

## ESL in the California State University: What are the Key Issues?

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At CATESOL 1991 in Santa Clara, the newly established California State University (CSU) English for Academic Purposes Professional Association held its first annual meeting (see *The CATESOL Journal*, 3 for background on the establishment of the Association). The main objectives of the meeting were to examine the issues relating to the teaching of ESL in the CSU and to begin the development of an agenda for the new organization.

Ann Snow of CSU, Los Angeles, the Association's interim chair, served as moderator. Donna Brinton of UCLA began the meeting with a talk entitled "ESL in the CSU: Coming to Terms with Multiple Identities." In her talk, Brinton identified seven key issues related to the teaching of ESL in the CSU and questions related to those issues. After the talk, small groups discussed the issues.

The issues suggested by Brinton not only reveal the range of interests and concerns related to the teaching of ESL in the CSU, but also point out the multiple identities of the various CSU campuses—that is, the many different faces of the ESL and TESOL programs within the state college system. A first step toward forming an agenda for the CSU EAP Professional Association, then, will include an effort to identify variables which exist from campus to campus and to prioritize those which require action. Though she provided no definitive answers to the questions she raised, Brinton shared her own experience and that of University of California TESOL professionals who grapple with many of the same issues in attempting to formulate educational policy. Since many of these issues and their attendant questions are pertinent to all arenas of ESL instruction, we provide them in detail below.

*The status of ESL instruction.* Nationwide, ESL programs in higher education suffer from an identity crisis in terms of their physical location, the face validity they enjoy across campus, and the amount

of articulation between ESL programs and other campus disciplines. The California State University system needs to consider carefully the following questions:

1. Where is ESL housed (separate language institute, continuing education division, academic department, learning center)? How does this affect the visibility and credibility of the program? How standard is this among campuses?
2. Is ESL instruction viewed as remediation?
3. Can students satisfy their composition requirement by taking ESL courses, or are the ESL courses a feeder mechanism into "regular" English courses?
4. Are ESL students marginalized on campus, or do they have equal access to the educational opportunities of native English-speaking students?
5. What is the perception of faculty across the curriculum of the ESL program and the service it renders to students?
6. If housed within an academic department, how mutually complementary are the aims of the academic department and the ESL program?
7. What is the perception of faculty across the curriculum of ESL students?

*The placement of ESL students.* Similarly, even on campuses where there are large numbers of ESL students, placement issues continue to figure prominently in discussions between program administrators, teachers, and students. Placement is confounded by the existence of at least two distinct populations of ESL students whose linguistic and cultural profiles (and therefore needs) are equally divergent—long-term immigrant students and international students. Critical questions to be answered here include:

1. What defines ESL students? On what basis are they identified and placed into ESL courses or programs?
2. Is the TOEFL required for international students? If so, what is the cut-off level for admission? Is this standard among campuses?
3. Are the students who are accepted into the ESL program articulated students? If not, does acceptance into the ESL program insure students' acceptance to CSU? Is this standard from campus to campus?
4. Are immigrant and international students placed into the same or different sections of ESL courses? What about graduate and undergraduate students?
5. What are the criteria for tracking students into native speaker or nonnative speaker courses?
6. What instruments are used for placement? Are standardized tests (SAT verbal, TOEFL, TSE, TWE) used, or institutionally designed instruments (GWAR)? How standard is this among campuses?

7. On the basis of what skills is placement effected?

*ESL curriculum and program design.* Closely related to the above issue is that of curriculum and program design. Here, questions to consider revolve around the extent to which ESL courses should be credit bearing and the desirability of offering all-skills instruction as opposed to limited skills instruction (e.g., intensive writing practice). Finally, the extent to which placement and exit exams color curriculum needs to be examined. Questions in this area are:

1. How many ESL courses are offered? What is the percentage of credit versus noncredit-bearing courses? Required versus elective courses?
2. If both credit- and noncredit-bearing courses are offered, at what level do the courses become credit bearing? Is this standard from campus to campus?
3. What is the skills focus of the course offerings? Are students provided with opportunities to improve in all skill areas, or does the instruction focus on more limited areas (e.g., writing skills)?
4. What is the organizing principle of the ESL curriculum (e.g., grammar, rhetoric, content)? Is there a match between students' needs and interests and the design of the courses?
5. What amount of ESL instruction is considered necessary for students to cope successfully at the university?
6. Can students repeat courses as necessary and still obtain credit if their skills are not up to par to enter the next level?
7. What informs curricular decisions? Is the ESL curriculum closely tied to the exit exam, or are other factors (e.g., students' needs across the curriculum) taken into account?
8. Is there built-in flexibility in the curriculum? How autonomous are instructors (e.g., in their choice of content, instructional materials, course objectives)?

*Assessment.* Typically, assessment is interpreted as referring to the means used to evaluate the work of students in the ESL program. However, this area not only concerns the validity and reliability of instruments and procedures used in ESL classes; it also extends beyond the ESL classroom to encompass the measures used to assess ESL students in their disciplinary studies. The following questions should be examined:

1. Are there standard entrance and exit requirements from section to section? Level to level? Campus to campus?
2. How reliable and valid are the instruments and procedures being used for assessment?
3. If instruments are teacher-developed, are teachers provided with guidance in producing them?

4. Are outreach efforts made to sensitize content area faculty to issues of "accentedness" in ESL writing and to inform ESL instructors of prevalent campus attitudes toward ESL-marked writing?

5. How is ESL program review carried out?

6. How tied are the assessment instruments and procedures to curricular objectives and philosophies?

7. How frequently are assessment instruments reviewed and revised for the match with curricular objectives?

8. Are instructors normed with reference to composition and oral skills evaluation criteria? Are these criteria systematically articulated?

9. What role do instructors play in articulating assessment criteria?

10. Who is the watchdog to insure that instructors are adhering to evaluation procedures?

*Support for ESL instruction.* The CSU system is not alone in experiencing inadequate support for its ESL and TESOL programs. As is the case elsewhere in higher education, part-time faculty exceed full-time faculty members, and facilities are far from ideal. Yet some campuses in the system have better support than others and can serve as resources for their sister campuses which are attempting to improve instructional support for their programs. Questions to be addressed include:

1. What percentage of faculty are part time versus full time?

2. Is there tenure or security of employment for ESL instructors?

3. Are part-timers offered contracts? Benefits? Sabbatical leave?

4. How does the institution provide for professional development of instructors (inservicing and preservicing)?

5. Do tenured faculty participate in ESL instruction?

6. Is there funding available for curriculum development?

7. Is institutional support and funding adequate for ESL instruction (for number of classes offered, class size, etc.)?

8. What academic credentials are required to teach ESL? Does the institution adhere to these?

9. What infrastructure exists within the ESL program to support the program (e.g., administration, supervisory staff, secretarial support, space)?

10. What resources (e.g., language lab facilities, computer labs, counselling, legal aid, EOP, tutorial centers) are available?

11. Are hiring and retention criteria clearly articulated?

*Articulation.* California is virtually unique in the U.S. in that it has three separate state systems of higher education. This situation mandates close articulation between the three systems, particularly in a domain such as ESL instruction where large numbers of the students transfer into the CSU system from the community college system or graduate from a CSU and apply to the state university system. Closer

articulation is also called for within given campuses, where there may be little communication between the various on-campus branches responsible for the instruction of language minority students. The following questions should be addressed:

1. How does the ESL instruction offered at CSU compare with that at other postsecondary segments?

2. Do CSU ESL courses transfer to other institutions?

3. Are entrance and exit criteria standard from campus to campus?

4. Are students tracked after completion of the program?

5. What are the retention rates of ESL students within the system? What efforts are made to improve their retention rates?

6. Is there open communication between the ESL program on campus and the unit responsible for the writing instruction of native speakers? Are efforts made to articulate curricula and standards of evaluation?

7. In what way do ESL programs articulate with other programs on campus responsible for language instruction?

8. How well and in what ways do TESOL and ESL programs on campus communicate? To what extent do they share a common agenda?

9. What tracking occurs of ESL students who transfer from CSU to another 4-year institution? What about students who enter graduate school?

*Responsibility to the profession in general.* Finally, the CSU system must recognize its leadership role within the state of California in teacher training and language education research. This responsibility begins on the home campus, with TESOL and ESL programs reaching out to other disciplines to educate faculty about the needs of language minority students. But the CSU system cannot afford to ignore its role in reaching out to the community, its schools and business, and effecting change based on its research findings. Questions which cluster under this heading are the following:

1. What responsibility do ESL programs in the CSU system carry in regard to the population of the state of California?

2. Can the CSU system accept responsibility for training future teachers of LEP and language minority students? Do TESOL programs exist on your campus?

3. To what degree can ESL programs on campus instruct and inform faculty across the curriculum about the language minority student population? How can this best be achieved?

4. What role should the CSU play in outreach faculty development in the elementary and secondary segments?

5. What should the research agenda of the CSU be? At what levels can this be implemented and how?

In conclusion, a strong sense of momentum developed at this first meeting of the CSU EAP Professional Association which we hope will serve as a springboard to subsequent CATESOL meetings and future association activities. We encourage everyone involved in ESL in the CSU, including TESOL teacher trainers and those administering and teaching in intensive ESL programs, to get involved in the Association—to work together to meet the challenge of improving instruction for language minority students in the California State University. ■

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*Ed. Note: We present this article hoping to encourage debate among ESL professionals in all segments. We welcome comments and discussion on these and any other issues of concern to ESL in California.*