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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

EIU'S ENGLISH LANGUAGE CENTER TO GET TOTAL OVERHAUL

CHARLESTON -- Eastern Illinois University's English Language Center -- a training ground for international students wishing to improve their language skills -- will offer a new curriculum, a new teaching staff and a new fee structure when it resumes operations this fall.

A recent extensive review by the university -- including a visit by outside consultants -- revealed that Eastern's year-and-a-half-old program fell short in providing the quality and scope of service it hoped to provide. The review was sparked by complaints from current ELC students.

In their 14-page report, Lila Blum, director of English as a Second Language at Western Illinois University, and Betty Jacobsen, director of Tutorium in Intensive English at the University of Illinois-Chicago, wrote, "The primary source of the problems encountered by the ELC is the result of poor planning and management. A well-designed and well-managed program would ride out such difficulties without undue disturbance.

"Eastern Illinois University must now decide if it will make a commitment to providing an intensive English program that meets the standards of the profession and which is part of an overall mission in international programming and quality education."

Charles Evans, assistant vice president for academic affairs, lauded Blum and Jacobsen's efforts, stating, "Everyone with whom they met was impressed with their objectivity and professionalism as they

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listened and went about their work. The written report was thorough, balanced and fair. It is extremely useful to us as we work to improve our efforts to provide an excellent experience to international students seeking to acquire English language proficiency.”

In his response to the report, Terry Weidner, interim provost and vice president for academic affairs, said, “The report of the consultants confirms our own investigations and makes it clear that the program should not continue in its present form.

“Realistically, it cannot be modified but, instead, it must be developed from scratch. I recommend that we move ahead in a positive manner to establish an English Language Center that meets Eastern’s high standards,” Weidner said.

The following steps have been or are in the process of being taken in order to reach the university’s goal:

- A curriculum is being developed by International Programs to bring course work into compliance with American Association of Intensive English Program standards. The curriculum will be reviewed by the International Faculty Advisory Committee and the Council on Academic Affairs.
- The hiring and evaluation of intensive ELC instructors is now being done by a team of faculty and administrators from International Programs and the foreign language department. The team will assess the qualifications, education and experience of the applicants to insure that high educational standards and quality of teaching standards will be met.
- Tuition and fees in this program are being reviewed and will be proposed by International Programs. They will be reviewed by the International Programs Faculty Advisory Committee and the Office of the Provost.

- A foreign student advisor -- a new position that was being recruited prior to the program's review -- will be hired to help international students with cultural issues and the technical aspects of student visas. This position will be separate from those advisors whose job it is to advise in issues regarding curriculum.
- With the assistance of the internal auditor, accounting procedures are being reviewed and will be revised in order to eliminate current "disorganized and sloppy" accounting methods. Despite past disorganization, Weidner said, there is **no** evidence of misappropriation of funds in the ELC.
- An agreement with Senzoku Gakuen College in Japan will be renegotiated, and it will be made very clear as to the skills needed to be successful at a university such as EIU. Weidner said the current agreement allowing Senzoku Gakuen students with a TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) of 500 to be admitted into the university is not consistent with the TOEFL requirement for other international students (550) and, thus, does not provide them with a fair opportunity to succeed in the upper division college environment.

In addition, all students enrolled in the program since June 10, 1996, will receive a partial refund of fee money for services promised but not provided. This includes all fees with the exception of books retained by students. One-time service fees (such as airport pickup) that were automatically charged each session even though a student might continue on into a consecutive session without making use of that service will be refunded.

Weidner said the International Programs Office will report directly to his office. Jointly heading the improved ELC will be Brian Bolter, associate dean of the Graduate School and School of International Studies, who will be responsible for all administrative and fiscal responsibilities of the program, and Heribert Breidenbach, chair of Eastern's foreign language department, who will oversee all academic issues and

evaluation of teaching staff.

Bolter, who began working at Eastern less than a month ago, has spent 15 years involved in international education. He previously served as assistant to the president for international studies at the University of Nevada and as director of international education at the University of Central Arkansas. His experience includes 10 years at the helm of English as a Second Language programs.

Weidner noted that the International Programs Office will provide a quarterly report to the campus community to demonstrate progress.

“I believe that an effective English Language Center can be a viable adjunct to our International Programs Office,” he said. “It will assist us to internationalize our student body and is a valuable resource for some international students. A well-run center can be financially self-sufficient, can deliver quality academic programs, and will treat students with fairness and respect.”