

12/7/2022

UM ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTITUTE



ELI 994 NOMINATIONS

FINAL REPORT

Prepared by: Bella Barrie, Isabella Buzynski,
Rio Capollari, Liwen Wu, and Xinyi Ye
TeamNoteUMSI@umich.edu

Client Contact: Christine Feak
cfeak@umich.edu

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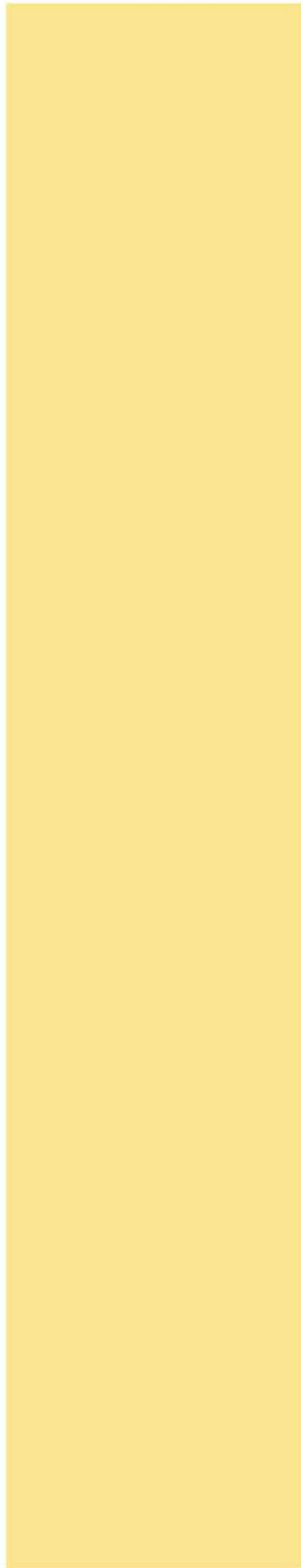
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The English Language Institute (ELI) at the University of Michigan has a nomination process for incoming graduate student instructors whom of which don't speak English as their first language. This nomination process has been difficult for students and administration. Both of these groups face an opposing set of problems.

Through the process of multiple different interviews, we sought out information on the process of the nomination process. Through these interviews we found out about the problems and the thoughts of those involved. We uncovered the following issues:

- Canvas as a source of information is ineffective
- A struggle in the flow of communication about the course
- High staff turnover causes a gap in institutional knowledge
- The ELI website is inaccurate or not recently updated
- Students want information that is not currently provided

Our recommendations were informed by the interviews that occurred over the semester. Our recommendations are as follows:

- Revamping the ELI website
 - This includes having more public information about the course, such as a schedule, an introduction to the course, and the information about waving the course. Additionally, having links between the website and the course.
- Using Google Workspace for private information between LSA and ELI administrators
 - Administrators are unfamiliar with Canvas, so using Google Workspace, something they are more familiar with, will ease the nomination process.
- Information Sessions for administration
 - Sessions for training and answering staff questions about this process will build institutional knowledge. These can also be recorded for future use.

CLIENT BACKGROUND

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Graduate students from non-English-medium undergraduate universities who expect to assume graduate instructor duties in LSA departments in the next academic year must attend ELI 994, a course developed and conducted jointly by the University's English Language Institute (ELI) and the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching (CRLT).

-ELI Website

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The English Language Institute at the University of Michigan “provides language, academic, and intercultural instruction for international students and scholars and others who speak English as a second language, language and pedagogy courses for international Graduate Student Instructors; and ESL/EFL teacher preparation courses for undergraduates (U-M English Language Institute).” This includes a “comprehensive program of language and pedagogy courses for prospective and current graduate student instructors (GSIs), full-time summer intensive programs, and a unique pre-arrival academic acculturation course for new international graduate students (U-M English Language Institute).”

CLIENT BACKGROUND, CONT.

The ELI offers a graduate student instructor preparatory course in the Winter and Summer semesters entitled ELI 994 College Teaching in the U.S.: Pedagogy, Culture and Language. They are currently facing many challenges surrounding the enrollment process for ELI 994 due to the inefficient and fragmented method by which information about the course is shared and made available to various stakeholders in the program, including: LSA administrators; Rackham administrators in international admissions; the LSA Dean's Office; and the English Language Institute GSI Advisor, Office Manager, 994 Course Coordinator and instructors, and prospective and current students. They are currently using two Canvas sites, Google Docs, Canvas surveys, a 994 course page on the ELI website, phone calls, Zoom meetings, and email messages to exchange information about the course, and are seeking to simplify and consolidate these platforms to reduce miscommunication and increase accessibility, particularly for students themselves.

METHODOLOGICAL OVERVIEW

Interviews

To gather more information and context on the ELI 994 course nomination process, we interviewed the ELI 994 course coordinator, an ELI advisor, two LSA graduate coordinators, two students, and an ELI 994 instructor. For each interview, we had a separate protocol containing different questions depending on the position of the person we were interviewing. Each protocol had an overarching question that our group was aiming to answer. From there, we developed a script and questions to ask the interviewees that would allow them to share their perspectives on the nomination process.

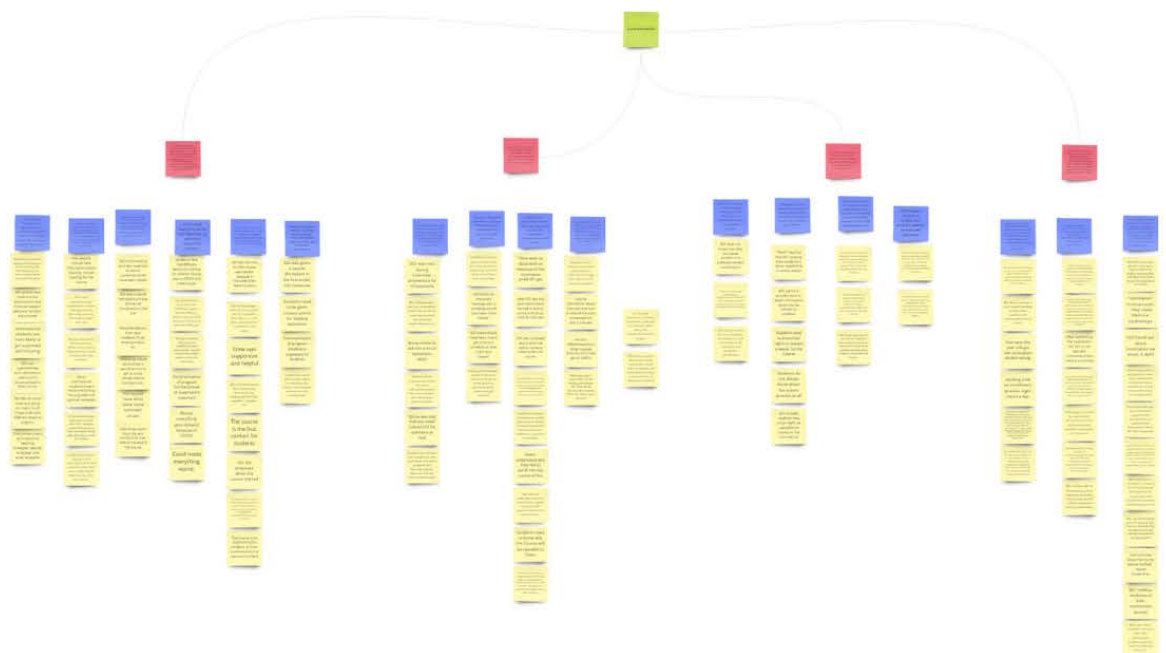
After each interview, the group got together to conduct interpretation sessions, where we listened to the interview recordings to extract important information that we could turn into qualitative data by taking what is known as “affinity notes.” These are sentences that showed something we learned during the interview. To anonymize the interviewees, we assigned a code to each person’s name so that they could not be identified. We entered the affinity notes into a spreadsheet that would be used later.

METHODOLOGICAL OVERVIEW, CONT.

Affinity Wall

We used the affinity notes that we took during our interpretation session to construct an affinity wall. This is a wall of sticky notes with each sticky note containing one affinity note. We constructed the wall by grouping related pieces of data to create a cluster and then summarizing that cluster. We repeated this process until we had a hierarchy where we arrived at two main issues: communication and organization of information.

The communication summary of the affinity wall is pictured below.



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KEY FINDINGS

STUDENT NEEDS

Nominated students are sometimes confused as to why they are required to take ELI 994.

In interviews conducted with former 994 students, they described being confused about what ELI 994 was and why they were required to take it upon being notified of their nomination to the course. Specifically, they found the term "nomination" to be misleading, as it refers to a mandatory requirement. Further, it was difficult for them to find clarifying information online. These concerns are corroborated by interviews with LSA and CRLT staff, who felt from their interactions with students that there is "not a lot of clarity" about the nomination and enrollment process from the student perspective. In particular, guidelines surrounding who is nominated to the course are unclear, especially for students who did not attend an English-language undergraduate institution but may be fluent for other reasons. Finally, staff members explained that more could be done to communicate the value of the course to students.

Nominated students often are unaware of the waiver process for ELI 994.

Related to the previous finding, staff expressed concerns that the course waiver process was unclear to nominated students. One LSA Graduate Coordinator reported that "most" inquiries they receive from students are about requesting a course waiver, and another staff member detailed multiple examples of students that were unaware of their ability to waive the course. The waiver process should be "transparent" and "accessible" to all students and administrative staff.

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KEY FINDINGS

STUDENT NEEDS, CONT.

Nominated students face logistical challenges when preparing for ELI 994 and need additional support.

Students described the many logistical challenges they faced when preparing to begin ELI 994, especially during the summer semester when many must move to Ann Arbor and navigate campus for the first time. Student interviewees explained that it would have been helpful to know about tuition and financial support options as well as detailed course information as soon as possible. Students also said that they would have appreciated recommendations and advice from past students about campus life, community, food, and entertainment in Ann Arbor before moving. One student added that they would like opportunities to set up a virtual meeting with former students. A common concern among students is securing housing on campus, which is difficult to do remotely. Many international students have a hard time finding housing after the summer semester and would benefit from receiving clear guidance early on. Additionally, students currently have no way to check whether they are on approved housing lists created by ELI, or whether they need to submit further information to secure housing.

Former ELI 994 students have had overall positive experiences with the course.

Overall, student interviewees felt prepared by the time they began ELI 994 and found both LSA and ELI staff to be "supportive" and responsive throughout the enrollment process. They also expressed appreciation for the course, saying that it improved their teaching skills and helped them adjust to a new campus setting.

KEY FINDINGS

LSA GRADUATE COORDINATORS

LSA Graduate Coordinators generally find their role in the nomination process to be straightforward.

The LSA Graduate Coordinators we interviewed were familiar with the nomination process and had participated in it many times. They reported only having to contribute a few hours to ELI 994 nomination responsibilities per semester. One LSA staff said described the form they are required to complete for student nominations as "straightforward."

Due to a lack of standardization, LSA Graduate Coordinators are sometimes underprepared for the ELI 994 nomination process.

Currently, there is no centralized regulation of LSA staff responsibilities surrounding nominations. Additionally, due to high turnover rates among LSA Graduate Coordinators, there is a lack of institutional knowledge about the enrollment process and about the English Language Institute more generally. Lacking clear guidance, departmental LSA staff use inconsistent criteria to create their lists of nominated students. LSA staff interviewees wished that ELI staff would be more consistent about communicating with them after submitting lists of nominated students from their department. Staff would like confirmation that ELI received their nominations and also would benefit from being told which of the nominated students have been invited to the class and which have received a waiver.

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KEY FINDINGS

TECHNOLOGICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Both LSA Graduate Coordinators and nominated students are unaccustomed to using Canvas sites.

LSA Graduate Coordinators "rarely" or never use Canvas outside of the ELI 994 nomination process. One coordinator described having to relearn how to use Canvas every year in order to upload nomination lists and other documentation to the administrative Canvas site. Similarly, although nominated students are expected to access important and time-sensitive information in the course Canvas site -- including a housing survey, orientation materials, and schedules -- their unfamiliarity with Canvas can be a barrier to doing so. One student explained that the Canvas site is not user-friendly to many international students, noting that it is mainly used by U.S. institutions.

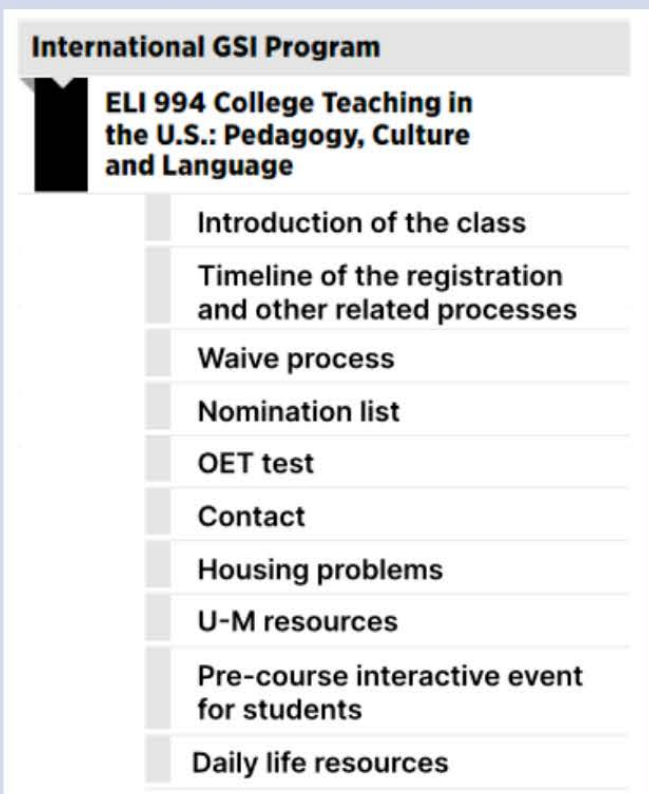
The current ELI 994 course site lacks salient information that should be accessible to students, faculty, and LSA staff.

We found that the [ELI 994 course website](#) is the main online resource that both students and LSA staff consult for information about the course. However, most of our interviewees, regardless of their role, described the website as insufficient. One LSA coordinator critiqued the design of the website, saying it is "not the easiest" way to find course information because "things get buried in there." Student interviewees reported that information on the website was not updated regularly enough, and that it lacked information they expected to find, such as past 994 syllabi and a timeline for pre-course activities. Additionally, the website is not accessible to students who speak English as a second language, as course information is only provided in English.

RECOMMENDATION #1

MAKE INFORMATION ABOUT ELI 994 MORE ACCESSIBLE TO ALL STAKEHOLDERS BY CREATING A REVAMPED ELI 994 WEBSITE.

Note: take advantage of LSA Technology Services by consulting them to create a new departmental website.



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RECOMMENDATIONS

REVAMPED ELI 994 WEBSITE

ELI 994 has its own official website including basic information about the course. However, this information is outdated and not comprehensive. There are many issues of concern to students that it does not cover. As we described in our "Findings" section, the nomination process for ELI 994 is undermined by challenges to communicate and organize information for various stakeholders. This is in part because there is a large amount of publicly available information that is not easy to access. If we can put this information on the website and make it better visited, then it undoubtedly reduces the unnecessary burden on the administrators. So we should make good use of the site. From the interviews we learned what the students were most concerned about, so we suggest that these questions be posted on the website.

First, students did not know why they were asking to take the class, they did not know about the class until they got notified. And they were also unable to find much information about the class online which is why they emailed administrators to have more clarity. We recommend making public a detailed introduction about this course so that they can know the situation, which will improve the efficiency of information exchange.

Besides, we learned from interviews that students have trouble submitting materials before the course, not only the paperwork but also other announcements related to the course such as orientation. There are many deadlines but it is not easy to keep up with the pace. That is why students need to be notified of the timeline of the whole process, including the time of submission of various paperwork, and some other activities.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

REVAMPED ELI 994 WEBSITE

We also suggest adding links next to the important time points to make it easier for students to find the corresponding information. There are many issues for international students to deal with in addition to the course, so having a clear time schedule will be helpful.

The waiving process should also be clarified. Some students are qualified to get waived but they did not even know it because the workflow is not clear. Even if they know, they have nowhere to get the criteria in addition to email, which is also one factor that increases the burden of the administrators. Also, there are concerns of inequity among students since they do not know why others have been waived from ELI 994 and they have not. The standard should be transparent and everyone could be able to have a right to advocate for themselves to get waived.

What is more, the list of nominations is also crucial. We advise making public the list so that everyone can get notified by checking online. In addition to students, other stakeholders will be given this list for follow-up as we learned that administrators need the list to take the next step. This, to some extent, can also solve the problem of coordination of work between the various stakeholders, who will be able to work and communicate in a more efficient way. As for privacy concerns, we can use unique names to indicate students.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

REVAMPED ELI 994 WEBSITE

For the “OET test” section, OET test is a test that students enrolled in ELI994 need to take. Students usually have no idea about the information of the test, such as what the deadline of the test is, how they can sign up for the competition, and what the contents of the test are. Currently, ELI and LSA administration are overwhelmed by the students’ emails asking such information. Therefore, it is necessary to list the information of the test on the public website. This section can include the official website of the test as well as ELI’s requirements of the test.

The “contact” section should contain all potential contact information that students need here. Besides, for each contact person, it should specify the scopes of questions that he/she can answer. Contact person includes the instructors, coordinators, administration of different departments of LSA as well as the instructors and coordinators of ELI 994. Students usually have many questions, but they do not know whom they should ask, and their contact information. These contact messages listed on the website can increase the efficiency for students to solve their puzzles.

Housing problem is a frequently asked question, so there is a particular section for housing problems. The institute provides students with free housing during the summer semester, but not in the winter semester. Students need to fill in some forms and make some application to get the free housing. However, students always do not know the whole process, hence sometimes forgetting to apply for the housing. This section on the website can give students the complete instructions.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

REVAMPED ELI 994 WEBSITE

The “U-M resources” section offers the university’s resources and adds the most frequently asked ones, in addition to the daily life resources. Since students taking ELI994 are always the U-M students and some of them are freshman. They are not familiar with university, and they are curious about everything. This section is a good opportunity to introduce the whole university to them.

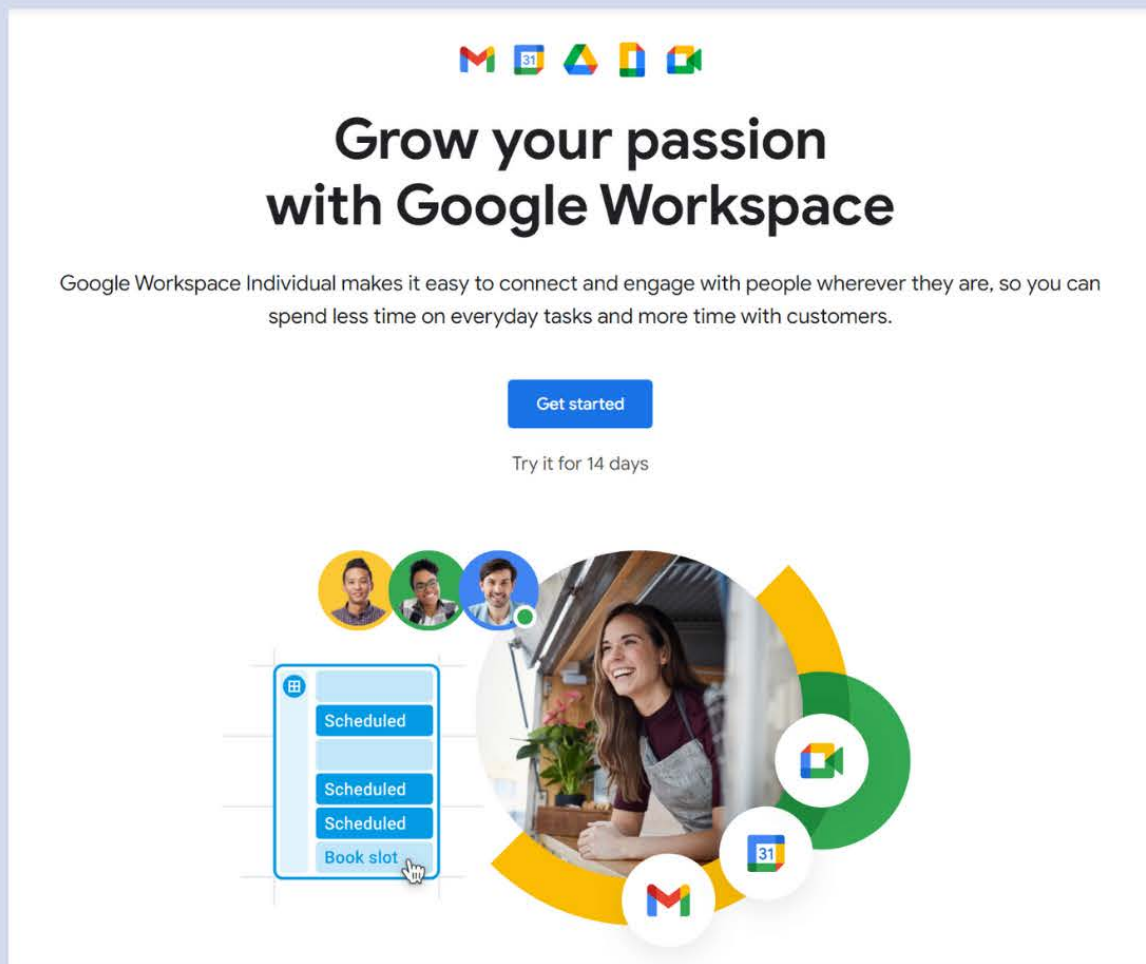
“Pre-course interactive event for students” section aims to show some activities that students can attend before the course. From our interview, we found that some students want to know each other before the class, so we suggest there could be an orientation for them before the class begins. The orientation not only serves for students but also is an opportunity for administrators to address the most concerned problems so that they don't need to frequently answer all kinds of trivial questions for students through emails.

“Daily life resources” section includes the most frequently asked daily life related problems and their resources link, such as the location of the university’s dining halls, the ways to apply for a debit card in US bank and so on.

RECOMMENDATION #2

USE GOOGLE WORKSPACE FOR SHARING PRIVATE INFORMATION BETWEEN LSA AND ELI ADMINISTRATORS

Note: learn more about Google Workspace and information security [here](#).



The image is a screenshot of a Google Workspace advertisement. At the top, there are icons for Gmail, Calendar, Drive, Docs, and Meet. Below these icons is the headline "Grow your passion with Google Workspace". Underneath the headline is a paragraph: "Google Workspace Individual makes it easy to connect and engage with people wherever they are, so you can spend less time on everyday tasks and more time with customers." Below the text is a blue "Get started" button, and below that, the text "Try it for 14 days". The bottom half of the advertisement features a collage of images: three circular profile pictures of people, a larger photo of a smiling woman in a cafe setting, and several floating icons for Google Workspace services like Calendar (with "Scheduled" and "Book slot" labels), Meet, and Gmail.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

GOOGLE WORKSPACE

The information transmission between the ELI and LSA administration is not smooth. The current problem is that ELI could not get the information he wanted within the time limit. Departments of LSA usually did not exactly know ELI's requirements and hence they did not meet the requirements. Our recommendation for such problem is using Google Workspace for sharing private information between LSA and ELI admin. In this part, we focused the information that is only shared between ELI and LSA administration.

We suggest they use a mutual platform where different users have different levels of access and each one can upload and download the information they need in one place. The tool that is being used currently is Canvas. However, it is inefficient for many people to modify the same file on Canvas at the same time. It is also inconvenient to share files in real time between different people.

There are several reasons to recommend using Google Workspace. First, the staff of both ELI and LSA are already familiar with Google Workspace. They not only use them in their daily work, but they also use them in their daily life. Therefore, it is not too difficult for them to start using Google Workspace. Second, using a Google Form is a good way to standardize the nomination list process and make inputs available as Google Sheets. There are many templates and different types of files can be chosen in Google Workspace.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

GOOGLE WORKSPACE

ELI can use templates to clarify their needs, and LSA can hence better understand their needs. The nomination list process can be more standardized and clearer. Third, modifying the same files on Canvas between different people is not efficient. Since ELI and LSA need to work on the nomination list on Canvas together, they usually need to first discuss with each other, then they need to download it, modify it, and upload it. Document sharing settings of Google Workspace are highly versatile. People can modify the same file at the same time without any conflicts. Finally, compared to Canvas, Google Workspace is a better way to archive documentation for future reference to build institutional knowledge. Canvas is a rather independent file space between different courses, while Google Workspace is a united whole. Moving and archiving documentation in Google Workspace is more convenient than Canvas.

RECOMMENDATION #3

BUILD INSTITUTIONAL KNOWLEDGE BY HOLDING INFORMATION SESSIONS FOR COLLABORATORS AT LSA AND CRLT.

Note: we recommend recording information sessions and making them available for future reference.



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RECOMMENDATIONS

INFORMATION SESSIONS

The LSA is responsible for providing the nomination list and sending it to ELI, there is a lot of paperwork handover part of the process and both parties need a more efficient way to communicate. We are aware that there are difficulties in exchanging information between all kinds of parties because they are not well organized. In addition to information that can be made public and the one to be shared privately, we propose to organize a team of people from various stakeholders, they will be the people who know all of the situations of each party. And these people act as an intermediary, coordinating between departments, they know the whole picture and any stakeholder with a problem can ask them if they do not find the information on the website or cannot find the people to contact. They are like implicit information that acts as a lubricant, providing flexibility in the delivery of information to everyone.

CONCLUSION

IMPROVING THE ELI 994 NOMINATION PROCESS

Overall, the ELI 994 nomination is a process that currently works, but needs some adjustments to make it a better experience for both students and administration. We found out through interviews that students are confused on what the course is and want more information from the course about housing, financials, and campus life.

Administrators have a varying level of knowledge about the ELI nomination process themselves, which can cause some confusion when answering student's questions. Administrators also do not have a working knowledge of Canvas, which is where they put their nominations in. Our recommendations for these problems are revamping the ELI 994 website, using Google Workspace, and holding information sessions.

REFERENCES

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