

## ESL in the California State University: Who Are We? And Where Will We Go?

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In 1988 California State University (CSU) established the CSU Institute for Teaching and Learning, designed to assist faculty in teaching within their disciplines. A major activity of the Institute is a yearly conference, organized by the Institute's Dean Helen Roberts, to develop a systemwide research and development agenda for teaching and learning in selected disciplines. For the spring, 1990 conference, the Institute identified economics, English as a second language, foreign languages, and sociology as the four disciplines of focus. The Institute funded two coordinators for each discipline to work throughout the semester developing the conference program. Patricia Nichols, SJSU, and Ann Johns, SDSU, were coordinators for ESL. In addition, the Institute sponsored one representative from each discipline from each campus. Many campuses funded additional representatives. Thus, the conference in April-May brought together 38 ESL faculty, who met on the Queen Mary in Long Beach for two days in intensive discussion on the nature of their discipline within the CSU system, on what they plan to achieve for their discipline (and particularly their students), and on how they plan to go about it. I attended the conference as a representative of CATESOL.

This was a unique opportunity for ESL professionals to get together. But it was also a unique opportunity for CSU ESL professionals to talk to CSU administrators and faculty from other disciplines—for, as Patricia Nichols noted in her closing remarks to all conference participants, because of the increasing numbers of ESL students in California, teachers in other disciplines will not be able to achieve their goals unless ESL professionals are able to do their job well.

In general sessions it became clear that we needed to determine how we in ESL see ourselves as a discipline. We asked questions such as: Who are our clientele? What are their needs in the CSU? To answer these questions, we struggled over possible differences between ESL/EFL learners; over differences between recently arrived immigrants and English-dominant bilingual students; over differing needs among the Asian student population (especially over the issue

of "the model minority"). Our thinking was expanded by the presentations given by Hideko Bannai (USC) and Ray Lou (SJSU) from the CSU Asian Pacific Education Advisory Committee and by Maria R. Montano-Harmon (CSU, Fullerton). Bannai and Lou helped us see our Asian students as coming from a variety of cultural backgrounds and previous educational experiences and as individuals with individual needs that cannot be addressed if we conceptualize *Asian* as a culturally monolithic group. Montano-Harmon raised the knotty issue of identifying Latino students, of differentiating between "true" ESL students and the speakers of a nonstandard dialect of English. Informal discussions and group discussions worked around these issues until we unanimously voted a resolution that clarified our clientele and their needs both for our own understanding and for dissemination to those outside the field. Since this resolution clarifies a problem all ESL professionals have to grapple with, I report it in full here, in the hope that it may be useful to others trying to clarify who and what they teach.

*Whereas in the CSU there is a plethora of nomenclature for our clientele and our focus of instruction,*

*Be it resolved that the CSU define our focus of instruction as teaching English for academic purposes (EAP) and our clientele as 1) Non-English dominant bilingual and/or bicultural students, and 2) English-dominant bilingual and/or bicultural students.*

*For CSU purposes, academic is defined as promoting language and communication skills for success at the university and beyond.*

Participants agreed that English-dominant bilingual/bicultural students, while exhibiting different problems from those of non-English dominant students (traditional ESL students), were better served by instructors trained in language and ESL methodology.

After brainstorming on the major issues for ESL in the CSU, participants worked in four groups that focussed on: curriculum organization and content; interaction of ESL students with academic English; testing and evaluation; and teaching and learning strategies. Each group tried to clarify the issues and then develop a research agenda that would help answer the many still unanswered questions about the teaching and learning of ESL in the CSU. The group discussing curriculum was most concerned about the reality in many composition classes—the "nightmare" class that has ESL students, bidialectal students, and native-English speaking students with poor academic skills. This group called for an examination of classroom teachers who are successful in these nightmare classes, suggesting

videotaping lessons for distribution throughout the state. The group wanted a video bank that would also include successful EAP models such as adjunct, writing-across-the-curriculum, content-based, and theme-based curricula. They also suggested pilot projects of models not yet a reality in practice, such as providing grammatical and rhetorical instruction for ESL students through separate classes. This group also called for a clear characterization of what ESL writing is acceptable for graduation from the CSU—what exactly does *writing with an accent* mean in an academic setting and in the workplace?

The group that focused on the interaction of ESL students with academic English suggested analyzing lectures for their linguistic structure, investigating how well ESL students comprehend the organizing devices used in lectures, and examining how ESL students' performance in content areas can be enhanced through instruction in such organizing devices.

The third group, which focused on testing and evaluation, was especially concerned about the use of tests normed on English speakers as screening tests for ESL students. Since all participants agreed that appropriate placement of students is dependent on effective screening and testing of students and that tests were a major impediment for ESL students, resolutions on testing practices were also passed. These resolutions recognize the ineffectiveness of the current CSU English Placement Test (EPT) for ESL students, call for appropriate systemwide testing of ESL students, and support local testing until such a systemwide test is in place. This group also suggested research into testing and placement of ESL and bilingual/bicultural students.

The fourth group's focus was on successful teaching and learning strategies and so developed a research agenda that would investigate successful and unsuccessful EAP students. The research would examine a number of student variables, such as L1 and L2 literacy experiences and educational background and would target students in business, engineering, computer science, and general education, all areas with a high proportion of ESL and bilingual/bicultural students. Their research proposal also included investigating successful instructors in content areas to determine what strategies and techniques are most successful with language minority students. The results from these research projects could then be used to develop effective faculty development for all CSU faculty since all faculty have language minority students in their classes.

Although the Institute conference is now over and all participants are back on their home campuses, facing nightmare classes and often a lack of recognition, our work from the conference is not over. We have research projects to try to get funding for, projects we can undertake, and a re-education of colleagues we must begin. Because we recognize how important it is to interact with other ESL profes-

sionals in order to keep alive professionally and intellectually, we passed another resolution to establish a CSU English for Academic Purposes Professional Association. Through a CSU association, we can focus on issues peculiar to our system. By meeting together and continuing the conversations begun on the Queen Mary, we plan to improve the instruction of our bilingual/bicultural students. ■