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## The Quest for Respect: ESL Faculty and Programs in U.S. Higher Education

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## The Quest for Respect: ESL Faculty and Programs in U.S. Higher Education

### Cover Page Footnote

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## **The Quest for Respect: ESL Faculty and Programs in U.S. Higher Education**

**Ildiko Porter-Szucs, Eastern Michigan University**

### **Introduction**

In the field of teaching English as a Second Language (ESL)<sup>1</sup>, several seemingly conflicting trends have been observed over time. On the one hand is a proud story of disciplinary professionalization and growth. The teaching of English to speakers of other languages can be traced back to the 1400's in England (Howatt, 2004) and 1600 in the New World (Nieto, 2009). The first English language institute in the United States – at the University of Michigan – opened its doors in 1941 to teach and research English to speakers of other languages (University of Michigan ELI, n.d.), and many more English language programs have been founded since. Gradually, over the decades, English has become the de facto language of international communication, and English-language teaching has differentiated itself into a field of its own. In nearly every setting – from preschool to adult education – and in countries around the world, English is taught as an additional language. To meet the demand for teachers, English as a second and foreign language instructors are being trained by the thousands (GradSchools.com, n.d.). In order to advance the teaching of, researching of, and advocacy for the teaching of

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<sup>1</sup> English as a Second Language (ESL) will be used throughout this paper to refer to the entire field of teaching students whose first language is not English and where the instruction occurs in English-speaking countries. ESL will also refer to units and departments where such instruction takes place. English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is used to refer to the field of teaching nonnative speakers of English in countries where English is not used on a daily basis. On the other hand, Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) refers to the training of ESL instructors in teacher-training programs and the pedagogical theory and practices in such training. It also refers to the professional association of ESL, EFL, and TESOL professionals and their annual convention (TESOL, n.d.-a).

English to speakers of other languages, the international TESOL organization arose over half a century ago, now claiming over ten thousand members (TESOL, n.d.-b). This is clearly a proud story of the professionalization of our field.

Or is it? Despite a great need for instructors of English as a second or foreign language, the profession does not receive the respect that would typically go along with meeting such a significant need. The following quotation from the TESOL International Association itself illustrates this clearly.

(I)n many academic settings and institutions, instructors and faculty of English for speakers of other languages in both English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as a second language (ESL) programs are not respected as being part of a unique discipline, and often do not receive the same professional treatment or benefits as their peers in other academic areas. (TESOL, 2008)

The excerpt above from a position statement drafted by the Board of Directors of TESOL, Inc. asserts that ESL and EFL are frequently less valued than are other disciplines. This situation can either be understood as those outside of ESL/EFL being unaware of this field's existence or not valuing the important contribution the field of ESL/EFL makes. In contrast to the story of growth, the field of ESL on many U.S. college campuses appears to have a second-class status. The field's respect and even name recognition on such campuses is remarkably low. Anecdotally, both native- and nonnative-English-speaking ESL instructors have reported being asked, when telling a colleague in another department that they teach English as a second language, what *their* first language is. The misunderstanding – that ESL must refer to the instructor's rather than the student's second language – is perhaps the most poignant example that ESL is little known and has a low status on many campuses. In an effort to better understand

the perceived status of ESL on college campuses in the United States, this paper describes the results of two nationwide surveys investigating this perception and makes suggestions for increasing the field's visibility and respect on campus.

### **Literature Review**

There is a likely series of interconnected causes for the disrespect and misconceptions that the field is experiencing. At the heart of it lies the lack of any exclusive mechanism to legitimate instructors. In other words, the field lacks control over its own expertise. Mirroring the successful trend of professionalization – that of TESOL becoming a distinct profession – is a parallel trend of deprofessionalization – that of TESOL professionals losing control over their field's expert knowledge. In 2003, former president of TESOL, David Nunan, when asked in an interview about the most important issue facing the ESL/EFL teaching profession, expressed concern about the deprofessionalization of the field:

Individuals who see English as a commodity to be exploited for their own personal gain, who set up schools largely to rip off students, education departments and governments unwilling to put resources into ELT in the form of appropriate training, curricula and materials etc. [are] bringing our profession into disrepute. (as cited in Scott, 2003, para. 5)

The trend in TESOL referred to above by Nunan mirrors a larger trend in the deprofessionalization of the teaching profession overall (as cited in Scott, 2003). Mathis & Welner (2015) have identified, among other culprits, the fast-track or no-track teacher-training programs that have mushroomed in a deregulated and market-driven environment. Unlike medicine, law, or engineering – fields into which entry is highly regulated – the teaching of the English language is often considered to require little specialized training. The sentiment that

“[a]lmost any fluent English speaker can teach English abroad” (Bentley, 2013, para. 1), especially those who are “native speaker[s] of English from a so-called ‘Lucky 7’ country” (which includes the US, UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, or South Africa) (Joun, 2015, p. 67) is widespread on weblogs (Moy, 2013; TEFL Search, n.d.) and in comment sections of blogs (Pranay Nath, 2016). Griffith (2005) has categorized these and other types of motivations that drive individuals to teach English globally in the following ways:

...the serious career teacher, the student of the host country’s prevailing language and culture who teaches in order to fund a longer stay, the long-term traveller who wants to prolong and fund their travels, the philanthropic teacher who is sponsored by an aid organisation, charity or mission society and finally, the teacher who embarks on this adventure to ‘find’ themselves. (pp. 8-9)

Four of the five aforementioned groups of teachers are likely to possess minimal preparation to teach their subject matter. Their preparation – as evidenced by the aforementioned weblogs and comments – may consist of nothing more than being a native speaker of English, having a Bachelor’s degree in any field, and/or having obtained a TEFL certificate after a few weeks of online (e.g., University of Toronto, n.d.) or face-to-face (e.g., Cambridge English, n.d.) training. On average, in 120 hours of instruction, individuals can obtain a certificate that provides them with “the essential skills, knowledge and hands-on teaching practice [they] need to teach English to adults” (Cambridge English, n.d.). This minimal preparation in a TEFL certificate course is approximately one third of the training required by an undergraduate minor and one quarter of a graduate master’s degree in TESOL (e.g., Eastern Michigan University, n.d.; Grand Valley State University, n.d.; Middlebury Institute of International Studies, n.d.; New York University Steinhardt, n.d.; School for International Training, n.d.; The New School, n.d.; University of

Northern Iowa, n.d.). Yet such minimal certificate preparation often suffices for an applicant to be offered a job teaching English in EFL contexts and for prospective students to sign up for their classes worldwide. Graduates of both TEFL certificate and TESOL degree courses use the same title-- ESL/EFL teacher-- as do the many volunteers, whose primary qualification for this task frequently is simply their desire to help. This reality presents a challenge for the fifth group identified by Griffith – the well-educated, serious career teacher – because the fact that an individual who is *barely* “more than a native speaker” – to invoke the title of Snow’s popular book (2006) – can teach English worldwide “negatively affect[s] TESOL’s efforts at being recognized as a legitimate profession” (Bowen, 2013, p. 210). As Gitlin and Labaree (1996) wrote on the process of professionalization:

[A]n aspiring profession must corner the market for a particular service. This monopoly both raises the status of the service givers, because of their membership in an exclusive organization, and enhances their value in the occupational market-place, because of artificial scarcity. (pp. 89-90)

But, as argued above, membership in the ESL teacher’s organization is not restricted by the profession, rather it is determined by free-market forces. It is doubtful that the professional organizations of doctors, lawyers, or engineers would accept into their midst individuals with zero to one third of the amount of training considered standard. It is doubtful that such individuals would be able to call themselves doctors, lawyers, or engineers. And it is doubtful that they would find employment in settings where they could practice on the public. Not so with ESL teachers. Breshears (2004) has stated that “[a]t this time, there seems to be no supervisory body with the power to authorize whom [language] schools hire to do the job of teaching” (p. 29). Although TESL Canada has prepared guidance for institutions who wish to hire qualified

ESL teachers, institutions are free to ignore these recommendations as there is no enforcement mechanism (Breshears, 2004).

Enduring and common problems resulting from the deprofessionalization of TESOL have been revealed by studies of job (dis)satisfaction of ESL and EFL professionals. For instance, over 75% of Blaber and Tobash's (1989) survey respondents stated concerns over inadequacies in compensation, professional recognition, and teacher qualifications. The authors warned, however, that before issues of salary, job security, and benefits could be resolved, TESOL must first be accepted as a unique profession and TESOL professionals considered as equals to their colleagues in other fields. Until such time, ESL practitioners will continue to struggle to advocate for themselves and their students effectively – for instance, arguing for college credit in ESL classes – which is a concern raised by Blaber and Tobash's respondents<sup>2</sup>.

In another survey of job (dis)satisfaction, Pennington and Riley (1991) queried members of the international TESOL organization using the 100-item Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire. They, too, found that respondents were dissatisfied with compensation, job security, social status, administrative policies and practices, working conditions, and professional recognition.

It would be convenient to dismiss these findings as concerns of the past were it not for the fact that studies of ESL/EFL professionals, regardless of the decade, country, or setting, have yielded similar results (see, for instance, Brown, 1992; Cowie, 2011; Joun, 2015; Lester, 1985; Loh, 1995; McCann & Johannessen, 2005; Porter-Szucs, 2008; Watland, 1988). In his recent master's thesis, Joun (2015) painstakingly details the deprofessionalization of English teaching in South Korea, resulting from a complex web of interactions enabled by government policies

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<sup>2</sup> For a review of the literature on college credit for ESL classes, see Van Meter, 1990.



and perpetuated by school administrators and native-English-speaking teachers with varying degrees of qualification. The reality described by Joun is, no doubt, what Nunan (as cited in Scott, 2003) warned against in the quotation at the beginning of this section.

It is against the backdrop of this ongoing deprofessionalization that two surveys were developed and employed for this study in an attempt to investigate how respected ESL professionals, as members of ESL units within their institutions, feel in U.S. higher education, with an eye toward attempting to elevate the status of the field on their respective campuses. The research questions the surveys were designed to address are as follows:

1. What challenges do ESL professionals perceive their units facing within the institution?
2. How do ESL professionals perceive the respect their field receives within the institution?
3. What successful initiatives have elevated the status of ESL on campus?
4. What positive outcomes have resulted from these initiatives?

## **Method**

This study was based on two anonymous web-based surveys(see Appendixes A and B for survey instruments<sup>3</sup>).Once the results of the first survey were analyzed, approximately four months later, further research questions arose and a second survey was conducted. Collectively, the questions were designed to elicit information about the way ESL professionals in the United

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<sup>3</sup> Raw survey data were first presented as part of the 2015 MITESOL Conference in a session entitled “Breaking the unwanted stepchild curse: Elevating the image of ESL” by P. Randolph, L. Zwier., I. Porter-Szucs, J. Ruppert., K. McIntosh, and L. VonReichbauer and subsequently at the 2016 TESOL convention in a similarly titled session by P. Randolph, T. Jones, I. Porter-Szucs, C. Dunsmore, L. Arokiasamy, and K. McIntosh.

States perceive the respect that their field or subject matter receives within the larger institution and what initiatives have successfully elevated the status of ESL on campuses.

### *Surveys*

Both surveys contained predominantly open-ended questions. This choice was motivated by a departure from the current scholarship in terms of the unit of analysis. Unlike previous studies, which focused on the individual ESL professional's job (dis)satisfaction, the current study focused on the ESL professional's perception of the entire ESL unit's challenges. Another reason for the open-ended format was a desire to focus on not only the perceived challenges and amount of respect (which is what the majority of the scholarship hitherto has covered) but also on the manifestations of the perceived respect (in the first survey), successful initiatives undertaken (in the first and second surveys), and positive outcomes resulting from these initiatives (in the second survey). This exploration into slightly new directions from those established in the literature warranted a question format that would elicit a wider range of responses.

There were two item types in the first survey: short-answer and multiple-choice. In nearly all non-demographic questions in either survey, no response options or terms for participants to select were provided (see Appendixes A and B). Rather, the participants gave their responses in a short-answer format. These responses were then read for themes, categorized, and labeled. In the case of some longer responses, multiple labels applied (such as Interdepartmental Connection, Policy Initiative, and Finance). In question #9 (In your opinion, compared to other disciplines/fields of study, how much respect does ESL receive?) the answer choices were *less, about the same, less than some and more than others, or more than others*. Because the paper's focus is on the challenges, respect, successful initiatives, and positive outcomes experienced by

ESL professionals in American higher education, all questions but #3, #7, and #8 (from the first survey) were analyzed.

The second anonymous survey was conducted using the same approach, four months after the first, to ask two additional open-ended questions: 1) Please share any successful initiatives aimed at establishing a healthy campus-wide exposure for ESL in your institution of higher education, and 2) Please describe any positive changes that resulted from the above successful initiative. The question about initiatives was asked in both the first and the second surveys (questions #12 and #1, respectively). It was repeated in the second survey in order to provide context for the question about positive outcomes generated by such initiatives (question #2), which was designed to answer research question #4.

### ***Participants***

The respondents for both surveys were recruited through the following electronic mailing lists of the TESOL International Association's various postsecondary interest sections: Higher Education, Teacher Education, Adult Education, Intensive English Programs, and Program Administration as well as through the electronic mailing list of the Michigan TESOL affiliate: MITESOL. The surveys were addressed to those in North American higher education. One hundred four members of the TESOL International Association and/or its MITESOL affiliate responded to the first anonymous survey. Demographic data reveal that 75% of the respondents to the first survey worked in higher education (with 62.5% at a university or four-year college and 14.4% at a community or two-year college). Other work settings included 13.5% in K-12 public school and under 1% each in language schools, adult/community education, independent

school districts, and church outreach programs<sup>4</sup>. The second survey received 33 responses. There were no demographic questions asked; thus, no additional information is available about these respondents.

It was evident from the demographic information gathered in the first survey, however, that there were responses from other settings as well. What was impossible to ascertain was whether any of the respondents were from outside the United States. It is possible that Canadian colleagues responded as well, albeit the responses received were compatible with the U.S. context. It is important to know, however, that this issue exists whenever a reference is made to the U.S. in the context of the two surveys in this paper.

## **Results**

Respondents to the two studies indicate that ESL professionals (teachers and administrators) in U.S. higher educational settings perceive a lack of respect and recognition from their non-ESL counterparts and administrators. They also report on numerous successful initiatives to counteract the perceived respect-deficit.

Responses to survey question #2 (unit where ESL is currently housed) and #4 (unit where ESL should be housed) provide the context within which research question #1 (What challenges do ESL professionals perceive their units facing?) can be fully understood. Survey question #2 inquired about the unit within the institution in which the ESL department is housed. This was an open-ended question though there was example wording for respondents to follow. A comparable number of respondents reported that ESL is a separate unit (20.6%), part of International/Global/Study Abroad (20.6%), English/Linguistics (19.6%), or

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<sup>4</sup> The numbers do not necessarily correspond to the number of institutions, however, as multiple individuals from the same school may have responded to this anonymous survey.

Developmental/College Preparatory/Continuing Education (18.6%). A small number of respondents (5%) reported being housed in a department of World/Foreign Languages. The remaining nearly 17% – the *Other* category – comprises K-12 institutions, private language schools, and adult education programs, which are not the focus of the current study (see Figure 1 for current departmental affiliation).

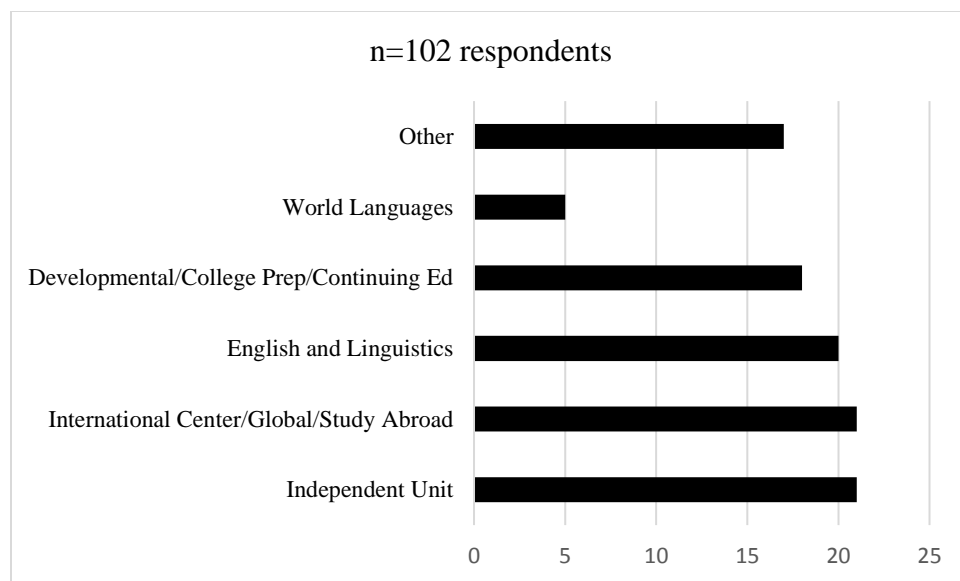
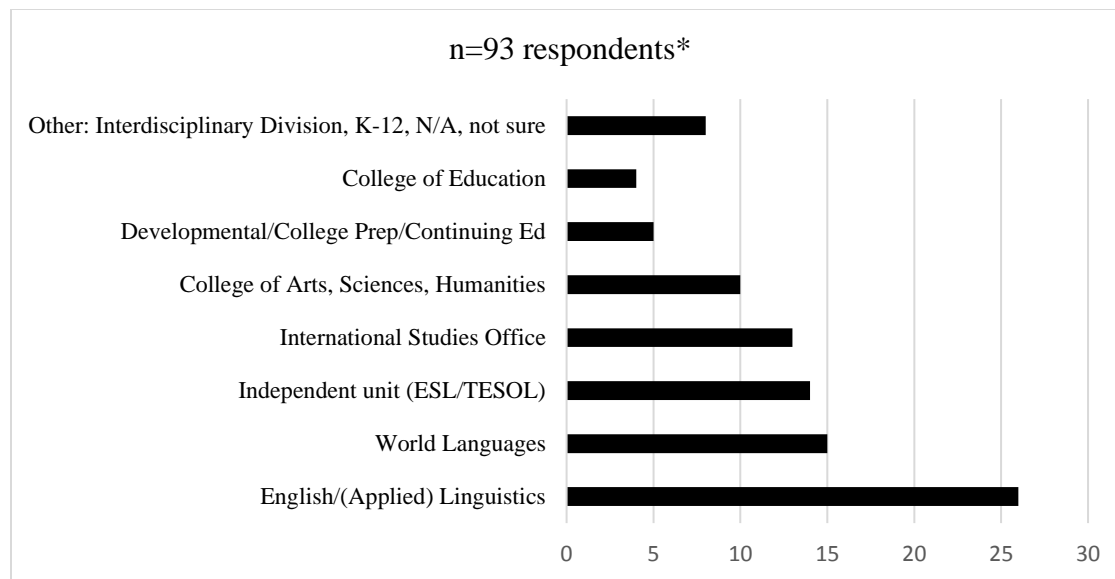


Figure 1. Unit Within the Institution in which ESL Is Housed

In contrast to Figure 1, which depicts the respondents' current affiliation, Figure 2 depicts their *desired* affiliation. Survey question #4 – an open-ended question – asked participants to state the department, or unit, where they would choose to place ESL if the decision were up to them in order to garner greater respect for and recognition of ESL as a unit<sup>5</sup>. The most preferred unit for ESL to be located in was the English/Linguistics department (27.95%). The next three affiliations were World Languages (16.1%), separate ESL/TESOL department (15%), and

<sup>5</sup> Question #3 (see Appendix A) asked about other departments that were housed in the same unit as ESL. The results are not reported here because they are not directly relevant to this paper.

International/Global Studies Office (14%). The College of Arts, Sciences or Humanities was also mentioned almost 11% of the time. The categories are somewhat overlapping though. As the question was open-ended, participants were free to specify the name of the desired unit. Since some participants were unsure of the best home for their ESL department, they provided more than one (see Figure 2 for desired departmental affiliation).



*Figure 2. Where Should ESL Be Housed* \*More than one response was possible, and 95 units were named.

This study's research question #1 (What challenges do ESL professionals perceive their units facing within the institution?), a major focus of this paper, was answered by question #5 on the first survey, which asked respondents directly about the challenges that their unit as a whole faces. Chief among these challenges was the lack of recognition or awareness they perceived within their institutions. This means they perceived either a complete ignorance of ESL's existence in the institution or a lack of understanding of what ESL is about. Lack of recognition manifests itself in other ways as well, as depicted in Figure 3, which indicates a number of shortages identified in survey question #5 : programming (including departmental affiliation and

priorities) (15.6%), full-time instructors and administrative support staff (14.6%), funding (14.6%), professional development (8.3%), facilities and equipment (6.2%), communication (such as decisions about ESL matters without ESL professionals' input) (6.2%), and leadership (lack of vision or uninformed top-down decision making) (5.2%).

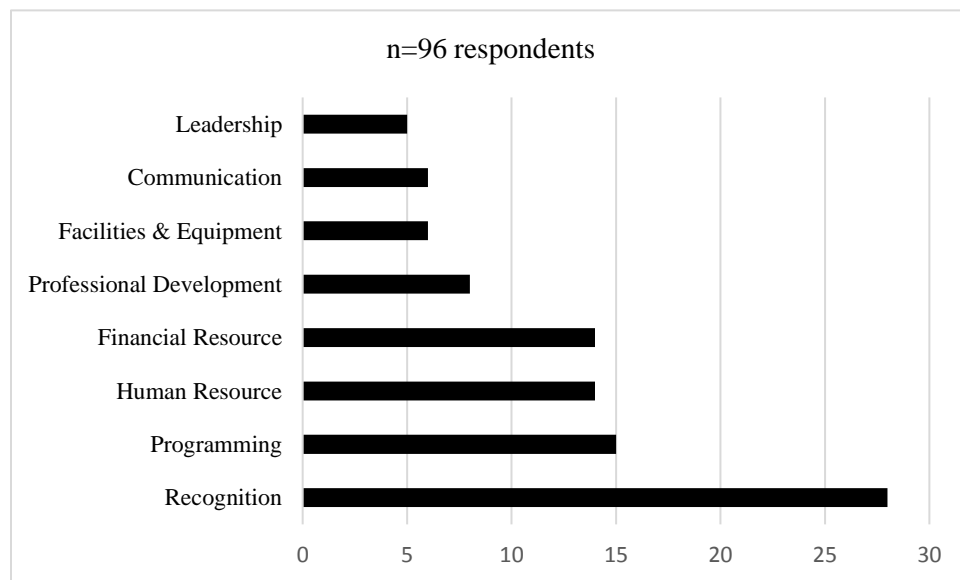


Figure 3. Most Common Problems Mentioned by ESL Professionals in the U.S.

Responses to question #9, along with question #11, answer this study's research question #2 (How do ESL professionals perceive the respect their field receives within the institution?). Question #9 asked specifically about the amount of respect the ESL discipline on campus receives compared to other disciplines. As Figure 4 depicts, the consensus is *less than other disciplines* (66 respondents, or 70.2%). Only one respondent perceived the situation to be the reverse. A further 14.9% (14 respondents) thought ESL received approximately the same amount of respect as other disciplines.

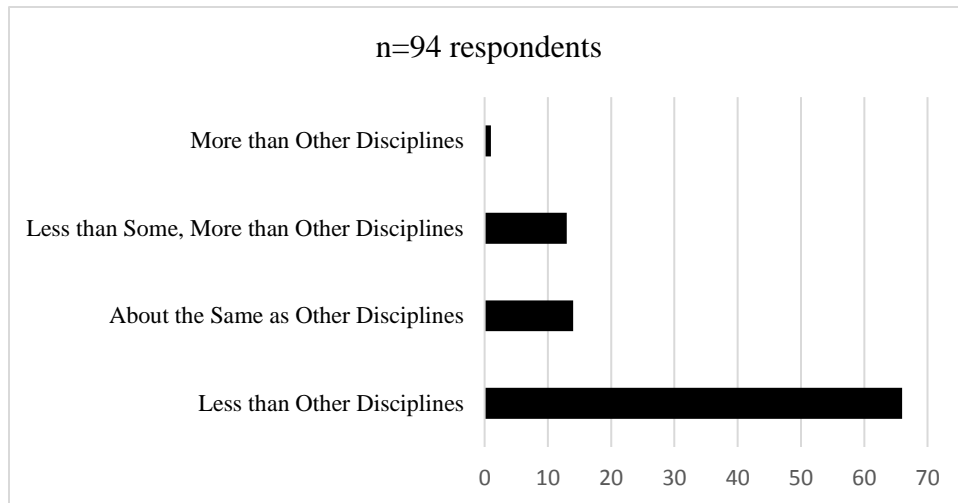


Figure 4. Compared to Other Disciplines the Amount of Respect ESL Receives

The study's research question #3 (What successful initiatives have elevated the status of ESL on campus?), was answered by question #12 on the first survey and question #1 on the second survey, both of which inquired into initiatives taken at the respondents' institutions to elevate the status of ESL. Eighty-nine respondents offered 111 comments. Twenty-one respondents (23.6%) reported not being aware of any initiatives in their units that seek to elevate the status of ESL. The other 68, gave answers that fell into eight general categories: interdepartmental outreach made up nearly half of the responses (41.6%), policy focused and marketing-related initiatives were cited 11.2% each, student life and publishing/presenting were mentioned 9% each, and human-resource and community-outreach initiatives were named 5.6% each. In the "Other" category (7.8%) were initiatives such as academic partnership for and by ESL students, international partnerships, academic showcase of ESL students' work, and elevating ESL students. These responses are depicted in Figure 5.



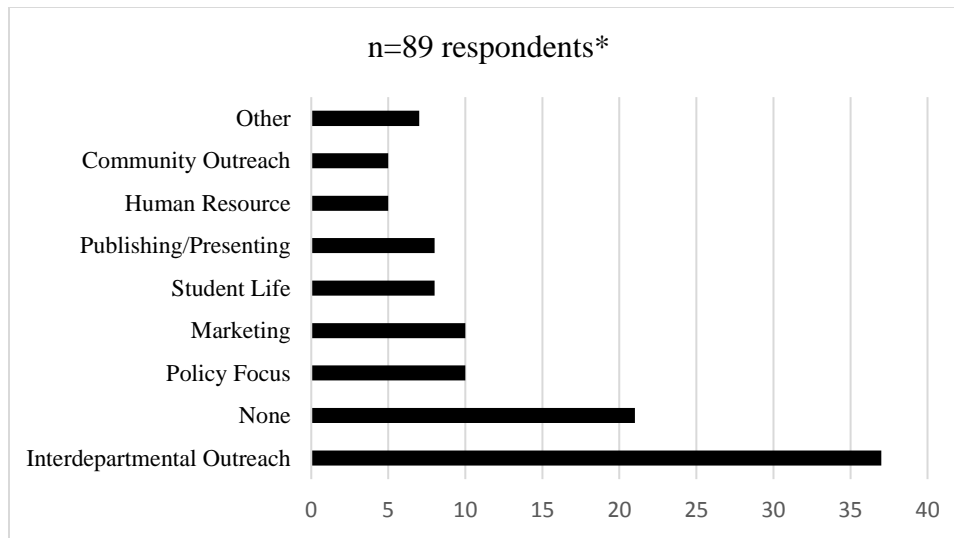
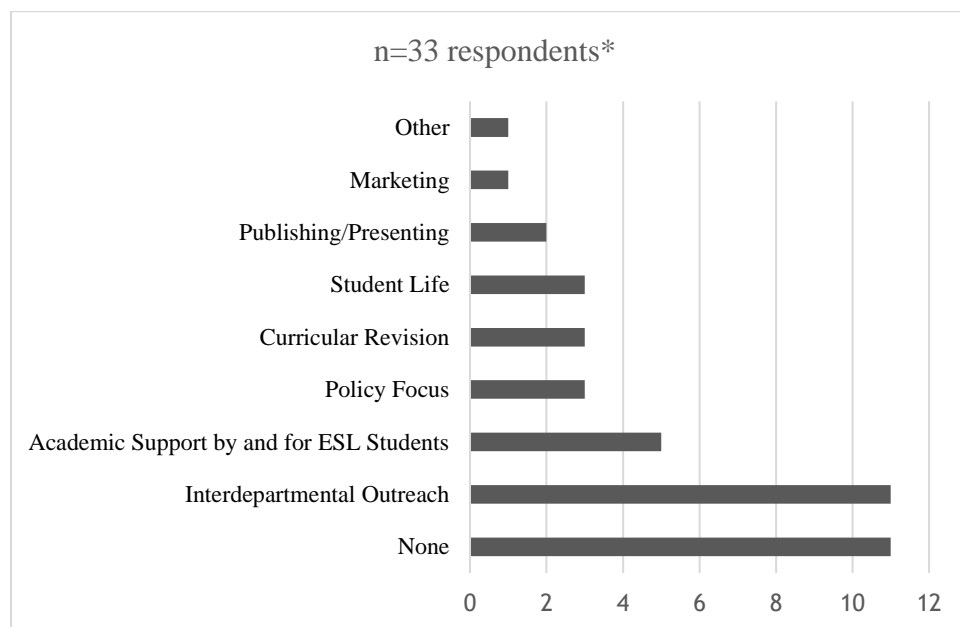


Figure 5. Successful Initiatives at the Respondents' Institutions to Elevate the Status of ESL

\*The numbers add up to 111 because some respondents mentioned multiple successful initiatives.

After the first survey identified some of the *challenges* faced by ESL professionals in the United States and *initiatives* to overcome them, the follow-up survey regarding the *impact* of said initiatives in a higher educational context was conducted (Appendix B). Question #1 of the second survey (Please share any successful initiatives aimed at establishing a healthy campus-wide exposure for ESL in your institution of higher education), which (together with the aforementioned question #12 of the previous survey on the exact same question) answers the study's research question #3 (What successful initiatives have elevated the status of ESL on campus?). Of the thirty responses, eleven (28%) reported a lack of any positive initiatives. The remaining respondents did, however, reveal a wide variety of creative ways to combat the perceived lack of recognition. The most common answer involved interdepartmental outreach (28%). In addition, initiatives related to academic support were cited 13%; policy, curricular revision, and student life were each mentioned 8% of the time, and publishing and presenting

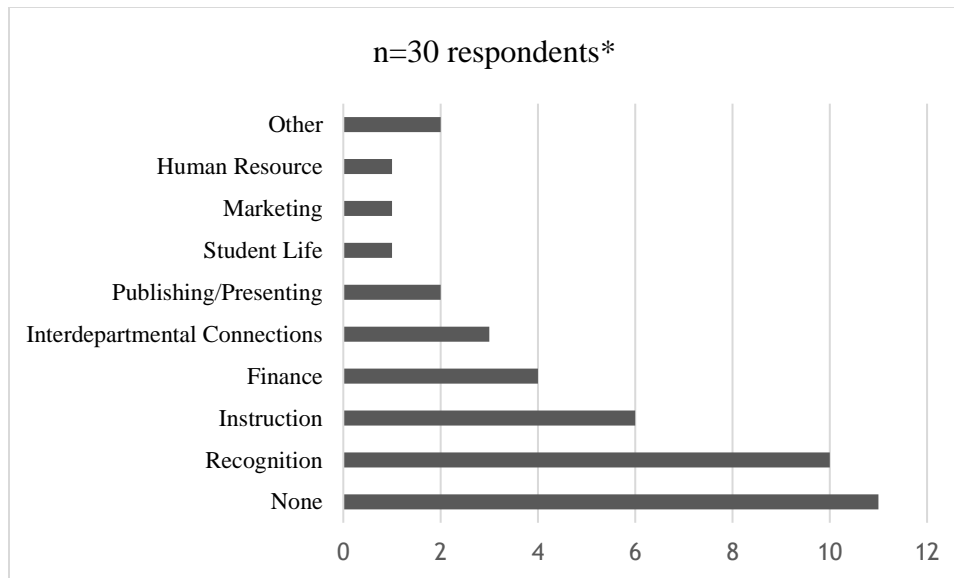
made up 5% of the responses. Investment into technology was mentioned by one respondent (2.5%). Figure 6 depicts these responses.



*Figure 6. Successful Initiatives on Campus to Elevate the Status of ESL* \*Thirty-three respondents gave thirty-nine responses because some respondents mentioned multiple successful initiatives.

Research question #4 (What positive outcomes have resulted from these initiatives?) was answered by the second and last question of the second survey (Please describe any positive changes that resulted from the above successful initiative). It inquired into any desirable changes resulting from the initiatives discussed above. Thirty respondents answered this question. Over a quarter of participants reported a lack of any successful initiatives (26.8%), The remaining answers fell into nine categories. Increased campus-wide recognition of the ESL program was the most frequently mentioned result (24.4%). Next were instructional initiatives (14.6%). This was followed by improved finances (9.7%), more interdepartmental connections (7.3%), and an increase in publishing/presenting (4.8%). Human resources, marketing, student life, technology, and culture were each mentioned once (2.4%) as beneficiaries of the successful initiatives.

Figure 7 depicts their responses.



*Figure 7. Positive Changes Resulting from the Above Successful Initiatives* \*The numbers add up to 41 because some respondents mentioned multiple successes.

## **Discussion**

This survey-based study investigated the perceptions of ESL professionals in U.S. higher education regarding, in their opinion, how ESL (as a discipline, unit, faculty, etc.) was viewed by their non-ESL colleagues at their institutions. It also investigated the group's perceptions of initiatives they deemed successful at elevating the status of ESL (as a discipline, unit, faculty, etc.). Overall, respondents report the following major theme: a perceived lack of recognition of – both awareness of and respect for – the field of ESL teaching and the ESL-teaching unit within the institution. A further major finding entails the existence of measures taken by respondents to counteract the lack of recognition and the successes that resulted from these measures.

### ***Recognition and Respect***

In response to the first research question about what challenges ESL professionals perceive their units face within the institution, a number of comments indicate that ESL professionals are primarily concerned about the lack of recognition the ESL field appears to

experience at their institutions (see Figures 3 and 4). Two distinct meanings for recognition have emerged in this study. One meaning entails awareness. The following sample comments made about challenges faced by the ESL unit fell into the category of lack of awareness:

- *Where do I begin? Most faculty on the campus either don't know about us or don't understand what we do.*
- *Ignorance of our existence on the part of the university as a whole.*
- *Other campus units outside international programs do not think to talk to us when they have issues with or questions about international students.*

The second type of problem relating to *recognition* can be understood as a lack of respect for ESL. (This simultaneously answers research question #2 about how ESL professionals perceive the respect their field receives within the institution.) This is manifested in the following quotations from the surveys:

- *We are looked down upon by tenured faculty in our own department.*
- *When the English Department receives permission to add a tenure line it tends to go to literature or one of the other areas.*
- *Second-class citizenship (non-tenure for instructors, low salary, etc...).*
- *Our place within the faculty of the college (we're not eligible for tenure or promotion, unlike other faculty members).*
- *[Not] being treated as equals in the university community, [not] being treated fairly in regards to classroom assignments, having to be a self-financed unit when all other units spend freely.*

These perceptions echo the experiences of many ESL-teaching professionals in U.S. higher educational settings (see Blaber & Tobash, 1989; Porter-Szucs, 2008; Van Meter, 1990). The

teaching of ESL often goes unnoticed by faculty and administrators outside the immediate unit within which it is housed or suffers from a respect deficit.

Other frequently mentioned concerns pertain to programmatic issues, such as inappropriate departmental affiliation. Respondents expressed a strong preference to be part of an academic department rather than a so-called developmental unit. For reasons that will become clear below, the lack of an appropriate affiliation negatively impacts the status of a unit at an institution, and by extension, the field at large. There was a notable difference between the respondents' current and desired departmental affiliation. Responses to question #2 in the first survey, which asked about which unit ESL is currently housed in, were vastly different from responses to question #4, which asked about which unit ESL should be housed in. The greatest difference pertained to the Developmental/College Preparatory/Continuing Education divisions. Over 17% of the respondents were currently housed in one of these divisions. Such designations usually suggests that ESL-teaching is not an academic or credit-bearing unit at these institutions, but rather provides a service either to community members who would like to improve their language skills for personal or professional purposes or to underprepared academically bound students, who must meet a level of language proficiency before being allowed to take college-level classes for credit. However, nearly 70% of respondents wished their ESL unit were not affiliated with the Developmental/College Preparatory/Continuing Education divisions. The vast majority of the respondents preferred to affiliate themselves with an academic, credit-granting unit such as English/Linguistics or World/Foreign Languages rather than a nonacademic, noncredit unit.

Placing ESL in a developmental or college preparatory unit suggests a deficit model of ESL at the institution. According to this view, ESL students are characterized by deficient

English skills and thus require remedial education. It appears from their responses that most respondents, however, did not believe that viewing ESL learners in a subtractive way serves the field best. Instead, most appear to subscribe to the countervailing view that ESL students should be viewed additively: the students have mastered at least one language and by adding English to their linguistic repertoire they are becoming bi-, tri-, or multilingual, which may explain why respondents see ESL units as most compatible with units where languages are taught and researched.

If ESL students are viewed through a deficit lens, this is, as lacking the needed qualifications to succeed, then the students as well as the department are viewed as a problem to be fixed rather than an asset that enriches its environment. Students suffer under the deficit model. In developmental ESL classes, students frequently do not earn college credit, which is perceived as a grave systemic injustice. In the words of one such student, “[T]hey don’t give us credit...It’s 1,000 dollars and they don’t give us any credit for it. I just think it’s a horrible thing what they’re doing” (Kanno & Varghese, 2010, p. 319). Students can feel like “second-class citizens” on campus. In order to fully grant them what might be termed “first-class citizenship rights,” respondents in this survey report advocating for credit-bearing status for their classes, as do Blaber & Tobash (1989) and Van Meter (1990).

Students are not the only ones who suffer when the ESL field lacks respect. Professionals in the field experience a lack of respect (and this problem circles back to students, as well). *Human resources* was identified by survey respondents as another pressing concern. Two thirds of those who identified the issue raised concern over a lack of full-time teaching and administrative staff in ESL units. *Financial resources*, in other words, lack of funding and low

salary, close the circle and lead us back to the respect-deficit that the ESL field suffers from. Low pay and unavailability of full-time, secure positions are corollaries of low status.

### *Successful Initiatives*

Research question #3 sought to elicit any successful initiatives that have elevated the status of ESL on the respondents' campuses. Perhaps nothing speaks louder to the need for widespread action to extract the field from obscurity on campus than the fact that one third of the respondents reported the absence of positive action in this desirable direction despite a need identified by the first survey. One anonymous respondent offered: "I am not aware of any such attempt to expose the university at large to our ESL program. I wish it were otherwise."

The most common among the remaining responses to the question of successful initiatives on the two surveys combined included interdepartmental outreach, policy initiatives, academic support, program marketing, and presenting/publishing. The category of interdepartmental outreach includes contacts between, on the one hand, the ESL-teaching unit and, on the other hand, other academic units, policy makers (such as the president and provost), and support units (such as advising). Such outreach encompassed informational meetings, professional development workshops, and collaborative projects. Specifically, one respondent elaborated:

*Making time to reach out to faculty on campus, notably deans, directors and higher admin, about the services we can offer to the campus (language assessment e.g., participate in phone interviews with international doctoral candidates), policy reviews of language proficiency, J-1 language proficiency reviews, information about how international students bring diversity and \$ to campus.*

Other representative examples of successful networking initiatives around campus included the following:

- *I requested a meeting with the new president to let him know what we were about*
- *Reaching out to different programs and organizations on campus; meeting with advisers in different colleges*
- *Workshops designed for professors with international students in their classes*
- *Provide more ESL-related professional development to all the teachers and admins, so that they better understand what we do and the challenges that the ELLs face*
- *The workshops I give and other opportunities I've been given by the administration to collaborate on policies for my students or speak in meetings to faculty and/or stakeholders*
- *Two of our faculty are on the campus council representing faculty to the board*
- *Participation of some faculty on college-wide committees and other activities (e.g. assessment, union)*

As demonstrated by the last two comments, one important aspect of interdepartmental outreach centers on committee work as a successful way to increase the campus-wide exposure of ESL programs. This includes participation in university-level committees and councils as well as organizing committees consisting of key stakeholders. It is an oft-heard sentiment, though, that ESL instructors and administrators are left out of decision-making bodies; they are not consulted on matters affecting even their own operations. This has been successfully combatted by the respondents by, for instance, organizing their own committees. The benefit of such advisory committees, as reported by the respondents, can go beyond increasing the ESL unit's profile on



campus. Some programs even invited input into the ESL department's course offerings and support services to better meet the needs of the institution.

One policy initiative enacted by several respondents focused on the ESL label. Some study participants not only objected to affiliating the ESL unit with non-credit-bearing units on campus, but they also objected to their unit name. The acronyms *ESL*, *EFL*, *ESOL*, *LEP*, *ELL*, *EL*, *CLD* (TESOL, n.d.-a) have all been in use throughout the decades to refer to nonnative English-speaking students, as have the terms *bilingual*, *language minority*, *linguistically diverse*, and *multilingual*. Some have prevailed over time, but many have fallen out of use. New labels have replaced old ones, with the hope to remedy the negative connotations of earlier ones.<sup>6</sup> Several participants in this study have prioritized renaming their units from *ESL* to *multilingual* so as to emphasize their students' strengths and to escape the stigma of ESL.

Another respondent shared initiatives that resulted in further policy changes. They succeeded at making ESL courses credit-bearing on their campus, thereby distancing themselves from the all-too-common deficit model.

Support services for ESL students exist on many campuses. One respondent, for instance, reported running a writing lab for ESL students in non-ESL classes, which has gained campus-wide regard. Another respondent mentioned a conversation club, which allowed ESL students to practice their English. However, in addition to these well-known forms of academic support that ESL students receive on campus, one respondent reported on an initiative in which the ESL students became the experts who *provided* academic support to other students. In this program, international teaching assistants in the STEM fields were paired up “with undergraduate peer

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<sup>6</sup> For a more in-depth discussion of this issue, see Ortmeier-Hooper (2008) and Newcomer (2012).

tutors and study-group leaders in the same disciplines” as part of a co-mentoring program.

Placing ESL students in the position of experts underscores the asset rather than deficit view of this population.

Ten respondents mentioned specific initiatives aimed at marketing their ESL program to both internal and external stakeholders. Methods included the creation of a promotional video, contacting community organizations that serve nonnative speakers of English, and even hiring a public relations consultant. One program relayed their marketing initiative. In this program, *all* the instructors were tasked with promoting healthy campus-wide exposure:

*[We were] responsible for heading an initiative that either furthered the department internally or brought greater exposure to the department within the university in general. I volunteered as a liaison between the ESL department and the department that was responsible for social media on campus. I made certain that their "reporters" were invited to ESL functions, and even recommended and helped organize an interview between the marketing/social media staff and two of our graduate students. Information about those students was featured as a web article on the homepage of the university website.*

Rather than waiting for the campus community to happen upon the activities of the ESL unit, these ESL-teaching professionals actively promote the important work they do.

The need for publication and presentation by ESL faculty and staff was mentioned in the survey in a variety of ways but always with an eye toward increasing the ESL department’s visibility on campus. Some respondents stated that they encourage their instructors to present and publish. However, in addition to the need to publicly share the results of one’s scholarship, respondents also emphasized the importance of self-promotion on campus. This may include – as

stated by the survey respondents – being recognized in the institutional newsletter for one’s publications and presentations, inviting campus reporters to multicultural events (as a result, being featured on the university’s homepage), and delivering talks at faculty in-service events.

ESL instructors need no encouragement to teach. Some do, however, need to be reminded of the importance of all four of Boyer’s (1990) categories of scholarship: discovery, integration, application, and teaching and learning. The scholarship of teaching and learning carries within it the necessity to publicly disseminate the findings of one’s systematic inquiry into pedagogical processes. Most ESL instructors already reflect, seek patterns, and solve problems in their day-to-day teaching, thus engaging in this type of scholarship. What ESL instructors do need encouragement to do, and what several respondents emphasized, is to take it to the next step and to disseminate these activities to their colleagues by presenting and publishing.

### *Positive Outcomes*

The respondents’ numerous successful initiatives bore fruit and answered research question #4. Of those who reported successful initiatives, the responses fell into the following categories: increased campus-wide recognition of the ESL program, instructional changes, improved finances, more interdepartmental connections, and increases in publishing/presenting, human resources, marketing, and student life. One respondent reported the establishment of a support center for ESL students: the Learning Center for Multilingual Students. The center, which is based on the concept of family and community, supports ESL students throughout their time in college. The center’s positive impact helped elevate the status of ESL on campus and its far-reaching initiatives seem to have produced ripple effects, as told below:

*Within 3 years, [a] campus that used to view ESL as a big problem began [to] celebrate diversity. Former ESL Program students hold key positions in student government, work in Records and Admissions, and their faces are virtually on all promotional materials.*

Another positive outcome that resulted from the initiatives undertaken by the survey respondents straddled the categories of inter-departmental connection and recognition. As one respondent reported, subsequent to informing higher administrators of the numerous language and assessment-related services the ESL department offers, the higher administration responded with interest, “We are being contacted to participate in things - had rarely been contacted before; I think this speaks to others recognizing our value and professionalism, and an acknowledgement that we have something of value to contribute.” Another respondent stated that improved interdepartmental connections manifested in strong working relationships with key departments, sharing of curriculum and teaching duties across departments, and (as one respondent put it) the “inclusion of departmental faculty/staff in important campus conversations/initiatives.” This is precisely what had been lacking previously.

Positive instructional changes have also resulted from the respondents’ efforts. One institution had experimented with allowing upper-level ESL students to enroll in credit-bearing mainstream courses. An examination of the student-success data they collected served as a testament to the ability of their ESL students. According to the respondent:

*The student success data generated by our due diligence was eye-opening for the college community: Upper-level ESL students tended to radically outperform their non-ESL peers in gen ed courses such as all 100-level math courses, chemistry, computer applications, and engineering. They slightly outperformed*

*their peers in courses such as psychology and intro to business. The data helped to change attitudes toward the capabilities of these students and the curriculum policies which govern their accessibility to credit-level courses.*

The collection and dissemination of student-success data to decision-makers has contributed to the positive outcome for this program. It has also helped to dispel assumptions about the ESL students' lack of ability to perform academically. At another institution where ESL and non-ESL reading and writing developmental courses were made equivalent to each other, similarly positive instructional outcomes were born. It was found that the ESL students visibly outperformed the native speakers and were better prepared for college-level courses.

The networking efforts at another program produced a greater number of students being referred to the ESL program for services to ensure their academic success. The increased enrollment also has had financial implications for the program. Several other respondents reported on increased enrollment, successful budget requests for additional faculty lines, in-kind resources, and a faculty grant to investigate the efficacy of the ESL program.

Through their initiatives, respondents sought and found greater recognition for ESL in further areas. One respondent started a publishing house with ESL-teaching colleagues. Another unit was granted a full-time faculty line teaching ESL. The co-mentorship program between ESL students and native-English speakers has resulted in long-term friendships. The various efforts of ESL professionals have borne fruit in demonstrable ways.

### **Limitations of the Study**

No scholarship is without limitations, and the present study is no exception. For instance, while the targeted demographic group of the anonymous surveys was ESL professionals in U.S.

higher education, 25% of the respondents to the first survey represented a wide variety of settings outside of the target group. Nevertheless, a clear majority (75% on the first survey) was, indeed, from the target group. It is not known if these demographics were the same in the follow-up survey as no demographic information was collected from the respondents to the second survey. While the responses appear consistent with the target group (ESL professionals in U.S. higher education), it is conceivable that respondents from outside of this group also participated. The limited sample size, particularly in the second survey, further limits the potential conclusions from this study, although the fact that the results are consistent with previous inquiries into this topic is reassuring.

Beyond the respondents, an unanticipated definitional challenge was encountered in the responses to the two surveys. The participants' understanding of the word *recognition* appears to have had two distinct meanings in their responses. One meaning has been interpreted as unit name recognition or awareness. The other has been interpreted as professional recognition or respect. Both meanings occurred among the responses: the former in response to question #5 and the latter in response to question #9, though these different interpretations were not detected until data analysis began. Responses to both interpretations have been accounted for in the study results.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the findings from this study and previous research, the field of English as a Second Language in U.S. higher education, as perceived by ESL professionals at such institutions, suffers from a variety of challenges. Primary among them is the lack of recognition from faculty and administrators in other departments. A corollary to this is that ESL units are overlooked in three ways. They are:

- ignored for investment into the human capital (full-time faculty, competitive salaries),
- ignored for investment into facilities and equipment (classroom space, computers, supplies, educational materials), and
- left out of vital inter- and intra-departmental communication (campus-wide conversations affecting ESL, committees, decision-making bodies, initiatives).

These conclusions echo the results of job-satisfaction studies (see, for instance, Blaber and Tobash, 1989; Cowie, 2011; McCann & Johannessen, 2005; Pennington & Riley, 1991; and the TESOL organization's position statement (2008) on the respect-deficit many ESL professionals experience).

At various institutions, however, ESL professionals are taking measures to counter these problems and are seeing palpable results in elevating the status of the ESL discipline on their campuses. They see what others on campus often fail to see, which is that nonnative speakers of English enrich the learning environment for the benefit of all students. As John King, the former U.S. Secretary of Education, stated in his address to international educators:

International students and immigrants are an asset in our preschools, elementary and high schools, and colleges. Our country, our campuses, our classrooms, and our students are stronger when we include diverse voices and points of view. We are stronger together studying and learning from and with each other. (NAFTA, n.d.)

The faculty and staff responsible for the education of these nonnative-English speakers also deserve the respect and recognition for the work they do not only from their institutions, but also from society-at-large.

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## **Appendix A**

### Survey Instrument 1

1. In what type of institution do you work as an ESL professional?
  - a. adult/community education
  - b. community/two-year college
  - c. K-12 public school
  - d. K-12 nonpublic school
  - e. language school
  - f. social service agency
  - g. university/four-year college
  - h. other
2. In which unit is ESL housed at your institution (department, college, division)? (for example, in the English department within the College of Arts and Sciences; this is the only unit; etc.)
3. What other departments/disciplines/fields are housed in the same unit? (for example, English literature, Spanish)
4. If it were up to you, in which unit would ESL be housed at your institution (department, college, division)? (for example, in the English department within the College of Arts and Sciences)
5. What are some challenges your ESL unit as a whole (department/discipline) faces?
6. To what do you attribute these challenges?
7. What are some strengths of your ESL unit as a whole (department/discipline)?
8. What do you attribute these strengths to?

9. In your opinion, compared to other disciplines/fields of study, how much respect does ESL receive?

- a. less
- b. about the same
- c. less than some and more than others
- d. more than others

10. What do you attribute the above (in question 9) to?

11. How does the amount of respect (in question 9) manifest itself?

12. What are some initiatives taken at your institution to elevate the status of ESL?

13. Do you have any final comments?

## **Appendix B**

### Survey Instrument 2

Question 1: Please share any successful initiatives aimed at establishing a healthy campus-wide exposure for ESL in your institution of higher education.

Question 2: Please describe any positive changes that resulted from the above successful initiative.