

2020

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Recommended Citation

Holmes, Marc (2020) "Toward Standard Interpreter Education Program Admission Criteria," *International Journal of Interpreter Education*: Vol. 12 : Iss. 1 , Article 4.

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Toward Standard Interpreter Education Program Admission Criteria

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Abstract

In the United States, signed language interpreter education programs (IEPs) must strike a balance between attracting a sufficient number of students and admitting only high-quality applicants who possess foundational language skills, can graduate in a timely manner and acquire professional credentials expediently. The Commission on Collegiate Interpreter Education (2014) asserts that all students entering U.S. IEPs should have strong language skills in both American Sign Language (ASL) and English before beginning to acquire interpreting skills. One way to measure a student's readiness to enter a program of instruction is through the use of admission criteria. I examined online documents and surveyed 52 baccalaureate-granting IEPs in North America 1) to identify their admission criteria, 2) to assess how these criteria were measured, and 3) to investigate which configuration of criteria, if any, had a positive impact on program completion by students and their subsequent time to credential.

Keywords: interpreter education programs, admission criteria, student success, path to graduation, readiness gap

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Toward Standard Interpreter Education Program Admission Criteria

1. Introduction and background

In 1974, the U.S. Rehabilitation Services Administration established the National Interpreter Training Consortium. As a result, the number of signed language interpreter education programs (IEPs) increased dramatically across the country. Since that time, interpreter educators have been seeking ways to ensure that students are able to succeed during and after their preparation. To that end, a number of researchers investigated the requisite knowledge and skills interpreting students need to learn including: Anderson & Stauffer (1990), Winston (2005) and Witter-Merithew and Johnson (2005); while others such as: Baker-Schenk (1990), Anderson & Stauffer (1990) and Shaw, Collins & Metzger (2006) created curricula. Despite these efforts, Patrie (1995) and Witter-Merithew & Johnson (2005) identified a long-standing “graduation-to-credential gap” (Cogen & Cokely, 2015). Godfrey (2010) examined what curricular factors might aid in shortening that gap, but only identified extra-curricular activities. She found that students who participated in service learning and/or practicums had the shortest graduation-to-credential gap. Other facets of interpreter education have not yet been examined for their potential impact on the graduation-to-credential gap. One such area is the criteria that programs use to admit students, some combination of which might help to ensure program completion and post-graduation outcomes. This study will help identify the expectations that the IEPs in the U.S. have of prospective students and determine if there are any admission criteria that are predictive of the time it takes for a graduate to earn a credential. It is assumed that there is a positive relationship between admission criteria and the time to credential post-graduation.

A number of other practice professions have examined the effectiveness of admission criteria in predicting both a student’s ability to successfully complete a program and to achieve necessary post-graduation outcomes. For example, research led to the development of a standardized entrance exam that all U.S.-accredited nursing programs now use to determine a students’ academic preparedness for coursework. Miller-Levy, Taylor, and Hawke (2014) identified that while some of the teacher preparation programs in Texas were using admission criteria, they were doing a poor job of identifying the professional dispositions of future students.

This paper describes a two-stage explanatory study of admission criteria for baccalaureate-granting signed language interpreter education programs (IEPs) in North America. The first stage involved an examination of IEPs’ admissions criteria that are provided online. The second stage collected data from a survey of the same programs, first to ensure the stated online admission criteria were current and accurate, second to collect IEPs’ admission criteria that were not available online, and third to determine what post-graduation outcomes the programs track. The survey data were also used to assess the relationship between admission criteria, graduation rates and post-graduation outcomes.

1.1 Theoretical framework

Although the CCIE standards state that accredited interpreter education programs must both have admission criteria for American Sign Language (ASL) and English skills and must define how the admissions criteria are used in accepting students, at the time of this study, only 13 IEPs in the U.S. were accredited. To date, no comprehensive content analysis of those admission criteria has been completed. As a field, interpreter education needs to know what should be expected of students so they can be successful in IEPs and in achieving post-

IEP admission criteria

graduation credentials. These credentials are defined as a state-level qualification (e.g. VQAS, BEI), or a national qualification such as the Educational Interpreter Performance Assessment (EIPA) or the National Interpreter Certification (NIC). Training as an interpreter is known to be a highly complex and demanding endeavor. Therefore, one may wonder whether it is possible to continue to learn a language while at the same time learning to interpret using that same language and still be expected to achieve graduation and post-graduation results in a timely manner.

Professions have examined admission criteria for professional education programs at all levels in a number of ways. Fields that have some level of research on these criteria include medicine, dentistry, general and specialty nursing, radiography, psychology, counseling, social work, occupational and physical therapy, as well as education and business. In translation and interpreting studies, the primary focus for spoken languages has been on determining what personality traits and dispositions are most likely to make a person successful as an interpreter (Longley 1978; Moser-Mercer 1985; Gerver, Longley, Long & Lambert 1989; Longley 1989). Keiser (1978) described discussions at the Paris Symposium in 1968, where conference interpreting trainers in spoken languages debated the usefulness of entrance exams and aptitude tests for entry into training programs. Not much has changed in conference interpreter training in the intervening years. Timarova and Ungeod-Thomas (2009) suggest that despite creating admission criteria, the pass rates for conference interpreting program final examinations at one German university vary between 20% and 80%.

In signed language interpreting studies, both Humphrey (1994) and Monikowski (1994) framed the underlying language and professional skills necessary for success as an interpreter. Later, some adaptation of the dispositional work in spoken language translation and interpreting studies for sign language interpreter preparation was done by Shaw and Hughes (2006), as well as Bontempo, Napier, Hayes, and Brashear (2014). These studies explored the personality traits that would potentially predispose an individual to successfully complete an interpreter preparation program. Shaw and Hughes (2006) identified that students and faculty believe that the most important personality traits are self-confidence, self-motivation and the ability to accept instructor feedback. Bontempo, et. al. (2014) found that globally, competent interpreters have higher self-esteem, are more emotionally stable, and are moderately inclined toward perfectionism. Additionally, Gómez, Molina, Benítez, and deTorres (2007) sought to “identify which perceptual-motor, cognitive and personality factors underlie both the acquisition of a signed language as a B language and the development of signed language interpreting skills.” (p. 71) They found that perceptual-motor coordination and cognitive verbal skills, rather than personality traits, are predictors of signed language interpreting proficiency.

A number of studies have explored admission criteria for signed language interpreter education programs. Petrino and Hale (2009) examined a single IEP with two sites where the admission criteria “at both sites included an overall grade point average (GPA) of 2.5 or higher, a passing score on a reading test administered by the IEP, and a minimum grade of C in all of the prerequisite courses (ASL 1-4, ITP 215: Professional Ethics and Issues in Interpreting, and ITP 220: Processing Skills for Interpreters)” (p. 49-50). They found a “combination of factors that, together, created an intense immersion-like type of learning environment that led to higher success” (p. 57) at one site over the other. Godfrey (2010) briefly mentioned that, in the five programs she studied, either the program or university admission criteria were so rigorous that a majority of students accepted were successful in the major (p. 48). Carter (2015) conducted a survey of 151 IEPs and based on responses about entry requirements (n=45) determined there was no standardized process for establishing baseline skills and knowledge for acceptance into programs. Garrett and Girardin (2018) investigated one admission criteria, pre-program ASL screening results, for two groups of applicants (n=250) to the University of Northern Colorado IEP and determined that transfer students with a two-year interpreting degree have expressive ASL skills similar to students with four semesters of ASL instruction instead of “junior-level expressive skills.” (p. 390)

The body of research on and use of admission criteria in other professions is dependent on the length of time and number of studies that have been conducted in that field. In highly competitive fields, such as medicine and nursing, research has advanced beyond descriptive measures into cross-validating multiple criteria. Some other fields are examining what admission criteria are being used and for what purpose, while still other fields are exploring the ability to predict student persistence, student performance or post-graduation outcomes.

IEP admission criteria

1.2 Use of admission criteria primarily for program entry

In a chapter discussing research on gatekeeping in bachelor-level social work (BSW) programs, Kropf (2005) described how admission criteria have developed over time and serve a role in this gatekeeping. In the 1970s and 1980s, most BSW programs were accepting all applicants but, as student interest in these fields increased, programs had to find ways to determine “goodness of fit” (p. 64). To do this, programs selected admission criteria that were “a mix between those that are more ‘scholastic’ in orientation and others that tend to measure more ‘personal’ characteristics and experiences of the applicants” (p. 63). Kropf (2005) warns that some studies have shown that faculty can use admission criteria to support their own perspectives about candidates and will tend toward using academic and scholastic criteria over those that measure personal attributes (p. 63).

In a related study of nursing admissions criteria, Jarmulowicz (2012) found that for associate and baccalaureate programs in one Southeastern state, a total of 35 different admission criteria were being used in differing configurations (p. 159) to select students. Of that initial set, 23 were in use by baccalaureate programs, with each individual programs using between 8 to 13 of those admission criteria. Only three criteria (grade point average, SAT/ACT scores, and ‘C’ or better in course grades) were required by all baccalaureate programs. Due to the variability and complexity of admission criteria, Jarmulowicz grouped the 35 admission criteria into five categories: 1) cognitive (e.g., GPA, standardized test, placement testing, minimum course grade); 2) curricular (e.g., required high school or college prerequisites, faculty advisement, priority placement); 3) professional (e.g., interview, essay, references writing sample); 4) time-limited (e.g., 2-10 year requirement to repeat prerequisite courses, standardized test or other requirements); and 5) other (e.g., health care experience, residency, motivation, age requirement). (p. 159). An attempt to correlate the complexity of these admission criteria with the teaching philosophy of program faculty failed to reject the null hypothesis that there was no relationship (p.170), which implies that sets of admission criteria and teaching philosophy likely go hand-in-hand.

Miller-Levy, Taylor, and Hawke (2014) conducted a document review of the admission criteria for 19 teacher preparation programs in Texas. All programs required the minimum admission criteria identified by the state: minimum GPA; minimum number of credit hours in the content area; passing content area test; basic reading, writing, oral and math skills; application; and an interview. Additionally, the National Council of Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) has several accreditation standards that set expectations for admission criteria. The NCATE standards include professional dispositions, defined as “professional attitudes, values, and beliefs demonstrated through both verbal and non-verbal behaviors” (Miller-Levy, Taylor, & Hawke, 2014, p. 6). Three of the programs studied by the authors were accredited and two were in the process of becoming accredited. The authors stated that “it appears as though most programs are doing a reasonable job of screening for academics. However, most programs have difficulty screening for actual teacher behaviors that should make up the majority of a teacher’s day” (p. 6-7).

In a study of accredited undergraduate business programs, Morgan, Tallman, and Williams (2004) identified two general classifications for admission criteria in public and private institutions. One classification is freshman admission, in which students are admitted to programs based on university admission with or without additional criteria. The other category is professional program admission, which is based on university GPA, minimum grades in a set of prerequisite courses, or both.

1.3 Focus on student retention and program completion

Some programs utilize admission criteria to determine the likelihood that a student is sufficiently prepared to remain in the program until successful completion. For example, Dolinar (2010) investigated whether course prerequisites could be used to determine if students would successfully complete their associate degree program in nursing. This subject was of interest because only 50% of admitted students were graduating from these programs (p. 68). Dolinar found that grades in prerequisite courses correctly predicted completion or non-completion for 85% of students (p. 69). Dougherty (2017) examined the relationship between the admission criteria and program completion of one associate degree program in radiation therapy. They found that of GPA, admission interview, writing sample and pre-admission testing, only the admission interview correlated

IEP admission criteria

positively with graduation. Similarly, Michael (2018) examined whether program admission criteria in a single bachelor of science in radiography program could be used to predict successful program completion. Four individual program admission criteria were tested across eleven years of admitted students: pre-admission testing score, pre-admission college GPA, introductory course grade, and prerequisite course GPA. All four were found individually to be predictive of program completion. Michael developed a “Probability Prediction Tool” that allows program faculty to enter a student’s admission criteria to predict whether a student will complete the program or not.

1.4 Alignment with program outcomes

Program admission criteria are also commonly used for predicting in-program or post-program outcomes. Programs want to predict these sorts of outcomes for a number of reasons including competitive student recruitment and retention, attempting to ensure available seats are filled with students most likely to succeed, maintaining academic rigor, accreditation requirements, and resource management.

For programs with open admissions policies, Shulruf, Wang, Zhao, and Baker (2011) examined which nursing program admission criteria were the best predictors of first-year undergraduate GPA. This examination was conducted because while enrollment in the program is not competitive, retention in the program is dependent on undergraduate GPA. In testing a number of the admission criteria for the University of Auckland nursing program, the New Zealand equivalent of high school GPA was found to be the strongest predictor of undergraduate GPA. Bathje, Ozelie, and Deavila (2014) examined the alignment of the admission criteria of one occupational therapy master’s degree program with fieldwork evaluations for students in eight semester-long placements. Findings indicated a relationship between undergraduate GPA and evaluations of student performance in their second-year first-semester fieldwork placement . There was also a relationship between evaluations of student performance in second-year, second-semester fieldwork placement and GRE written scores. However, no relationship was found between the two sets of variables. This result may indicate that while no individual admission criteria will predict overall program success, they can provide indicators of where a student may demonstrate strength.

Another way to align admission criteria is to examine post-graduation outcomes. This approach allows programs to report not only retention and graduation rates, but professional attainment as well. Wambugh, Eckfield, and Hofwegen (2016) justify researching this alignment because educating nurses, “is resource intensive and the attrition or failure of any students represents a loss of invested resources” (p. 92). It also means that another applicant lost their opportunity to enter the program and possibly succeed and represents one less successful nurse in the field. It is in the interest of nursing programs to examine the “contribution of admission criteria to student success” (p. 92). Wambaugh et al.’s investigation explored five admission criteria: pre-admission science grade, score on the Test of Essential Academic Skills (TEAS), experience in healthcare, previous baccalaureate degree, and college transfer versus original university admission. They evaluated each criterion’s ability to predict any of three potential nursing program outcomes: graduation, nursing coursework GPA, and passing the national licensure examination in nursing (NCLEX-RN). The authors found that students with higher pre-admit science GPA were more likely to have a higher nursing GPA and more likely to pass the NCLEX-RN on their first attempt. The same was true for TEAS score, that is, those students with a higher TEAS score were more likely to have a higher GPA and were more likely to pass the NCLEX-RN on their first attempt.

2. Methodology

In this exploratory study, I have investigated three topics: 1) describing the admission criteria used for baccalaureate-granting IEPs in the U.S., 2) the potential correlation of certain admission criteria with higher IEP graduation rates, and 3) the potential correlation fo certain admission criteria to a shorter time to post-graduation credential. Understanding the lack of substantive research on admission criteria for baccalaureate-granting IEPs

IEP admission criteria

and the need to determine what admission criteria are currently in use, I applied a two-phase process for data collection and analysis for this study.

To describe the admission criteria used by baccalaureate-granting IEPs in the U.S., I conducted a review of IEP materials available online, seeking to identify IEPs that met the study inclusion criteria: 1) listing as a baccalaureate program by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf (RID), 2) provision of a baccalaureate degree, and 3) listing of valid contact information. RID maintains a listing of IEPs at the certificate, associate, bachelor and master's level. At the time of my review (2019), the RID database contained 56 bachelor IEPs with links to their program websites. I used these college or university websites to examine information on admission criteria for each program. I reviewed both program web pages and university catalogs for statements of admission criteria. Further, I gathered contact information for the program chair, director, coordinator or other program faculty. I documented the collected information in a spreadsheet for analysis and for use in the second phase of this study. Of the fifty-six programs listed on the RID website, one was a duplicate, and at least two, although tagged as baccalaureate programs, were identified incorrectly. One was an associate degree program that had no information on their website about any formal articulation agreement with a university. Another was a program that appeared to be offered from an individual's home and promised that some universities would offer credit for courses taken there. A third program did not have current contact information in the RID database nor on their webpages. Attempts to email individuals listed as faculty were returned as undeliverable. In the end, fifty-two programs were identified for potential inclusion in this study.

For phase 2, I then sent a survey to these 52 baccalaureate programs, regardless of whether or not they provide admission criteria on their site. For those programs for which criteria were identified in phase one, the survey included the information uncovered in the website review and elicited additional information. The survey asked 1) whether the information on the web was accurate and complete; 2) if not accurate, what information was missing; 3) how the IEP measures whether a student meets the admission criteria; 4) if the IEP had alternate admission criteria; 5) the graduation rate of admitted students; and 6) the average length of time after graduation that a student achieves a state or national level interpreting credential. Additionally, the survey elicited the following information: 1) whether the programs measure students' English language skills; 2) methods used to assess English language skills; 3) minimum requirements for English proficiency; 4) students' ASL skills; 5) methods used to assess signed language skills; 6) minimum requirements for ASL proficiency; 7) course prerequisites; 8) placement test and/or screening tools used; and 9) grade point average of students at program entry. Programs for which admission criteria could not be found in phase one received the same survey but without having any fields pre-populated. An additional question on these surveys was about how admission criteria are communicated to potential students.

The survey was conducted using Google Forms with a unique link created for each IEP that allowed for the pre-population of fields using the information uncovered in the online document review. These unique links were then shortened using Google's URL shortener so that programs would only see the prefilled information in the survey. Each unique survey's URL was disseminated via email to the program director/coordinator for those IEPs in the US and Canada that qualified for inclusion in the study (n=52). Two follow-up emails were sent to encourage survey completion. With a well-defined population, voluntary probability sampling had the possibility of gathering the highest possible response rate.

3. Results

In this section I will present the results from the two phases of the study. First, I will discuss the data collected in the document review of the fifty-two programs identified from the RID list as meeting the inclusion criteria. This phase of the study sought to describe what admission criteria were provided on program websites. Second, I will discuss data collected in the survey distributed to those same programs, which sought to determine admission criteria for programs that did not list them on their websites as well as answer the other two research questions. Those research questions focused on whether there was any correlation between admission criteria and program graduation rates and/or post-graduation credential attainment.

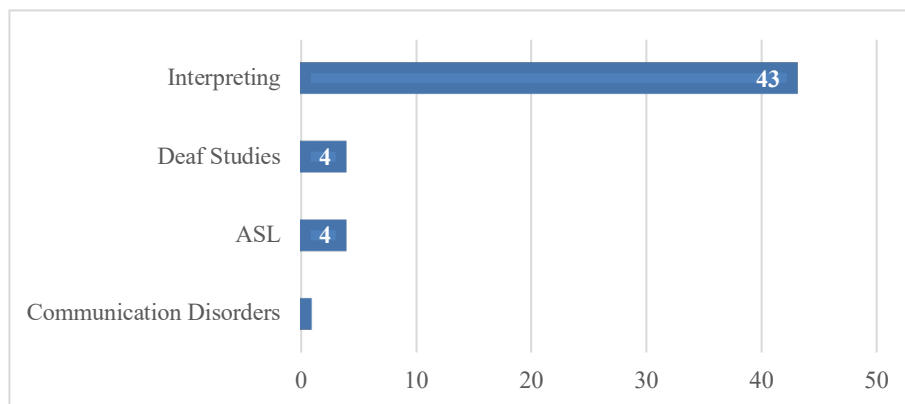
IEP admission criteria

The document review identified five major categories of admission criteria: ASL fluency, English fluency, course prerequisites, preadmission interviews, and other. In the survey, programs were asked to confirm the accuracy of data uncovered in the document review, to fill-in missing information, or expand on how the criteria were measured or weighted. Sub-sections of section 3.2 will discuss each type of admission criteria in turn.

3.1 Phase One - Document Review

During the website review process, I collected and coded information regarding the type of degree awarded. In IEP programs, both Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Science degrees are offered, however, I noted that not all programs are specific degrees in interpreting. Four of the programs were degrees in ASL, four were Deaf Studies programs, and one was a degree in Communication Disorders. Each of these programs offered specializations in signed language interpreting. The remaining forty-three programs were all degrees in interpreting specifically. Of the fifty-two programs in the document review, ten offered a Bachelor of Science, nine offered a Bachelor of Arts, two offered the option of one or the other, and the other thirty-one did not specify in the materials that were reviewed.

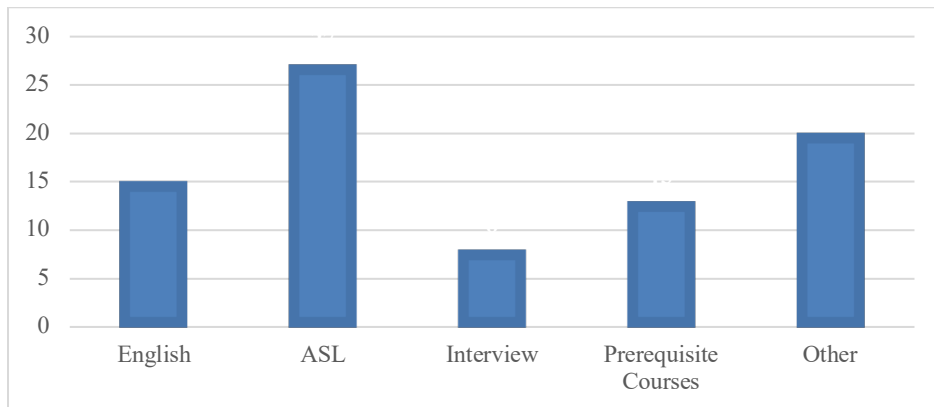
Figure 1: Type of program



Thirty of the fifty-two programs listed some admission criteria, either on the program web pages or in the college/university course catalog. Of those, 50% specified English competence, 90% specified ASL competence, 26.7% required a pre-admission interview, 43.3% laid out course prerequisites, and 66.7% had other criteria. The English competence criteria varied from high school English grades, prior college/university coursework or general education requirements, written and/or spoken assessments during the interview, to essays or video submissions. The majority of criteria related to ASL addressed the successful completion of ASL courses, while a few programs utilized standardized ASL tests or their own assessment processes. Eight programs required admission interviews, but very little was said about the content of the interviews. Course prerequisites were identified for thirteen programs. The most common prerequisite was some form of introduction to interpreting (n=8), followed by ASL coursework (n=7), and introduction to Deaf culture (n=5). Three programs required some form of linguistics, one program required biology and one required a course on the history of interpreting. Other admission criteria included things such as: cumulative GPA, an application packet, a prior degree, essays, letter(s) of reference, video submissions in one or both languages, a willingness to engage in out-of-classroom activities, a police background check, and standardized test scores.

IEP admission criteria

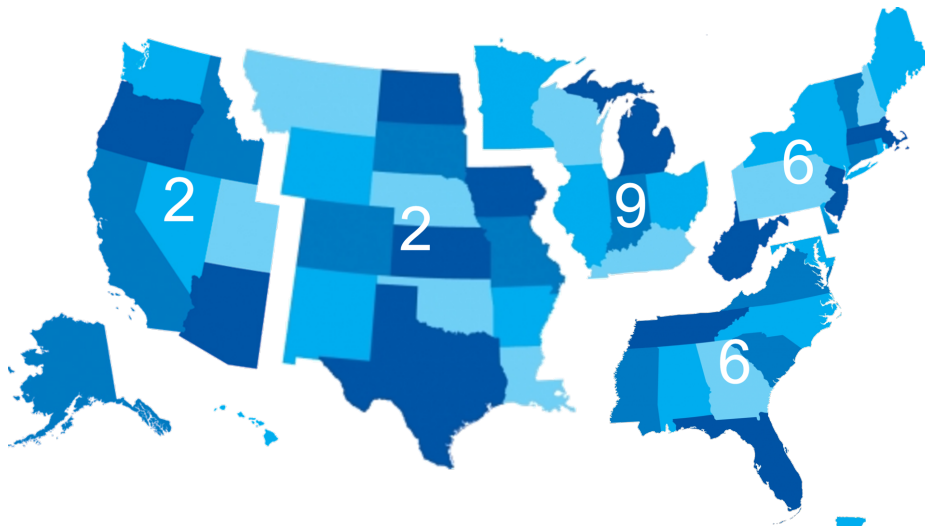
Figure 2: Number of programs with each type of admission criteria in document review



3.2 Phase two - Program Survey

Of the 52 surveys distributed 25 responses were received for a total response rate of 48.08 percent. Proportionally, the Northeastern U.S. (6, or 24%), Southeastern U.S. (6, or 24%), and Upper-Midwestern U.S. (9 or 36%) were overrepresented among respondents, while the Central U.S. (2, or 8%) and Western U.S. (2, or 8%) were underrepresented. Nineteen programs were Bachelor in Interpreting programs, with six interpreting specializations; three were in an ASL program, two were in Deaf Studies programs, and one was in a program for “professions working with Deaf people.”

Figure 3: Number of survey responses from programs by RID region



The programs that responded to the survey either admitted students annually (n=16) or had rolling/open admissions (n=9). The average number of students being admitted into programs was 14, but this number ranged from 5 to 40 per admission period. In terms of when students were admitted into a program, 10 programs admitted students upon acceptance to the university, four during the sophomore year, and 11 after the sophomore year. University graduation requirements were mostly standardized with 22 of the universities requiring 120 credits or

IEP admission criteria

more. However, the number of credits required to complete programs ranged between 15 and 120. Eighteen of the programs reported graduation rates averaging above 50% while the rates of 10 programs were greater than 80%.

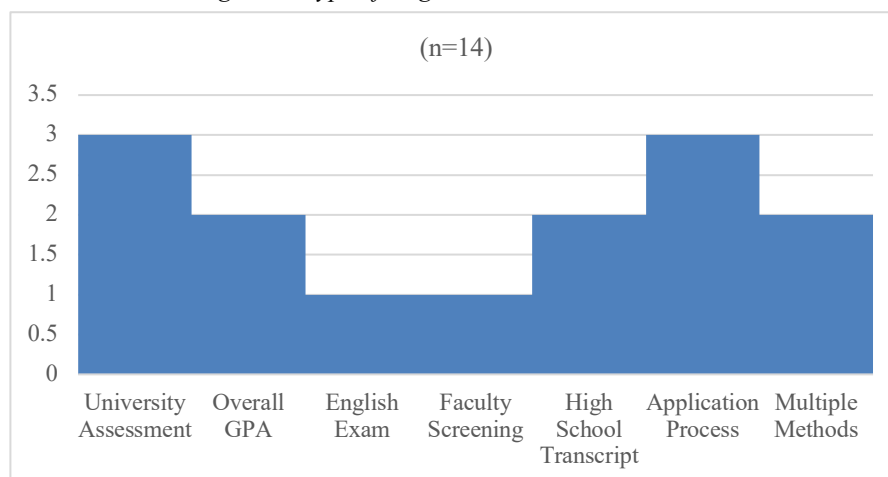
Overall, 18 of the programs tracked post-graduation outcomes for their students. The seven programs that did not, cited the following reasons: 1) they were either too new and did not have any graduates yet; 2) they did not have the resources to track students; 3) they had not been charged by their university to track students; or 4) did not receive responses from their graduates. Ten programs track whether students achieve state-level credentialing; six of those reported that this process took six months or less, and the other four programs reported a maximum of two years. Thirteen programs reported the average time to achieve national-level credentialing, with two reporting credentialing in less than six months, one reporting 1-2 years, four reporting 2-3 years, four reporting 3-4 years, one reporting 4-5 years and one reporting more than five years. Approximately half (n=9) of the programs that tracked post-graduate outcomes included some measure of employment, whether a graduate was working as an interpreter, the settings in which graduates were working, or the settings in which graduate were employed.

Of the 25 programs that responded to the survey, 84% (n=21) had some configuration of admission criteria, which leaves four that did not. Two-thirds of those programs (n=14) had had admission criteria for four or more years, while four had had criteria for two or three years, and one established their admission criteria within one year of data collection. Programs with admission criteria also reported reviewing the criteria on a regular basis, with 11 reporting an annual review and three reporting a biennial review. The four programs that did not have admission criteria admitted students at university acceptance, and report that coursework rigor and benchmarks helped to ensure that students were an appropriate fit for the major. Three of the four did not report post-graduation outcomes.

As noted earlier, the document review identified five major categories of admission criteria: English competence; ASL competence; prerequisite courses; admission interview; and other criteria. The survey asked about each of these, and the responses to each question will be described in turn.

3.2.1 Criteria measuring English language competence

Figure 4: Type of English admission criteria

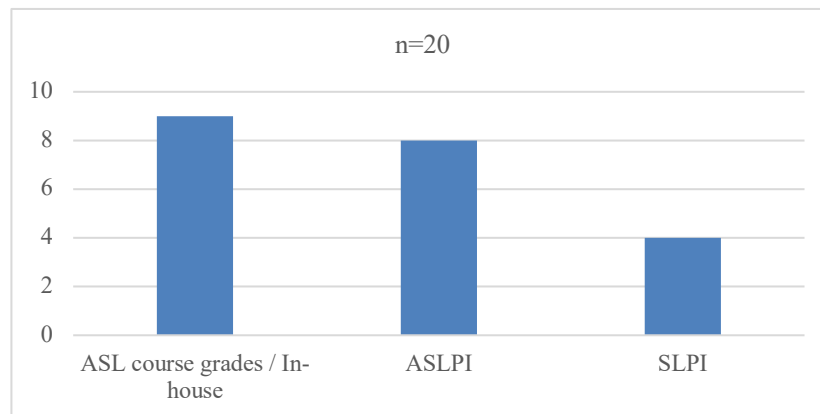


Fourteen programs identified having an admission criterion that measured English language skills and reported varied methods of assessing those skills. Three programs use a university assessment or general education requirement, two programs use the candidate's overall GPA, one program administers an examination, and one program conducts a faculty screening. Two other programs review the candidate's high school transcript for English readiness. Three programs have some type of English assessment built into their application process, requiring the student to complete an application essay and/or spoken English presentation. Finally, two programs use a combination of admission essay, general education course requirement, and an English assessment tool administered either by the university or the program.

IEP admission criteria

3.2.2 Criteria measuring ASL competence.

Figure 5: Type of ASL admission criteria



Twenty respondent programs reported having an admission criterion that measured ASL skills, but the criteria themselves were mixed. Nine programs identified grades in ASL courses and/or an in-house language assessment as a part of their evaluation of a student's ASL skills. Most programs that used course grades set a minimum of a B-. Eleven programs used either the American Sign Language Proficiency Interview (ASLPI) (n=8) and/or the Sign Language Proficiency Interview (SLPI) (n=4). All the programs that used the SLPI required a score in the Intermediate range, which requires a candidate to be:

...able to discuss with some confidence routine social and work topics within a conversational format with some elaboration; generally, 3-to-5 sentences. Good knowledge and control of everyday/basic sign language vocabulary with some sign vocabulary errors. Fairly clear signing at a moderate signing rate with some sign misproductions. Fair use of some sign language grammatical features and fairly good comprehension for a moderate-to-normal signing rate; a few repetitions and rephrasing of questions may be needed. (Newell & Caccamese, 2007)

For the ASLPI, the most common score required is an ASLPI:2 (n=6), which is defined as follows:

Signers at this proficiency level are able to express uncomplicated communicative tasks in straightforward practical and social situations. They demonstrate the ability to elaborate on concrete and familiar topics (e.g., current events, work, family, autobiographical) with some confidence. They can also discuss with hesitancy some unfamiliar topics, relying on learned phrases, recombinations, and circumlocution. Sentences are discrete and are influenced by language patterns other than those of the target language with noticeable errors, ranging from occasional to considerable, affecting clarity. They may display self-repair ability. They are able to respond to simple, direct questions or requests for basic information. Their responses are short and may leave sentences incomplete. If asked to handle a variety of topics, accuracy cannot be maintained. Comprehension is good with familiar topics, but frequent repetition and/or rephrasing are needed with unfamiliar topic. (ASLPI, n/d)

One program required an ASLPI:1 and another required and ASLPI:3.

3.2.3 Prerequisite course criteria

Seven of the programs with admission criteria identified specific course prerequisites. Five of those programs require ASL prerequisite courses that are also noted as part of their ASL admission criteria, and two programs

IEP admission criteria

identified these coursework requirements even though the program did not state that it had an ASL admission criterion at all. Other prerequisite coursework included a Deaf Culture course (5 programs), an Introduction to Interpreting course (5 programs), and an ASL Linguistics or Introduction to Linguistics course (4 programs). The remaining eight prerequisite courses are required by one program each, and half of those belong to a single program which has an entire associate degree program among the course prerequisites.

3.2.4 Admission interview criteria.

Twelve of the respondent programs require an admission interview. Eight provided some insight into the content of the interview. They mentioned an interest in learning about the candidate's: ASL and oral English interview skills, cultural and community involvement and knowledge, attitude towards interpreting, ASLPI scores, areas of interest and strength, an understanding of the student's objectives in the field of interpreting, other fields of interest, reason for wanting to major in interpreting, understanding of linguistics, and understanding of overall time commitment for the major. Several programs identified that they set aside time during the admission interview for the student to complete specific activities, such as an English Processing activity, an ASL comprehension activity, and ethical case study discussions.

The program which provided the most in-depth description of their interview process offers their students a guide to their interview. The website states:

In this section of your screening you will meet an interview panel. The panel is made up of 3 (deaf and hearing) individuals. The goal of this interview is to explore, with you, your readiness for the program. Keep in mind, the panel is interested in establishing a good rapport with you so that they can see you at your best – we are looking for what you can do, your potential – and are eager to identify individuals who are ready to enter the program. So please try to relax and enjoy your interaction with the panel. Feel free to ask questions if you don't understand something. The panel may also provide some prompts to help you better demonstrate what skills you have.

This interview included a casual conversation in ASL, an paraphrasing activity in ASL, an storytelling activity in ASL, an description of a picture in ASL, an ethical case discussion, a discussion in English of strengths and weaknesses, as well as a reading comprehension / written response activity.

3.2.5 Other admission criteria

Fourteen respondent programs identified having some other type of admission criteria. A majority of these criteria were completion of the formal application process, provision of letters of recommendation, or minimum university GPA. One program emphasized their inclusion of service learning in ASL coursework, to ensure students were aware that the program has in- and out-of-classroom expectations.

3.2.6 Weighting of admission criteria

Four of the programs that responded had some method of weighting their admission criteria. Two of these programs use a panel process to screen the applicant's entire admission packet but did not actually define how the criteria are weighted. One program provided the following as their weights: "GPA 15%, English Assessment 15%, ASLPI 35%, Personal Statement 15%, and Interview 20%." The other stated they put the most emphasis on ASL coursework GPA and only admitted students with a 3.0 or better, with some attention paid to possible "academic or other issues that suggest the student might not be suitable for interpreting".

IEP admission criteria

4. Analysis

While the raw data provides interesting details of what individual programs were doing, further analysis has the potential to inform whether there is any relationship between admission criteria and program outcomes. Initially it was hoped that some statistical analysis could be run, but due to the small sample size and variations in how programs responded to the individual questions, no conventional method would have provided valid results. Instead, in order to test the initial hypothesis that some combination of admission criteria might predict graduation rates and/or post-graduation time to credential, those criteria were visually compared. The analysis of those comparisons are shown below.

4.1. What admission criteria are in use for baccalaureate IEPs?

No uniform admission criteria were found among the IEPs. Rather, each program reports its own set of standards and measurements reflect what they believe to be most effective. The most frequent admission criterion is some specific level of competence with ASL, with 80% of programs having some requirement. This is followed by 56% of IEPs requiring competence in spoken English, and 25% requiring an interview.

4.2. Is there an optimal set of admission criteria that lead to higher degree completion rates?

As seen in Table 1, which is sorted from highest graduation rate to the lowest, the most important factor predicting higher graduation rate is the use of multiple criteria to screen admissions. All but two (80%) of the programs with graduation rates higher than 80% for the prior five years use three or more criteria to screen applicants, whereas fewer than half (47%) the programs with lower graduation rates do so. More successful programs have at least an ASL admission criterion and an English admission criterion, as well as requiring an admission interview. However, since there are programs with lower graduation rates with similar configurations of admission criteria, it appears that admission criteria are not the only factor leading to high graduation rates.

Table 1: Highest to lowest university five-year graduation rate with admission criteria

	University Code	English	ASL	Interview	Prerequisite	Other
>91%	B	•	•	•		•
	H	•	•	•	•	•
81-90%	A	•	•			
	E	•	•	•	•	•
	K	•	•		•	
	N	•	•		•	•
	P		•	•		
	S	•	•		•	
	U			•		
71-80%	V	•	•	•	•	•
	D	•	•			•
61-70%	G					
	F		•	•	•	•
51-60%	T	•	•	•	•	•
	C	•	•	•	•	•
	J					
	M				•	•

IEP admission criteria

	Y					
<50%	I					
	L			•		
Not Reported	O	•	•	•	•	•
	Q	•	•			
	R	•	•			•
	W	•	•			
	X	•	•	•		•

4.3. Is there an optimal set of admission criteria that contribute to a shorter post-graduation time-to-credential?

Seventeen programs reported tracking the time that it took program graduates post-graduation to earn either a state or national interpreting credential. Table 2 provides a comparison by university between the time to state credential and the program admission criteria. Table 3 provides the same comparisons for time from graduation to earning a national credential. Very few programs identify a time to credential of less than six months (n=6). Of the ten programs that track state credentials, seven have at least three admission criteria. Six of those seven have an English criterion, an ASL criterion, and an admission interview. Many of the programs that do not track or did not report time to state credential have the same number or combinations of admission criteria.

Table 2: Shortest to longest university time to state credential with admission criteria

	University Code	English	ASL	Interview	Prerequisite	Other
< 6 months	M			•	•	•
	O	•	•	•	•	•
	P		•	•		
	Q	•	•	•		
	S	•	•	•	•	
	V	•	•	•	•	•
6-12 months	A	•	•	•		
	U			•		
	Y					
1-2 years	B	•	•	•		•
Not Reported	C	•	•	•	•	•
	D	•	•	•		•
	E	•	•	•	•	•
	F		•	•	•	•
	G					
	H	•	•	•	•	•
	I					
	J					
	K	•	•	•	•	
	L			•		
	N	•	•	•	•	•

IEP admission criteria

	R	•	•	•		•
	T	•	•	•	•	•
	W	•	•	•		
	X	•	•	•		•

Nine programs (B, M, O, P, Q, S, U, V, and Y) track both time to national credential and state credential, while four (D, E, I, and K) report only time to national credential. All but three of these thirteen programs have three or more admission criteria, with the most common admission criteria (n=8) being English, ASL, and an interview. However, an equal number of programs do not currently track time to national credential but have the same number and types of admission criteria, so it is difficult to determine what the impact of admission criteria has on time to credential, if any.

Table 3: Shortest to longest university time to national credential with admission criteria

	University Code	English	ASL	Interview	Prerequisite	Other
6-12 months	E	•	•	•	•	•
	P		•	•		
1-2 years	M			•	•	•
2-3 years	D	•	•	•		•
	I					
	Q	•	•	•		
3-4 years	Y					
	B	•	•	•		•
	K	•	•	•	•	
	S	•	•	•	•	
4-5 years	U			•		
	V	•	•	•	•	•
> 5 years	O	•	•	•	•	•
Not Reported	A	•	•	•		
	C	•	•	•	•	•
	F		•	•	•	•
	G					
	H	•	•	•	•	•
	J					
	L			•		
	N	•	•	•	•	•
	R	•	•	•		•
	T	•	•	•	•	•
	W	•	•	•		
X	•	•	•		•	

5. Discussion

The online document review uncovered that, at the time of the study, approximately 40% of the IEP programs surveyed (n=26) did not publish their admission criteria online, although some of these do have such criteria and shared them in their survey responses. This lack of transparency may make it difficult for applicants to compare programs based on which skills the programs expect them to have prior to program admission. At the same time, rolling or open admission programs are often not permitted to screen students before program entry and rely instead on progression requirements (requirements necessary to advance through the program) in order to maintain program standards. For example, students may be screened out when they do not achieve a minimum required grade in foundational courses. While this practice does not meet the letter of the stated CCIE accreditation requirements, it may meet the spirit of the requirement since it provides programs with a means to ensure that students meet minimum competency (requirements) in both ASL and English prior to taking advanced coursework. If interpreter educators truly want to understand how students can be successful in achieving an interpreting credential within a reasonable time frame after graduation, they must take steps to ensure students are adequately prepared for their coursework when they are accepted into their IEP.

Even though the survey achieved a response rate of nearly 50%, many survey questions were either left blank or marked as unknown. This made a statistical analysis of the responses impossible. While seventeen programs track post-graduation credential achievement, it was not possible to determine which if any constellation of admission criteria would predict a shorter post-graduation time to credentialing. Reported data does suggest that having admission criteria ensures higher rates of graduation. Programs should be encouraged to track student-by-student admission criteria through post-graduation credential achievement to provide the field with better visibility into the efficacy of both admission criteria and curriculum in producing desired outcomes.

With that said it does appear that there may be some relationship between the use of multiple admission criteria and good outcomes. Nearly all of the programs with the shortest time to state or national credential have admission criteria for ASL, English and a pre-admission interview. However, the same holds true for the programs with the longest times to credential. Further investigation is needed to determine if there is something in the content of the admission criteria or some other factor that has a stronger relationship to the time to credential. The same is true for graduation rates, the schools with the highest graduation rates have all three as well, but so do some of the programs with lower graduation rates. This means that the study was able to meet its aim to describe admission criteria, as well as identify the likelihood there is some relationship between admission criteria and graduation rates and time to credential, but further study is needed to clarify the nature of that relationship.

A surprising number of programs (n=12) require a pre-admission interview, but the content and format of the interviews are highly variable. While some programs ask a few questions about the applicant's language learning history, others require practical skills evaluations in addition to open dialogue. The program with the most structured interview reports an 81-90% graduation rate and an average post-graduation time to national credential of less than six months. This finding suggests that the constellation of admission criteria used by this program may have the potential to ensure success, but more research would be required to confirm the accuracy of the reported time to credential, to delve into which of the program's admission criteria are causing these results, and to ascertain whether these results might be replicable in other programs.

In general, this study of interpreter education programs demonstrates that currently, these programs are tracking individual student progress information with little consistency between schools. Other professional fields have advocated for the creation of more uniform student-level data tracking for preparation programs. Tracking post-graduation data anonymously may allow interpreter educators to better understand the ability of admission criteria to predict students' ability to successfully complete IEP coursework and achieve post-graduation credentials. Using a process similar to that of Michael (2018) for one radiology program could allow for the creation of a "Probability Prediction Algorithm" for IEPs. What Wambuguh, Eckfield, and Hofwegen (2016) reported about nursing programs may also hold true for interpreting, that educating interpreters is very resource-intensive, and every time one student is selected who does not persist or succeed in a program, it deprives another possible student of access to training. Having the ability to predict the likelihood that a student will succeed would benefit the field greatly.

IEP admission criteria

The large number of open-admission schools suggests that an adjustment to the CCIE standard requiring admission criteria might be warranted. Offering programs the choice between admission criteria or progression criteria would remove this barrier to accreditation for IEPs that are prohibited by school policy from implementing admission criteria. As mentioned above, the fact that so few baccalaureate programs are accredited means that there is no universal standard for admission. The variability in responses from open admission programs can likely be attributed to the fact that the CCIE standards are a barrier to accreditation.

In considering limitations of this study, the principle difficulty was atrophy in the sample size. At first glance, the response rate seemed substantial, leading to hopes that the results would be generalizable. Unfortunately, fewer than two-thirds of the programs that responded actually track post-graduation outcomes, and then only half of those programs track the achievement of a state or national credential. That reduced the sample from 52 surveys sent to 25 overall responses to only ten to thirteen responses with useable data. Additionally, due to the high variability in the responses it was not possible to test the correlational hypothesis between admission criteria and graduation rate or time to credential, though there is some evidence of a relationship that needs to be tested with more consistent data.

7. Conclusion

Unlike other professional fields such as nursing, radiology, and social work, research on program admission criteria has been extremely limited for signed language interpreter education. Most prior work in translation and interpreting studies has focused on personal and professional dispositions that make students more likely to be successful as interpreters.

Using a two-phase study design, this study examined the online information provided by fifty-two baccalaureate IEPs for evidence of admission criteria and then surveyed those same programs to confirm and further elicit information on admission criteria, as well as gather data on program outcomes. It sought to describe current admission criteria and identified that thirty programs publish some information about their admission criteria online. While CCIE recommends language admission criteria, the form in which that recommendation is applied varies greatly from program to program. Additionally, the study sought to uncover any relationship between admission criteria and program completion rates and/or post-graduation time to credential attainment. Due to limited survey responses and variability in how programs responded to the individual questions, no direct correlation could be calculated. Visualizing the data, however, provided some insight into the relationship between admission criteria and higher graduation rates as well as shorter time to credential.

This study has uncovered some patterns in IEP admission criteria that merit further investigation but require more detailed documentation and tracking of student application, progression, graduation, and post-graduation data. There is a need for better data on individual student outcomes in a more consistent way. Some of the findings point to combinations of admission or progression criteria such as minimum language competencies along with a robust interview process, as being predictive of student program completion. Finally, CCIE (2014) recommends language assessment admission criteria, but this requirement may actually be a barrier to accreditation for programs in universities that are required to admit all students, leading to the potential need for programs to either have admission or progression criteria.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to Dr. Danielle I. J. Hunt for her guidance as I undertook this project, to Dr. Brenda Nicodemus for her careful review of the initial draft, to Dr. Regina Nuzzo for helping to develop a method for visualizing the data when statistics would not work, to Dr. Lisa Godfrey and Loriel Dutton for their consultation on survey design, and finally, to my family for supporting me in completing this work.

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IEP admission criteria

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IEP admission criteria

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