

## Editor's Note: *The Survey*



In this issue of ILI@AEC, we include the results of a survey we administered in February of this year. This survey is an initial attempt at characterizing AEC faculty, GTAs, and administrators. This initial characterization can help us understand what it means to be an ESL professional at the University of Kansas. The results begin to show the kind of team we have put together to help our students meet the university's English language requirement for international students.<sup>1</sup>

Another reason to make our collective professional interests explicit is to help us identify our strengths so we can lead with our strengths as we face future challenges. Some 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges we face are significant. We need to update our curriculum and materials. Updating will require us to revisit our proficiency test. Short-term programs are growing quickly and our IEP may also experience much growth in the not too distant future.<sup>2</sup> We also face the ever present theoretical issue of determining the relationship between language ability and academic success. At the same time we are facing these challenges, the university is also going through changes. The Chancellor's Bold Initiatives are redefining what it means to study, teach, and do research at KU. A good way to begin to address these kinds of challenges is to identify our strengths and interests. This survey is an initial step.

The data from the survey are only a snap shot of key professional interests of our faculty, GTAs, and administrators. Although incomplete, the data from the survey begin to characterize the team that we present to our students and the university on a daily basis. Now we need to interpret these data. Our interpretations and how we act on them can help us determine what kind of team we have and how we can better contribute to the university. We may also be able to use the data to help us make decisions that lead to advancing our status at KU, our profession generally and our individual careers more specifically. I will leave deeper interpretations and applications of the data to you. At this point I begin discussion of the data with an overall summary and some specific observations.

### **Overall Summary of the Survey**

In summary, the data show that we are an experienced faculty with a good mix of newer faculty members and veterans. A good number of us are changing positions within the AEC and getting exposed to different aspects of the profession. As a group we have much study abroad and work abroad experience. We speak other languages relatively well and over a third of us studied significantly beyond our field's terminal degree. Interestingly, faculty, GTAs, and administrators as a whole do not have a high interest in applying theory to TESL but nearly two thirds of us have a 'high interest' in second language acquisition, which is commonly referred to as applied linguistics. The data also show we have a very high interest in teaching and a somewhat diminished interest in non-teaching duties, although there are notable exceptions.

### **Some Specific Observations with Minimal Interpretations**

To begin, almost 82% (50 out of 61) of us responded to the survey<sup>3</sup>. This high response rate to an anonymous survey that was not required shows we have an affiliation to the AEC or a desire to be part of the Center. In general, the data suggest a sense of community among our faculty, administrators, and GTA's.

### *Background and Experience*

The data show that although most of us have not been at the AEC for very long (56% have been here for 0-7 years) we have a balanced mix of veterans and newcomers. 20% of us have been here for 8-15 years and 24% of us have been here

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<sup>1</sup> International students can also meet the university's English language requirement for international students by scoring 23 or higher on the Internet-based TOEFL or by scoring comparatively high on other standardized proficiency tests before coming to the university.

<sup>2</sup> I use the expression IEP (Intensive English Program) instead of AEC because the AEC has three components: The Graduate Writing Program, Short-Term Programs, and the IEP, which is the biggest component.

<sup>3</sup> The number 61 is rough. It came from the spring 2013 AEC phone list. I used the list to count faculty, GTAs, and administrators. I left out some names that are on the list because those individuals are currently not teaching at the AEC. Moreover not everyone who took the survey answered every question. Therefore the numbers throughout the Editor's Note are intended as approximate rather than exact.

for more than 16 years. This balanced mix suggests a certain amount of institutional understanding which provides the environment for a smooth continuation of operations to newcomers.

Another interesting result is that there appears to be movement within the Center. More than half of us (27 out of 50) have held multiple positions at the AEC. This is particularly important because it suggests some professional mobility within the AEC. It also shows that our faculty and administrators are getting experience in different aspects of the profession. The AEC seems to be a good place to work to advance careers.

The data also show that we are an experienced team. Nearly half of us have been in the field for more than 21 years. Over half of us have studied abroad and nearly three quarters of us have worked abroad. When we go abroad, we stay. For example, 83% of the nearly three quarters of us who have worked abroad did so for one or more years.

The survey also reveals that we know personally what it takes to learn another language and/or what it means to be bilingual. 85.7% of us know another language other than English. We seem to be able to use our non-English languages relatively well, especially oral/aural skills. 43% of us rate our S/L skills at 4th level or higher while 39% rate our Grammar for Communication skills at 4th level or higher. Interestingly only a third of us rate our Reading/Writing skills at 4th level or higher. These numbers may reflect the study abroad/work abroad distinction. More of us have worked abroad which requires more of an emphasis on Speaking/Listening skills. Study abroad requires an emphasis on all four skills and grammar. Another explanation for the higher S/L percentage may also be the result of a spouse or partner who speaks a language other than English. In relationships, conversations take precedence over reading and writing.

The data may also be showing some insight into the amount of education we feel we need. Just over a third of us have 3 or more semesters of graduate school beyond our profession's terminal degree while just under a third of us have an ABD, Ph.D. or equivalent. These data may be indicating a future educational trend in the profession.

#### *General Professional Interests*

General professional interests were rated on a scale of 1-5, where 5 indicated the highest interest and 1 the lowest. We seem to have the highest interest in six of the ten areas listed under General Professional Interests. The six areas we are most interested in under this category are: (1) teaching methodologies and approaches, (2) curriculum design, (3) materials writing, (4) intercultural communication, (5) second language acquisition, and (6) English for academic purposes.

Perhaps more intriguing are the areas where our interests are evenly distributed. We can see a relatively even distribution for interest in Application of Theory to TESL/TEFL. Just under 20% of us rated our interest in this category as 1 and a similar percent rated it as 5. Just over 20% of us gave it a 2, 3, and 4 rating. A similar distribution of interest in administration was registered.

#### *Teaching Interests*

Teaching interests were also rated on a scale of 1-5, where 5 indicated the highest interest and 1 the lowest. We do not see an even distribution of interest in teaching. Consider these notable examples. A decisive 73% of us gave a 4 or 5 rating to teaching level 4. We also see high interest in teaching Reading/Writing, Grammar for Communication, and teaching in short-term programs. Nearly 70% of us gave each of these an interest level rating of 4 or 5.

Also interesting is that of the eleven questions on the survey related to teaching, we gave a 5 rating to eight of them. In other words, almost 73% of the questions about teaching were rated 5 by most who responded. We love to teach.

#### *Non-Teaching Interests*

Non-teaching interests were also rated on a scale of 1-5, where 5 indicated the highest interest and 1 the lowest. The data seem to show we are more interested in teaching than in non-teaching duties. Only 38% of the non-teaching areas were rated 5 by most who responded.

The data seem to show that we have the most interest in the following eight non-teaching areas of our profession: (1) being a coordinator, (2) offering in-house workshops, presentations; facilitating brown bag discussions, etc. (3) interacting with visiting scholars, (4) curriculum review/revision, (5) materials development, (6) assessment (e.g., improving the proficiency test), (7) decision-making processes, and (8) strategic planning. That we have a high interest in some of these areas is not surprising since they are related to teaching such as course coordination, curriculum review/revision, materials development, and even assessment.

These are my initial observations. Now it is your turn to look at the data. Let us know what you see, what you don't see, and what it all means. [Click here to jump directly to the survey.](#)

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