

Comparing ESL Programs

Many students come to America every year hoping to improve their English skills and enter a two or four-year college or university. Northern Virginia is one very popular destination for these students since the area has some fine academic institutions and plenty of job opportunities. However, it can be difficult for students to decide which ESL program they should enter. In the Northern Virginia area, two respected programs are the ELI (English Language Institute) at George Mason University and the credit ESL program at Northern Virginia Community College. When deciding between these two programs, students should consider the cost, the schedules, and the instructors.

One of the most important considerations is the cost of tuition. The ELI program at George Mason University can be as high as several thousand dollars for a full-time student per semester. Full-time means a student takes at least 10 credit hours. Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA) costs less than half that amount for a full-time student with the same 10-credit load per semester.

For many students, taking ten credits depends on the schedule of classes and how many sections exist for each class throughout the week. The ELI program has a limited schedule with only a few sections for each class. On the other hand, NOVA can have as many as ten or more sections for reading and writing classes, with morning, afternoon, and evening hours. This can allow students with jobs and families the flexibility they need to carry a full-time load.

Lastly, it is very important to know the talent and knowledge of the people teaching the classes. Both ELI and NOVA have experienced, dedicated instructors who place a high value on student success. The faculty in both programs hold master's or doctoral degrees in their field, and most contribute to conferences and advising training every year. In each program students will receive expert feedback and in-class help.

To summarize, both the ELI and NOVA programs are high quality and will offer substantive training for all ESL students at any level. If cost and scheduling are important

factors, than NOVA may be the best choice. If taking classes at GMU is one's goal, then being on that campus while getting ESL instruction may be desirable. With either choice, students can be confident that they are receiving some of the best ESL instruction in the Northern Virginia area.