

St. Charles Community College's English Language and Culture Institute (ELCI) received five-year initial accreditation in spring 2020 from the Commission on English Language Program Accreditation (CEA), making SCC the only community college in Missouri with this privilege. ELCI is also only one of seven CEA accredited programs in Missouri (including three in a single university system) and only one of about 300 programs or institutions in the world.

CEA, which accredits post-secondary intensive English language institutions and programs in the United States and internationally, requires institutions to provide evidence of compliance with industry-accepted rigorous standards. Institutions and programs must also demonstrate the constant ability to improve and excel in the intensive English field. Only those that demonstrate compliance and continuous improvement are recognized with accreditation.

To obtain accreditation, ELCI submitted an eligibility application, after which Dr. Dawn K. Huffman, ELCI chair, and Meredith Struebing, English as a Second Language (ESL) Learning Specialist, attended a workshop to learn about the 44 standards that govern the accreditation process. ELCI underwent an extensive self-study process, directed by Dr. Huffman with the help of Ms. Struebing and Dr. Mara Vorachek-Warren, dean of the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences Department.

Following the self-study, volunteer peer reviewers, who are professionals recognized in the field of English Language education, visited the site in September 2019 and formulated a report with recommendations, which Dr. Huffman had to address with a post-report. Finally, the CEA Commission confirmed that SCC's ELCI met the agency requirements and mission, granting the longest accreditation allowed for first-time programs.

"We could not have achieved this recognition without the support of our administration and the contribution of several staff and faculty members," Dr. Huffman said. "It was an intensive process."

Along with the accreditation approval, CEA identified five standards out of 44 total that showed partial meets because of changes instituted recently and not yet documented over a long enough period. Those standards must be reported on by February 2021.

"Because of the reporting requirements and CEA's systematic review of standards, our work is not yet done; it is never done," said Dr. Huffman, who now serves as a volunteer peer reviewer for CEA. "The accreditation ensures that departments do not grow stale. Our faculty and staff are always striving to meet best practices."

The accreditation benefits students by assuring that the program's services and faculty meet the CEA standards, which were originally created by intensive English professionals. According to the CEA website, these standards allow the "program or institution to gauge its effectiveness against benchmarks set by the profession." Furthermore, the reporting and reaccreditation required ensure that institutions remain dedicated to the standards and mission.

When a program is accredited by CEA, it can display that accreditation "checkmark" on its page, brochure, and other marketing materials. English language learners, whether international or

residing in the United States, know that they will receive quality instruction, and organizations, companies, and governments that pay for students to learn English can also be assured that they are making a good investment, especially at SCC where the tuition is much lower than most intensive English programs.

“SCC established an International Student Services Department, boasts a wonderful non-credit ESL program, offers Global Studies and Diversity Certificates, and now has a CEA-accredited English Language and Culture Institute,” Dr. Huffman said. “To me, this shows SCC is committed to cultural diversity on campus. We understand that our community benefits from the variety of perspectives these students provide.”

Credit ESL courses first began about two decades ago under Gayle Fang Checkett, former chair of the ESL program and the author of two books still used by ELCI. Now the English Language and Culture Institute offers 24 courses that serve a variety of purposes. ELCI’s primary purpose is to teach credit intensive English courses (lower levels) and academic English and specific career English courses (intermediate to advanced).

The institute’s secondary purpose is to be one source of cultural opportunities through cultural courses, service learning, and events that involve English language learners, students on campus, and community members. For example, an English Language and Culture faculty member will teach younger English learners at an online summer camp at SCC, and over the years the program has also been asked to have students speak and contribute at local organizations and schools. ELCI is also a member of EnglishUSA, a professional organization of 400 accredited English Language Programs.

“I really think it is important for the college and our state to attract international students and serve those local English Language Learners as well,” Dr. Huffman said. “We have wonderful global educators at this college and in this state.”

Dr. Huffman also serves as the current chair of Study Missouri, a consortium of universities and colleges devoted to international education, and on the executive committee of the Missouri Consortium for Global Education, a community college organization that operates under the auspices of the Missouri Community College Association. She was also the program liaison for the NAFSA 2020 Conference, an international education event that was scheduled to be in St. Louis this May but was cancelled due to COVID-19.

“The cancellation of that conference was disappointing, so this decision is one bright spot during this time for me although my biggest hope right now is just for our community and students to stay safe and healthy,” Dr. Huffman said.

To learn more about ELCI, please go to the following page on the SCC website:

<https://www.stchas.edu/academics/departments/English-Language-and-Culture-Institute>