

Program Performance Review of the MS TESOL Program
California State University, Fullerton
March 11, 2025

Review Team

External

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Summary of Self-Study

Mission

This MS in TESOL program seeks to be a general TESOL program in that it trains students to teach both domestically and abroad. As such, it attempts to cover all the basics of the TESOL field to prepare future teachers.”

Goal

- Create a culture on campus where international students are desired and infrastructure is developed to support them during their studies.
- Increase enrollment, including international

Environment

- “The external factors most impacting the program are the need for job placement for our graduates, at which our program continues to do a good job.”
- There has been a “decrease in the US market for English language training and education.” “TESOL is at the mercy of geopolitics and economies.”
- Student enrollments, particularly international students, were dramatically impacted by the COVID pandemic and are only now beginning to recover.
- With retirements and a failed search, the MS TESOL currently has only 1.3 faculty to cover the curriculum and to mentor/advise students.
 - In recent years the program has lost three faculty members to retirement (Dr. Cheryl Zimmerman, Dr. Juan Carlos Gallego, and Dr. Janet Eyring).
 - The program did have a failed search for a tenure-line faculty member, and they were unable to run the search again.

Review Process

The Review Team held a full day of interviews, conversations, and meals with stakeholders. We met with both the Dean and Associate Dean twice, in the morning for them to give us our charge and basic institutional context, and in the afternoon so that we could discuss our initial observations and recommendations. We had several lengthy conversations with the two tenure-line faculty who teach in the program: Nathan Carr, who also serves as the Department Chair, and Daniel Rueckert, who serves as the MS TESOL Program Coordinator. We had both informal and focused conversations with one of the part-time instructors, several students representing both first- and second-year cohorts, as well as one undergraduate TESOL certificate student and four alumni from the program. These conversations gave us helpful input on conditions, strengths, challenges, and opportunities.

Summary of Strengths

- **Faculty**
 - Students speak very highly of the mentoring, support, and expertise of Nathan and Daniel at all stages of the program (admission through graduation and beyond)
 - The part-time teachers in the program appear to be well regarded by students as well.
- **Curriculum**
 - Strong core curriculum that provides students with the foundations, skills, and experience needed to teach English to adults
 - Some core courses have service-learning components for students to apply what they are learning in real-world situations.
 - The service-learning component of the methods courses at Project Shine and other North Orange Continuing Education internships are consistently noted by students as a highlight of the program.
 - The CSUF TESOL program is the only SMPP (Subject Matter Preparation Program) for World Languages Development in California.
 - Prepares teachers for secondary credentials.
 - The TESOL program includes a healthy undergraduate certificate program that students from multiple majors can pursue.
- **Students**
 - Students have a strong sense of community and “belongingness.” There is a strong cohort dynamic.
 - Students are able to find careers in TESOL after graduating
- **Context**
 - CSUF is in an area where there continues to be good demand for teachers with the MS TESOL to teach; for example, southern California community colleges (e.g., Santa Ana, Mt. Sac, Golden West, etc.), adult schools (e.g., NOCE: North Orange Continuing Education), and private language schools (e.g., Language Systems in Fullerton).
 - California and the LA area are a known and desirable place for international students to study.

Summary of Challenges

• *Faculty & Mentoring*

- It is overwhelming and unsustainable to run a graduate degree program that requires the high-level of student-teacher interactions with 1.3 tenure-line faculty
 - Faculty have to offer TESL 598 independent studies so students can meet graduation requirements when other courses are cancelled due to low enrollment, which is an overload on faculty
 - The Department Chair (Nathan Carr) regularly teaches classes beyond expected load to meet course needs
 - Notwithstanding the dedication and popularity of the current faculty, students want to hear from a wider breadth of faculty. Students have the same teacher for multiple classes. Current faculty are white-males. They do not represent the majority of their student population. Fewer faculty choices also means fewer faculty experiences to learn from (e.g., a TESOL instructor with AI experience).
 - Recruitment and advising fall on one faculty member: Daniel Ruekert. Students speak positively of the advising, but centralizing all the advising on one faculty member on top of all other responsibilities is not wise or sustainable.
 - The strain on the faculty is compounded when a faculty member goes on sabbatical or other leave.

• *Recruitment*

- Word-of-mouth seems to be the primary means of students learning about the CSUF TESOL programs. Both the CSUF undergrad community and broader educational community do not seem to be aware of the strength of this program.
- There appear to be outreach and marketing opportunities that have not been harnessed to better promote the MS TESOL to current CSUF students, in particular to undergraduates from CSUF programs who would likely have interest in this program after graduation (e.g., Sociology, Anthropology, English)
- Information regarding admission and program requirements for the MS TESOL Program is confusing and hard to understand. Multiple students spoke about the website being a barrier to them when applying. It was not until they connected with Daniel that they understood the application process and requirements.
- Changes to the international student admission process at CSUF have created unnecessary barriers to timely admission.
- A sentiment seems to exist that international student enrollment must increase to bolster the program, yet assertive outreach/marketing to domestic students has not fully been harnessed.

• *Curriculum*

- Courses are cancelled or are not even scheduled due to low enrollments (etc.) resulting in some students having trouble progressing through the degree without herculean efforts on the part of the faculty.
- Elective courses reflected the expertise of former faculty (e.g., Vocabulary) and if not offered also affects students' experience of the program.

Student Academic Achievement and Assessment of Student Learning

- When speaking with the alumni and graduating students, it was clear that students feel that the program trains and prepares students well for careers in TESOL. Students note that the skills and practice they receive while in the program give them not only a good foundation but opportunities to practice the theory and skills they are learning in their courses.
- Currently, all Assessment of Student Learning, beyond successful completion of courses, is based on the MS comprehensive exam (SLO 1-3). The MS TESOL faculty feel strongly that the assessment plan they have in place is effective and efficient, and it allows for easy comparison across cohorts. We did not have the opportunity to discuss assessment of student learning at length while on campus, so we do not have any significant feedback to offer on this point. Our one suggestion would be to consider benchmarking the type of assessment that other comparable/peer programs do to evaluate student learning to confirm that their approach is meeting expectations.

Summary of Recommendations

- **Recruitment**
 - Leverage better the SMPP program to recruit students to get secondary credential while pursuing MS TESOL.
 - Leverage better the undergrad TESOL certificate with majors in Linguistics, English, Anthropology, Sociology, International Business, etc. to recruit into the MS TESOL program.
 - The undergrad TESOL certificate should be seen as a key pipeline into the MS TESOL.
 - Look at more ways to engage with and involve undergrads with students in the MS TESOL program (outside of classes).
 - Consider developing a 4+1 BA/MS program/Blended program, perhaps with the linguistics BA.
 - Consider other ways to better promote the program to both the CSUF undergraduate community and broader undergraduate communities (CSUs, UCs, private, out of state).
 - Rework the website to make the application requirements and process much more transparent and easier to understand.
 - In the context of needing increased enrollments to strengthen and stabilize the program, consider eliminating as many “prerequisites” as possible, especially ones that students can address while taking the required courses in the program. Prerequisites can also be a barrier to students applying to the program and completing the application process. Expanding the pool of applicants and decreasing time-to-degree (and overall cost of the program) will likely increase applications/admissions.
 - Benchmark your program admission prerequisites against peer and other MA/MS TESOL programs to see if you are adding barriers to admission that, while maybe desirable, reduce applications from quality candidates. For example:
 - ◆ [CSU-LA](#)
 - ◆ [CSU-SB](#)
 - ◆ [CSU-N](#)

- ◆ [Pepperdine](#)
- ◆ [Northern Arizona University](#): “Individual program admission requirements over and above admission to NAU are required: Personal Letter of Intent (2 - 3 pages in length); 2 letters of recommendation required only for those MA TESOL applicants applying for Graduate Teaching Assistantships.”
- ◆ [U of Northern Iowa](#)
- ◆ [Michigan State University](#)
- Consider making it clearer that you can accept students that do not meet the department’s admission standards. Some TESOL programs at universities, including [CSUDH](#) and [CSUN](#), allow students that do not meet the department standards to submit supplementary materials by which their application can be considered. Your website states, “We only require letters of recommendation if your GPA is a little below the required level (3.0 in the major, 2.7 in the last 60 semester units attempted). Otherwise, you don’t need to send them in.” It should be clear that they can still be admitted if they send the supplementary materials.
- Work with the International Education & Engagement (IEE) Office to identify potential partners to help with recruitment in key international markets.
 - Consider using overseas graduate recruitment services that specialize in identifying countries with high numbers of TESOL
 - Work with the Admissions Office to address roadblocks on the timely processing of submitted application materials plus communication with prospective international students. It’s unfortunate to lose potential students to inefficient or impractical (to the student) application processes/timelines not designed to accommodate the realities of international applicants.
- In the current geopolitical climate, it seems likely that targeting California undergrads (to take advantage of resident tuition rates) and out-of-state undergrads (based on CSUF’s reputation and SoCal’s desirable location) will be the better investment of limited recruitment resources.
- **Curriculum**
 - The Current curriculum is well received by students and prepares them well for teaching positions. In time, rethinking required classes may be needed. For example, including work on incorporating AI in lesson design, etc., and adding preparation for teaching English for Specific Purposes will benefit students looking for jobs in the future. However, these should not simply be “added.” Consider courses that can be dropped as well as how essential material might be integrated into new courses. For example, consider reworking TESL 595 as an *ESP & Materials Development* Course to better prepare students to teach English for specific purposes in workplace and professional contexts.
 - In the context of lower enrollments and fewer faculty to cover required courses, consider prescribing more strictly the program requirements with fewer electives. For example, develop degree maps that articulate specific courses in specific semesters for each cohort (fall and spring entries); this can help ensure sufficient enrollments by offering fewer options. For example:
 - TESL 500 is not offered in the spring. Schedule three classes in the spring

- economic challenges that would make maintaining a pipeline of new international students challenging. We believe the investment of time, money, and other resources needed to establish a new Intensive English Program before it becomes profitable may be untenable at this time.
- The self-study commented on the possibility of adding a “bridging” program for international students. We did not have the opportunity to discuss this while on campus, but this may be an idea to consider. For example, the Indiana University Indianapolis (IUI) campus has an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) Program for students who meet admission requirements but still need English language support based on lower test scores (e.g., TOELF, IELTS), including an ESL version of the first-year writing course to meet Gen Ed writing requirements for the campus. Students take one to three EAP courses depending on their scores from an on-campus placement test. These courses are credit-bearing and can meet General Education requirements for graduation. Something like this might be worth exploring in conversation with the admissions and international affairs offices to see if it would make sense for CSUF. See:
 - [EAP Program at IUI](#)
 - [IUI English language proficiency admission requirements](#)
 - [EAP Test](#)
 - [IU Bloomington](#) has a similar program: [ELIP](#) and [Placement](#)

Summary and Personnel Recommendation

It is remarkable that with 1.3 faculty The MS TESOL Program has been and continues to be a very high-quality program. It has a strong reputation and continues to deliver a quality program in keeping with that reputation. Based on conversations with multiple current students at various stages of their degree progress and four alumni, the level of satisfaction for the instruction and training the program offers and the support they receive from the faculty is remarkably strong. There were very few “complaints”.

Unfortunately, the program is currently working its way through a “Perfect Storm” of challenges, that include:

- Loss of faculty due to retirements and administrative assignments.
- Covid pandemic that essentially ended all international student admissions into the program
- Global political and economic challenges that impact international student interest in and ability to study abroad
- The unfortunate loss of the American Language Program that seemed to be shut down without review of implications and long-term financial and curricular impact, removing a valuable on-campus observational/internship site for TESOL students.
- Fiscal challenges within the California State University system that limit investment into the program to situate it for a rebound in enrollments – but the faculty in the program are barely keeping up simply maintaining the program, so have little ability to increase enrollments with the staffing they have.
- Changes to the international student admission process at CSUF that create unnecessary barriers to timely admission.

Following discussions with Dean Jessica Yirush Stern and Associate Dean Carl Wendt about the larger fiscal and enrollment context for the MS TESOL, College of Humanities & Social Sciences, CSUF, and the California State University system as a whole, we recommend considering a three-step approach to address the immediate need for faculty support in order to not just grow the MS TESOL Program but simply to maintain it in a way that does not continue to over-extend the faculty who oversee the program:

1. Recognizing that the program must first increase the number of students in the program by at least 30 before they will be eligible to search for an additional tenure-track faculty member, and also recognizing that the two faculty in the program now – one of whom is the department chair – are already overextended and unable to do little more than metaphorically tread water, a short-term solution could be to hire a full-time contract lecturer (non-tenure line). A lecturer would assist with teaching courses in the program – especially while Nathan Carr is on sabbatical leave in Fall 2025, but would also be able to take on some of the other service responsibilities in the program, allowing the two tenure-line faculty to make changes to strengthen the program suggested above as well as invest more time into recruitment efforts at least locally and regionally that will expand the pipeline for students into the program. This would also provide another faculty member to help with student advising and mentoring, which currently is the primary responsibility of one person.
2. If growth with a lecturer is realized, consider as a next step the possibility of searching for a joint/split tenure-line appointment with another program or departments that has some personnel need – such as Linguistics or Spanish – that could serve as a stepping stone to a full-time appointment in the program. Split appointments have their drawbacks, but they can be essential in helping programs to meet demands of time and instruction when resources for hiring are a challenge.
3. Ideally, with an investment in at least a partial tenure-line appointment, the program can continue to rebound to enrollment numbers that can justify another tenure-line FTE in time.