

Results of the 1996/1997 I-TOEFL Tests

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This article reviews and explains the results of the Institutional Test of English as a Foreign Language (I-TOEFL) administered in 1996 and 1997 to the students who registered for the Asia University America Program (AUAP). In light of our analysis of these test results, the use of the I-TOEFL as an effective evaluative tool for the Freshman English program (FEP) is questioned and recommendations for future evaluations are suggested.

Methodology

The I-TOEFL was given to freshman students in all four majors at Asia University who registered to attend the AUAP program during the 1997/1998 school year. The I-TOEFL examination was administered twice during the students' first year (May and December, 1996). Results of these two tests were used primarily for placement purposes in AUAP. During their sophomore year after returning from their AUAP semester in the United States, students were given the I-TOEFL a third time for evaluation purposes. Appendix A shows the results of these two pre-AUAP tests. International Relations and Economics majors participated in Cycle 1 of the AUAP program and went to the United States in the first semester of their sophomore year. These students took their post-AUAP I-TOEFL in September 1997, and the results of this test are included in Appendix A. Business Administration and Law students participated in Cycle 2, in the second semester of their sophomore year and have not yet taken their final I-TOEFL test.

Results

Appendix A recaps the scores of all students in International Relations, Economics, Business Administration and Law who took the I-TOEFL examinations in May and December, 1996 and of International Relations and Economics majors who took the examination in September 1997. Mean scores of the May and December 1996 tests for Economics, Business Administration and Law majors were similar, ranging from 384 to 392. Mean scores for International Relations majors ranged from 420 to 452. The post-AUAP score results for International Relations students reflected a mean score increase of 31 points and a 19-point mean score increase for Economics students. Since Business and Law students have not returned from AUAP as of the date of this article, post-AUAP scores are not yet available. In addition, 37 International Relations students scored over 500 points on the post-AUAP I-TOEFL. This is the largest number of students in the history of the AUAP program to achieve such high scores. Results of the Business and Law Faculty post-AUAP I-TOEFL will be available in April 1998.

Although AUAP participants were strongly encouraged to take all I-TOEFL tests administered by Asia University, a certain number of students did not take every test. For example, 237 International Relations students took the test in May 1996 while 196 students sat for the test after they returned from AUAP, and only 178 students took all three of the tests. For this reason, the raw data displayed in Appendix A should not be used to analyze score trends.

Analysis of I-TOEFL Scores for Cycle 1 Students

Appendix B shows the I-TOEFL mean scores of International Relations and Economics students who participated in Cycle 1 of the 1997/1998 academic year. These data are also displayed in Graphs 1 and 2. The I-TOEFL was administered in May and December 1996 to first-year International Relations and Economics students and again in September 1997 after they returned from the United States. To facilitate the comparison of scores of the three tests, only the scores of students who took all three of the tests are included in this analysis.

Changes in the mean scores of students who took all three I-TOEFL tests were most striking between the December 1996 and September 1997 test administrations. The mean score for International Relations majors increased 34 points between these two tests, and for

Economics majors the scores increased 16 points. The majority of students increased their I-TOEFL scores between May 1996 and September 1997. Of the 178 International Relations students who took all three tests, 148 (83%) showed score increases. In the Economics Faculty, 25 of 39 (64%) students also increased their I-TOEFL scores between these test administrations.

Analysis of I-TOEFL Scores for Cycle 2 Students

Appendix C shows the I-TOEFL mean scores of Business Administration and Law students who took both I-TOEFLs administered in their first year at Asia University. These data are also displayed in Graphs 3 and 4. Because these students have not yet taken their post-AUAP I-TOEFL, only the test scores of the May and December 1996 test administrations are available at this time.

An analysis of the scores of Business Administration and Law students who took both tests administered during their first year at Asia University shows that the mean score of the 54 Business Administration students who took both tests decreased slightly from 398 to 386, and the 31 Law majors had similar declines in their mean scores.

Observations and Concerns

Although the I-TOEFL is not administered at Asia University to determine student progress in learning English, the score results are sometimes looked at in this manner. We strongly believe that these test results are not an accurate measure of student achievement for three main reasons.

First, the TOEFL is an inappropriate test instrument for accurately gauging English ability of students in this test population. Although the TOEFL is a highly respected test instrument and has produced reliable results when administered in countries around the globe, it is designed to show the difference between individuals whose English language abilities are from intermediate to advanced levels. The TOEFL "...does not discriminate well on scores lower than about 450 (generally considered intermediate-level)." (Gilfert, 1995, p. 83) In other words, scores below 450 are not reliable indicators of student language ability. As we can see from the 1996-97 test data for the Asia University student population, mean scores ranged from a low of 384 to a high of 457. Since the vast majority of students who took the I-TOEFL placed well below the 450 cutoff score for reliability, we must conclude that the meaningfulness of the test data is a poor indicator of student ability.

Second, the TOEFL does not provide an accurate assessment of student achievement in the Freshman English program (FEP) at Asia University. The FEP is specifically designed to develop students' communicative capabilities and does not focus on preparing students for success on the TOEFL examination. To gain an accurate measurement of student progress, an achievement test which focuses on the FEP curriculum should be developed.

Third, student motivation in taking standardized tests must be considered. Since AUAP participants have no purpose for and receive no benefit from taking the I-TOEFL tests, it appears that they are not highly motivated to prepare in advance and do their best. Based on student questionnaires administered to freshman Asia University students in 1995, 41% of students responded that studying English was very important to them because they expected to take standardized tests such as TOEFL or TOEIC to enable them to study abroad, enter graduate school, or get a job in the future. (Morrison & Paullin, 1996, Appendix G) Because the students who take the I-TOEFL know that their score on the TOEFL does not reflect their ability to participate in the AUAP, it appears that there is little motivation for them to study before the test or to try particularly hard. This assumption is further supported by the number of students who took the I-TOEFL when it was administered the second and third time. The number taking the test declined by 41 students in International Relations, 25 students in Economics, 50 students in Business Administration, and 34 students in Law. It would seem that student motivation to perform well on the TOEFL is moderate to low, which could also help explain the decline in scores.

Recommendations

After assessing the results and analyzing the reasons for the 1996-97 I-TOEFL scores, it seems clear that a more accurate picture of student learning could be obtained if an achievement test was designed to measure the type of language education that students are receiving, namely communicative. If the university desires to see student scores improve on the TOEFL examination, we recommend offering special optional after-hours preparation courses for TOEFL or creating some incentive for students to do independent study, such as giving academic credit for achieving a significant score improvement.

References

- Gilfert, S. (1995). A comparison of TOEFL and TOEIC. In J.D. Brown & S.O. Yamashita (Eds.), *Language Testing In Japan* (pp.76-85). Tokyo: The Japan Association for Language Teaching.
- Morrison, D. & Paullin D. (1996). *Student learning objectives for the Asia University Freshman English Program*. Unpublished manuscript, English Language Education Research Institute, Asia University, Tokyo.

Appendix A

I-TOEFL Results 1996-1997

May 1996

	International Relations	Economics	Business Administration	Law
Number of Examinees	237	77	124	75
Mean Score	420	388	389	392
Scores over 500	9	0	0	0

December 1996

	International Relations	Economics	Business Administration	Law
Number of examinees	223	74	74	41
Mean score	421	384	385	384
Scores over 500	10	0	0	0

September 1997

	International Relations	Economics	Business Administration	Law
Number of examinees	196	52	*	*
Mean score	452	403	*	*
Scores over 500	37	0	*	*

* Because of the AUAP schedule, Business and Law students have not taken the post-AUAP I-TOEFL as of the date of this article.

Appendix B

An Analysis of the I-TOEFL Results International Relations and Economics Students 1996-1997

	Major: International Relations	Major: Economics
Number of students who took all tests:	178	39
<i>May 1996</i>		
Mean score	423	391
<i>December 1996</i>		
Mean score	423	390
Increase (decrease) in mean score	0	(1)
<i>September 1997</i>		
Mean score	457	406
Increase (decrease) in mean score	34	16
<i>Number of students whose scores:</i>		
Increased	148	25
Decreased	26	12
Remained the same	4	2

Appendix C

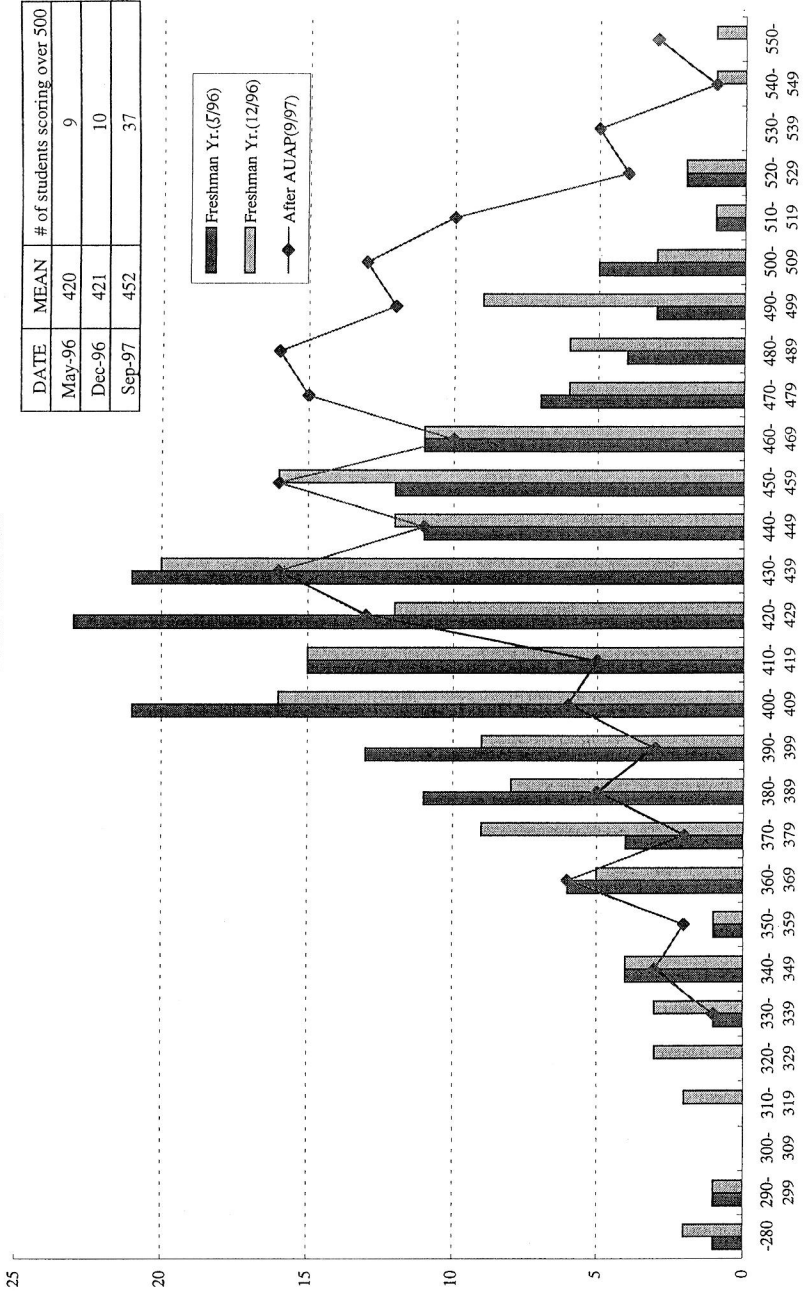
An Analysis of the I-TOEFL Results 1996-1997

	Business Administration	Law
Number of students who took both tests:	54	31
<i>May 1996</i>		
Mean score	398	394
<i>December 1996</i>		
Mean score	386	385
Increase (decrease) in mean score	(12)	(9)
<i>Number of students whose scores:</i>		
Increased	21	10
Decreased	30	20
Remained the same	3	1

GRAPH 1

I-TOEFL 96/97

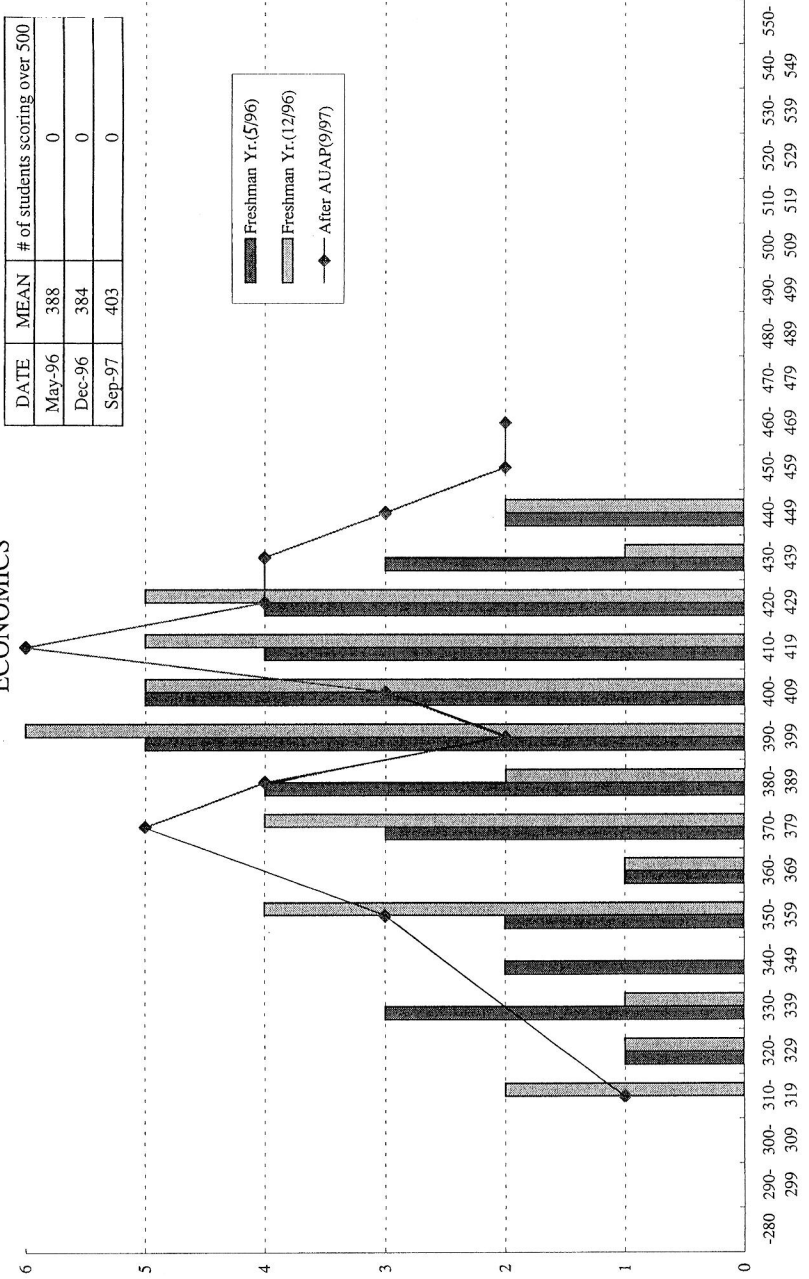
International Relations



GRAPH 2

I-TOEFL 96/97

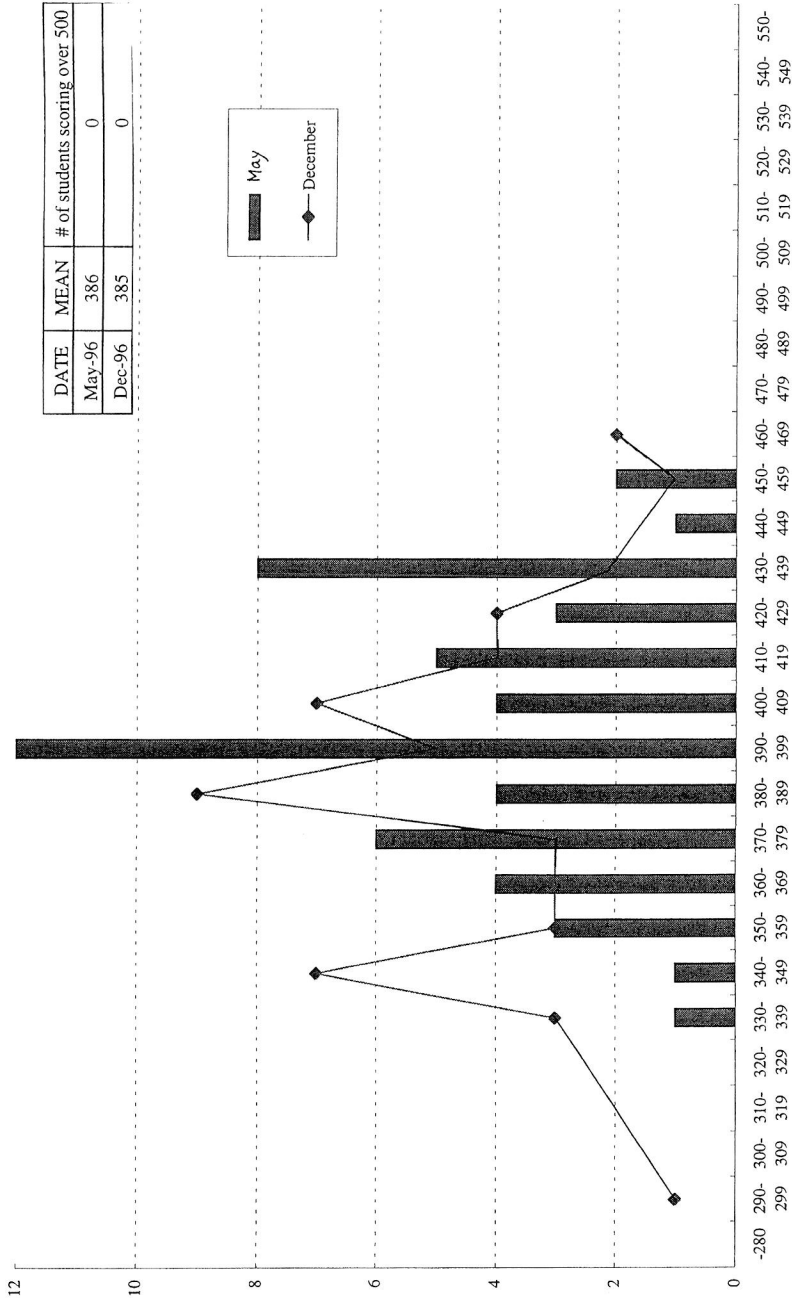
ECONOMICS



GRAPH 3

I-TOEFL '96

BUSINESS



GRAPH 4

I-TOEFL '96

LAW

