

An Evaluation of the FAST TRAIN ESL Program

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Introduction

Purpose and Background

The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the online coursework component of the FAST TRAIN English as a Second Language (ESL) Program at George Mason University. Since 1990, FAST TRAIN Programs have prepared over 1,000 teachers currently working in over 40 countries. The ESL Program is a graduate program that is offered in a hybrid of online and on-site courses (George Mason University, n.d.).

The program prepares students to teach ESL students in international schools in grades Pre K-12. Students can begin the program at any time and can be licensed in approximately 18 months. As a requirement of the program, students must attend one summer session at the Fairfax campus but all other coursework can be taken online. Each teacher who completed the FAST TRAIN ESL program would have taken at least four online courses. In addition to coursework, students complete 15 to 20 hours of fieldwork and a student teaching or internship requirement.

Client and Stakeholders

This evaluation was conducted for Dr. Beverly Shaklee, academic director of FAST TRAIN Programs. In addition, Jen Coarts, administrative coordinator of FAST TRAIN Programs provided all information regarding survey contacts. The stakeholders are the professors who teach the courses that the FAST TRAIN ESL students take.

Limitations

One possible limitation of this evaluation was that was conducted using program graduates rather than current students where memory and perceptions were possibly altered by passing time. Another possible limitation was a lower survey response rate due to outdated email contact information for those same program alumni and a lack of knowledge concerning where those graduates had ended up as many FAST TRAIN teachers come from outside the United States or eventually teach internationally.

Focus of the Evaluation

Description of the Evaluation

The evaluation was conducted using George Mason University's survey design engine, SSG. A 12-question survey was created and sent to all 2008 and 2009 graduates of the FAST TRAIN ESL Program. Potentially, there were 42 respondents. The survey had a mix of questions that respondents could simply answer and others where they could also provide comments if they so desired. A 10-day window for response was agreed to by the evaluator and client and

the FAST TRAIN office sent out a short note introducing the survey and evaluation to the potential response pool, followed up by the evaluator's survey and two reminders. During the survey window, it was learned that seven of the email addresses were invalid, cutting the response pool to a possible 35 respondents.

Evaluation Questions

The client requested that the FAST TRAIN ESL Program be evaluated using two sets of absolute standards and thus following a connoisseurship model. The program was evaluated using the following standards:

- Southern Association for Colleges and Schools (SACS) Distance Learning Standards and
- National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education/Teachers of English to Students of Other Languages Standards (NCATE/TESOL)

From those standards, the following evaluation questions were agreed upon and are listed below. The accrediting agency they were drawn from follows the question.

1. To what extent do the courses in the ESL Program provide for timely and appropriate online interaction between students and faculty and among students? (SACS CS 3.4.5)
2. How favorably are the online courses in this program comparable to the face to face courses in terms of assessments? (SACS CS 3.3.1)
3. How well do the online courses in the ESL Program provide instruction so that upon completion graduates know and understand the major concepts that support ESOL students' language and literacy development? (NCATE/TESOL 1a. & 1b.)
4. How well does the online program provide instruction related to the nature and role of culture and cultural groups? (NCATE/TESOL 2a. & 2b.)
5. How well does the online program provide instruction regarding the use of standards-based assessment measures with ESOL students? (NCATE/TESOL 4b.)

The survey had six questions addressing the five evaluation questions above with an additional six questions to provide requested demographic data to the client.

Results of the Evaluation

Twelve program graduates responded to the survey. This is a response rate of 34 percent over the 10-day response period. The results are listed below by evaluation question.

1. To what extent do the courses in the ESL Program provide for timely and appropriate online interaction between students and faculty and among students?

58 percent (7 respondents) agreed that there was timely and appropriate online interaction

between students and faculty in online coursework. Half of the comments noted “depended on the instructor”.

2. How favorably are the online courses in this program comparable to the face to face courses in terms of assessments?

This evaluation question was assessed using two different survey questions. One asked about assessments as in tests, finals, culminating projects, etc. and the other asked graduates to consider comparability to the face to face program in terms of workload.

In terms of assessments, 75 percent (9 respondents) felt the online coursework was comparable to the face to face courses in terms of assessments.

Regarding workload, 67 percent (8 respondents) perceived the online coursework to be comparable to the face to face coursework. One respondent strongly disagreed while one comment brought up the differences in the time structure of the face to face coursework and the some online courses, citing differences between the summer intensive program and the regular 15-week semesters.

3. How well do the online courses in the ESL Program provide instruction so that upon completion graduates know and understand the major concepts that support ESOL students’ language and literacy development?

All 12 respondents (100 percent) selected either Strongly Agree (75 percent) or Somewhat Agree (25 percent) for the survey item linked to this evaluation question.

4. How well does the online program provide instruction related to the nature and role of culture and cultural groups?

Like the question above, this question also had a positive result with 91 percent of respondents (11) choosing Strongly Agree (58 percent) or Somewhat Agree (33 percent). One comment suggested that the question might be vague.

5. How well does the online program provide instruction regarding the use of standards-based assessment measures with ESOL students?

Of all the questions, this question was the most split. 66 percent (8 respondents) felt comfortable with standards-based assessment measures, while 17 percent (2 respondents) were not as comfortable, responding with the choice “Somewhat Disagree”. One respondent chose “Neither Agree or Disagree”.

Demographic Data Results

Included in the survey were six demographic questions used to ascertain characteristics of the respondents. These questions focused on gender, years of teaching experience, and current teaching placement.

The majority of the respondents (75 percent) were female. Of the FAST TRAIN ESL Program graduates, 42 percent (5 respondents) had three to four years of teaching experience while 25 percent (3 respondents) had zero to two years of classroom experience. Two respondents each (17 percent) had five to six years and more than eight years respectively. Only 1 respondent was not teaching ESL students at the time of the survey.

Fifty percent of the FAST TRAIN ESL graduates were teaching in a self-contained ESL classroom (6 respondents), while three respondents were teaching in regular classrooms. Respondents who noted "other" listed placements including "Spanish" and "pull-out to work with targeted groups of students".

The data in terms of teaching level and geographic location was less telling as the respondents were equally split between primary and secondary placements and nearly equally split in terms of placements international (7 respondents, 58 percent) and domestic (5 respondents, 42 percent).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the data, graduates are generally happy with the online coursework that is required as part of the FAST TRAIN ESOL Program. Given the results of the survey and this evaluation, I would make the following recommendations:

1. Develop an evaluation that could be given separately from George Mason's course evaluations addressing some of the items addressed in this evaluation as well as others. A suggestion might be to look at the Online Course Evaluation Project through the Monterey Institute for Technology and Education. This project evaluates courses in higher education against several criteria including breath of coverage, exercises, projects and activities, and learning objectives. An evaluation developed by the FAST TRAIN Program could be given at the conclusion of each online course or at the conclusion of the entire FAST TRAIN ESL Program, immediately prior or immediately after graduation depending on the will of the client and/or Program.
2. If an evaluation is developed that is to be given to graduates of the FAST TRAIN ESL Program, ask graduates for program feedback as soon as possible after graduation as alumni response rates are often lower the longer they are out of school.
3. As feedback from an evaluation comes in, use it as an additional source in program instruction and curriculum feedback and reflection.

4. Add evaluation data to existing data set and materials for NCATE and SACS accreditation.

References

- George Mason University - FAST TRAIN Programs. (n.d.). *English as a second language licensure /master's degree* [Brochure]. Fairfax, VA: Author.
- Monterey Institute for Technology and Education. (2010). *Online course evaluation project*. Retrieved April 25, 2010, from <http://www.montereyinstitute.org/ocep/>
- TESOL. (2003). *TESOL/NCATE program standards: standards for the accreditation of initial programs in P-12 ESL teacher education* [Brochure]. Author.
- The Commission on Colleges, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. (2009). *Distance and Correspondence education: policy statement* [Brochure]. Decatur, GA.

Appendices

Evaluation Plan – FAST TRAIN ESL Program

Purpose and Background

The purpose of this evaluation plan is to assess the online coursework component of the FAST TRAIN English as a Second Language (ESL) Program at George Mason University. Since 1990, FAST TRAIN Programs have prepared over 1,000 teachers currently working in over 40 countries. The ESL Program is a graduate program that is offered in a hybrid of online and on-site courses.

The ESL Program prepares students to teach ESL students in international schools in grades Pre K-12. Students can begin the program in any semester and can finish in about 18 months. Students must attend one summer session at the Fairfax campus but all other coursework can be taken online. Each teacher who completed the program would have taken at least four online courses. In addition to coursework, students complete 15 to 20 hours of fieldwork and a student teaching or internship requirement.

Client and Stakeholders

The client and academic director of all FAST TRAIN Programs is Dr. Beverly Shaklee. In addition, I am also working with Jen Coarts, Administrative Coordinator, FAST TRAIN Programs for my survey contact information.

The stakeholders are the professors who teach the courses that the FAST TRAIN ESL students take. However, at the present time, I am working only with the client and the additional contact.

Evaluation Questions

The client has requested that the online ESL Program be evaluated using two sets of absolute standards:

- * Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) Distance Learning Standards and
- * National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education/Teachers of English to Students of Other Languages Standards (NCATE/TESOL)

From those standards, the following evaluation questions have been agreed upon. The accrediting agency they have drawn from follows the question.

1. To what extent do the courses in the ESL Program provide for timely and appropriate online interaction between students and faculty and among students? (SACS)

2. How favorably are the online courses in this program comparable to the face to face courses in terms of assessments? (SACS)
3. How well do the online courses in the ESL Program provide instruction so that upon completion graduates know and understand the major concepts that support ESOL students' language and literacy development? (NCATE/TESOL)
4. How well does the online program provide instruction related to the nature and role of culture and cultural groups? (NCATE/TESOL)
5. How well does the online program provide instruction regarding the use of standards-based assessment measures with ESOL students? (NCATE/TESOL)

Methodology

The data gathering for the evaluation will be done through an electronic survey. The client has decided that I will be provided with email contact information for approximately 45 individuals – graduates from the ESL Program from the Class of 2008 and the Class of 2009. It is probable that most, if not all of these contacts are out of the United States.

Jen Coarts and Dr. Shaklee will be responsible for sending an introductory note about the survey. The survey tool provided by George Mason University will be utilized to gather data and then analysis will be completed using a mixture of qualitative and quantitative methods as some of the survey questions do allow for respondents to provide comment and clarifications. A copy of the survey (already approved by the client) follows this evaluation plan.

Timeframe

April 13	Survey approved by client.
April 14	Email addresses of potential survey respondents received.
April 16	Introductory note to be sent out by Jen Coarts and Dr. Shaklee.
April 20	Survey will be sent out to potential respondents.
April 26	First reminder about survey.
April 28	Second reminder about survey.
April 30	Survey due date.
May 1- 8	Data analysis.
May 9-11	Report writing.
May 13	Report due to Dr. Galluzzo and client.

Due dates and reminder dates for the survey were suggested by client based on when my report would be due. It was decided by me that the report would be due to the client at the same time it would be due for the course but a meeting would be determined later depending on the client's schedule.

Survey Instrument

FAST TRAIN ESL SURVEY

The purpose of this questionnaire is to get your opinions about the online courses that were part of the FAST TRAIN ESL Program at George Mason University. I am Kimberley Daly and I am conducting this survey as part of a course requirement in the Ph.D. program at George Mason University and for Dr. Beverly Shaklee. It should only take about 10 minutes to complete the following survey, but your perspective is very important to me, so please feel free to share all that you would like. All of your answers will be confidential. Thank you.

For these questions, choose one answer. You may also provide additional comments.

The online courses in the ESL Program provided instruction, so that upon graduation,...

...I knew and understood the major concepts that supported ESL students' language and literacy development.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Somewhat Agree
- ☐ Neither Agree nor Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☒ Comments:

...I understood the nature and role of culture and cultural groups.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Somewhat Agree
- ☐ Neither Agree or Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☒ Comments:

...I felt comfortable using standards-based assessment measures with ESL students.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Somewhat Agree
- ☐ Neither Agree or Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☒ Comments:

For these questions, choose one answer. You may also provide additional comments.

The online courses in the ESL Program were comparable to the face to face courses in terms of workload.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Somewhat Agree
- ☐ Neither Agree or Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☒ Comments:

The online courses in the ESL Program provided for timely and appropriate online interaction between students and faculty and among students.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Somewhat Agree
- ☐ Neither Agree or Disagree
- ☐ Somewhat Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☒ Comments:

The online courses in the ESL Program were comparable to the face to face courses in terms of assessments.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Somewhat Agree
- ☐ Neither Agree or Disagree

- ☐ Somewhat Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree
- ☒ Comments:

The next questions are for demographic purposes only. Please choose one answer.

What is your gender?

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

How many years of teaching experience do you have?

- ☐ 0-2 years
- ☐ 3-4 years
- ☐ 5-6 years
- ☐ 7-8 years
- ☐ More than 8 years

Are you currently teaching ESL students?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

At what level do you teach?

- ☐ Primary
- ☐ Secondary
- ☐ Other or Do Not Teach

What is your present teaching assignment?

- ☐ Regular Classroom
- ☐ Self-Contained ESL
- ☐ Resource Room
- ☐ Consulting (to Reg)
- ☐ Not Currently Employed
- ☒ Other:

Where are you teaching?

- ☐ Domestic (U.S.)
- ☐ International (Outside of U.S.)