

**English Language Programs for Immigrants in Florida:
Institutional and Community Embeddedness**

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Abstract

This paper presents a deeper understanding of the institutional and community embeddedness of the university and college affiliated English language programs available to immigrants in Florida. It is a piece of continued research and discusses the driving forces behind program membership in formal, national and statewide associations. It also explores the ways in which English language programs get their students involved in the local community. The goal of my work is to present an idea of these programs relative to their academic cooperation, development and community standing. Prior to this report, I conducted a series of first-hand interviews with English language program faculty and staff.¹ Much of this paper, however, is based on a follow-up interview I conducted with one program director in particular.² Additional information was gathered through online research.

Introduction³

In the United States, colleges and universities are not isolated from one another. In some respects, they compete for students, faculty, funding, the national sports championship, etc. But, they also collaborate. They work together and share information to improve and work out educational or program challenges. School representatives meet to talk about their curriculums – what is and what is not working. One academic area in Florida where we see this taking place is with the English language programs available to immigrant students at some state colleges and private universities.

This paper refers to such collaboration as *institutional embeddedness*. The term is used as a means to convey the point that English language programs at the major colleges and universities in Florida co-exist. This includes Florida International University, the University of Florida, the University of Miami, Florida State University and more. Both state and national consortiums bring the schools together, but there are standards the schools must meet in order to participate. In the following pages, I will discuss these standards as well as the specific benefits and challenges that come with membership.

Beyond the connections these schools share with each other, this paper also touches on the *community embeddedness* of the English language programs. On this topic, I will discuss how program curriculums are designed to involve students in the local culture. The objective of my work is to help readers understand that English language programs for immigrants in Florida are not static. They are constantly introducing new measures and making changes to their curriculums, largely because of their institutional and community relationships.

Institutional Embeddedness

There are three major associations that Florida college and university English language programs participate in: The American Association of Intensive English Programs, University and College Intensive English Programs and The Florida Intensive English Consortium.⁴ Table 1 provides a brief overview of each with information gathered through a study of the data promoted on the programs' websites. Overall, each association has a general goal of bringing various English programs together, but in subsequent analysis, I go into further detail about how some programs have more specific goals and membership requirements than others.

Table 1: An Overview of the Major Institutional Associations Florida College and University Level English Language Programs Hold Membership In

English Language Association	Date Founded	Mission	Geographical Affiliation	Total Number of Members
The American Association of Intensive English Programs (AAIEP)	1986	To promote intensive English program development in the U.S.; to foster professional development for member programs	National	Over 330 members (18 Florida members)
University and College Intensive English Programs (UCIEP)	1967	To promote excellence in intensive English program administration, curriculum and instruction	National	71 members (4 Florida members)
Florida Intensive English Consortium (FIEC)	1993	To promote and develop the top university-based intensive English language programs located in Florida	State-wide	9 members (All Florida members)

Sources: Table prepared by the author based on information retrieved from <http://www.aaiep.org/> <http://www.uciep.org/> <http://englishinflorida.org/>

The American Association of Intensive English Programs

The AAIEP is a consortium made up of university, college or city center operated English programs. Luis Sanchez, the Director of the English Language Institute at Florida International University, described it as “one of the more commercial” associations in that “they are very much into promoting schools.”⁵ Membership is nationally spread with over 300 program members across the United States, and 18 of those members are Florida programs.⁶

In its mission statement, the AAIEP describes itself as a promoter and supporter for ethical and professional practices in intensive English language programs. It also says that it “champions and communicates the value of English language study; enhances visibility of

member programs; and fosters professional development among members.”⁷ Upon reading this final proclamation about “fostering professional development among member programs,” I directed my research towards figuring out how this goal is being met. I came to understand that the AAIEP has an extensive, detailed list of requirements. There does not seem to be much that the institution is doing once programs join other than promoting those programs to international, non-English speaking students, but “professional development” is actually occurring in the ongoing process of membership where participants must renew their status in the association.

On the AAIEP website, there is a detailed list of membership requirements for potential and current members. The administrative standards are listed first. The top requirement indicates that every program must have a director who is responsible for leading and managing the intensive English program in question. Directors like Luis Sanchez, who has been with FIU’s Intensive English Programs since 1980, strive to meet this standard, and in doing so, they become the face of the program. They assume a huge amount of responsibility and are essentially held accountable for every branch of the operation, while also working to interact with other schools and programs. Their focus is both inward on classroom learning and outward on the state and national development of the curriculum with the networking help of consortium membership.

Additional administrative standards say that those employed by the program must have master’s degrees or equivalent training in the field their position falls under, and salaries must be on par with the salaries given at other English language programs within the same geographical region (meaning if FIU’s program pays its administrators a certain amount, UF cannot pay an amount that differs greatly). The administration must “demonstrate cross-cultural knowledge and sensitivity,” and if the English program is part of a larger university (such as it is at FIU), or is

located on a college or university campus, the program should enforce “policies and practices compatible with the corresponding policies and practices of the college or university.”

In total, the AAIEP website lists 73 different requirements. Fifteen of those are administrative, 14 refer to faculty, 8 to the curriculum, 3 to student admissions policies and procedures, 19 to students and student services, 8 to marketing and recruitment and 6 to program assessment. Program assessment comes in the form of “self-study and evaluation” whereby Sanchez explained the program must review its stated goals at the beginning of the year and measure its accomplishments come the end of the year. Administrators ask questions like: Did the program end the year with too few students completing their English language courses and passing the TOEFL exam than administrators had initially projected? Did the program overspend their budget? And what did the students themselves think about the courses they were taking and the teachers who were instructing? The AAIEP makes a point to indicate who should be involved in this process of evaluation, noting that English as a second language students should be included.

Of the three associations in Florida that bring college and university level English language programs together, I conclude that the AAIEP has the most comprehensive list of membership requirements.

University and College Intensive English Program

Unlike AAIEP, UCIEP exclusively caters to universities and colleges, or higher academic institutions. City center English learning centers cannot participate in the institutional exchange, and because of this, UCIEP is considered to be a more academically oriented association. It has 71 total members, four of which are Florida programs from Florida State University, Florida International University, University of Florida and University of Miami. The UCIEP mission

statement says the program strives for “excellence in IEP administration, curriculum and instruction by establishing guidelines for member programs, encouraging and sponsoring professional development as well as cooperation and communication among member programs, and advocating on behalf of member programs, the organization, and the field of teaching English as a second language.”⁸ Luis Sanchez with FIU said that out of the three major intensive English associations, “UCIEP is the more stringent because it deals with university programs.”⁹

Similar to AAIIEP, UCIEP provides a list of membership requirements online. The various categories include general program requirements, staff, faculty, curriculum, recruitment, testing and placement. The list more uniquely mentions an “appointments” requirement whereby full-time faculty must meet with top program administrators to review their role in the program and ultimately renew or terminate their contracts. Programs must also submit a self-evaluation document every five years and agree to submit to an on-site evaluation before even being accepted as an UCIEP member. Luis Sanchez simply stated that in these site visits, “they are checking on everything.” UCIEP representatives look at program curriculum, the ratio of instructors to students and the length of classes. They are checking to make sure the program complies with all of the standards and that it is “a true working program. That it does not just look good on paper.”¹⁰

The individuals who conduct these check-ups are not making the trip to enforce curriculum style, however. There is no rule that English is taught in one specific way. According to Sanchez, all member programs need to prove is that they are adhering to the curriculum they themselves laid out. The point of curricular evaluation is not to create uniformity among all English language programs. On the contrary, the variety in the methods of teaching English to immigrants is what allows for program development through institutional embeddedness. It is best

for the curriculums overall to be diverse, just like their student population because the differences allow for comparison and contrast when UCIEP member programs meet.

Florida Intensive English Consortium

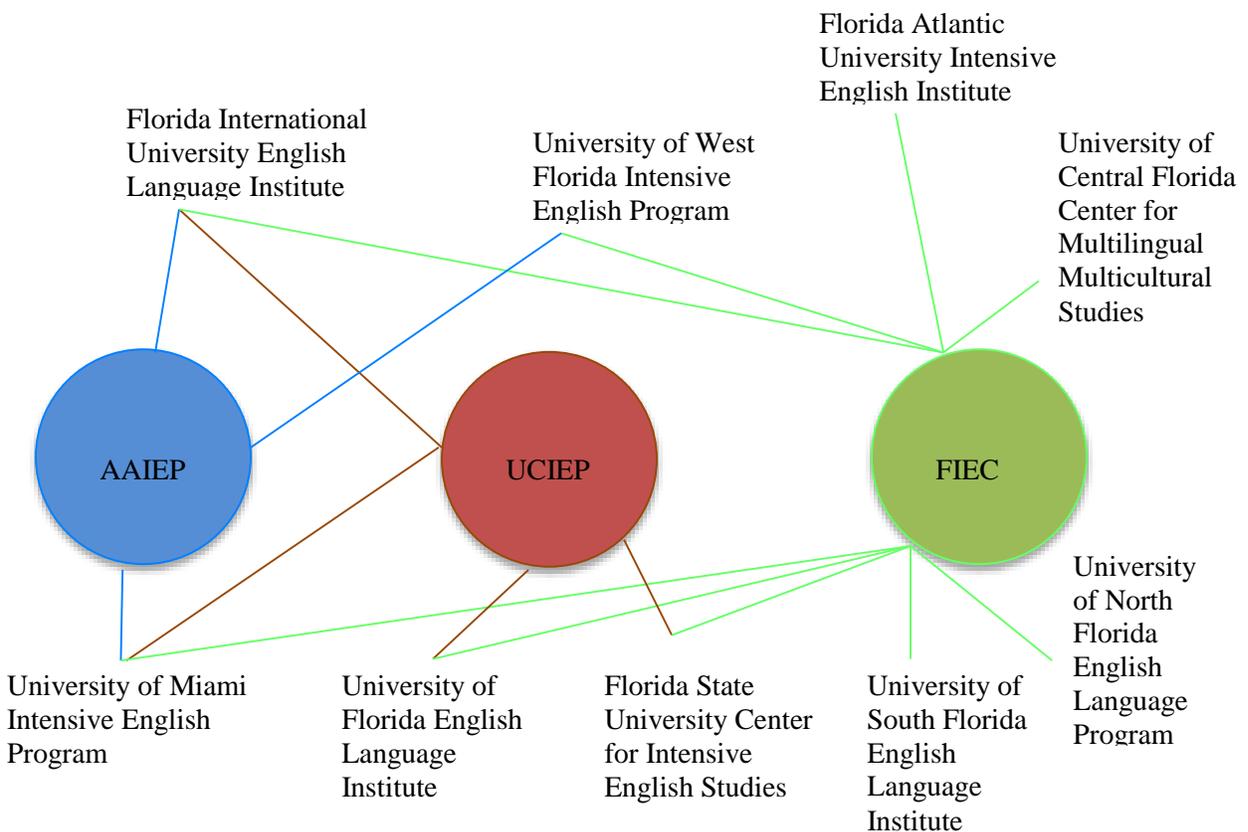
The FIEC is a statewide organization with nine Florida English teaching program members. According to the United States Census from 2007 to 2011, 19.2% of Florida's population is made of up foreign-born individuals, and 27% of those people speak a language other than English at home.¹¹ In 2011, 48.2% of immigrants age 5 and older had limited English proficiency.¹² While these numbers quantify the reality of a Florida population in need of English training, the majority of students who enroll in the intensive English programs at FIU, UM, FSU, etc., are international students. As a result, the Florida Intensive English Consortium serves two purposes.

One is to promote Florida English programs. The heading on the FIEC website reads, "Study English in Florida," and a separate tab called "Why study in Florida?" explains that "Florida is known worldwide for its tropical climate, sandy beaches, and blue ocean waters. Florida offers exciting cities, quality universities, world-famous attractions, professional sport teams, and more. It is a great place to experience U.S. culture, meet new people, and learn to speak English."¹³ The message is meant to not only urge but to convince foreign students that Florida is the best location for learning English because of the top quality programs available within the state.

To ensure the quality of the programs, the FIEC also works to foster interaction among its members. It hosts two meetings a year, one in the fall and one in the spring. Luis Sanchez described the meetings as opportunities "to talk about the issues that affect all of us. We discuss curriculum, learning strategies and all of the things that are of relevance to us."¹⁴

As far as FIEC membership requirements go, the association does not outline specific standards online. It is simply made up of accredited state university English language programs (the University of Miami’s Intensive English Program being the only private institution) that offer professional English instruction. To get an idea of how FIEC membership overlaps with both AAIEP and UCIEP membership, view Chart 1. The illustration offers a visual display of institutional embeddedness. It shows how Florida English programs are connecting with each other through the three major national and statewide associations.

Chart 1: Florida State and University English Language Programs: Links to National and State Umbrella Organizations



Sources: Prepared by the author based on information retrieved from <http://www.aaiep.org/> <http://www.uciep.org/> <http://englishinflorida.org/>.

Note: The American Association of Intensive English Programs (AAIEP); University and College Intensive English Programs (UCIEP); Florida Intensive English Consortium (FIEC).

Benefits of Association Membership

In return for meeting all of the membership requirements upheld by AAIEP, UCIEP and FIEC, intensive English member programs in Florida gain an opportunity for professional development. As an individually operating program, FIU's English Learning Institute, UM's Intensive English program and others would be stuck with their challenges. They would not be able to share their success or their hopes for the future. Through AAIEP, UCIEP and FIEC they can do all of this. Luis Sanchez with FIU said the benefit of membership is "that you grow professionally and you are really keeping up with everyone in the field. You get to know your colleagues in the field. You get to know that you do not live and work in a vacuum, that there are people out there who are having the same problems as you and there are people who have different solutions to those problems."¹⁵

Institutional embeddedness allows for quicker problem solving. It builds relationships, but as I pointed out earlier, the goal is not to create a uniform platform for all English programs available to immigrants across the country. "There's a difference between having standards and having cookie-cutter programs," said Sanchez.¹⁶ And while the standards for membership outlined by each association are stringent, Sanchez said he does not feel that they are restrictive. Instead, they serve as guidelines that programs already aim to meet.

Membership in AAIEP, UCIEP and FIEC also helps with recruiting students. On University of South Florida's website, for example, their Intensive English program boasts that they are "proud members of AAIEP, of NAFSA,¹⁷ of FIEC and of UCIEP."¹⁸ Even so, Luis Sanchez said, "there is no such thing as a huge advertising network," offered by the three associations.¹⁹ This is because each program does its own recruiting. They put up ads in

embassies around the world and rely on word of mouth referrals from program alumni to their friends and family back in their country of origin. Consortium membership just adds an additional layer of promotion.

In summary, associations like AAIEP, UCIEP and FIEC offer intensive English programs in Florida and around the country a formal, organized network. They support open discussion and program development in areas ranging from curriculum, to faculty, to students, to the recruitment process. Without institutional embeddedness, I argue that the English programs available to immigrant students interested in learning the language and advancing their careers or education in the United States would not be able to meet the increasing academic demand. The programs would remain trapped in the challenges that arise because educators would feel they alone, as though they are “working in a vacuum,” as Luis Sanchez put it.²⁰ Institutional interaction is therefore vital to current development and future English program growth. Plus, that is not all that these associations have to offer.

Community Embeddedness

The national and statewide associations for English language programs additionally support community embeddedness through their requirements for cultural immersion. The AAIEP for example, mandates a standard for facilitating “students’ contacts with the community through host family arrangement and extracurricular or co-curricular programs.”²¹ One reason for doing this fits in with a general mindset about college being a time and place where new experiences and memories are made. Challenging students in the classroom while also encouraging them to explore their surroundings is not exclusive to intensive English programs. However, an academic curriculum including community involvement is arguably more important

when the students are foreign-born. Luis Sanchez says this is because immigrants who come to the United States for the purpose of learning English and gaining an education serve as future American ambassadors. It is therefore important to immerse them in the local entertainment and make them feel connected to the area so that they can return to their countries of origin and speak highly of their experience in the U.S. “These students will go back to their countries of origin with a different impression they came in with as far as the United States is concerned. They are the best ambassadors we could ask for...this is the best way that we have of making friends all over the world.”²²

Dennis Beltrons, the Director of the English as a Second Language Program at Miami’s College of Business and Technology,²³ agrees that it is important for English language learners to connect to their community abroad, but for a different reason. He believes that immigrants seeking an education through English learning programs should also maintain a goal of co-existence: “Yes you have your culture, you have your own customs and habits, but you need to co-exist...it’s not only about how well you speak the new language, but how you feel about the country.”²⁴

Regardless of the mindset, national and statewide associations that foster English language program development for the sake of students’ success recognize the need for community embeddedness in conjunction with institutional embeddedness. When it is time to renew their accreditation status, for example, each program must demonstrate a social or community involvement calendar to The Commission on English Language Program Accreditation (CEA).²⁵ At FIU’s English Language Institute, Sanchez said more than 50% of the student activities take place off campus. A coordinator plans trips to the beach, to bowling alleys, to popular and ethnic restaurants – all for the purpose of allowing them to practice their English

and engage with a new culture.²⁶ The same is true with University of Miami's Intensive English Program. Students take trips to Disney World, attend Heat games and are encouraged to mingle with locals.²⁷

Another way these programs meet the CEA's and other association's standard for community embeddedness is through a host family living arrangement. With this, immigrant students get paired up to live with local residents upon arriving to the United States. The residents must sign up for the arrangement, and in some cities it works. In others it does not. Luis Sanchez explained that living with local families works best in smaller cities where the area in itself does not have that much to offer. He compared big-city Miami to small-town Bloomington, Minnesota saying,

While we might be very lucky in terms of getting to take our students to so many places because Miami is a big cosmopolitan area, [Bloomington] programs can enforce a lot more community involvement in terms of getting their students to have extra conversation practice...people there are more open to take these students in and actually talk to them.²⁸

According to Sanchez, Miami English language programs are challenged when it comes to finding local families who would be willing to take an international student in. If they do find an exchange type living situation for them, he said it usually happens because homeowners with spare space are interested in making some extra money, not in forming an actual relationship with the student. "They don't even care about you, you're just renting a room in the house," he said. This opposed to other places where host family living situations give "you a family experience where they really take you in as a member of the family and they take you out to dinner, they take you to family reunions, they take you to church. So, if you're lucky, and as a student you get placed into one of those homes, your experience is complete."²⁹

Conclusion

As Sanchez concluded in that last quote, the combination of English language programs' institutional embeddedness and community embeddedness is what is making immigrant students' academic and cultural experience complete. The hope is that my paper serves to show that while programs vary in curriculum, size and local surroundings across the country, those that are members of national and statewide associations like the American Association for Intensive English Programs, University and College Intensive English Programs and the Florida Intensive English Programs, are working towards this goal.

Endnotes

¹ That research was used as a base for my first report on English language programs available to immigrants in Miami.

Romig, Hannah. "English Language and Professional Training Programs for Immigrants in Miami." *IMTP-Magazine on Migration Issues*, No. 1, (2013).

² I would like to thank Luis Sanchez, the Director of Florida International University's English Language Institute, for taking the time to speak with me about his program and the role of national and statewide English language associations.

³ This paper was written under the guidance of Dr. Margarita Rodriguez as a follow up to a paper about the English language and professional training programs available to immigrants in Miami.

⁴ After Internet research and interviews with various representatives from English language programs at schools in Miami, I was able to conclude that these three associations are the most prominent.

⁵ Phone interview with Luis Sanchez, Florida International University. English Language Institute. April 25, 2013.

⁶ English USA. The American Association of Intensive English Programs. Retrieved from:

<http://www.aaiep.org/>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ University and College Intensive English Programs. Retrieved from: <http://www.uciep.org/>

⁹ Phone interview with Luis Sanchez, Florida International University. English Language Institute. April 25, 2013.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ United States Census Bureau. "State and County QuickFacts." Retrieved from:

<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/12000.html>

¹² MPI Data Hub. "Florida: Language and Education." Retrieved from:

<http://www.migrationinformation.org/datahub/state2.cfm?ID=fl>

¹³ Florida Intensive English Consortium. "Study English in Florida." Retrieved from:

<http://englishinflorida.org/>

¹⁴ Phone interview with Luis Sanchez, Florida International University. English Language Institute. April 25, 2013.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ NAFSA stand for the National Association of Foreign Student Advisers. Founded in 1948, it serves a broader purpose than AAEIP, UCIEF and FIEC. In addition to catering to English-language programs by holding a national convention for international advisers every May, NAFSA also supports admissions personnel and community volunteers who play "an important role in helping foreign students acclimate to U.S. college communities."

Retrieved from: <http://www.nafsa.org/>

¹⁸ University of South Florida. "English Language Institute." Retrieved from:

<http://www.eli.usf.edu/uploads/docpdf/ELIbrochure.pdf>

¹⁹ Phone interview with Luis Sanchez, Florida International University. English Language Institute. April 25, 2013.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ English USA. The American Association of Intensive English Programs. Retrieved from:

<http://www.aaiep.org/>

²² Phone interview with Luis Sanchez, Florida International University. English Language Institute. November 16, 2012.

²³ The College of Business and Technology's English as a Second Language Program does not belong to any of the three major English language state or national associations discussed in this paper, but it does share the goal of community involvement and Director Beltrons spoke in length on the topic during our interview.

²⁴ In-person interview with Dennis Beltrons, College of Business and Technology. English as a Second Language Program. February 22, 2013.

²⁵ CEA. Retrieved from: <http://www.cea-accredit.org/>

²⁶ Phone interview with Luis Sanchez, Florida International University. English Language Institute. April 25, 2013.

²⁷ In-person interview with Cara Wenig Mori, University of Miami. Intensive English Program. March 1, 2013.

²⁸ Phone interview with Luis Sanchez, Florida International University. English Language Institute. April 25, 2013.

²⁹ Ibid.