

## focus

# Preparation counts

Academic preparation courses in Canada are becoming more popular with international students and are evolving as the needs of clients are better understood.

Confirming a trend that academic preparation courses in Canada are on the rise, Izabella Bachmanek from Global Village English in Toronto, ONT, reports, "These courses have always been popular, about 50 per cent of our students take them, but we've certainly seen an increase in recent years."

Jacqueline Prowse from the English Language Centre at the University of Victoria in Victoria, BC also mentions increased interest in their academic preparation courses. "I think many countries are coming to appreciate the high quality of education at Canadian post secondary institutions," she observes.

As interest in Canadian higher education opportunities grows overseas, the issue of being adequately prepared for academic life in Canada takes on more importance. Maureen Sargent at the Tesl Centre at Saint Mary's University in Halifax, NS, says that they have recently adapted their courses to be "more authentic" and address academic issues that students may be unfamiliar with. "We now spend more time on helping students to understand the Canadian concepts of academic integrity and plagiarism," she says. "Many students struggle with how to cite sources appropriately and how to use the work of established authorities in their own work."

At the University of Victoria too, recent course changes ensure that students are more prepared for the demands of their future academic courses. "We are putting strong emphasis on working cooperatively as this is the reason most international students fail in a university credit setting," says Prowse. "In Canada it is common for students to carry on discussion and work in groups [and] for students whose second language is English, it is sometimes hard to keep up with the conversation."

With many international students anxious to complete their degree courses in the shortest space of time in order to cut down costs, some schools and colleges in Canada are also allowing students to combine their

academic preparation courses with subject courses that count towards their final degree. Martine Allard from Seneca College in North York, ONT, says that they have recently increased the range of subject courses available to academic preparation students in response to student demand. "We have [also] added more presentation skills... at the request of the post-secondary professors who felt that international students needed more preparation in [that area]," she says.

While the trend generally is towards intensifying academic preparation courses so that they provide the best preparation for academic life, Grant Lovelock at Modus Language Institute in Vancouver, BC, is contemplating running two preparation courses in the future at differing academic levels. "We are considering opening a lower-level academic preparation course, as there seems to be increased demand for that among students," he relates.

Private language providers such as Modus and Pacific Language Institute in Vancouver, BC offer various pathways into university life. Katie Idle at Pacific Language Institute points out that students taking more focused Toefl and IELTS preparation courses at their school also have the option of taking an advanced reading and writing course, "which is also great preparation for university".

A key attraction of academic preparation courses at private language schools is that many have special entry agreements with local higher education institutions. "The number-one reason students cite for the popularity of taking [our] university preparatory English programme is that successful completion exempts them from taking IELTS or Toefl," states Chris Musial from International Language Institute in Halifax, NS.

A focus on providing a clear route from language learning to higher education also goes down well with agents, Musial adds. "Agents feel a measure of security knowing that we have formal associations with major universities," he says.