BYU Hawaii’s student body has not always been as international as it now is. The Church College of Hawaii’s (now BYU Hawaii) inaugural class (1955) did not have a single international student. In the 1957-58 academic year only 13 of the 402 students were international. The following year, 17 international students were enrolled including the first student from Hong Kong and Fiji. (Henrichsen, 1998). It was not until the early 1960’s that international student enrollment began a steady increase that eventually leveled off and remained at approximately 40% of the total student body, making BYU Hawaii one of the most international campuses in the nation (Chronicle of Higher Education 2002).

When it became apparent that international students were going to be an integral part of this campus, faculty and administrators realized the opportunities and challenges such a student body would present. The single greatest challenge in having such a diverse student body stemmed from the fact that many of the international students attending CCH came from countries and educational systems where English was not the means of communication, nor was advanced English language instruction readily available to them. In order to maintain its academic integrity and a commitment to
educating international students with limited English proficiency and limited post-secondary educational opportunities, CCH created an English Language Institute to help matriculated students improve their language skills. This institute now known as the English as an International Language (EIL) program has evolved over the past forty years from a single-course offering to the current EIL program which is a complex series of over thirty different credit-bearing language courses ranging from foundational to advanced levels. Since its inception, the Institute has borne the primary responsibility for preparing international students with language skills adequate for university-level work.

A recent charge by the Board of Trustees now calls into serious question just who should assume the responsibility for students’ English development. In University Board meetings held in 2001 and in a report from the subsequently-formed University Futures Committee, BYU Hawaii was asked to increase international student enrollment from the long-standing forty to sixty percent with an emphasis on Asian student enrollment. In addition, a charge was issued to provide these students with outstanding English language skills. Such a shift in student demographics creates unusual circumstances makes the second charge more challenging, and raises issues and questions never before considered at this institution. For instance, English would no longer be the dominant language influence. Students from certain countries could spend much if not most of their time outside of class speaking their native languages. In addition, we must ask such questions as how much English do students learn at BYU Hawaii beyond their EIL classes, and how might other sectors of the campus assist in reinforcing and furthering English usage and skills? With native English speakers in the minority, BYU Hawaii must seriously
consider what it could do to improve non-native English speakers’ abilities to communicate in English. Even if BYU Hawaii never reaches a 60:40 ratio, with the large percentage of international students typically enrolled, there is already a need to be more conscious of and better providers of English language development and opportunities.

Responding to the Charge

Steps are under way to respond to the Board’s two-pronged challenge. Faculty hires have been focused on language planning and assessment. A university-wide leadership retreat dedicated nearly a full day of discussion on ways everyone on campus can improve student language learning. A language planning consultant spent a full semester in residence analyzing and assessing the language learning environment on our campus (Eggington, 2003). These steps are precursors to the institution’s commitment to its international students and their needs. Put simply, an institution with the number of non-native speakers like BYU Hawaii should have a university-wide language plan. English language competency cannot be seen exclusively as the EIL program’s responsibility; this is a university issue. Accordingly, we propose a course of action that will lead to the establishment of an English language plan that will facilitate the Institution’s commitment to its international student population.

Action

In order to create an environment more conducive to English language learning at BYU Hawaii, we are proposing two distinct action steps—extensive data collection, which will be used to inform the second step—the development of a campus-wide language plan development.
Archival search and presentation of current student levels of proficiency and usage

- EIL entry v. EIL exit
- Survey of English usage

- English development post EIL
  - Cross-sectional view of EIL students language development beyond EIL coursework
  - ESL student competency at graduation

- Qualitative data
  - Students’ attitudes about English
  - English developmental opportunities across campus
  - Reasons for learning English
  - Expectations of their English post graduation

These data would then lead to the development of a university language plan that:

- Both informs and is informed by all corners of the campus—from employment to curriculum, from Housing to Admissions, and from ecclesiastical to Student Life.
- Systematically collects data on students’ language development at all stages of their university career
- Is managed by a committee that broadly represents campus life.
- is built on a model that allows for constant assessment, evaluation, and respondent modifications (for example see Stark and Lattuca, 1997).