



## **Seneca College English Language Institute places students quickly and accurately with iTEP**

The Seneca College English Language Institute (ELI) is a major Canadian ESL program with between 400 and 500 students depending on the time of year. The ELI prepares students from more than 65 countries to enroll in the Toronto college's academic programs, which range from fashion management to engineering technology.

The ELI has eight levels, from beginner to advanced. In order to place students in the appropriate level, Director Martine Allard needs a test that is easy to administer, flexible and valid in the eyes of the students.

Since early 2019, she has relied on the iTEP Academic (International Test of English Proficiency) to assess her students' English abilities for placement into the ELI levels.

"We wanted a computer-based academic test that would be appropriate for a program like ours since we prepare students to study at the college," she says. "It was important that it assess speaking and writing – in addition to listening, reading and vocabulary."

As well, Allard wanted to consider the students' view of the assessment tool. "We sought a test that they thought was fair and accurately measured their English-language skills," Allard says.

The ELI runs seven-week sessions and has six start dates per year. Each session features five testing days – a main placement test and four additional dates for latecomers who may have been delayed receiving a visa or missed their flights.

In addition, students who want to enroll in the program and are already in Toronto can take the test anytime, instead of having to wait for the next testing session. "While group testing is more efficient, we love the flexibility of being able to test a single student if necessary," Allard says.

Once students have taken the iTEP, Seneca instantly receives the results for listening, reading and vocabulary. Seneca has chosen to administer the speaking and writing sections of the test, but to save time and money by choosing the unscored option. While iTEP expert raters score speaking and writing within 24 hours, Allard prefers to be able to immediately review the student responses.

The iTEP system is easy to use, allowing test administrators to easily email teachers to share results and gather feedback.

In order to get started with iTEP, Seneca conducted pilot testing with students from all eight levels in the program. There were three goals:

1. Determine whether the test would accurately assess the English ability of incoming students at all levels
2. Gather feedback from students about whether they felt the test was fair and appropriate
3. Benchmark test scores to each ELI level so that students could be easily sorted in the future

The iTEP hit the mark on all three counts. “The student comments were positive, the results were accurate and when the teachers begin classes they believe that students are generally placed appropriately.”

The face validity of the test is important for Seneca. Students appreciate taking a recognized and standardized assessment. As a result, very few complain that they have been placed in the wrong level. This saves the Seneca ELI considerable time in dealing with student requests to change classes, a problem that plagued the program with a previous in-house test.

During the piloting, students in the lowest levels – one and two – found the test to be quite difficult. However, Allard is pleased that the iTEP takes only 90 minutes so most students do their best to respond to all of the questions and don’t get frustrated.

For the Seneca English Language Institute, placement testing is important in helping students successfully begin their academic journey at Seneca. About 92 percent of ELI students pursue academic study at the college, joining 97,000 full-time and part-time students from both Canada and more than 130 other countries.

“The iTEP meets our needs very well,” Allard says. “It’s an academic test, places incoming students accurately and is respected by the students.”

*The International Test of English Proficiency (iTEP) was introduced in 2008 to modernize English language assessment with on-demand scheduling, 24-hour grading, and accurate test data. iTEP provides a convenient and cost-effective testing option delivered in a highly secure environment. More than 800 colleges, universities, middle/high schools, and boarding schools in the USA and Canada accept iTEP results for admissions. Applicants can take iTEP at more than 500 test centres in 61 countries. iTEP International is headquartered in Los Angeles, California.*

*ESQ Educational Services represents the iTEP in Eastern Canada. For more information about using the test for placing students, measuring progress and determining outcomes, please contact Doug Ronson at [douglasronson@yahoo.ca](mailto:douglasronson@yahoo.ca) or at 613-888-9560.*

