The Ugly Stepchild: On the Position of ESL Programs in the Academy

by Deborah Osborne

There are over 600 college and university ESL programs nationwide (Hopkins 2011), encompassing a wide variety of approaches to student enrollment and instruction, to faculty status, and to program identity within the institution. That is, our ESL discipline at the higher ed level is significant in all respects, particularly in the sheer number of students that are taught each year as well as the income generated from that endeavor. At the same time, the characteristics of our respective programs vary in fundamental ways: student access to credit courses, the program's place within (or outside of) the institution, faculty rank and pay, and so on. When we view this scenario more broadly across the academy, we can see that while our discipline's size, our training as college faculty and our economic significance are certainly comparable to those of other major college disciplines, our field of ESL grapples with identity issues that other disciplines do not. With that in mind, it is important for us to assess the overall state and status of our higher ed ESL discipline – who we are, what we do, and where we fit in – in order to understand the broader trends in our field and to prioritize our efforts in pedagogy, policy, and research.

I begin this "state of the discipline" review by examining a sampling of university ESL programs, based upon the large public institutions surveyed by Elaine Dehghanpisheh in her 1987 paper, but also including for diversity's sake some private institutions in the state of Missouri, where I worked from 2004-2013. In each case, the university ESL program was contacted and asked the following questions:

- Where is the program housed (i.e. in an academic department, stand-alone department, International Student Services, etc.)?
- Are the personnel considered staff or faculty? If the latter, tenure-track or NTT?
- Are classes in the program worth academic credit?
- What is the average size of the program? (For comparison's sake)
- Are students admitted to the program only, or to the university? What is their admission status?

Other details of the program that were provided or were gleanable from each university's website, for instance, how students "graduate" from ESL into the main body of the university, TOEFL scores for entrance, etc., are also included in the following table.

"Dehghanpisheh's Schools": An Update

Institution	Prog. size	Housed in..?	Status of instructors	Credit-bearing?	Student admission status
Oregon State	large	INTO corporate pathway program- offer Academic English, General English, undergrad and grad pathway; joint venture with OSU; under Provost's office	NTT	Academic English/General English, no 'Pathway programs', yes	Pathway students full admission as long as academic status is maintained
University of Arizona	large	Center for English as a Second Language (IEP) under College of Humanities; stand-alone center, collect own tuition Also, Academic Bridge program	Full-time, NTT; Director = 75% admin/ 25% teaching; adjunct lecturers are full time, adjunct instructors are paid hourly	No; Academic Bridge program, yes	Conditional admission; to graduate from program, must reach benchmark scores on TOEFL or get endorsement from program
University of Oregon	large	College of Arts & Sciences	Executive Director is staff; instructors are faculty, NTT	no	Sts with conditional admission who successfully finish top level can enter university
University of Colorado (Boulder)	large	International English Center (IEP) under Continuing Ed; Linguistics dept. provides oversight, reviews and approves curriculum and faculty	Director = "professional exempt position," reports to Exec. Director/Assist. Dean of Continuing Ed	Not for undergrads- yes for graduate sts	Sts are considered non-degree

			Faculty NTT; yearly contracts		
University of Utah	medium	Under Continuing Education, English Language Institute: IEP, 8 levels, levels 7 & 8 = Bridge	All ESL instructors NTT, even in Dept. of Linguistics	ELI, no ESL classes, yes	Full admission 80 iBT/550 TOEFL; low or no TOEFL, ELI
University of Washington	large	International and English Language Programs, under UW Educational Outreach; classes approved by English Dept.	Instructors are Extension Lecturers "academic personnel-neither faculty nor staff"	no	Conditional; graduate by taking 8 credit hours in top level
University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign)	medium	Intensive English Institute Stand-alone program, but Director is in Dept of Linguistics	Director is NTT assistant professor adjunct in Linguistics; Instructors are NTT	no	Admitted to program only; must apply separately to university
Indiana University	medium	Intensive English Program, in Dept. of Second Language Studies	Master teachers and instructors NTT	no	Admitted to program only; must apply separately to university
University of Iowa	medium	Program, not dept., reports to Dean of CLAS	Director is admin staff;	IEP- no; have a credit program	Sts admitted to program only; must apply

			instructors NTT faculty lecturers	for those with higher scores	separately to university; conditional admission available for those with TOEFL betw. 450-530
University of Michigan	Small (ESL)	English Language Institute provides intensive English in summer only; clients = mainly graduate sts, teacher trainees; same status as an academic dept.;	Faculty is "not professorial"- Director is senior professional administrator, not a professor	Yes, but only 4 credits count towards degree	Yes, only help fully admitted students; SAT/ACT score, TOEFL 600/iBT 100 necessary
Michigan State	large	English Language Center- stand-alone center in College of Arts and Letters IEP beginner – advanced; EAP at advanced level	Director and Assoc. Directors are faculty; instructors are NTT continuing specialist faculty positions	IEP, no; EAP (advanced level) yes	IEP sts accepted to program; EAP sts accepted conditionally to university
University of Minnesota	medium	Minnesota English Language Program, non-degree program under College of Continuing Education; AEP- advanced ESL for those betw. 477-517 TOEFL, academic ESL for those above 517	Director- staff; Teaching Specialists NTT	IEP, no; AEP, Academic ESL, yes	Full admission 550; IEP (below TOEFL 477) sts accepted into program only; AEP conditional admission

University of Nebraska Lincoln	medium	Special admin. unit of the Dept. of English	Director, Instructors NTT, 1-3 yr. contracts	IEP, no; Advanced for Credit IEP (AFCIEP)for sts with TOEFL >/= 500, < 523, 9 credits for 1 semester	No TOEFL required, but 523 for full admission; conditional admission
Ohio State	medium	American Language Program; in Dept. of Teaching and Learning, College of Education and Human Ecology; report to Chair, and Dean of College	Instructors are staff, non-tenure-track; Specialists have 1-year contracts, Lecturers semester by semester	no	Admission to program
Purdue	medium	English Language Program; Part of Office of International Programs	Director is a tenured professor; instructors NTT	no	Sts admitted to Program; conditionally admitted to university after finishing ELP
Iowa State	small	Intensive English and Orientation Program (IEOP) stand-alone; also, ESL classes as support for undergrad & grad sts	Director- Assoc. Professor of TESL/AL, a division of Dept. of English; Asst. Director, instructors, NTT faculty	IEOP, no; support ESL, no, but 101 level classes count towards GPA (not graduation)	Under TOEFL 55, admitted to IEOP ; conditional admission avail. for betw. 55 & 71; "ESL' classes for admitted grad sts

Utah State University, Logan	medium	International English Language Institute (IELI); part of Languages, Philosophy and Communications Studies Dept., under College of Humanities and Social Sciences	Director is Professor; most other faculty tenure-track; plus lecturers	Yes, at all levels	Sts given conditional admission into university, can enter degree program by passing top level

Missouri University results (public and private)

University of Missouri, Kansas City	medium	American Language Institute (ALI)- stand-alone- also, Academic Support Courses	Director = admin; Lecturers/ESL Specialists	Mostly, no; level 4 reading/vocab & grammar count towards graduation; support courses, yes	Below 500, conditional admission; over 500, full admission
Missouri University of Science and Technology	small	IEP; work with International Affairs, under VP for Academic Affairs	Director is staff Learning specialists (full-time) are staff; part-time adjunct faculty	no	Sts admitted to program only; can get full admission with good perf. In test & coursework
Missouri Southern State	small	International English Program; in dept. of International Studies	Director, 1 NTT asst. professor attached to International Studies, adjuncts	Level 5 reading; otherwise, no: 'support classes'	Admitted to IEP if TOEFL below 68; after sts complete program and pass placement test, can be

					admitted to MSSU
Missouri State, Springfield	medium	English Language Institute , under International Programs, under Associate VP of International Programs IEP; 10 levels	Director, Assistant Director; 5 full-time , 20 part-time instructors; everyone is NTT staff	no	61 iBT TOEFL for full admission; can be admitted to program or conditionally admitted to degree program; successful completion of ELI fulfills English proficiency requirement
SE Missouri State	small	IEP, under office of International Education and Services	Director, full & part-time instructors; were NTT faculty, now staff; year by year contracts	'developmental' credit- appears on transcript; does not count towards graduation	Conditional admission
Truman State University	small	3rd party provider (TLC); Not part of the university	All teaching and administrative staff belong to TLC	no	Sts who graduate from level 9 can enter Truman, or other universities who accept TLC levels

University of Central Missouri	small	IEP in International Center	Co-directors, instructors have 1-yr contract NTT faculty positions	no	Conditional admission
St. Louis University (private)	small	The English for Academic Purposes program consists of the IEP plus some credit-bearing classes; intermediate and advanced levels only; formerly under Modern Languages, now stand-alone; report to Dean of College of Arts & Sciences	4 full-time NTT faculty (all Ph.Ds)	IEP, no: Some classes are credit-bearing	Sts must have a minimum of 480 for conditional admission; 550 and above = full admission
Washington University in St. Louis (private)	medium	Support classes; Under office of International Students & Scholars, part of Student Services	Director, f/t instructors & administrators are staff, part-time, NTT faculty	Sts take coursework in major at same time; some divisions recognize credit, some not	Full admission; sts must have 550-600 TOEFL, depending on major
Webster University (private)	small	IEP, starts at Intermediate level; full ESL program at intermediate, Bridge program at Advanced; in College of Arts and Sciences, International Languages and Cultures	Coordinator has yearly visiting lecturer contract, has to teach 6 classes as well; is neither full-time faculty or staff, NTT, no benefits	Bridge program ESL classes are credit-bearing	Sts admitted to program if under required TOEFL score; re-take institutional TOEFL for admission

			Other instructors- adjunct		
Drury University (private)	small	English for Academic Purposes program, 1 semester only; in Dept. of English	Coordinator is tenure-track in Dept. of English	Yes, elective credit	Sts must have at least 480 TOEFL for admission; if below 530, must take EAP; can enroll in university courses with B average in EAP
Columbia College (private)	small	English for Academic Purposes program, academic unit of Humanities Dept. Intermediate/advanced levels only; Lev. 1- 20 hours Lev. 2- 15 hrs Lev. 3- 6 hrs	Coordinator is assistant professor	Yes: Lev. 1, 12 credits Lev. 2, 9 credits Lev. 3, 3 credits	Sts must have at least 460 TOEFL for admission to program; 500 TOEFL = full admission to university
Park University (private)	small	3rd party provider: 7-level IEP	Director, instructors work for company (not university employees)	No	Sts admitted to university conditionally; 500 TOEFL= full admission

As can be seen from the chart, answers to the first question, pertaining to where a department was housed, varied widely. Most programs are administrative units, headed usually by a Director, who oversees the teaching faculty and administrative staff. However, as far as their relationship to the

university and resemblance to an academic department goes, ESL programs in this sample run the gamut from completely independent of the university (3rd party ESL providers, such as The Learning Company at Truman State) to academic departments, such as at Utah State - Logan. The most autonomous programs do their own recruiting, provide visa and admissions services, develop their own curriculum and assessment, etc., and collect their own tuition. This is always the case with 3rd-party ESL providers; such programs typically contract *with* a university, but are not part of the university (though some grant conditional admission to the university which houses them). However, some university programs are similar, providing a sort of one-stop shopping experience for students. The latter type of program tends to report directly to a VP or Dean, sometimes an academic Dean, but programs which are not connected with an academic unit generally find their home in non-academic "service" departments such as Educational Outreach, Continuing Education, or International Studies. Roughly a third of the ESL programs contacted were somehow connected with an academic unit at the departmental level, but again the degree of affiliation varies. At the loose end of the spectrum, some program directors preside over autonomous programs, but they themselves hold positions in an academic department: for example, the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (non-tenure-track) or Michigan State and Iowa State (tenure track). In most cases, however, only the director has an academic "toehold." Some programs' curricula and faculty are overseen by academic departments, as occurs at the University of Colorado - Boulder, and the University of Washington. A minority are actually part of a department, usually English, Linguistics, or Modern Languages; and one is actually an academic department, complete with tenured faculty. However, in general, if the location of an ESL program is any indication of its status, it appears that most universities view them as ancillary to academic programs.

Of note is the fact that percentage-wise, the overwhelming majority of ESL faculty in this sample are non-tenure-track. Some programs mentioned in their responses that because their classes are not credit-bearing, their students are considered non-degree students and thus faculty who teach them are not eligible for tenure-track positions. This is not surprising in programs under Continuing Education or International divisions, which are traditionally considered to belong on the "staff" side of university programs. However, given the academic rigor which characterizes the modern ESL program, it is noteworthy that the faculty of many programs housed within academic departments – presumably surrounded by colleagues who are tenure-track – find themselves shut out of this process. Tenure, while not as sure a guarantee of job security as it used to be, is still prized, and is usually also linked to the pathway to advancement within the ranks of academia. One colleague from a university in Missouri commented that while most of her non-tenure-track colleagues were satisfied with their positions, they would like the option of being promoted based upon time and merit.

The issue of tenure and academic rank comes into particular focus when the ESL faculty members of a university are compared with their colleagues in other disciplines. Academic departments generally consist of a Chair, an assortment of professors of different rank and tenure stature, and any number of adjunct faculty. In a large institution, graduate students may also teach. This arrangement is slightly different in language departments, the most closely-related discipline to ESL. Language departments not only have a Chair and a complement of tenured or tenure-track faculty; they may also contain "instructors" (or language specialists) whose job it is to teach the language classes. For

example, the University of Minnesota Department of Spanish and Portuguese Studies, which offers various majors and minors, has 5 full professors, 5 associate professors, 3 assistant professors, 1 visiting professor, and 5 emeriti. In addition, 6 teaching specialists, 12 senior specialists, 2 lecturers, and 5 senior lecturers are listed. Students are admitted with any level of Spanish or Portuguese proficiency, including none. Michigan State's Romance and Classical Studies has 8 full professors, 13 associate professors, 3 assistant professors, 4 visiting, and 13 emeriti, accompanied by 15 instructors and several GTAs. Again, students are admitted at every level of language skill. So, the difference between a typical ESL program and a typical academic program is that the former have few or no members of academic rank, while the latter consists principally of members of academic rank. On the other hand, language departments resemble ESL programs more, in that the non-tenured members of the department teach the actual language classes, while the professors usually teach literature, cultural studies, or whatever the subject of their research may be. (This may well be different in smaller universities, where professors also teach language classes). In other words, what ESL programs lack vis-à-vis language programs is the professorial layer.

Finally, as far as their treatment of students is concerned, very few ESL programs grant academic credit across the board, though some do have credit-bearing classes at the most advanced levels. The latter includes some institutions, for instance, the University of Michigan and Washington University of St. Louis, which provide a limited number of "support" classes only for fully admitted students, in the latter case graduate students only (not surprisingly, the standardized test score requirement for such universities is very high, approaching native-speaker command of the language). In addition, except in the cases noted above, ESL students are given conditional admission, the "condition" in this case being the attainment of sufficient language proficiency according to some standardized measure. More often than not, they are admitted, not to the university where the program is located, but to the ESL program itself. Once again, if an ESL student is compared with, for example, a French major, a stark contrast emerges. An American student intending to major in a language may take a test for placement purposes, but does not have to prove proficiency. All of the courses in his or her major will be worth credit towards the degree. Language majors typically do not face a standardized test in order to be allowed to progress in their degree program; and if they do poorly, they have the option of changing majors rather than facing the bleaker prospect of transferring or going home. Not only does the ESL student not receive credit for their effort, but they are not allowed to fail, in a sense.

Of course, it could be pointed out that ESL students are not ESL majors, the University of Ottawa (Canada) excepted. However, a few ESL programs in the U.S. and Canada offer ESL minors. Institutions do this for various reasons, the most common being that it is felt that giving students the opportunity to declare a minor, which is obligatory for the B.A. degree, both saves them the time it would take to complete another minor in addition to their major, and recognizes and rewards the time and effort spent working on their English proficiency. Nonetheless, this is not common practice. For the most part, in perception and in practice, ESL programs are way-stations only, serving intended majors of other subjects.

The picture of a typical ESL program which emerges from the data above is, in the words of the King of Siam, "a puzzlement" in some ways. On the one hand, we have intensive and demanding courses of study, which, not being degree classes and not being worth credit, seem to count for less. Even if they are credit-bearing, often the credit may not be applied towards graduation, or only a very limited amount may be. These classes purport to prepare students for their degree program, but also represent hurdles which students must clear – and the programs themselves, enclosures from which students must escape – in order to gain admission to the university. In addition, these "service" or preparatory classes cost students, both in terms of money and of time. And finally, the instructors of these students, well-trained and degree-bearing, are usually classified as non-tenure-track faculty or staff. To sum up, we have students studying intensively in language programs who are not fully accepted to their universities and who are not given credit for their efforts; we have academic programs which are sequestered from other departments in service units; and we have academically trained and credentialed teaching personnel who are not considered "true" academics, at least not in the conventional sense.

For the most part, these observations are not new: inquiries as to the perception and treatment of ESL students and the programs which serve them have occupied scholarly attention in the field for some time. Zamel (1995) eloquently argued against the view of ESL students as deficit learners who ought to be excluded from the "real courses of the academy" as she puts it. She champions the view of English language learners as works in progress, who ought to be encouraged and nurtured by **all** faculty members, not just their ESL instructors. Van Meter (1990) and several others have ably defended academic credit for ESL classes. Dehghanpisheh (1987) classified types of ESL programs mainly on the criterion of inclusiveness, whether of the ESL program or the ESL student; and many researchers – for instance, Waterstone (2008), Lee (2008), Marshall (2010) Norton (1997) – have written about identity issues, and the practice of "othering" ESL students. And in 2008, the TESOL Board of Directors issued a Position Statement on Academic and Degree-Granting Credit for ESOL Courses, which reads as follows:

> Courses for English language learners in academic institutions are often mischaracterized as remedial and are not always acknowledged for full credit and/or count towards graduation. These policies and practices fail to recognize that ESOL courses are standards-driven content courses, similar to and on par with other subject matter, such as language arts or foreign language courses.
>
> TESOL advocates that institutions of secondary and tertiary education develop policies that identify those ESOL courses that will be credit-bearing upon successful completion and/or satisfy academic requirements for graduation purposes and that these institutions grant such courses appropriate credit hours. Second, TESOL encourages institutions to examine, and revise as needed, their guidelines for eligibility for participation in or access to programs at their schools that are driven by academic course requirements that do not recognize ESOL coursework as credit-bearing courses. These guidelines for eligibility may currently exclude English language learners from participation. Finally, testing opportunities should be made available that would allow English language learners to receive equivalent credit for appropriate coursework upon demonstrating mastery of expected content and/or skills.
>
> (http://www.tesol.org/s_tesol/seccss.asp?CID=32&DID=37)

Within the field of ESL, scholars and practitioners perceive themselves and their students, as legitimate colleagues, participants, and contributors within the university. Yet, judging from the data collected, it seems that outside of the field, the dominant and persistent perception of ESL programs on the part of the Academy appears to be that they are non- or semi-academic, one degree removed from the central degree programs, whose students should be kept in their ESL "silo" prior to entering their degree program. This attitude essentially excludes students and the programs in which they study from the "real" university and deprives both of the academic status they have earned and deserve. It also absolves non-ESL faculty of all responsibility to look beyond the glass-half-empty view of a student whose English is a "problem" to a glass-half-full view of a student whose English is in the process of improving; and to assist, as opposed to punish, this student. Finally, in this globalized age, it is flirting with hypocrisy to welcome the diversity and wider perspectives that international students bring to universities, and extol the virtues of internationalization, while ensuring that many are kept insulated and apart from the university, some permanently. This insulation, by the way, is at times keenly resented, as recounted by an ESL student in Waterstone (2008): "…I hate the ESL idea! And, uh, it's a cliché and I don't like to be clichéd in any way. And I think that the first time ever in my life I was clichéd was as an ESL."(p. 58).

In Dehghanpisheh's 1987 paper concerning models of ESL programs, the fourth and final type she describes is labeled "progressive." Progressive programs, in her description, have no TOEFL barrier for admission to the university. Students are admitted on their previous academic achievements, and may or may not take ESL classes according to their performance on placement exams. Students are allowed "…to ease into full-time university work as English skills improve" (p. 574); further, this model is more democratic, since it does not exclude those who cannot afford to take and re-take standardized tests, and upholds the view that a student who has already achieved success will do so again regardless of the present state of their English proficiency (576). This model also supports Zamel's defense of the notion that lack of language proficiency and lack of cognitive ability should not be conflated (1995, p. 507). In our view, the "progressive" label should be extended even further and incorporated into best practices for a university or college's treatment of ESL faculty and students. ESL programs, if they are not already, should be included *within*, rather than without, the precincts of the Academy; not in a half-hearted way, but as full academic partners. Further, this ought to be reflected in the type of positions offered to ESL faculty. If international students – including those whose English needs improving – are truly to be part of the university community, so too should their instructors. Finally, ESL faculty as well as their students are ideally suited to provide invaluable assistance in the "push" to internationalization. Any university which desires integration, communication between disciplines and the elimination of the "silo" or ivory tower mentality would do well to begin with their ESL program.

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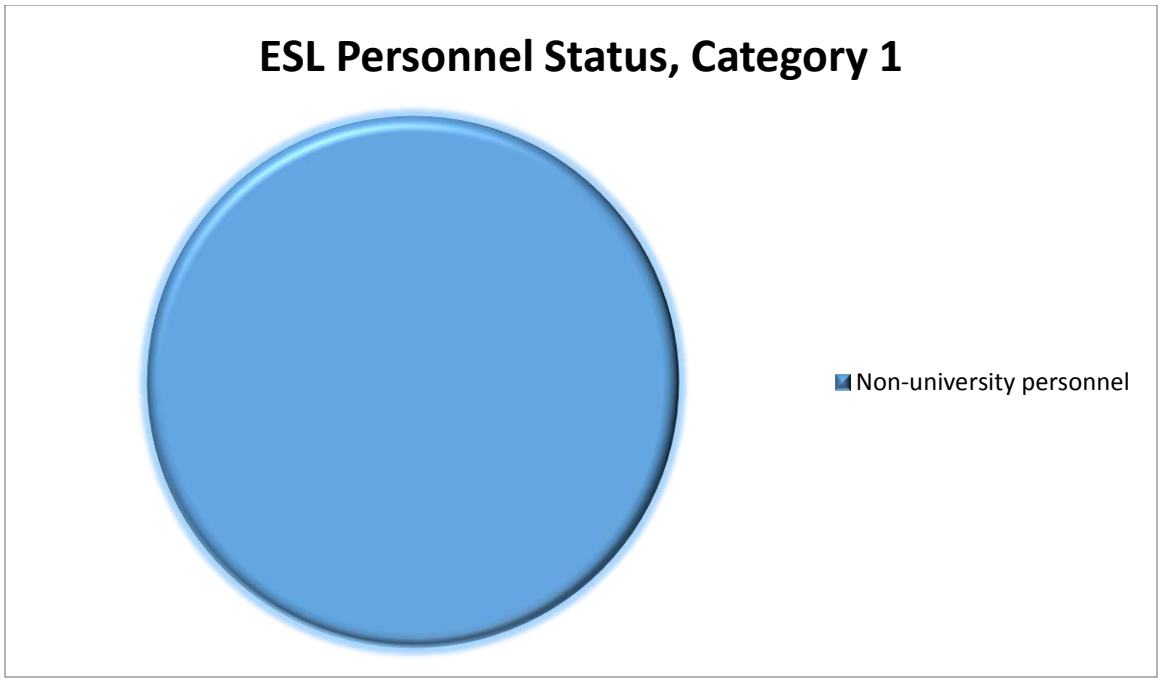
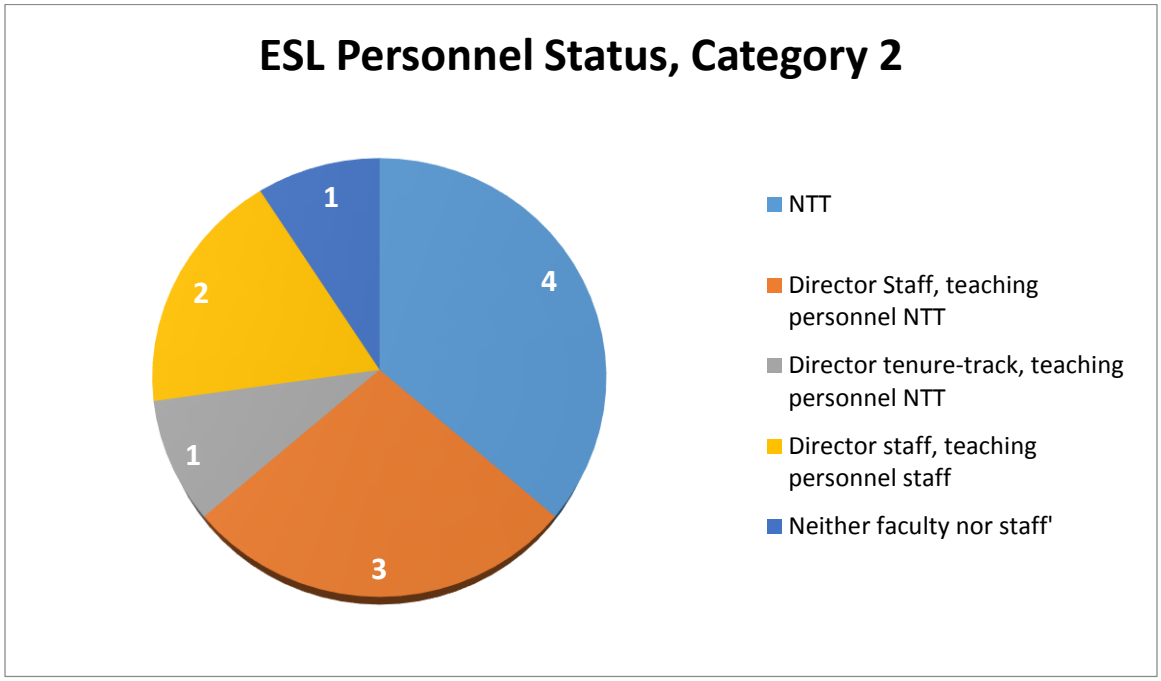
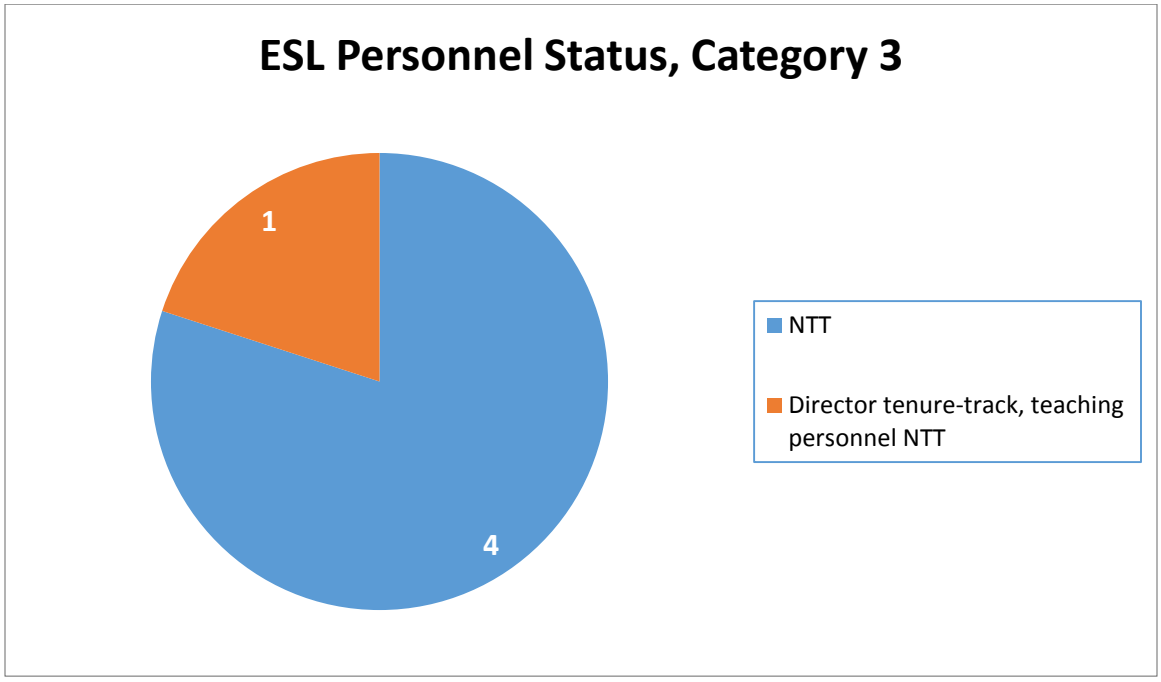
Fig 1: Categories according to academic affiliation

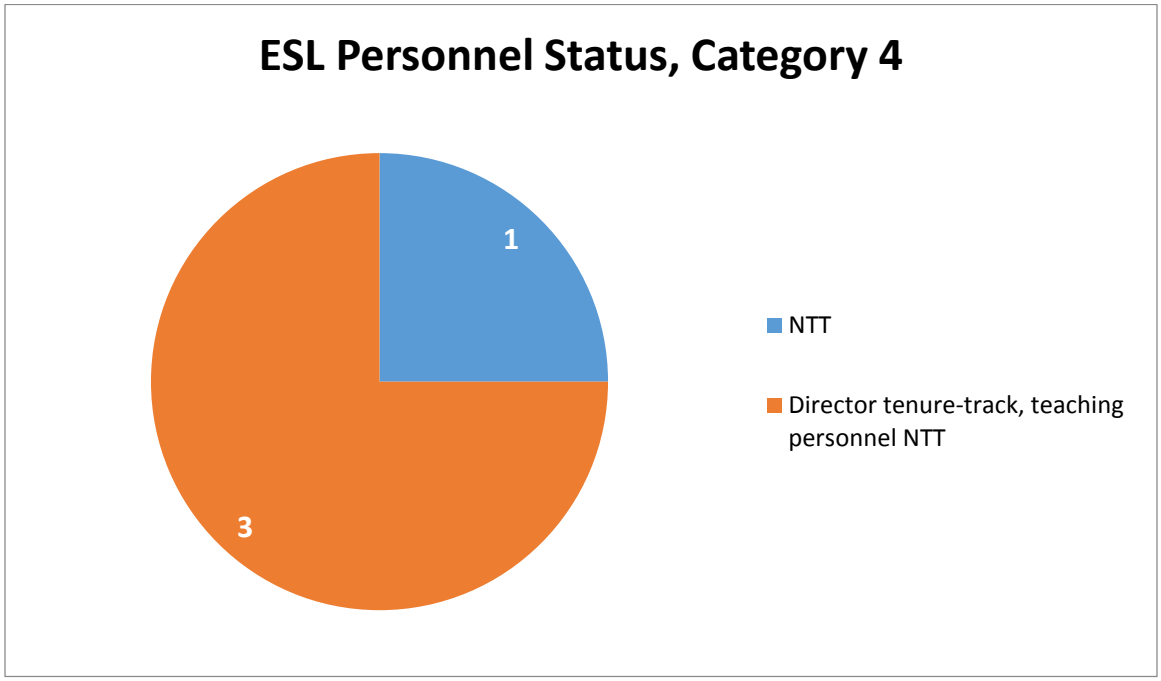
Category	1	2	3	4	5	6
Descriptors	Completely independent (3rd-party providers)	Separate program under Student Services, International Programs, etc.	Separate program, under Dean or College	Director holds academic position, but program separate from academic dept.	Part of an academic dept., e.g. English, Modern Languages etc.	Academic dept.
Number of institutions in sample (30 total)	2	11	6	3	7	1

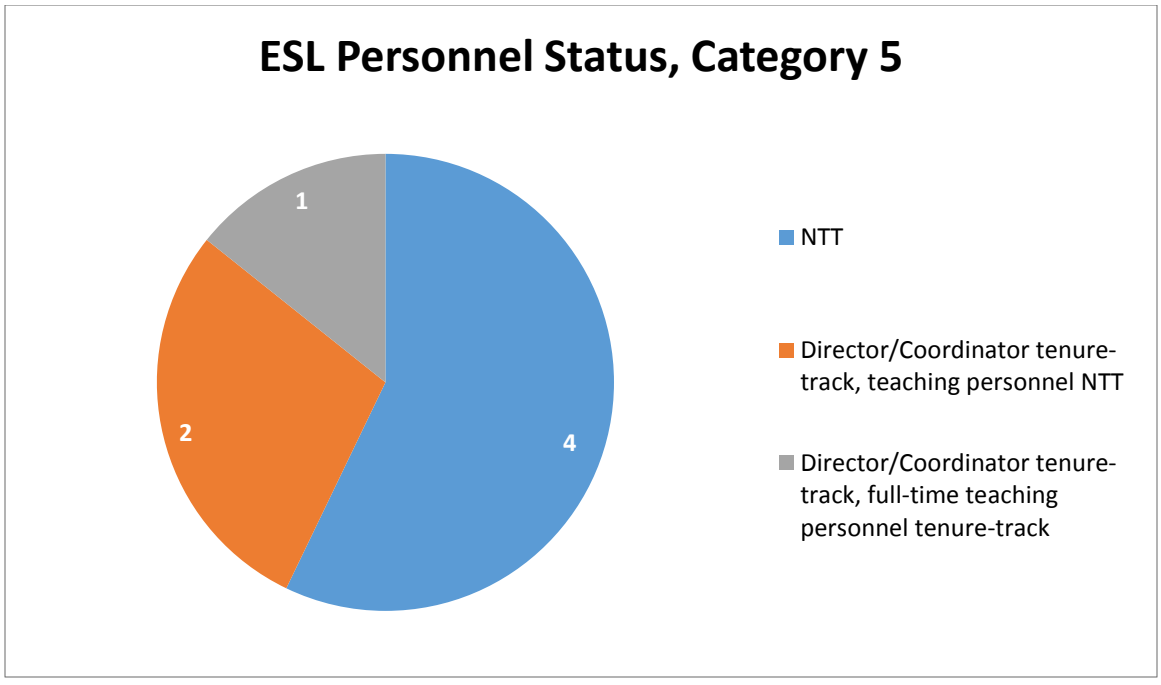
Figs 2-7: ESL Personnel status: Staff, Tenure-track, etc., according to category

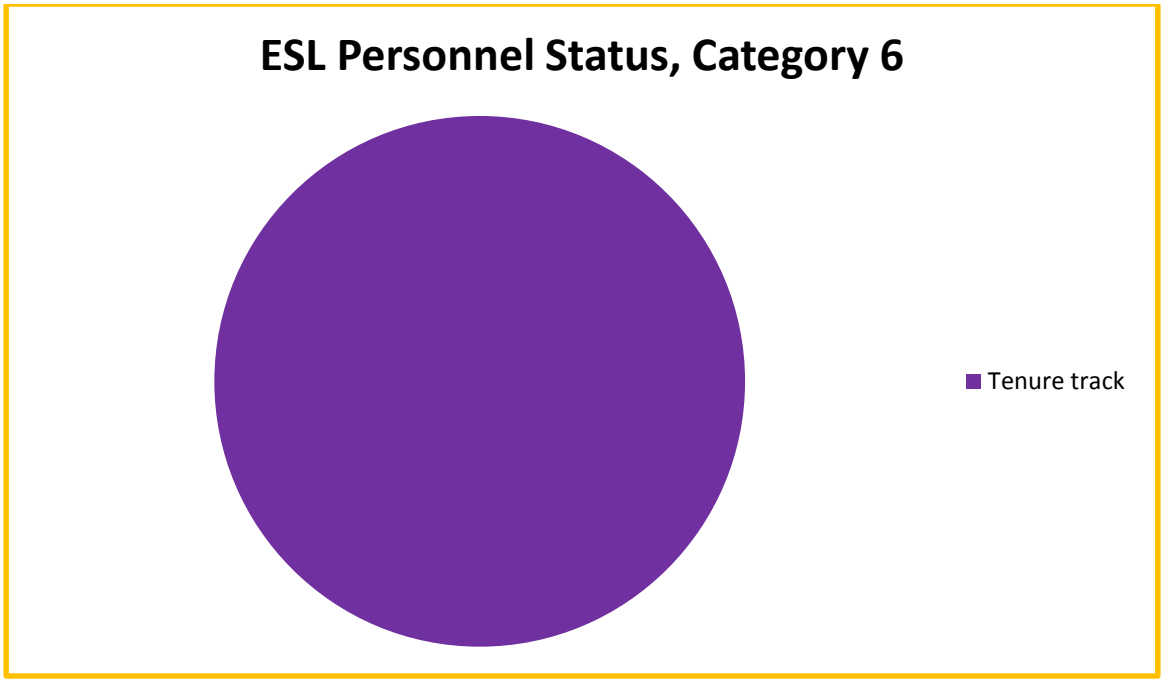


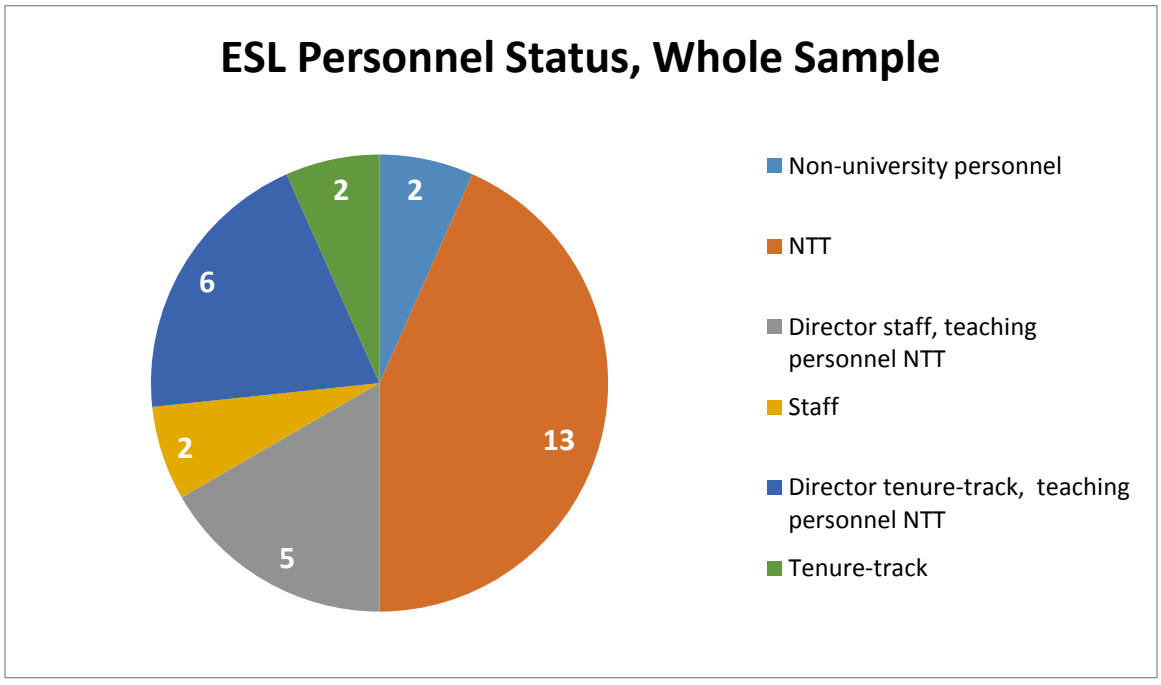

ESL Personnel Status, Category 2
1
4
2
1
3
NTT
Director Staff, teaching personnel NTT
Director tenure-track, teaching personnel NTT
Director staff, teaching personnel staff
Neither faculty nor staff'

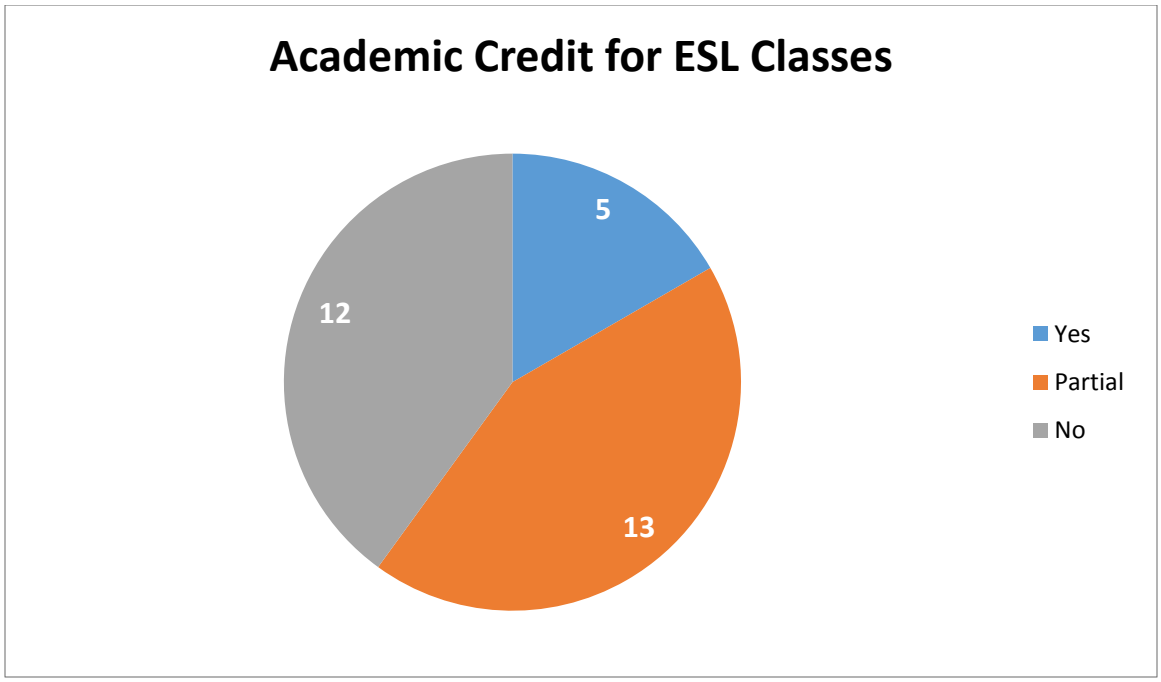

ESL Personnel Status, Category 3
1
4
NTT
Director tenure-track, teaching personnel NTT


ESL Personnel Status, Category 4
1
3
NTT
Director tenure-track, teaching personnel NTT


ESL Personnel Status, Category 5
1
2
4
NTT
Director/Coordinator tenure-track, teaching personnel NTT
Director/Coordinator tenure-track, full-time teaching personnel tenure-track


ESL Personnel Status, Category 6
Tenure track


ESL Personnel Status, Whole Sample
2
13
5
2
6
2
Non-university personnel
NTT
Director staff, teaching personnel NTT
Staff
Director tenure-track, teaching personnel NTT
Tenure-track


Academic Credit for ESL Classes
5
13
12
Yes
Partial
No

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