

# **Results of the 2011-2012 FEPT and TOEIC Tests**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this article is to review the results of the Freshman English Placement Test (FEPT) administered at Asia University in April 2011 and January 2012 and the results of the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) administered to students who participated in the Asia University America Program (AUAP) in 2011-2012 (Cycle 2) and 2012 (Cycle 1) as well as those students scheduled to participate in AUAP in 2012-2013 (Cycle 2). Average total test scores were calculated for the four Asia University faculties that took the FEPT and for all of the TOEIC exams administered. In addition, scores for the individual sections of the two exams were included in order to provide a more detailed picture of the results.

Average scores for students who took the FEPT at the beginning and end of the academic year improved for all four faculties, including total scores and scores for the two main sections of the test. Average total scores and section scores also improved for nearly all administrations of the TOEIC test with the exception of Cycle 2, 2011-2012 students after they returned to Asia University and resumed their studies.

## **2010/2011 FEPT Administration and Methodology**

The FEPT was administered to 1106 entering first year students in the Business Administration, Business Hospitality, Law, and Economics Faculties in April 2011 and to 871 first year students from those same faculties at the end of the year in January 2012. The April test was used to

place students into Freshman English (FE) classes, and the January test was used to place students into English classes in their sophomore year.

### **Results of the FEPT**

Average test scores were calculated for both administrations of the test for the four Asia University faculties. Scores for both the listening section and the vocabulary, grammar, and reading section of the test were included in order to provide a more complete account of the results.

The average scores of students who took the April 2011 and January 2012 tests (Table A) improved for all four of the faculties. For the January test, Business Administration and Business Hospitality each showed an increase of 5 points, and Law and Economics had an increase of 6 points. On average, there was an increase of 6 points. These results are very similar to those reported by Messerkliner (2008, 2009) before a few changes were made in the FEPT in 2009. The results are also consistent with those reported in 2012 by Hull after those changes were made in the FEPT.

It is worth reminding the reader here, as has been noted by Messerklinger (2008, p. 6) and Hull (2012, p. 34), that the FEPT is neither a test of proficiency nor a test of achievement. It is a norm-referenced test administered for the purpose of ranking entering students in order to make decisions about their placement in Freshman English classes. A scale of proficiency has not been created for FEPT test scores, nor has the FEPT been connected in any way with any other tests of proficiency. In addition, no attempt has ever been made to coordinate the content of the test items with the curriculum first year students study in their English classes. Therefore, the increase in scores at the end of the year does not reflect in any direct way progress students have made in mastering their first-year curriculum. Hull (2012, p. 34) points out that although the range of student

scores indicates a relatively greater or lesser proficiency in English, it does not indicate what that proficiency level is. The test has been used by Asia University strictly for placement purposes.

One limitation in comparing pre- and post-test scores is that a different number of students for all four faculties took the test in April and January. Differences in the way the test is administered at the beginning and end of the academic year and inconsistencies in student attendance are primarily responsible for this. In April, with the exception of the International Relations students, nearly all freshman students take the FEPT at the same time in large lecture halls with enough time scheduled for students to complete the 54-minute test. On the other hand, in January, individual instructors administer the test in their 45-minute Freshman English classes. More often than not, this results in the test being given in two parts, with the listening section in one class and the vocabulary, grammar, and reading section in another.

As a result, a significant number of students in January have either no end-of-year score or a score for only one of the two halves of the test. In order to reduce the problem this creates for placing students in English classes after their first year, the test has been reduced to a 40-minute test that can be administered in a 45-minute class (Hull, 2012, p. 10). This new version of the test started being used from April of 2012. For this report, only the scores of students who took both sections of the test are included in the January results. Therefore, an analysis of the two sets of data, for April and January, does not reflect an accurate comparison.

**Table A: Results of the 2011-2012 FEPT**

	<b>Business Administration</b>		<b>Business Hospitality</b>		<b>Law</b>		<b>Economics</b>		<b>All Faculties</b>	
	Apr	Jan	Apr	Jan	Apr	Jan	Apr	Jan	Apr	Jan
Number of Examinees (change)	335	278 (-57)	94	77 (-17)	389	304 (-85)	289	212 (-77)	1106	871 (-235)
Mean Listening Score (change)	25	29 (+4)	28	31 (+3)	24	28 (+4)	24	28 (+4)	25	29 (+4)
Mean Vocab/Grammar/RdgScore (change)	24	25 (+1)	24	26 (+2)	23	25 (+2)	23	25 (+2)	24	25 (+1)
Mean Total Score (change)	49	54 (+5)	52	57 (+5)	47	53 (+6)	47	53 (+6)	48	54 (+6)

**2011/2012 TOEIC Administration**

The TOEIC was given to all freshman students scheduled to participate in the Asia University America Program in the second half of the 2011-2012 academic year, the first half of the 2012-2013 academic year, and the second half of the 2012-2013 year. The scores were used to place students in AUAP classes at the three Washington university campuses where the program is held. The International Relations Faculty also used the scores from the first administration of the test to place their students in FE classes at Asia University. Similar to the FEPT, then, the TOEIC is a norm-

referenced test used for placement purposes, although it is also used to chart the progress of the International Relations students as they proceed through their English studies.

As previously reported in this journal (Hull, 2012, p. 36), after the 2003-2004 academic year International Relations students have participated in AUAP during the second half of their first year. However, in April of 2011, the International Relations Faculty implemented a change which resulted in one-half of the IR students participating in AUAP in the second semester of their freshman year (Cycle 2, 2011-2012) and the other half in the second semester of their sophomore year (Cycle 2, 2012-2013). Ultimately, the department is transitioning to the 2013-2014 academic year in which all IR students will participate in AUAP during the second half of their sophomore year. This report, then, along with reports that have appeared in this journal in the past (Koelbleitner & Messerklinger, 2006; Hull, 2012), serves as a record of TOEIC scores that will help track the changes in AUAP and IR that were initiated in 2011 and will be completed in 2013.

Students from the Business Administration, Law, and Economics Faculties participated in the program in the first half of their sophomore year (Cycle 1, 2012-2013). Their participation in AUAP has not been affected by the changes the International Relations Faculty has undertaken.

Although the majority of IR students participated in the AUAP program at Western, Central, or Eastern Washington University, nine of the IR students with the highest test scores attended ESL and related classes at Arizona State University. This group's scores are also reported here.

For all first-year IR students, the April 2011 TOEIC took place at Asia University before the start of Freshman English classes. Cycle 2, 2011-

2012 students took the test again at Asia University in June three months before leaving Japan for the U.S., and then those same students took the test again in January at the completion of their studies in the U.S. The students who studied at Arizona State University took the same tests as the Cycle 2, 2011-2012 students, with the exception of the January 2012 test. Instead of that test, the Arizona students took the test again in April after they returned to Japan. Cycle 2, 2012-2013 IR students continued to study at Asia University during that period and took the TOEIC two more times, one shortened practice test in August of 2011, and then the complete test in June of 2012 before they left for Washington. All IR students in the above groups were scheduled to take the August 2012 practice test at Asia University after completing the first term of their sophomore year.

The practice TOEIC administered internally by the International Relations Department at the university was purchased from ALC, a Japan-based educational organization that offers E-learning and TOEIC programs. It is exactly one-half of the length of the regular TOEIC Listening and Reading Test. It is a one-hour multiple-choice test made up of 100 questions evenly divided into listening comprehension and reading comprehension. To arrive at a score that is comparable to the regular TOEIC Listening and Reading Test, the score is doubled.

For Business, Law, and Economics students, the November 2011 TOEIC took place at Asia University three months before they left Japan, while the July 2012 test took place in the U.S.

### **Results of the TOEIC**

Average test scores were calculated for all of the TOEIC exams administered, and both listening and reading scores were included to provide more a detailed account of the two major sections of the examination.

Test scores improved for the International Relations students who participated in AUAP in Washington through January of 2012 (Cycle 2, 2011-2012) as well as for the IR students studying at Arizona State University through April of 2012 (Tables B and D). Cycle 2, 2011-2012 students saw their average total scores mark a 33-point improvement after three months of study at Asia University, and after participating in AUAP for about four months they saw an additional 112-point improvement. The IR students scheduled to study at Arizona State University marked a 38-point improvement in their average total scores after three months of study at Asia University, and after studying at Arizona State University for five months they made an additional 106-point improvement. Considering that the Arizona State University students began with a significantly higher TOEIC score than the Washington students, it is remarkable that they made about the same amount of total point improvement even though progress at a higher score level is typically more difficult to make. In addition, whereas the AUAP students in Washington had classes devoted to the study of TOEIC, students at Arizona State University studied the TOEFL. Without doing an in-depth study of this group, one can only speculate as to why they made this increase in TOEIC test scores. It may be due in part to this particular group of students being stronger English students than the students who studied in Washington. They may be a more highly motivated group of students. Studying TOEFL test-taking skills may have a positive impact on progress on TOEIC scores. Or it may be due in part to the studying and living environment these students experience in Arizona. In contrast to the students in Washington, greater demands are placed on the students in Arizona to use the language they are learning since there are few other Japanese speakers to interact with.

With this transition year in the International Relations program, it is also informative to compare the TOEIC scores between the two different groups that the IR students were divided into: the half of the students that stayed at Asia University and completed a year and a half of study in Japan before going to the U.S. (Cycle 2, 2012-2013) and the half that went to the U.S. after one half-year of study at Asia University (Cycle 2, 2011-2012). Unfortunately, inconsistent student participation in taking the practice tests at Asia University, different testing schedules for the two groups, and the fact that students took different kinds of TOEIC tests on each occasion limit the value of this comparison. The number of students who sat for the August 2012 test was nearly thirteen percent smaller in the case of Cycle 2, 2011-2012 students and three percent smaller in the case of the Cycle 2, 2012-2013 group.

Those qualifications noted, after completing their studies in the U.S., Cycle 2, 2011-2012 students significantly reduced the average total score gap they had at the beginning of their freshman year with the Cycle 2, 2012-2013 students. Whereas the two groups had a nearly 70-point difference in average total scores at the beginning of their studies at Asia University, there was only a 14-point difference a year and a half later. In particular, the first group's listening scores rose above that of the second group. This, very likely, is a result of the first group's studies in the States.

The pre-AUAP to January post-AUAP test score improvement for the Cycle 2, 2011-2012 group was consistent with scores kept on record by the International Center at Asia University for the last six years for International Relations students, the period during which IR students participated in AUAP in the second semester of their freshman year. From 2005 to 2011, the average increase from pre- to post-test was around 133 points. The Cycle



2, 2011-2012 student group saw a 145-point improvement.

One other difference between the two groups worth noting in the August 2012 test results, however, is that the Cycle 2, 2011-2012 group saw their scores decline after returning to Japan. This also occurred last year (Hull, 2012, p. 36). On the other hand, the half of the IR students that stayed in Japan saw their scores continue to improve with each examination over that same period, including the August 2012 test.

Unlike the Washington students, the select group of students who studied in Arizona also saw an increase in their scores after returning to Asia University, on average a 16-point increase. It would be worth investigating why the Arizona group marked about the same amount of score improvement as the Washington group before returning to Japan and then continued to make improvement once back in Japan despite the comparative disadvantages of having a significantly higher TOEIC score to begin with and not having had explicit TOEIC studies in their Arizona curriculum.

Turning our attention to the differences between Cycle 2 and Cycle 1 students who completed their participation in AUAP, it is first of all worth noting that, whereas IR students spent about one-half of their class time on TOEIC test-taking skills in Freshman English classes during their first semester at Asia University, Business, Law, and Economics students did not study the TOEIC at all in their Freshman English classes. To some extent, this may account for why, after nearly one full academic year of study, the Business, Law, and Economics students had an average TOEIC score which was not significantly higher than the average TOEIC score IR students had after just three months of study at the university (Tables B and C). It may be possible to make the case that the IR students benefited from three months of TOEIC skills study that Business, Law, and Economics students did not

have. On the other hand, since the Business, Law, and Economics students, unlike the IR students, don't take the TOEIC at the beginning of their freshman year to indicate what their entrance level TOEIC scores would be, the comparison between these two groups on this point is limited.

It is possible to compare these two groups from the point of view of how much score improvement they made before beginning and after completing their AUAP studies. Last year, the two groups were strikingly similar in the amount of progress they made on the test, both in terms of the individual components of the test and the total score (Hull, 2012, p. 37). This year, however, the Cycle 1 students made noticeably more progress in their scores compared to the Cycle 2 students, particularly in the listening component, in which the Cycle 1 students gained 101 points to Cycle 2 students' 74-point gain, and in the total score, in which Cycle 1 students gained 153 points to Cycle 2 students' 112-point gain. If one takes into consideration the bump in scores the IR students experienced during their three-month study of TOEIC test-taking skills in their first semester at Asia University, studies that the Cycle 1 students didn't have, however, the point differences don't appear to be as significant.

Finally, similarly to last year, Cycle 1 and 2 students made double the progress in their listening scores compared to their reading scores after completing their studies in Washington. On the other hand, the Arizona State University students, differing from last year, in which they made four times as much progress in the listening score relative to the reading score, made about the same amount of progress in both skill sections this year.

## **Conclusion**

The results of the FEPT test this year are consistent with those reported in the past in this journal. Although the comparison between

entrance test scores and end-of-year test scores is of limited accuracy because of inconsistencies in the test groups, scores generally improved overall about five or six points across the four departments that took the test. With the introduction of a significantly reduced version of the FEPT in the 2012-2013 academic year, however, we can expect that will change in next year's report.

The results of the TOEIC are more complicated. On the one hand, the Cycle 2, 2011-2012 International Relations students followed a pattern similar to that reported in past years. They made an initial gain in TOEIC test scores before beginning the AUAP program on the order of 11 percent. They then marked their biggest gain of around 35 percent just after completing their AUAP program.

Clearly, the AUAP experience had a significant impact. The kind of growth in scores experienced by the Cycle 2, 2011-2012 students was repeated by the Cycle 1, 2012 students, who marked a 45 percent gain. In addition, the Cycle 2, 2011-2012 students who studied in Arizona marked average total point gains that were nearly equal to that of the Washington students. On the other hand, the Cycle 2, 2012-2013 International Relations students, who stayed at Asia University during that same period, experienced only modest score gains.

It may be possible to attribute this increase for the Washington students to a combination of factors: the significantly greater number of classroom hours per week they had studying English including regular TOEIC studies, the experience of living in an English speaking community with significantly greater opportunities to interact with native English speakers, and, perhaps, the stronger motivation students may have during AUAP to make improvement. However, the Arizona students made this kind

of score improvement without the benefit of having classes devoted to the study of TOEIC. This may indicate that score improvement is due less to the matter of whether or not the students study the TOEIC than to other factors.

Another pattern that seems fairly consistent for the Washington students upon return is a decline of about four percent in their average total scores with greater decline shown in the listening scores relative to their reading scores. On the other hand, the Arizona students continued to make improvement upon returning to Asia University, and the Cycle 2, 2012-2013 International Relations students, who had not yet studied in Washington at the time of this report, also continued to make improvement.

How is it that these two groups continued to make improvement during the same time that the Cycle 2, 2012-2013 students' scores declined, and what can be done to help create similar results for the Washington students in the future? Should the curriculum the Washington students study upon their return to Asia University include a greater focus on listening, since that skill seems to decline for them more than their reading skills?

Studying the different AUAP student groups more closely, their attitudes, motivation, and experience over time, particularly while they are at AUAP in their different sites, as well as after their return to Asia University, would help us to understand to what extent and in what ways the differences in scores are significant. It might also help us to understand what can be done to continue to build on the growth the students' experience during the time they are studying at AUAP after they return to Japan.

**Table B: Results of the 2011-2012 TOEIC, Cycle 2, Pre- and Post-AUAP  
Washington Universities Students**

	TOEIC, Cycle 2			
	Apr '11	Jun '11	Jan '12	Aug '12 Practice Test
Number of Examinees (change)	121	121	121	105 (-16)
Mean Listening Score (change)	177	201 (+24)	275 (+74)	258 (-17)
Mean Reading Score (change)	113	121 (+8)	159 (+38)	158 (-1)
Mean Total Score (change)	289	322 (+33)	434 (+112)	416 (-18)

**Table C: Results of the 2012-2013 TOEIC, Cycle 2, Pre-AUAP  
Washington Universities Students**

	TOEIC, Cycle 2			
	Apr '11	Aug '11 Practice Test	June '12	Aug '12 Practice Test
Number of Examinees (change)	95	88 (-8)	96 (+8)	93 (-3)
Mean Listening Score (change)	209	242 (+34)	244 (+2)	253 (+9)
Mean Reading Score (change)	150	167 (+17)	176 (+9)	177 (+1)
Mean Total Score (change)	359	409 (+51)	420 (+11)	430 (+10)

**Table D: Results of the 2011-2012 TOEIC, Cycle 2, Arizona State University Students**

	TOEIC, ASU Students			
	Apr '11	Jun '11	Apr '12	Aug '12
Number of Examinees (change)	9	9	9	8
Mean Listening Score (change)	316	330 (+14)	385 (+55)	396 (+11)
Mean Reading Score (change)	208	232 (+24)	283 (+51)	288 (+5)
Mean Total Score (change)	524	562 (+38)	668 (+106)	684 (+16)

**TABLE E: Results of the 2012 TOEIC, Cycle 1**

	TOEIC, Cycle 1							
	Bus		Law		Econ		Three Faculties	
	Nov '11	July '12	Nov '11	July '12	Nov '11	July '12	Nov '11	July '12
Number of Examinees (change)	24	24	21	21	27	27	72	72
Mean Listening Score (change)	209	316 (+107)	183	297 (+114)	203	288 (+85)	199	300 (+101)
Mean Reading Score (change)	164	208 (+44)	125	183 (+58)	137	190 (+53)	143	194 (+51)
Mean Total Score (change)	373	524 (+151)	308	480 (+172)	339	478 (+139)	341	494 (+153)

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