For further study into the assessments being used, Phase II of the research was designed to closely examine a select set of interpreter education programs' ASL and English language competency assessments and identify their perceived strengths and weaknesses.

This research was conducted through semi-structured phone interviews with interpreter education program coordinators, assessment designers, faculty responsible for assessment administration, or any combination thereof. The interview questions regarding ASL and English language assessment practices included but were not limited to: theory to support assessment, criteria used in assessment, design of the assessment and materials, progression of the assessment design, weight of the testing in ASL verses English, as well as other aspects of the assessment tool(s) that arose. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions that were intended to expand on information found during Phase I and to fully understand the design of the assessment tools (see Appendix C for the Phase II Interview Questions).

To gather interview participants for Phase II, participants of the Phase I survey were asked if they would like to participate in the second phase of this study; of the 44 responding programs, 22 indicated interest in participating in Phase II interviews. From the contact information given in Phase I, the participant sample was narrowed to 11 programs. The goal was to target programs that met two criteria: 1) their institution already had (or would shortly implement) in-house ASL and English language competency assessments, and 2) the assessment was unique to the institution not based on standardized testing such as the Sign Language Proficiency Interview (SLPI) or its raters. The researcher wanted to focus on the variations that exist among an institution's own ASL and English language competency assessments rather than any standardized assessment form.

Interview invitations were sent out, via email, to the 11 program directors or coordinators. Four of the 11 programs responded to the initial call for interviews. Only

three programs continued contact and were available for scheduled interviews. When the interview time was set, the participants were sent an interview consent form (see Appendix D) as well as the list of questions to be asked. Participants were notified that the interview would be recorded for note-taking purposes only and all identifying information would be kept confidential. Each interview was conducted over the phone and lasted approximately 45 minutes.

These interviews were recorded in an audio format for review and note-taking purposes only. Simultaneously, typed notes were also taken during the interview by the principal investigator. The recordings have only been heard by the principal investigator and will not be made public. Findings have been compared between interpreter education program representative's responses to identify as many similarities and differences as possible. All interview participant names and program information have been kept confidential, and programs will not be singled out or referred to by name without consent from participants. The principal investigator reviewed the notes and listened to the recorded interviews to ensure all pertinent data was recorded accurately. Based upon a descriptive and interpretive analysis, data were then analyzed by color-coding informational concepts to locate themes. Once themes were coded and highlighted, the data for each of the three programs were also analyzed for unique patterns that were not replicated at the other institutions. Data were also compared to the results of the Phase I survey to further support or contradict any conclusions.

Chapter 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The population of this study was 165 identified ASL/English language interpreter education programs. Of that population, a sample of 151 programs was chosen as described earlier. With a response rate of 29%, this allowed for a confidence level of 99% with a confidence interval of +/- 2.78. Of the 151 programs that were successfully contacted, 44 survey responses were identified as valid and distinct. Results show that 24 of the programs have some type of pre-admission ASL and English language competency assessment while 20 programs did not have any defined pre-admission ASL and English language competency assessment. In this chapter, the results from the survey and interviews will be reported and the implications of the data discussed.

Phase I: Survey

Programs with no pre-admission ASL and English language competency assessments. As illustrated in Figure 1, of the 20 programs without a pre-admission ASL and English language assessments, 75% (15) were at the two-year associate's degree level (with programs awarding either an associate's degree or a certificate of completion). Five of the 20 programs (25%) were at the bachelor's degree level.

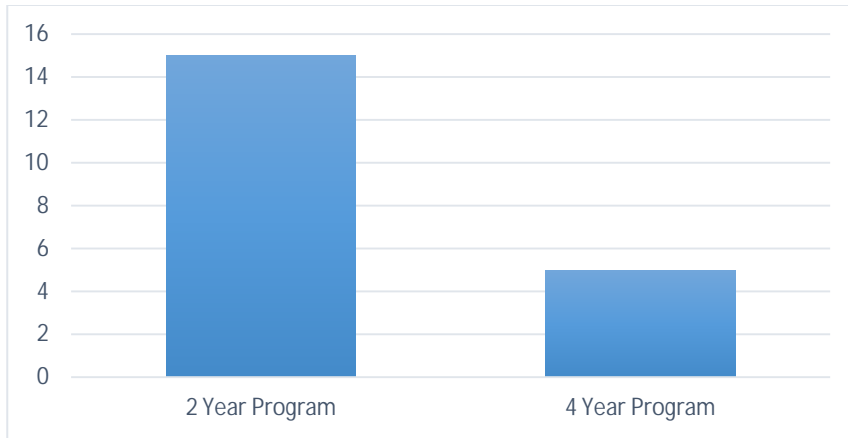


Figure 1. Programs with no formal pre-admission ASL and English language assessments

When looking at program longevity as explained in Figure 2, the number of programs with without pre-admission ASL and English assessments breaks down as follows: 12 of the 20 programs (60%) indicated their interpreting program had been in place for more than 20 years. 4 of the 20 programs (20%) programs have been around for 16-20 years, one program each (5%) has been in place for 11-15 years and 6-10 years respectively. Finally two programs (10%) have been in place for less than five years.

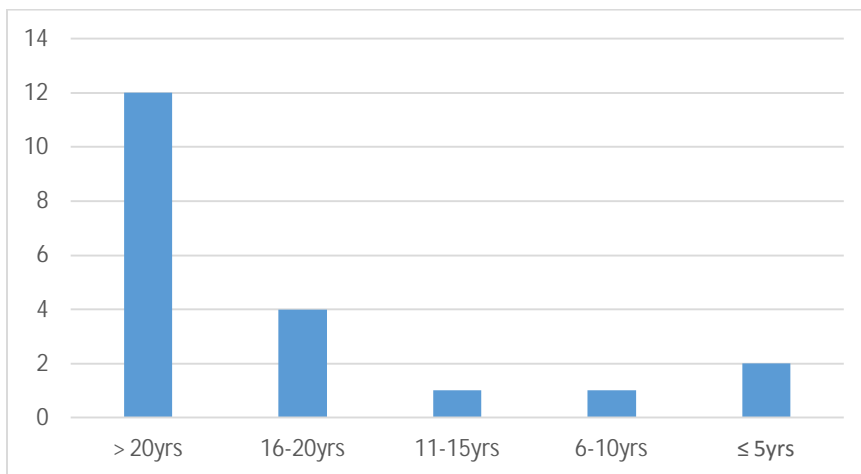


Figure 2. Longevity of programs without a pre-admission ASL/English competency assessment.

The survey also looked at the number of students who apply each year to the interpreter education programs without a pre-admission ASL and English language competency assessment, as shown in Figure 3 below. Four of the 20 programs (20%) indicated more than 50 student applicants each year. Two programs (10%) have 26-50 student applicants each year. Eight of the 20 programs (40%) of the programs have 16-25 applicants and in addition eight other programs (40%) have 0-15 student applicants each year.

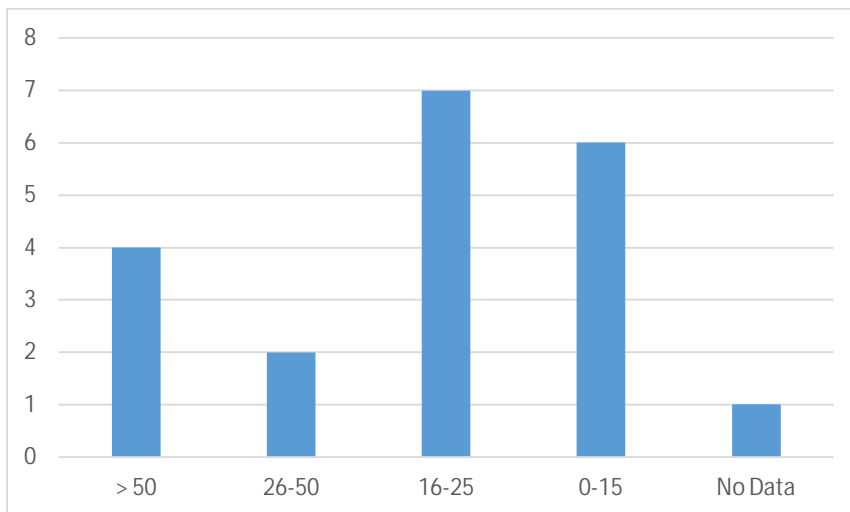


Figure 3. Average number of annual student applicants to IEPs without an assessment

Further data looked at the average number of students enrolled in an interpreter education program without a pre-admission ASL or English language competency assessment; see Figure 4 below. Of the 20 programs without an assessment, four (20%) have more than 30 students enrolled. Furthermore four of the programs (20%) have only 21-30 students enrolled, and only two programs (10%) have 16-20 students enrolled. The

majority of programs, seven (35%) indicated they have 11-15 students. Finally three programs (15%) have between zero and ten students enrolled on average.

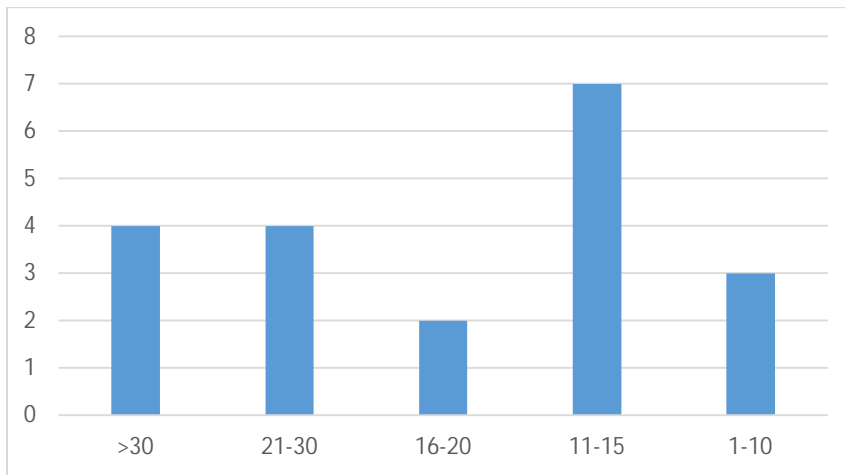


Figure 4. Average number of students enrolled in an IEP without an assessment

Of the 20 programs without a pre-admission ASL and English language competency assessment, six programs (30%) identified college policy as the reason they do not have a pre-admission assessment in place, as can be seen in Figure 5. Four programs (20%) stated that they had never had a pre-admission assessment put in place. Eight programs (40%) identified a lack of resources (monetary, faculty, academic, or availability of raters) as the reasoning for not being able to put an assessment in place. Two programs (10%) did not provide an answer to this question.

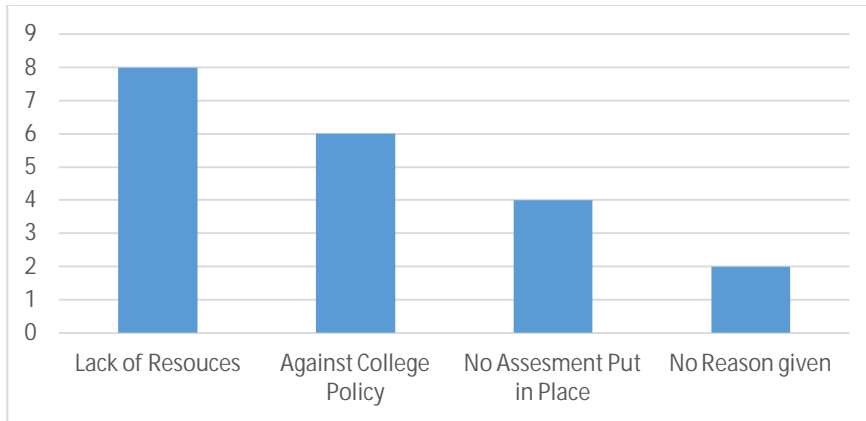


Figure 5. Reason for no pre-admission ASL and English language assessments

Of the respondents, 17 of the 20 programs (85%) without a pre-admission ASL and English language assessment do assess student's language competency at other times in their program as seen in Table 1. Nine of the 17 programs (53%) assess language competency at least one other time during the course of the program via benchmark assessments (e.g., before practicum or before graduation). Eight of the 17 programs (47%) that do assess at alternate times listed students' passing grades in required coursework as their means for assessing ASL and English language competency. Two of programs listing coursework as an assessment specified that students had to pass their interpreting coursework with a B average or better to be allowed to continue to the next class. Three of the 20 programs (15%) without a pre-admission ASL and English language competency assessment indicated that they have no pre-admission assessment nor do they have any further testing for language competency at other times in the course of the program.

Table 1

Additional and Alternate Assessments

<u>Type of Alternate Assessment</u>	<u>Programs</u>
Benchmark Assessments (e.g., before practicum or graduation)	9
Coursework (Passing Grades)	8
No Alternative Assessment	3

Programs with a pre-admission ASL and English language competency assessments. Programs that indicated that they do have a formal ASL and English language competency assessment totaled 24 of the 44 program responses (54%). Of those programs, as illustrated in Figure 6, 13 programs (54%) were at a four-year bachelor’s degree-awarding institution; 11 were at an associate degree-awarding institutions (4 of which also award certificates of completion).

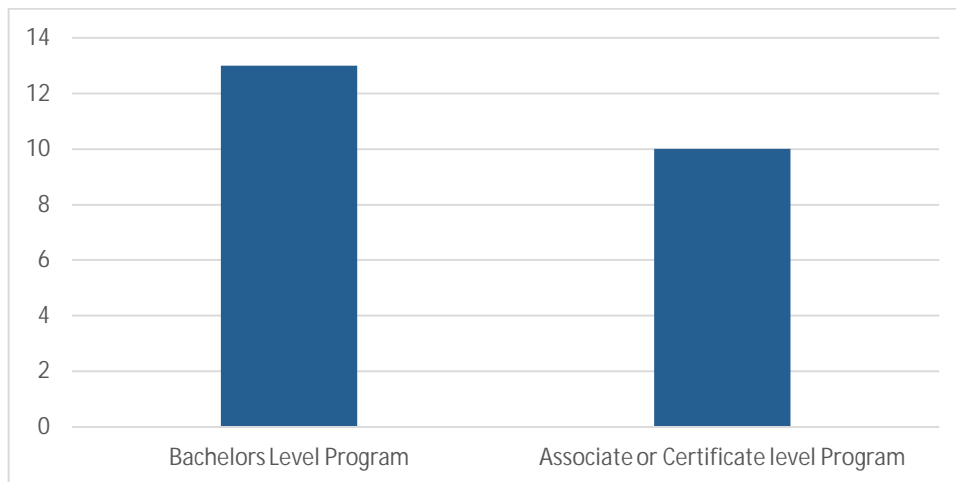


Figure 6. Programs with a pre-admission ASL and English language assessment

The survey questions elicited data on the programs with ASL and English language assessments prior to admission. Figure 7 shows the longevity of the programs.

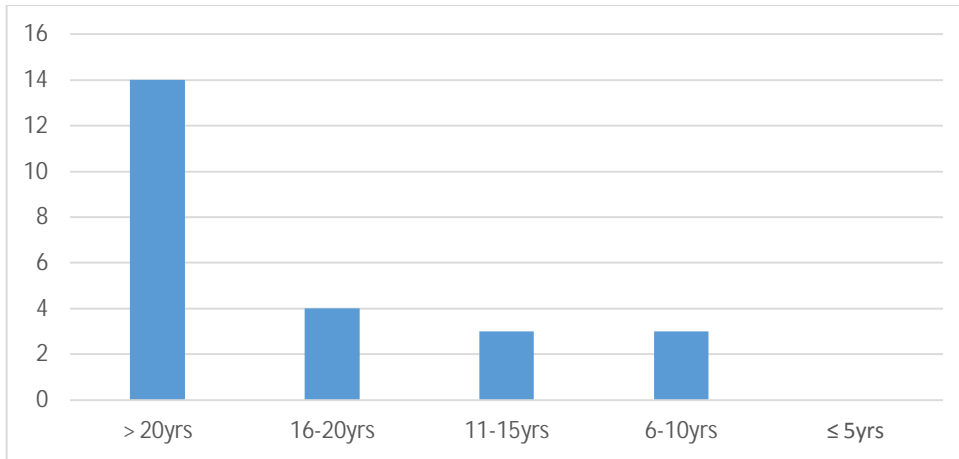


Figure 7. Longevity of IEPs with a pre-admission ASL and English language assessment

When asked how long the interpreting program had been in place, 14 of the 24 programs (58.3%) reported their programs had existed for more than 20 years. Four programs (17%) indicated 16-20 years, three programs (13%) marked 11-15 years, and similarly three programs (13%) indicated the program had been around for 6-10 years. None of the programs indicated they had been in existence for five years or less.

Programs with a pre-admission ASL and English language competency assessment were also asked about the average number of students that apply to their program each year. As indicated in Figure 8, three of the 24 programs (13%) indicated they have more than 50 student applicants each year. Four programs (17%) have 26-50 students apply, and eight of the 24 programs (33%) have 16-25 students apply on average each year. Finally seven of the 24 programs (29%) have between 0-15 students apply and 2 programs (8%) did not provide a response to this question.

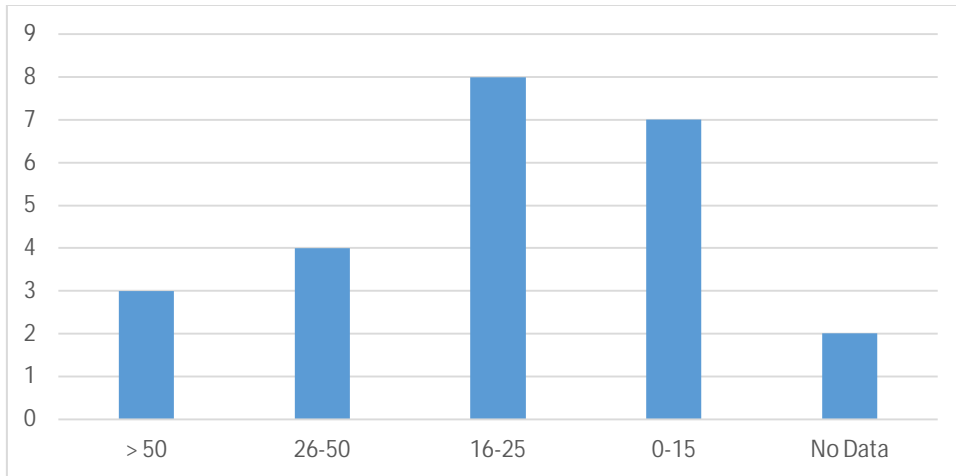


Figure 8. Average annual number of applicants to programs with a pre-admission ASL and English language assessment

Interpreter education programs with a pre-admission ASL and English language competency assessment were also asked to indicate on average how many students are enrolled into their programs each year, as shown in Figure 9. None of the 24 programs indicated they had more than 30 students at any given time enrolled in their program, and six of the 24 programs (25%) have an average of 21-30 students at any given time. Additionally, five programs (21%) listed 16-20 students, four programs (17%) marked 11-15 students and seven programs (29%) have only 1-10 students, on average, attending their programs. Two of the 24 programs (8%) did not complete this part of the questionnaire.

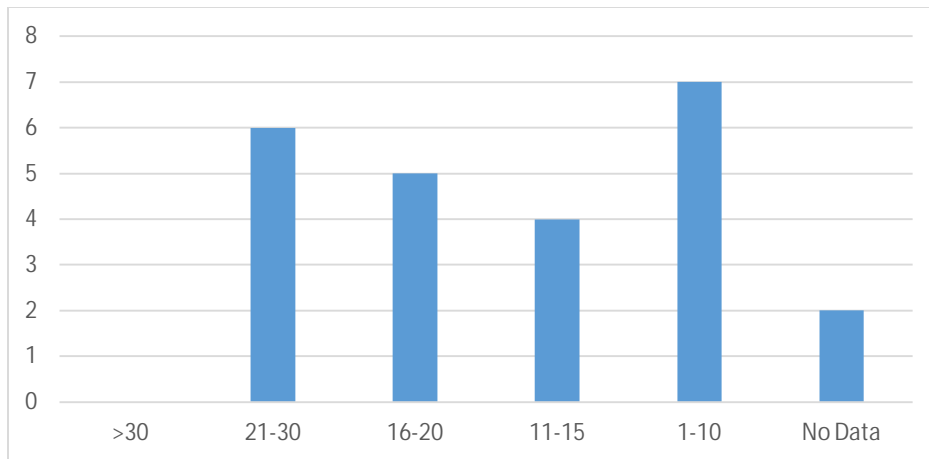


Figure 9. Average number of students enrolled in an IEP with an ASL/English assessment

When focusing on the specific methods for assessing ASL and English language competency, program representatives were asked about the longevity of the current assessment method and the duration of the assessment. Longevity results are shown in Figure 10. The research discovered that 15 of the 24 programs (63%) stated their current method for assessing ASL and English language competency pre-admission had been in place for more than five years. Two of the 24 programs (8%) have had their current assessment for between 4-5 years. Additionally, three programs (13%) indicated only 2-3 years, and only one program (4%) stated its current assessment had been in place less than one year. Three of the 24 programs (13%) did not provide data for this question.

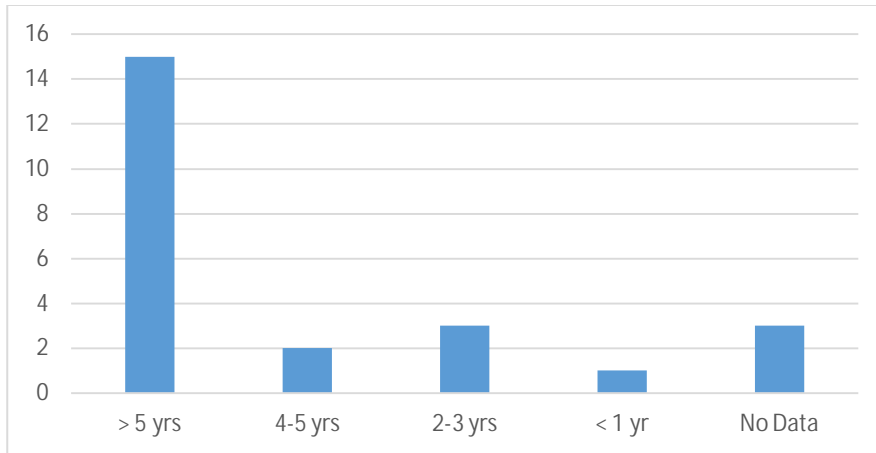


Figure 10. Assessment method longevity for IEPs with an assessment

Another question asked on the survey related to the duration of an interpreter education program’s current ASL and/or English assessment. The researcher was looking for any similarities across programs in the duration of the chosen assessment method (see Figure 11); 12 of the 24 programs (50%) indicated their assessment took one hour or less. Three programs (13%) indicated it took more than one hour but less than three hours to complete their ASL and English language competency assessment. Two programs each (8%) said their assessment was three or fewer hours 1-3 hours to complete their assessment. Only one program of the 24 (4%) indicated their assessment was between 3-5 hours in length. A total of four programs (17%) did not provide data on this question.

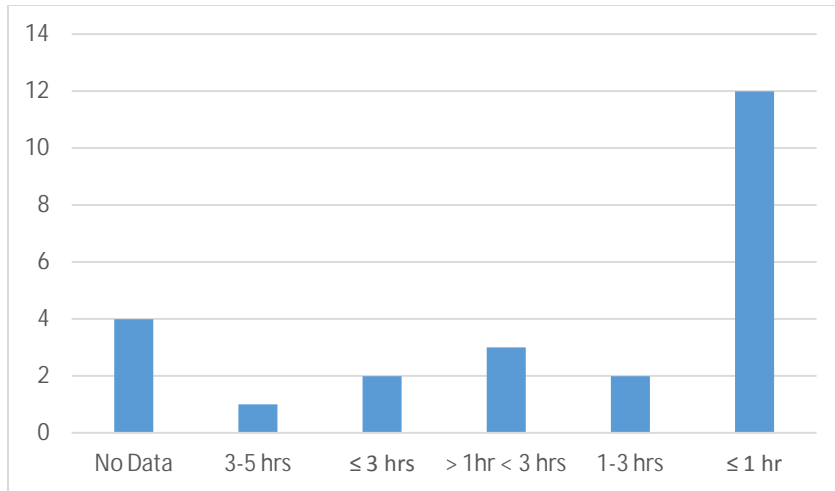


Figure 11. Pre-admission ASL and English language assessment method duration

When asked about the makeup of their ASL and English language assessment, respondents were given a multiple-choice list, asked to indicate all aspects that apply, and were given an additional text box to include information that differed from the options given. The options included:

- Activities Conducted in L1 (Completed Solo)
- Activities Conducted in L2 (Completed Solo)
- Activities Conducted in L1 (Part of a Group)
- Activities Conducted in L2 (Part of a Group)
- Paraphrasing in L1 or L2
- Consecutive or Simultaneous Interpreting
- Memory Function
- Personality
- Self-Confidence
- Other- Indicate alternative

Results are displayed in Figure 12 below. The highest numbers came in the category of activities conducted in student's second language (L2 or ASL) and completed solo with 16 programs. This was closely followed by 12 programs using activities using student's native language (L1 or English) and completed solo. Seven programs asked students to paraphrase information in either their L1 or L2, six programs allowed students to work in groups while utilizing their L2 and only one program has students work in groups while using their L1. Also, two programs ask for students to participate in activities that include consecutive or simultaneous interpreting. Four programs indicated they do something other than the options listed but did not specify as to what that assessment method would entail. Furthermore, some of the programs are using their assessment methods to look at competencies other than those for language however due to the scope of this study, the programs were not asked to describe this part of their assessment methods. Three programs look at memory function in students, three programs assess personality, and three assess self-confidence.

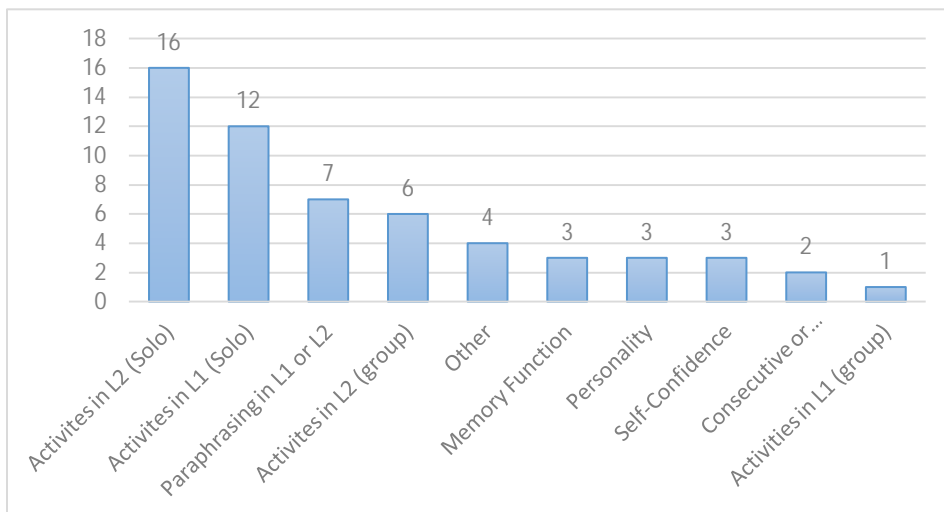


Figure 12. Pre-admission ASL and English language assessment activities

When program representatives were asked about their use of a standardized ASL and English language assessments, 10 of the 24 (42%) program respondents indicated some use of a standardized assessment for language competency (see Table 2). Two programs use a modified version of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL, 2012) standards to dictate their assessment method. Six program respondents indicated the use of the Sign Language Proficiency Interview (SLPI) in one manner or another: three of those programs require students to pass the SLPI with an intermediate rating to begin their interpreting classes; one program requires students to take the SLPI but did not indicate what level students must achieve to continue study; two programs have an in-house assessment that is not the SLPI, but is modeled after the SLPI. Additionally two programs use a form of the American Sign Language Proficiency Interview (ASLPI): one program requires students to take the ASLPI and get a score of 2 or better to continue their interpreting studies; the other program has an in-house assessment that is modeled after the ASLPI. Accounting for in-house assessment design, in total only 7 of the 24 (29%) interpreter education programs actually utilize a standardized ASL assessment.

Table 2

Standardized ASL competency assessment

<u>Standardized Test</u>	<u># of Programs</u>	<u>Individual Results</u>
SLPI	6	
Intermediate Score		3
No Minimum Level Indicated		1
In-house Assessment		2
ASLPI	2	
Score level 2 or Better		1
In-house Assessment		1
ACTFL (Standards)	1	

When specifically focusing on assessing English language competency, programs were asked to describe their pre-admission assessment methods. Of the 24 programs that do have an ASL and English language assessment prior to admission, five programs indicated they do not assess English language skills at all, as described in Table 3. Fourteen of the programs use either college placement tests, passing of English composition coursework, or written materials when applying to count as their English language assessment. That leaves eight programs that do specifically assess English as part of their admission process the most common method of assessment is paraphrasing either from L1 to L2 or within English. Additionally only two interpreter education programs indicated the use of an assessment that is conducted outside of the institution and would be considered standardized. One program requires students to take and pass the American College Testing (ACT) assessment with a score of 21 or better; the other program requires students to take the Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) assessment (Ortiz, 2004), although a specific score was not specified.

Table 3

English Language Competency Assessment

<u>Method of Assessment</u>	<u># of Programs</u>
Institution Metrics	14
In-house English Assessment	8
No English Language Assessment	5
American College Testing (ACT)	1
College Academic Language Proficiency	1

Note. IEPs were asked to indicate all metrics that applied.

Programs were also asked to list the coursework that is required before applying to their program. No significant patterns were found. Only one program required more

ASL coursework than just four semesters (two years); 10 programs required language study for four semesters before beginning the interpreting coursework; three other programs required only two or three semesters of ASL coursework. One program indicated it did not require any prerequisite classes in ASL at all. Six programs self-described their pre-requisite as having some ASL coursework requirements but did not specify the number of semesters required.

Phase II: Interviews

Interview invitations targeted interpreter education programs that met two criteria: their institution already had (or would shortly implement) an in-house ASL and English language competency assessment, and the assessment was unique to the institution not based on standardized testing such as the Sign Language Proficiency Interview (SLPI) or its raters. However, due to the limited response to the interview invitation (response rate 27%), the programs that responded are more indicative of the range of possible pre-admission ASL and English language assessment options than to the in-house designed assessments that the survey data indicated. With the three program faculty that were interviewed, “Program A” utilizes the American Sign Language Proficiency Interview (ASLPI) conducted by Gallaudet University; “Program B” uses a hybrid of community rater involvement and standardized metrics; and “Program C” uses community rater dependent observation based assessment.

Program A is housed in a four-year institution that awards a bachelor’s degree, and does not require any ASL language competency assessment at the time of admission. The English language requirements are only those that are required by the institution for admission and graduation. Students start their ASL language study in their freshman and

sophomore years. To continue their study, junior year students are required to take the ASLPI through Gallaudet University, the cost of which is paid by the student. Students must achieve a score of 2 or higher to continue on to the interpreting classes. Level 2 is defined by Gallaudet as “Signers at this proficiency level are able to express uncomplicated communicative tasks in straightforward practical and social situations” (Gallaudet University, 2014). Program A’s faculty felt this to be the minimum competency needed to start in their interpreter education program. If a student fails to achieve a score of 2, the program allows for several options based on the score they do achieve. If students achieve a zero they are required to change their major since they have had, at that point, four semesters of ASL study and failed to achieve the basic levels of competency. If students get a 1 or a 1+ rating they are allowed to work with a tutor and retake the test. Students must earn a minimum score of 2 on the retake, or they must defer interpreting coursework for a year or change their major. When asked why Program A requires students to take the ASLPI instead of an in-house assessment, the program director emphasized that the test was standardized and thus provided validity and reliability. Program A indicated there was a history, before the current program administrator, of graduates lacking ASL competency at the time of graduation. This led to the implementation of the ASLPI requirement by which the coordinator has noted a discernible difference in the graduate’s ASL skills.

Program B is located in a two-year community college that awards an associate’s degree. The program requires a pre-admission ASL and English language competency assessment. The difference between Program B and others interviewed is that the assessment comes before admission into the third semester of ASL course work; not after

the typical four semesters, or two years, of ASL study. Program B indicated they had recently changed their assessment procedures. The previous assessment consisted of students meeting with a panel of two or three Deaf people (mostly Deaf faculty at the institution). Students were expected to introduce themselves and converse with the panel as well as translate a given text. The program coordinator saw two flaws in this assessment design. The students had not yet been trained to translate text but were expected to possess the skills to translate for the assessment; even those students who showed competency in ASL struggled to translate the text accurately. Secondly, the assessment did not rely on any standardized metrics and was therefore subjective to the panel's opinions of the students (most of whom were current or former ASL students). Program B's new assessment was piloted over summer 2014 and now includes a quantitatively measured portion in the form of a multiple choice vocabulary test administered, in house, on a computer. The second part of the assessment involves the student being presented a situation that they are then asked (by the Deaf staff of the college) multiple-choice questions to test comprehension. Finally, students are taped signing responses to prompts, describing a person based on a given picture, and describing an event based on a video clip provided (e.g., an automobile accident). Student videos are then reviewed by a panel of Deaf staff.

Benefits the program coordinator saw to this method were the correlation to quantitative data produced from the multiple-choice questions and the qualitative data given by the panel. The new assessment has provided more validation to the selection and removed some of the subjective nature of the panel assessment. Program B's coordinator indicated further iterations of the assessments are to include Deaf raters from outside of

the institution that would work with a standardized rubric when assessing the student videos to further eliminate any bias the Deaf staff might have.

Program C is also housed within a community college and awards an Associate's Degree at completion. Their assessment has been in place for approximately seven to eight years but undergoes minor changes each year based on the feedback from the students and raters the year before. The assessment consists of community raters coming in for an all-day observation and interaction with, on average, 36 student applicants. Community raters are an equal mix of professional Deaf consumers, Deaf educators (from within this institutions and others), certified interpreters, and other college staff. There are two raters, one Deaf and one hearing, assigned to observe each student. Each rater will closely observe, and focus on, two students. While raters are able to comment on students not directly assigned to them, they are principally responsible for the two assigned students. Observations take place throughout the day during various activities that students must perform. Only one of the activities is conducted in English, while the rest of the day students are required to interact in American Sign Language. Some of the activities are simple "meet and greet" with a group of students, while other activities involve demonstrations of critical thinking and language ability. The whole day seeks to understand, holistically, the student's strengths and weaknesses in terms of language, attitude, critical thinking, poise, and so on. The coordinator of Program C indicated they are eventually looking to add a more standardized assessment, such as the ASLPI, to their pre-admission assessment procedures but did not want to over-burden the students.

During the interview process, each of the three program Coordinator/Directors were asked about their assessment's perceived strengths and weaknesses. All

interviewees indicated a greater weight being put on assessing ASL language competency as compared to assessing English language competency. The three programs stated they would like to do more to assess English language competency prior to admission into their interpreting program. The three programs have experienced program conflicts when it was deemed students did not have an adequate level of English competency to effectively interpret course materials. Programs B and C had no recourse when students were identified to be less competent in English, other than reflecting the deficit on their tests and course grades. Program A instituted an intervention with the students to allow them to strengthen their skills before continuing their course work. Program B's coordinator stated that a standardized English assessment would not be feasible due to the nature of the student population. In what was described as a high Latino and immigrant student population, English language competency is a struggle for all disciplines at Program B's institution. Programs A and C also indicated a population of bi-lingual and multi-lingual students presented an issue, but to a lesser extent.

Discussion

Based on the data collected it can be estimated that almost 45-50% of interpreter education programs are not conducting any formal ASL and English language competency assessment prior to admission into their program. Those programs are presumably dependent on course grades or benchmark testing to screen out students without ASL and English language competency or are graduating interpreters without ASL and English competency.

Institutions without pre-admission ASL and English language competency assessments are predominantly (16 of the 20 programs; 80%) housed within institutions

awarding two-year degrees. They lack the resources necessary to implement or maintain a valid assessment. These resources can come from the institution, the program itself, or from the students. The data on the institutional break down of programs without an assessment is compared to the almost even split (13 Bachelor's degree and 10 Associate's degree) of programs with a pre-admission ASL and English competency assessment. This is further support for interpreter education programs to be housed in four-year institutions as originally proposed by and discussed at CIT (Ball, 2013). If interpreter education programs continue to be housed in two-year institutions they will need to be more stringent in implementing pre-admission ASL and English language competency assessments to assure a language competent student population. However, four-year institutions allow more time for ASL and English competency to develop and to address issues in language competency that may present after the initial assessment.

When looking at program longevity for programs both with and without pre-admission ASL and English language competency assessments there is minimal difference in the trends. The biggest difference that can be noted is with programs that do have an assessment; none of the programs that responded have been in place for five years or less. In fact, the trend for programs with an assessment skews more toward programs that have been in place for a long time 58% of which have been in place for more than 20 years and an even distribution of remaining programs from 6-20 years. Contrary to these findings the programs without a pre-admission ASL and English assessment the majority (60%) have also been in place for more than 20, however two of the 20 programs (10%) of the programs have be in place five years or less.

The average number of students that apply to interpreter education programs either with or without a pre-admission ASL and English language competency assessment shows no remarkable difference both with a median range of 16-25 students. The same can be said for the number of students accepted or enrolled in interpreter education programs with or without pre-admission ASL and English competency assessments as the median range is 11-20 students.

When comparing longevity of current assessment method to that of the longevity of the interpreter education program, there were significant results. Of the 24 programs with an assessment, 15 (63%) have had their current assessment in place for more than five years, and of those 24 programs 14 (58%) of them have been in place for more than 20 years. This indicates the longer the program has been in place the more likely it will be to keep a currently used assessment practice.

Furthermore, institutions with a pre-admission ASL and English language competency assessment largely have created their own assessment method instead of using a standardized form of language competency assessment. This trend might change as more research is done and the interpreter education field can come to a consensus as to what constitutes standard ASL and English competency. Once a baseline has been established, it will become easier for interpreter education programs to take the next step to developing a truly nationally standardized, commonly used, ASL and English language competency assessment. Moreover, the interviews indicate that even if there is a desire by the director or coordinator of an interpreter education program to conduct a standardized form of language competency assessment, it is not often supported by others within the interpreter education program or the institution where it is housed. With all of

the programs surveyed and interviewed, the topic of registration numbers and student matriculation was paramount. One interpreter education program coordinator indicated pushback from the administration of their institution to keep enrollment numbers high regardless of the results of a pre-admission ASL and English language competency assessment.

The majority of interpreter education programs (52%) conduct an ASL and English language competency assessment that lasts an hour or less. The methods for assessment are mostly conducted as solo activities in either the Language 1 or Language 2. When focusing on only ASL or English language competency one hour or less can be an adequate amount of time, based on assessment method. However if programs are looking to assess ASL and English language competency, critical thinking, adaptability as well as other attributes one hour or less will not be enough time.

The most consistent finding was that a majority of interpreter education programs focus on ASL competency but rely on their institution's admission policies and general education coursework requirements to measure written English language competency. The qualitative results showed in both the survey and interviews that interpreter education program faculty feel their programs do not properly assess English language competency and do not have any measures in place, other than failing grades, to screen out students who, after admission, are found to not have an adequate level of English language competency. This finding is thought provoking, especially given that large majority of student admissions into interpreter education programs are students who come to ASL as a second language with English as their L1. During the interviews, two of the interpreter education program coordinators indicated a large student population

that are tri- or multi-lingual and that might be a hindrance to English language competence.

Additionally, there were also no significant patterns to be found in the pre-requisite coursework required, outside of direct language study. Some programs required ASL linguistics or Deaf culture classes, while others required public speaking and pre-interpreting skills. Pre-requisite coursework seems to be very program dependent with few parallels to be drawn.

Chapter 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was informed by three perceived problems that led to one central research question. The problems that exist are, first, the lack of an industry-wide agreed upon standard of ASL and English competency in interpreter education. Secondly, interpreter education programs are being expected to graduate competent interpreters, but interpreter education programs curriculum and faculty are consistently impacted by students who are admitted without adequate ASL and English language competency. Finally, it is important to analyze the impact of increased enrollment of second language learners (L2) to ASL to interpreter education programs. The research question posed: Is there a common assessment being used by interpreter education programs, pre-admission to assess ASL and English language competency?

The study was conducted through an explanatory sequential mixed methodology study carried out over two phases. Each phase sought to further explain and clarify all facets of the assessment process. Phase I consisted of a nationwide survey sent to identified programs compiled from various sources. The survey consisted of two tracks where the respondents were able to indicate if their interpreter education program did or did not conduct a pre-admission ASL and/or English language competency assessment. Data (44 responses) from the survey was transferred to Excel worksheets and studied for themes, commonalities and outliers. Interview invitations were sent to 11 programs that met the criteria for further study in Phase II. Phase II consisted of open-ended interview questions that discussed design, implementation, and perceived strengths and weaknesses of assessment method. Interviews were conducted with three interpreter education

program faculty to expand upon the themes discovered in the survey as well as to clarify their specific methods of pre-admission ASL and English language competency assessment.

In response to the research question asking whether a common assessment is being used by interpreter education programs to assess ASL and English competency prior to admission, the research data shows that only 24 of the 44 participating programs (55%) are conducting any type of ASL and/or English language competency assessment pre-admission. Of those interpreter education programs with a pre-admission ASL and English language competency assessment, only five programs are using a standardized form of ASL assessment such as the SLPI or the ASLPI. For English language competency assessment, 14 of the 24 interpreter education programs (58%) rely on their intuition's metrics, such as placement tests, passing grades in English coursework, or written materials provided by the students at time of application. It is safe to say that at this time there is no common pre-admission ASL and English language competency assessment being used by interpreter education programs. These numbers would likely change if the interpreter education field came to a consensus as to what ASL and English competency looked like in terms of interpreter education applicants.

Other observed commonalities, in terms of ASL and English assessment methods, included a primary focus on activities conducted solo by the applicant in either their native language (L1) or their second language (L2). It should be noted that in all of these instances of assessment L1 was testing English language skills and L2 was testing ASL skills. Sixteen programs assessed students based on activities conducted in L2 (ASL) mostly as video samples or panel/individual interviews and 12 programs indicated the use

of assessment activities in L1 (English) in the form of written materials or interviews. Additionally, 63% or 15 of the interpreter education program's assessments have been in place for more than five years, and half of the programs (12) indicated that their pre-admission assessment lasted one hour or less. If programs are focusing solely on language competency than one hour can prove to be an adequate amount of time. However as programs look to assess language competency as well as critical thinking, adaptability, personality, memory function as well as other attributes one hour will not be enough time.

It should also be noted that of the 24 programs that have pre-admission ASL and English language competency assessments, 13 (30%) of the programs are housed within four-year bachelor's degree awarding institutions, and of all of the 44 interpreter education programs 14 (32%) have been in place for more than 20 years. Based on interview responses, program faculty observed shortcomings in the English language assessment methods that are currently in place. Each of the three interpreter education program faculty admitted to focusing their language assessment more on ASL and allowing the institution requirements for English language study to act as their English language competency assessment. Each of the three programs expressed desire to implement more pre-requisites or a more focused English language assessment and possibly an assessment that addressed English competency for second language learners.

This study suggests several areas for future research. Additional studies should examine the percentage of programs that use a subjective method that relies on raters and their expertise as compared to a more objective, standardized metric-based approach to pre-admission ASL and English language competency assessments. In addition, data is

needed related to the graduation-to-work gap that exists for students who graduate from a program with a pre-admission ASL and English language competency assessment and those interpreter education programs without assessments. Further research is also needed to understand the prevalence and impact of students who are currently accepted to interpreter education programs as L1 English language speakers as compared to percentage of students applying to an interpreter education program whom come from a tri or multi-lingual background.

In conclusion, since there is no industry-wide agreed upon standard for ASL and English competency as it pertains to interpreter education, each interpreter education program is working as a silo to graduate the most competent interpreters possible. This includes creating ASL assessments that best fit their needs but are unique to each institution. Since the students who apply to interpreter education programs are predominantly second language learners (L2) to ASL who have been recruited or matriculated from an ASL program that lasts only two years, the likelihood that students will apply to an interpreter education program with the necessary ASL competency is low. If students apply to an interpreter education program and are not assessed for ASL and English language competency prior to admission, the burden for language development will fall to the interpreter education curriculum and faculty. When this is the case, less time can be spent on the acquisition of interpreting theory and practice. In turn, interpreter education programs are less likely to graduate competent interpreters and therefore contribute to the Readiness to Credential Gap that plagues our field. Since ASL/English interpreter education is now firmly rooted in academia it is the responsibility of interpreter education programs to be gatekeepers to the profession and to

maintain the standard of professional quality we have strived to achieve over the last 50 years.

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APPENDIX A
Research Phase I: Survey Questions

1. Is your ASL/English interpreter education program (IEP):
 - Certificate
 - 2 year (AA/AS)
 - 4 Year (BA/BS)
 - Graduate Degree
 - Other:
2. How long has your IEP been in place?
 - Less than 3 years
 - 3-5 Years
 - 6-10 Years
 - 11-15 years
 - 16-20 years
 - More than 20 years
3. How many students, on average, apply/seek admittance to your IEP each year?
 - 0-15 Students
 - 16-25 Students
 - 26-50 Students
 - More than 50
 - Other: Please specify

IEP ASL/English Language Competencies Assessment Process:

3. List the prerequisite classes required for admission to your IEP: (Text Box)
4. Does your IEP currently have an ASL/English language competencies assessment for students prior to admission? (Yes/No)
Survey splits here and will display different pages based on the answer to question #4.

Answering Yes to Question #4 will take you to this page:

IEP has ASL/English language competencies assessment:

- 1A. How long has the current form of your ASL/English language competencies assessment been in place?
 - Less than 1 year
 - 2-3 years
 - 4-5 years
 - More than 5 years
- 2A. Is your ASL/English language competencies assessment modeled after another program's assessment? If so what program? (Text Box)
- 3A. Is your ASL/English language competencies assessment modeled after any ASL/English language assessment tool?
 - SLPI

- ASLPI
- ASLTA/ACTFL Standards
- No/None
- Other:

4A. What language components does your program assess? (Check all that apply)

- Spoken English
- Written English
- Receptive ASL
- Expressive ASL
- Other:

5A. What is the duration of your ASL/English language competencies assessment?

- Less than 1 hour
- More than 1 hour less than 3 hours
- 3-5 hours
- 6-8 hours
- More than 8 hours but less than 1 day
- Greater than 1 day
- Other:

6A. Which of these are aspects of your ASL/English language competencies assessment?

- SynCloze test
- Personality/Aptitude
- Self-Confidence testing
- Memory function testing
- Activities conducted in L1 (completed solo)
- Activities conducted in L2 (completed solo)
- Activities conducted in L1 (completed as part of a group)
- Activities conducted in L2 (completed as part of a group)
- Paraphrasing in either L1 or L2
- Consecutive Interpreting
- Simultaneous Interpreting
- Other:

7A. What does your program do to assess ASL language competencies? (Text Box)

8A. What does your program do to assess English language competencies? (Text Box)

9A. What level of language competencies (ASL/English) do you expect the students to demonstrate at the time of application? (Text Box)

10A. Do you have data (pass/fail rates, enrollment to graduation statistics, etc.) that supports the effectiveness of the ASL/English language competencies assessment?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know
- Other:

11A. In the event the student does not receive a passing score on their ASL/English language competencies assessment what is the recourse? (Check all that apply)

- Re-Apply to take the assessment the next time it is offered
- Remedial classes
- Individual Feedback
- Mentoring
- Individualized skills development plan
- Appeal
- Other

If participants answered no to question #4 they will be directed to this page:

IEP does not currently have an ASL/English language competencies assessment.

1B. Does your program assess ASL/English language competencies at any time other than at admission?

- No, we do not assess language competencies
- Yes, our program has a language competencies assessment prior to graduation
- Yes, our program assesses language competencies periodically during the program
- Yes, our program assesses language competencies once during the program
- Other:

2B. What is the motive for not having a ASL/English language competencies assessment prior to admission? (Check all that apply)

- Against college/university policy
- Students do not/would not pass
- One has not been put into place
- It was tried but was not successful
- Cost prohibitive
- Other:

3B. Does your program anticipate implementing an ASL/English language competencies assessment? Why or Why not? (Text Box)

4B. If your program intends to implement a ASL/English language competencies assessment what is your projected time line?

- Less than 1 year
- 2-3 years
- 4-5 years
- More than 5 years
- Other:

5B. Has your program used a ASL/English language competencies assessment in the past?

- No
- Yes
- N/A
- Other:

6B. If yes, what was the ASL/English language competencies assessment and what is the reason for it being discontinued? (Text Box)

All participants, after being directed to their designated pages, will be sent to the thank you and opt in for Phase II page.

Thank you for your time!

Phase II of my study will entail:

Collection, cataloging and analyzing all materials used during a ASL/English language competencies assessment. This includes written instructions of activities, videos, preparation materials given to students, scoring guide or instructions given to raters, rubrics, metrics, etc.

If you and your IEP are interested in being a part of Phase II of this study please include IEP name, your name and contact information below. I appreciate your time in furthering my research and enhancing our field as a whole. You can also contact me at ccarter11@wou.edu or 916-595-1091.

I would like my program to be part of phase two of this research project.
Please indicate: Your institution's name, Name of the interpreting program, Contact Information (including website) and Your Name.
(Text box where participants can add their information)

APPENDIX B
Research Phase I: Implied Consent Form

Dear Colleague,

I am a master's degree student at Western Oregon University, in the MA in Interpreting Studies program under the supervision of Dr. Elisa Maroney. I am conducting a research study (Phase I) seeking to discover what current interpreter education programs (IEP) are using to screen applicants for ASL and English language competencies at the time of application into the program.

I am inviting your interpreter education program's participation, which will involve taking a confidential online survey that may be accessed directly by clicking on this link: [Phase I Research Survey Link](#)

Participation in the survey will serve as your consent. The survey will take no more than 15 minutes. The final question on the survey will ask you if you are open to sharing your ASL/English language competencies rating and screening materials, including rubrics and metrics. If you are so inclined please indicate as such which will provide consent for me to contact you for phase II of the research project.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. There is no penalty if you choose not to participate and you can withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, all data collected from you will be destroyed through deletion of files. You must be 18 years or older to participate in this study.

There are no foreseeable risks for participants in this study. Your responses will not be anonymous, but they will be confidential. I will remove any personal identifiers after coding is completed in order to maintain confidentiality. The results of this study will be used in my master's thesis, and may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but your name and the name of the interpreter education program in which you are affiliated will not be known/used.

If you have any questions regarding the research study, please contact Cari Carter by email at: ccarter11@wou.edu or by phone at 916-595-1091. You may also contact my Thesis Committee Chair, Dr. Maroney at: maronee@wou.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Institutional Review Board at (530) 838-9200 or at irb@wou.edu.

Thank You,
Cari Carter, NIC Advanced
Candidate for Master of Arts in Interpreting Studies
Western Oregon University

APPENDIX C
Research Phase II: Interview Questions

1. What is your position with the program?
2. What has been your involvement with the admissions ASL/English language competencies assessment design, implementation and facilitation?
3. Has the ASL/English language competencies assessment changed over time, if so how and why?
4. How effective do you feel the entrance assessment is for identifying language competencies in either or both ASL and English?
5. How are students rated or scored during the process of the assessment?
6. Do you use people outside of the program to rate/score the student's ASL/English language competencies? If so, how do you recruit and what are their qualifications?
7. Do you feel equal weight is paid to both ASL and English competencies, if so how?
8. How often do you find students that apply without the needed ASL/English language competencies? Has that lead to changes in your assessment practices?
9. What else are you looking for in your IEP students other than ASL/English language competencies?

APPENDIX D
Research Phase II: Consent Form

Project Title- Current Practices: Assessment of ASL/English language competencies for admission to ASL/English interpreter education programs.

Principal Investigator:

Cari Carter, NIC, Advanced

ccarter11@wou.edu

916-595-1091

I am a graduate student at Western Oregon University in the MA in Interpreting Studies program under the supervision of Dr. Elisa Maroney. I am conducting research to gather data on current interpreter education programs' assessment of student's ASL and English language competencies at the time of application. Your interpreter education program has been selected based on criteria from previous phases of this same study.

I invite you to participate in an interview regarding ASL/English language assessment practices including but not limited to: theory to support assessment, criteria, design of assessment and materials, progression of the assessment design, as well as perceived strengths and weaknesses of the assessment tool(s). The interview will consist of open-ended questions that are intended to expand on information found during phase II to fully understand the design of the assessment tools.

The interview should last no longer than 30 minutes depending on depth and breadth of the discussion. The information collected, via recording devices and notes taken during the interview, will be kept confidential, and will be destroyed five years after the results have been published. At any time results can be shared with you upon request.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. There is no penalty if you choose not to participate and you can withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, all data collected from you will be destroyed through deletion of files. You must be 18 years or older to participate in this study.

There are no foreseeable risks to participants in this study. It is hoped that the results of this study will benefit interpreter education by offering options for student's ASL/English language assessment at time of application. I also hope that this study will lead to more

standardization in the ASL/English language competencies assessments used in interpreter education programs.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact Cari Carter by phone at 916-595-1091 or via email at ccarter11@wou.edu. You may also contact the graduate advisor Dr. Elisa Maroney at maronee@wou.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Institutional Review Board at 503-838-9200 or irb@wou.edu.

Thank you for your willingness to help further research in best practices for the field of ASL and English interpreting education.

Sincerely,

Cari Carter, NIC Advanced
Candidate for Master of Arts in Interpreting Studies
Western Oregon University