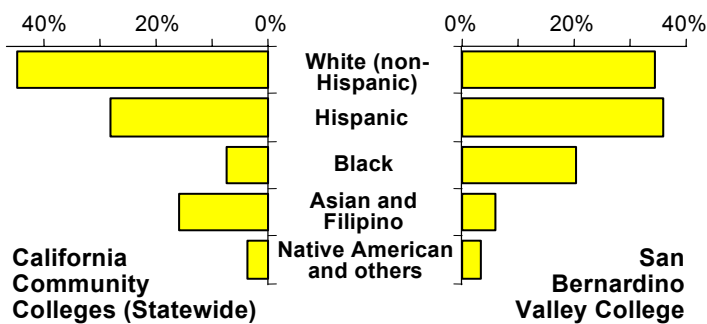


# The sociolinguistic insights for ESL instruction at SBVC

Divergent sociolinguistic backgrounds of learners can often make the task of L<sub>2</sub> instruction a pedagogic nightmare, as the desperate mix of students in our ENGL 015 and ENGL 101 classes at the SBVC clearly shows. Indeed, ethnicity and economy are the two factors that have combined to create this complexity in our English classes.

## Ethnic Background or the Linguistic Scene:

Figure 1 compares the ethnic makeup of SBVC students with that of community college students statewide, based on the Fall 2000 semester enrollment data. Note that SBVC has a larger proportion of Hispanic and Black students, and a smaller proportion of Asian (including Filipino) students, than community colleges in California in general.



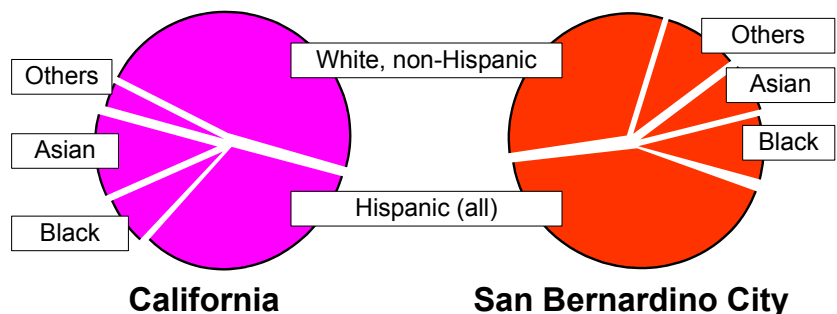
**Figure 1:**

Comparing the ethnic composition of SBVC student community with that statewide. (Source: California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office).

This reflects the reality of the San Bernardino community itself, as can be seen in Figure 2 where we compare the ethnic makeup of San Bernardino city with that of the state of California. Note that Hispanics rather than non-Hispanic Whites are the largest ethnic group in the City.

**Figure 2:**

Unlike the State, non-native speakers of English (Hispanics and Asians) outnumber the native speakers (Whites and Blacks) in San Bernardino. (Sources: U.S. Census Bureau and San Bernardino City Government)



Combining the White (non-Hispanic) and Black segments of these populations as the native speakers of English, on one hand, and the Hispanic and Asian segments as the non-native speakers on the other, it can be seen that non-native speakers (= 49.9%) outnumber the native speakers (= 40.4%) in San Bernardino City. The corresponding statewide proportions are 43.5% and 53.1%, respectively. This suggests that, compared to an average California community college, there is a far greater potential demand for ESL programs at the SBVC.

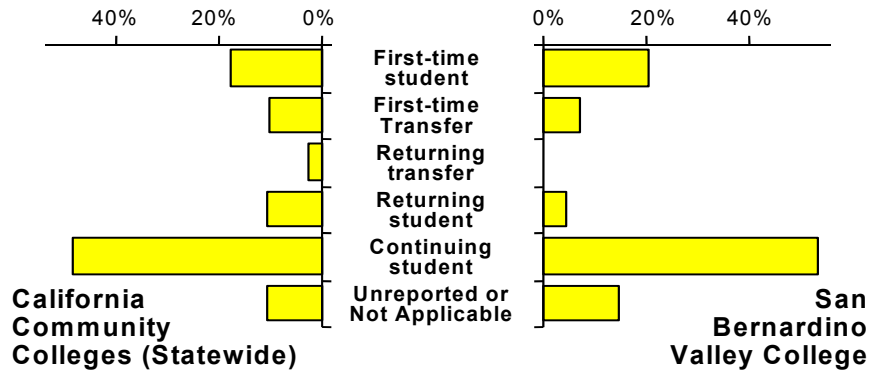
## The academic profile of SBVC students:

Much like the other community colleges, the majority of SBVC students are either continuing (53.2% in Fall 2000) or first-time (20.6% in Fall 2000) students. This can be seen in Figure 3 where these statistics for the Fall 2000 semester are compared with the corresponding statewide community college enrollment data.

**Figure 3:**

About 75% of the community college enrollees are either continuing or first-time students.

Source: California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office.

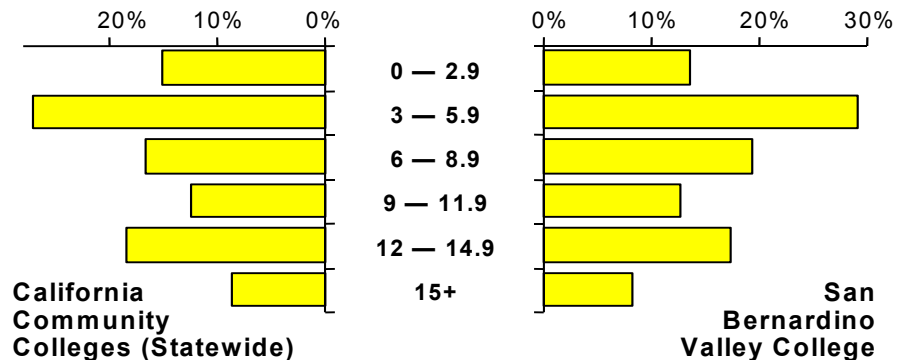


In terms of the average unit-load too, the student population at SBVC is typical of an average community college in California. As shown in Figure 4 below, full-time students (i.e., those with 12 or more units) accounted for only about a quarter of the total community college enrollments in SBVC and elsewhere in Fall 2000. These figures exclude the non-credit enrollments that accounted for 13.5% of the total unit load in Fall 2000 statewide. This number is likely to be as much or more for SBVC because fewer of our students tend to transfer to the 4-year colleges and universities than what is the average for community colleges in California.

**Figure 4:**

Much like the other community college enrollees, 70-75% of the SBVC students take less than 12 units per semester.

Source: California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office.

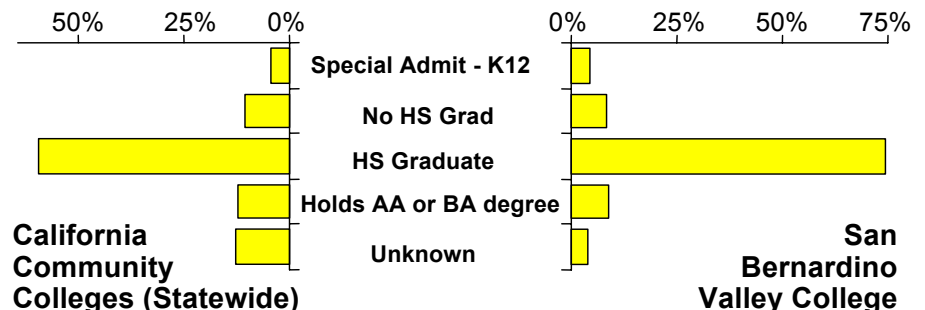


Interestingly, this is despite the fact that SBVC enrollees comprise a much larger proportion of High School graduates than the California community colleges in general. This can be seen in Figure 5 where we compare the Fall 2000 SBVC statistics with the statewide data.

**Figure 5:**

Compared to the California community colleges in general, SBVC has a higher proportion of High School graduates.

Source: California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office.



Ordinarily, with such a large proportion of high school graduates coming in, we should expect SBVC transfer rates to exceed the state average. The question why fewer SBVC students are transfer-bound is one that continues to be a matter of considerable concern college-wide, therefore. The problem is that the transfer rates are hard to measure. This is largely because a student who comes to the community college does not necessarily seek transfer to a 4-year college or university. Indeed, many of them come to the community college merely to shop around and see if transfer is indeed what they wish to pursue. A recent NCES (National Center for Educational Statistics) study<sup>1</sup> of this issue thus found that only a quarter of all beginning post-secondary students enrolled at public 2-year institutions nationwide in 1989-90 had transferred to 4-year institutions by Spring 1994. This proportion jumped to 36% for the students who expected to complete bachelor's degree or higher, and to 40% for the students enrolled in 12 or more credit hours. Thus, as SBVC has the same proportion of enrollees taking 12-plus units as the average community college in California, then one wonders why its significantly higher proportion of High School graduates has not translated into a comparable, if not proportionately higher, transfer rate.

### The economic profile of SBVC students:

Part of the answer perhaps lies in the economy. More often than not, students pursue formal education based on its perceived economic benefits, after all. Our transfer rates are unlikely to improve, then, if our students found a 2-year college education to be all that they need in order to accomplish their economic goals. This is consistent with the recent job-growth projections for 2000-10 by Bureau of Labor Statistics, summarized in Table 1, which suggests that the fastest growth during this period is expected to come through Associate degree or community college education.

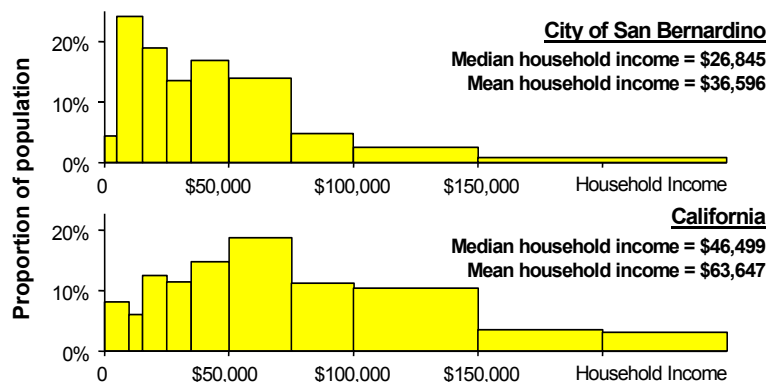
**Table 1:**

Employment and total job openings by education or training: 2000-2010.

	Total Number Employed and/or Jobs Available		Change during 2000-10
	2000	2010	
<b>Formal Education</b>	41.83 million	51.16 million	22.29%
Post-Baccalaureate	12.27 million	14.75 million	20.19%
Baccalaureate	17.80 million	21.81 million	22.50%
Associate	5.08 million	6.70 million	31.83%
Post-Secondary Vocational	6.68 million	7.89 million	18.16%
<b>Work-related Training</b>	103.76 million	116.60 million	12.37%
<b>Total</b>	145.59 million	167.75 million	15.22%

Source: <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/ecopro.t04.htm>

To this we should add the fact that, as shown in Figure 6 which compares the income profile of the city of San Bernardino with that of the State of California, San Bernardino is a relatively poor part of California. The economy today is largely knowledge based. Therefore, the poorer a community the less likely it would be to either demand higher education or pursue when it is available.



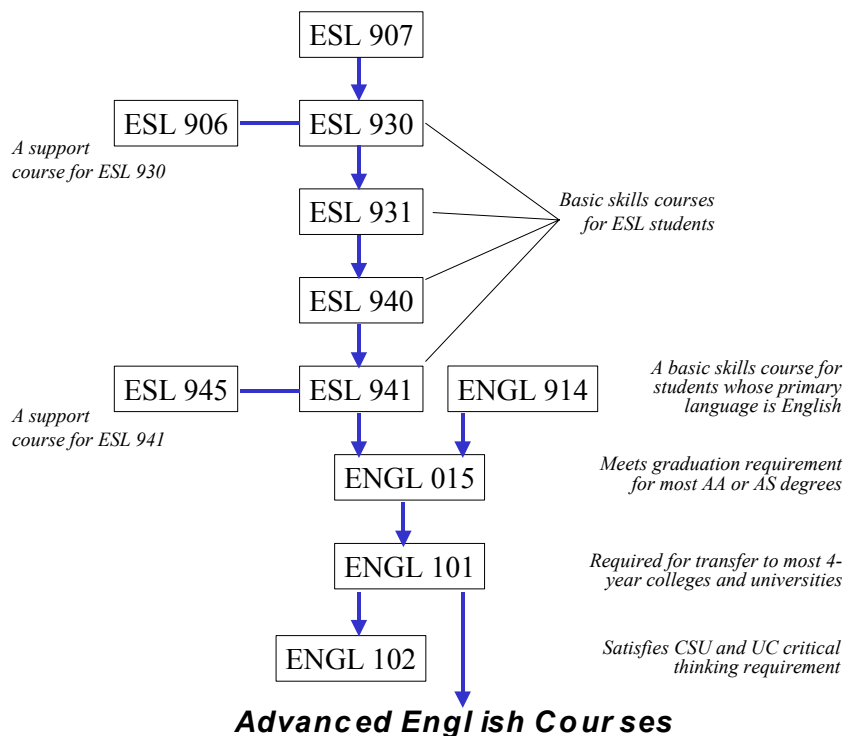
**Figure 6:**

Household income and benefits, in 2000 inflation-adjusted dollars, for the city of San Bernardino (top) and the State of California (bottom).

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

## Implications for the ESL program at SBVC:

These factors have two implications for our SBVC English program. Overall, they emphasize that the success of our English program is critical to the transfer goals of the College. All transfer bound students are bound to pass through our English program, after all. Any improvement in the efficiency of our English program is therefore bound to positively impact the SBVC transfer rate. Likewise, as for our English program itself, these sociolinguistic factors suggest that our students can be broadly grouped into two. One is the ESL group, whose need to learn the English language is what our existing sequence of ESL courses, from ESL 907 to ESL 941 (Figure 7), seeks to serve. The number of such students is rather small, however. As 70-75% of our credit students are High School graduates (Figure 8), these ESL students comprise only a fraction of the 25-30% of our other students. The other group comprises the “limited English” students who, having graduated from our local High Schools, come straight to either ENGL 015 or ENGL 101 but mostly speak Spanish at home are yet to acquire the ESL skills that they need in order to succeed in these courses.



**Figure 7:**

Sequence of English Courses at SBVC

***Based on these ethnicity and enrollment data, 20-25% of our ENGL 015 and ENGL 101 students need ESL skills.***

How large would this second group be? Since 70-75% of our students come in from the local high schools and 50-55% of our students are non-native speakers, these two factors perhaps combine to make 35-40% of our ENGL 015 and ENGL 101 classes. Even if only one-half to two-thirds of them need ESL, these classes end up with 20-25% of students whose College English needs require that they receive ESL-focused instruction.

1. Ellen Bradburn and David Hurst, “Community College Transfer Rates to 4-year Institutions Using Alternative Definitions of Transfer”, *Education Statistics Quarterly*, vol. 3, no. 3 (Fall 2001).