To: Dr. Erika Paterson
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Subject: Proposal for Improving Learning Outcomes of UBC AES Program

**Introduction**

There has been an increasing international enrollment in UBC over the past few years. A significant proportion of these perspective students are from non-English speaking countries. One of the challenges they face are how to communicate effectively in English which is essential to achieving success both inside and outside the classroom. AES program with its full name to be “Academic English Support Program” intends to support new students who speak English as an additional language by offering them free, one on one mentoring. The program consists of a self-directed study focused on learning online resources and modules at one’s own pace, and coach assisted study where language coaches help students design individualized plan. It should be resourceful and a good starting point for new coming international students. However, the number of students who choose to register for AES is low compared to the high volume of the mentioned group joining UBC every year. Moreover, the returning rate is also low. Registered students usually do not choose to stay in the program beyond their first semesters. The proposal intends to improve the engagement and learning outcomes of the current students in AES to achieve a sustainable development in the long run.

**Statement of Problem**

AES program aims at improving students’ overall academic English performance. For the self-directed study, students are offered access to online resources of all four parts: reading, listening, speaking and writing. The potential problem here is suggest students take the same approach to improving speaking and writing as to the other two parts. Due to the interactive features involved in speaking for example, practicing at home facing one’s computers can hardly ensure a steep learning curve from the beginning. Over time, students are discouraged by the inefficiency of following online resources.

For the coach assisted study, students are paired with an advisor following their progress throughout the semester. The one on one meetings every two weeks intend to help students understand the challenges they are facing and what actions they can take. It is considerable that the meetings are conducted in private settings. But for students who are on their way improving spoken English, they may not be able to fully convey certain concerns or feelings, which can also be a result of cultural differences. Consequently, the focus of such meeting turns to be more on how AES can relate students to other external programs or resources, but not enough on gaining feedbacks based on students’ past experiences. Without an appropriate feedback system, AES may not know the reason behind a student not returning to the program the next semester, and how they can improve on the current situation.

**Proposed Solution**

The proposed solutions start with suggesting AES program separately address to students with intentions to improve reading, listening abilities and speaking, writing abilities. Condense or replace online modules regarding the speaking and writing part with resources available to students, for instance, showing where UBC’s writing center is and how students can make an appointment for revision.

It is nice to have bi-weekly individual meetings with advisors so that students gain full attention to the problems they have. Meanwhile, this proposal suggests include group meetings into the scope as well. Bringing together students who are in similar situations (for instance, each in the small group aims at improving writing skills) can create a peer leaning environment. At the beginning, students may feel more comfortable in sharing concerns or problems with peers in the group from which it will be more natural to form collective reflections on the program arrangements.

This proposal considers feedback an integral part of AES promotion and development. Only by analyzing the needs of current registered students can it see the strengths and weaknesses and better serve students in the future. Such feedback can be as simply as a follow up survey sent by email to all currently registered students. Devoting some part of one on one meetings for feedback is another possible way to go. This way feedback can be guaranteed from students. Although the process may be less efficient than the survey, it may better fit this program considering that variations among individual cases tend to be large here

**Scope**

To assess the feasibility of improving the learning outcomes of UBC AES program, I plan to pursue five areas of inquiry:

1. How do students who are currently registered and from the past think about the program? What do they think are the biggest strength and weakness of the program?
2. What parts of English do students mostly want to improve?
3. Consult program advisors. What kind of challenges as to improving English do they usually hear from students?
4. How the current AES program help address these challenges?
5. What are the mentor-student ratio now? Is there balance between demand from students and resources provided by the program?

**Methods**

My primary data source will include interviews with program advisors, students who are or once were part of the program. I also intend to conduct a survey about how non-English speaking international students in general overcome language challenges, what kind of support they received along the way, and what are the most helpful approach based on their own experience.

Secondary sources will include publications on the history and development of the AES program, similar programs in other universities.

**My Qualifications**

I had once participated in the AES program in my first year at UBC. Throughout the semester, I maintained an active interactions with my advisor following a standard workflow of the program. I also got the chance to talk with others who were also registered around the same time, understanding the problems we had in common. Besides, as a second language learner myself, my various English learning experiences provide me with some intuition about how to guide the research to the right direction.

**Conclusion**

On one hand, language supportive programs like AES have great potentials to offer students a smooth transition to the new environment. There’s still room for improvement to ensure a sustainable development that will benefit both the program and the students. By addressing the five areas of inquiry mentioned earlier, I can determine the feasibility of improving learning outcomes of AES program. With your approval, I will begin research at once.