



## Teaching English for Academic Purposes in the KU Academic Accelerator Program

Marcellino Berardo, Ph.D. and Kellie Smith Herrod  
*Language Specialists*  
*Applied English Center*



### Introduction

The Kansas University Academic Accelerator Program (KUAAP) is new to the University and brings with it a reconceptualization of the first year experience for newly arrived international students who have not yet fulfilled the University's English as a second language requirements. In their first two terms, international students in KUAAP take classes in English for academic purposes (EAP) alongside General Education (Gen Ed) courses. By their third term, students no longer take EAP classes.

This new KU program required a reinterpretation of English language pedagogy for international students. We needed an approach to EAP that would fit the EAP-Gen Ed context. We also needed a set of principles to define our approach and guide our decision-making processes. This essay offers an overview of our approach and a brief description of EAP classes we developed for the Academic Accelerator Program (AAP). We end by proposing a set of principles we are using to define EAP and guide decision-making relevant to curriculum, instruction, and assessment. We hope these principles will develop into a robust EAP pedagogy applicable to the AAP and other EAP programs.

### Teaching EAP in KUAAP

KUAAP had a rough start. Faculty in the Applied English Center (AEC) had little time to develop courses based on an original proposal given to the AEC. The original proposal included familiar ESL courses such as Grammar, Reading and Writing, and Listening and Speaking, but it soon appeared that a general skill-based approach would not be most relevant to students or the program. The original proposal also included *supplemental* courses such as English Course Supplement A and B in the first term and English Course Supplement C and D in the second term. It was not clear what an English supplemental course would entail. Also still to be determined were the goals, objectives, and student learning outcomes for all classes, and whether the English language courses would be geared for intermediate, high-intermediate, or advanced English language students. We needed a model for teaching EAP that would address these issues in the AAP context.

### AURC as a Model for Teaching EAP

In spring 2015, we were asked to contribute to AAP's curriculum and instruction. To begin to address issues that arose in the Program's first term, we decided to implement a version of EAP we developed for high-intermediate Reading and Writing (AECR 140) in the Intensive English Program at the Applied English Center. Central to this approach is *AURC*, which stands for accessing, understanding, recreating, and critically discussing disciplinary content.

*AURC* is a pedagogical approach to teaching academic language at the university level. A number of strategies can be used to help students "AURC" content from Gen Ed courses. Academic strategies associated with *AURC* make use of (a) the hierarchical organization of academic texts, (b) visual representations/graphic aids, (c) highlighting techniques, (d) jargon, and (e) discipline-specific displays of content such as maps in a history chapter or photographs in a biology chapter.

Concerning textbooks, AURC helps students exploit textbook design for the purpose of learning language. Gen Ed textbooks can be exploited because key content is presented in a highly telegraphed way which makes the content easily identifiable and comprehensible, two necessary conditions for second language acquisition. Gen Ed textbooks in the humanities, social sciences, and sciences, however, are not intentionally designed to teach EAP. Pedagogical scaffolding is necessary. Scaffolding begins with the student's current knowledge and ability in English and helps the student advance by gradually introducing more and more language and practice with academic strategies relevant to accessing, understanding, re-creating and critically discussing ideas as presented in the Gen Ed materials.

The EAP instructor using AURC does not attempt to teach or explain disciplinary content as a content area specialist would. Of course, understanding of content occurs and is necessary to second language acquisition, but mastery of the fundamentals of a course in the humanities, social sciences, or sciences is not the main goal of language class. The main goal for students is to become fluent users of academic English for classroom success in any subject area. This includes learning academic English to construct knowledge as well as acquire and share knowledge. It also includes using English to find out what needs to be learned and to ask questions about what is not yet understood.

### **EAP Classes in KUAAP**

The foundational EAP courses in the Academic Accelerator Program are AAP 101, a six-credit course, and AAP 102, a three-credit course. Both courses provide sustained exposure to disciplinary language in context, and teach the strategic use of academic English to access, understand, re-create, and critically discuss disciplinary content. The key differences between the two courses are scope and depth. Taken in the student's first term, AAP 101 broadly introduces students to the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Kansas through the College's web presence as well as through one chapter from a textbook representing the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. AAP 102 is much smaller in scope but also much deeper in subject matter. Offered in Term 2, AAP 102 is based on the same idea of applying AURC to disciplinary content to teach academic English, but the content comes from one course, an American Studies class. In short, AAP 101 is an EAP that exploits the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences for the purposes of language learning and AAP 102 is an EAP that exploits one particular course in the College. The template for the two EAP courses can also be applied to any professional school at the university and to any course in that school. Used in tandem, these two EAP courses help students learn to use academic English appropriately, whether it is in a general university context or a discipline-specific context.

Grammar is also taught in the Academic Accelerator Program. AAP 121 and AAP 122 are EAP grammar classes that make explicit how grammar structures are used in the context of environmental studies classes that students take in their first and second term. Grammar in these courses is seen as a continuum that includes word forms, word choice, phrases and collocations, clause and sentence level grammar, as well as the organization of the paragraph. In AAP 121 and 122, students narrowly approach the linguistic expression of key concepts by focusing on how words, phrases, and grammar are used in definitions, examples, and explanations. Students also focus on the language needed to compare and contrast concepts, order steps in a process, and describe a diagram. The emphasis in both courses is to develop an ability to use academic English spontaneously with high degrees of grammatical accuracy, fluency, and complexity in the context of an academic discipline.

AAP 111 introduces students to information literacy and is directly paired with AAP 101 and subsequently AAP 102. In AAP 111, students are introduced to the technological skills necessary to identify questions, use digital campus resources to find answers, become familiar with the campus library databases, find and evaluate sources, and incorporate sources in written work. Techniques for avoiding plagiarism and using common style guides associated with undergraduate coursework are also introduced throughout the term. The jargon of information literacy is explicitly taught throughout the course so students can identify the necessary steps of research and other writing assignments.

### Guiding Principles of EAP in KUAAP

AURC and the EAP classes discussed above express principles that characterize our pedagogy and guide our decision-making. We offer the principles below to introduce and begin developing an EAP pedagogy for the Academic Accelerator Program.

#### Use of Discipline-Specific Texts

A discipline-specific text refers to any text that is written by content area experts for the discipline. The use of discipline-specific texts is key in EAP because academic English is used differently in different disciplines to the extent that the same words can take on various meanings and usages depending on the subject area (Hyland & Tse, 2007). Consider a small example from Hyland and Tse's (2007, p. 245) comprehensive study of the Academic Word List. They note that "...science and engineering students [are] very unlikely to come across *volume* meaning 'a book or journal series' unless they are reading a book review." In fact, any look at academic texts quickly reveals language used in discipline-specific ways. We see this in the anthology we use for students in their first term, AAP 101.<sup>2</sup> In the biology chapter, for example, words such as *producer* and *consumer* roughly refer to *plants* and *animals*, respectively (Coopman, Starr, Berstein, & Mankiw, 2013, p. 30). Discipline-specific phrases such as *opportunity cost* and *marginal change* take on unique meaning in the economics chapter (Coopman, Starr, Berstein, & Mankiw, 2013, p. 78). In short, discipline-specific texts are needed to sensitize students to the idea that words and phrases will take on unique meanings and usage across disciplines.

#### Language and Content as Inseparable

Disciplinary content and its linguistic expression are inseparable. Disciplinary content is realized through general academic words, discipline-specific jargon, grammar structures, collocations, sentences, paragraphs, and larger stretches of text, where text "refers to any instance of language, in any medium..." (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 3). Language also shapes disciplinary content by giving structure and organization to academic genres such as the textbook, the research article, the academic essay, the classroom lecture, and the class discussion.

This principle is key because learning words, grammar, and paragraph organization for the specific purpose of acquiring and (re)creating disciplinary content can have a *feedback effect* in the Gen Ed classroom. In particular, learning the linguistic expression of content can facilitate and/or reinforce the learning of the very content itself. In other words, acquiring disciplinary content and learning to use academic English to express the content are two sides of the same coin. Furthermore, the ability to choose the right collocations, formulate grammatically correct sentences, and organize and develop paragraphs helps students demonstrate their

<sup>2</sup> The anthology is a custom published textbook consisting of chapters from the sciences, social sciences, and humanities (Coopman, Starr, Berstein, & Mankiw, 2013).

knowledge of the discipline to the course instructor. The more skilled students are at using English, the more potential success they can have at demonstrating their academic achievement in term papers, on tests, during class discussions, and in formal class speeches.

### **Functional or Usage-based Pedagogy**

Our approach to EAP falls within a *functional* or usage-based approach to language pedagogy. Relevant functions of academic language include constructing, disseminating, construing, and acquiring disciplinary content (cf. Martin, 2007). Students need English to accomplish these intellectual tasks but also to recover information they may have missed in lecture notes, class discussions, and readings. In addition, students need to acquire university registers of English to signal compatibility with the institution and readiness to join the academy. This social function of language is arguably as important as the intellectual function. Finally, the use of language results in text. This situates text as central to the relationship between language and disciplinary content. These three uses of language to (a) construct knowledge, (b) join the academy, and (c) create text roughly follow Halliday and Matthiessen's (2014) notions of ideational, interpersonal, and textual meta-functions of language.

### **Academic Disciplines as Generators of Linguistic Corpora**

To EAP professionals, all disciplines are seen as generators of linguistic corpora, specifically sources of university English used for various academic purposes.<sup>3</sup> All disciplines, then, are equally important to the field of EAP because they provide the context for university English that international students need to learn. Most immediately relevant to AAP students, however, is the kind of English used in Gen Ed fields of study: the humanities, social sciences, and natural/physical sciences. Since Gen Ed subjects are most relevant to our students, we exploit Gen Ed subject areas for language instruction in KUAAP.

Seeing disciplines as corpora of data or sources for academic texts, differentiates EAP faculty from other faculty. Faculty in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences as well as professional schools devote their careers to teaching, research, departmental administration, and student advising. These activities are not seen as opportunities to generate texts that reveal English in its university register. In contrast, EAP professionals view class discussions, labs, field trips, textbooks, scholarly articles, administration, professional service, and advising as crucial sources of academic English. These sources constitute the raw data for EAP curricula and materials.

### **Sustained Engagement**

Another guiding principle of EAP in the Academic Accelerator Program is *sustained engagement*. Starting with vocabulary and grammar, students are exposed to the discourse of academic topics through extended definitions, explanations, examples, and relationships among topics. Sustained engagement with text allows students to develop a kind of fluency needed to construct meaning of complex ideas that can span 20 to 30 pages of a textbook chapter. Students use English over multiple weeks to engage with ideas and relationships among ideas in textbook chapters, videos, and other material devoted to one subject area.

### **Authentic Materials and Scaffolding**

Authentic materials in language pedagogy are any materials not originally designed to teach a second or foreign language. Authentic materials in the KUAAP context include textbook chapters and other readings

<sup>3</sup> For an example of a corpus-based study of university language see Biber (2006).

from the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences, as well as materials from environmental studies, humanities and Western Civilization, American studies, mathematics, and other Gen Ed disciplines. As such authentic materials represent a linguistic *target*. They provide the level and kind of vocabulary, grammar, and organization that students will need to engage with and demonstrate in their own academic work.

Authentic materials, however, cannot be immediately accessed and understood by students still working on their academic English. *Scaffolding* is necessary to help the student understand the language in the authentic materials and produce the language in a discipline-specific way. Scaffolding broadly refers to the pedagogy that takes the students from where they are linguistically and brings them, as close as possible, to being independently capable of engaging with and learning to engage with authentic materials. Interpreted in the AURC approach, scaffolding is understood as a gradual or step-by-step process that helps students access, understand, re-create, and critically discuss authentic material.

### Conclusion

Language instruction in the AAP needs to be relevant to the new Academic Accelerator Program as well as to the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. The discipline-specific approach helps keep EAP curricula relevant to KU's new EAP-Gen Ed program. The principles of EAP help define what it means to teach English for academic purposes and they also provide a coherent approach to curriculum development, instruction, assessment, and interaction with our Gen Ed colleagues. AURC, the new EAP classes, and EAP principles should provide a solid foundation for future terms in the Academic Accelerator Program at KU.

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