Final Report
of
The Committee on English as a Second Language

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Submitted to
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In May of 2011, Vice-President for Campus Life and Dean of Students in the University, Kimberly Goff-Crews charged the Committee on English as a Second Language (Committee) to examine our current ESL offerings and make a recommendation for the best model of an English language training program for implementation at the University. Through information gathered by use of surveys, interviews with local universities and peer institutions, and communication with faculty and students at the University, the committee sought to respond to two overarching questions:

1. How can the University of Chicago best support its international students’ English language needs?

2. How can the University ensure that international graduate students serving as teaching assistants have sufficient English language skills to teach undergraduate students?

Findings

All of our peers interviewed offer an academic ESL support program restricted to their institutions’ own students, typically graduate students. Several, but not all, also offer non-academic ESL courses for a broader audience. Lacking an academic support program focused on our graduate students makes the University of Chicago an outlier.

The committee identified seven characteristics common among the best practices of our peer institutions (please also see attached table):

Course Design
Although English language skills and acculturation issues are interrelated issues, they are often addressed separately and for different purposes at peer institutions.

Target Audience
Some language training programs distinguish between the needs of teaching assistants and the general population of international graduate students, and most distinguish between graduate students and general populations, with advanced academic support courses reserved for teaching assistants and graduate students;

Administration of ESL
Programs for graduate students are administered by academic units, while programs for mixed populations are often administered by non-academic areas;
Instructors
Instructors are required to hold Master’s degrees in TESOL or a linguistics-related field and to have significant experience teaching in an advanced higher education setting; often, but not always, they have academic appointments similar to the appointments of foreign language instructors at their institution;

Mandatory Testing
New international students are required to take an English proficiency test and teaching assistants must pass the test before they are allowed to teach;

Academic Credit
Academic ESL courses for graduate students typically carry academic credit, although at most institutions they do not count toward a degree. Some non-academic courses, particularly where offered through a continuing education academic unit, carry credit as well.

Cost:
The cost for academic ESL courses for graduate students is generally borne by the institution and not the student; some institutions provide a stipend for coursework taken outside of the academic year. Tuition and fees for non-academic ESL courses are typically paid by students.

Recommendations
The committee identified three over-arching recommendations that together, if implemented, would address the questions raised and incorporate the best practices listed above.

1) The University should offer a combination of non-academic pre-matriculation and year-long academic support courses, with pre-matriculation courses open to a wider and paying audience and subsidized academic support courses reserved for University graduate students.

   a. Non-academic pre-matriculation courses
      i. Should take place between mid-August and the beginning of autumn quarter and should include cultural as well as general language instruction, such as the type and level of ESL needed in daily life situations;
      ii. Should be open and marketed to all, including University of Chicago students, postdoctoral researchers, visiting scholars, employees, and their spouses; students and scholars and their spouses from other institutions; and members of the greater Chicago area community;
      iii. Should generate revenue.
b. **Academic support courses**
   i. Should be reserved for University of Chicago graduate students and offer a curriculum aimed at providing English language support at critical junctures in the student’s academic program;
   ii. Should be available to graduate students at no extra cost;
   iii. Should offer academic credit with credit issues to be addressed with the Office of the Registrar, particularly in light of our unique residence system for Ph.D. programs;
   iv. Should collaborate extensively with existing resources, such as the Center for the Study of Languages, the Center for Teaching and Learning and the Writing Program.

2) **The University should place oversight of ESL in an academic unit and hire a director for all ESL programs to oversee academic year and non-academic pre-matriculation programs, even if the pre-matriculation acculturation program is offered by a non-academic unit.**

3) **The divisions and schools, in conjunction with the Office of the Provost, should set minimum proficiency standards that graduate students must meet before serving as teaching assistants. All international students whose academic program includes a teaching requirement should be required to demonstrate that minimum proficiency upon arrival through a standardized English language proficiency test so that an appropriate ESL plan can be developed should it be necessary.**

4) **The Committee believes that a residential component for the English language program is not needed.**

   As indicated under #2 above, the Committee recommends that the University hire a director to develop, implement and oversee all English as a Second Language programming in the University. This position should hold an academic appointment similar to other, already existing appointments, such as lecturer appointments held by language instructors in the University at various levels (lecturer, senior lecturer, etc.).

   The Committee envisions that the director, in broad collaboration with stakeholders, will develop the curriculum and business plan for building a comprehensive ESL program over time, appropriately serving the needs of each academic area and various micro-populations of international students and others. Given the Committee’s recommendation that the primary focus of new ESL programming should be the University’s own graduate students, with particular attention paid to the needs of international teaching assistants, we envision the director to implement steps toward that goal first. Attention should be paid to how this and already existing programming might complement each other. Next steps would include the incremental development of programming elements to best meet the specific needs of academic areas, for example through an English for Special Purposes approach, taking into account the
specific writing, conceptual and vocabulary needs of students in diverse programs, for example law and business versus the physical and biological sciences. Once such a program has been successfully launched, next steps should consider programs for additional populations, such as spouses of students, the University international scholar and employee population, and others with ESL needs. The latter could be viewed as a revenue-generating option. The director would develop staffing and resources accordingly.

Based on our interviews with peer institutions and the perceived needs of the University, the Committee believes that hiring an ESL director will be the first step in a three to five-year strategic plan to arrive at comprehensive ESL programming at the University.

In addition to qualifications common for such positions in the field, the ESL director should have the ability to both develop a high-level vision for future ESL programming and the service orientation and experience to implement the day-to-day curriculum and business processes to create a successful program.