

## **Program Self-Study: The Product is in the Process**

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The mere mention of "self-study" can strike fear in the hearts of people who have gone through the institutional accreditation process. To many, self-study is a "tedious, unproductive task of answering questions handed down from above. A report is produced and handed back up. Little if any change results; little if any reward is given for the effort." (Byrd & Constantinides, 1991). Those who have gone through a self-study sanctioned by TESOL, however, have a very different view of the process than that typically associated with accreditation. The major difference being that the TESOL self-study is initiated by ESL programs on their own terms and time-tables. The English Language Institute at BYU—Hawaii is currently involved in a self-study following TESOL guidelines. It has been rigorous, to be sure, but at the same time, it has been professionally rewarding and enriching for both the individuals and the program.

While the models and the extent of a self-study will and should vary from program to program depending on needs and resources available, BYU—Hawaii opted to 1) conduct a full-scale, general self-study and 2) follow the guidelines available through the TESOL Field Service Office. We did this for several reasons. First, this was to be the first self-study ever conducted in the thirty-year history of our ELI. We also wanted to be thorough and professional. The guidelines offered by TESOL were developed by well-qualified TESOL professionals—they provided a standard by which we wanted to be measured. In addition, a program has much to gain, internally and externally, once it has met the requirements of an organization with the size and influence of TESOL. The extensive nature of the guidelines provides a structure for the study and ensures that once a study is complete, it is a complete study. And yet, the TESOL guidelines are flexible enough to allow a program to set its own timetable and adjust the structure of the study to meet its size, purpose and unique features.

The self-study is without a doubt one of the most progressive steps our program has taken. But progress does not come without a price. The highest price exacted by our self-study has been time. The first three phases have taken almost two years to complete.

The data collecting phase took nearly eight months. During this phase we held fourteen open meetings on campus to discuss the TESOL core standards as they applied to our program and institution. These meetings were advertised in the school newspapers and bulletins, and personal invitations were issued to people in

key positions. Open meetings were vital to our success because they created a wide-base of ownership and awareness of the ELI and its self-study.

Once the data were collected we were ready to begin the review phase of our study. We sought reviews from many sources both internal and external. The two most significant reviews came from the University faculty and external consultants. At the request of our vice president for academics, each department on campus sent a faculty member to a two-day retreat to read and respond to the reports from our open meetings. This review did more to raise campus awareness of our program than any orchestrated public relations campaign could ever hope to accomplish.

At our request, two "outside" consultants were secured to read the reports and then come to campus for a three-day visit. Susan Carkin, of Utah State University, and Edward Klein, of Hawaii Pacific University, came on campus to meet with students, program and school administrators and faculty. This "outside" perspective helped us see our program as we have never seen it, and offered suggestions that might never have been made. Their visit was invaluable to our study.

The final and most important phase of the study was to extract the many recommendations from our reports and develop an implementation calendar. It should be noted that change and implementation were on going during the earlier phases of our study as well, but many recommendations had to be worked into a master calendar. This phase will remain open-ended. It is becoming clear that self-study is and should be an on-going process.

The total process has taken nearly two years to date. The meetings required have been numerous; the recommendations, commendations, and findings fill hundreds of pages of reports. The hours spent are almost incalculable, and the questions asked about our program range into the thousands. The obvious question now is what has been gained? The gains have been significant:

- Our program's goals and purposes have been brought more clearly into focus than ever before. Not only do teachers and administrators have a much better sense of the program's direction, but the students do too. It is refreshing to be in the driver's seat and be in charge of our destination.

- Curricular needs and possible solutions have surfaced as a result of the study. We are already making major adjustments to the curriculum. The final product will be a much more effective curriculum based on student and institutional needs.

- The level of awareness of the ELI program has increased tremendously as a result of the study. Faculty members who had no concept of the program and its impact on them are now informed and actively involved. Administrators have a better understanding of the program and how it is helping the University meet its mission objectives. ELI faculty are much more aware of options, and there is a spirit of willingness to share and openly discuss options.

• The level of commitment and ownership to the program has increased significantly. There is a sense among the teachers that the program belongs to them; it does. When TESOL established its guidelines for a self-study, it was hoped that a substantial spirit of ownership would develop within a program during the self-study process; it certainly has with us.

BYU-H will file a final self-study report with TESOL in May of 1993. And while it was once perceived that this report would mark the end of our self-study, in reality, it is only the beginning. It is true the product of a self-study is in the process—a process that should never be finished. Self-study is an "attitude of continual improvement" (Henrichsen, 1991). The final question that we need to ask ourselves after two long years of probing and inquiry is: Has it been worth all the effort? Without question!

### References

- Byrd, P. & Constantinides, J. (1991). Self-Study and Self-Regulation for ESL Programs: Issues Arising from the Associational Approach. In M. Pennington (Ed.), *Building Better English Language Programs*. Washington D.C.: NAFSA.
- Henrichsen, L. (1991). *BYU—Hawaii ELI Self-Study: An Interim Report*.



Pictured are self-study committee members (top): Maureen Snow, Ellen Bunker, Fawn Whittaker, Pamela Slack, Karen Smith, and Debbie Yang; (bottom): Norm Evans, Earl Wyman, Lynn Henrichsen, Kory Collier, Marge Stanton, Perry Christiansen, and Thad Draper.