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## ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a 2-year project carried out in a foreign language department at a research institution in the United States that intended to professionalize the language teaching faculty. A change in the university's core curriculum resulted in the implementation of the foreign language requirement for undergraduate students. This led to a growing demand for foreign language instruction, especially in Spanish. With this demand came the need to radically change the nature of the culture and literature-oriented research department and to redefine and restructure the department to meet the need for this increased instruction. The paper describes how the department and the faculty evolved as a result of the university's changing needs. It began with a few untrained teaching assistants and a few unqualified language speakers, hired on the basis of need, and evolved into a more professional language teaching track. The roles played by the different stakeholders are described. Major accomplishments of this transformation are presented, and the problems of this professionalization option are pointed out. Numerous data-rich tables detailing the issues and changes in the department are appended. (KFT)

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**Professionalizing Foreign Language Teaching in a Research Department**

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**Professionalizing foreign language teaching**

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## **Abstract**

This paper reports on a two-year project carried out in a foreign language<sup>1</sup> department at a research institution in the US, intended to professionalize the language teaching faculty. A change in the university's core curriculum brought the implementation of a FL requirement for undergraduate students. As a result, FL programs on campus became increasingly important because of the growing demand for FL instruction, especially Spanish. With the demand came the need to (a) radically change the culture of a culture/literature oriented research department, and of the university as a whole, with respect to FL education; and (b) redefine the language teaching body.

It is described how the language program and its faculty evolved due to the university's changing needs, from a group of untrained TAs and a few rotating unqualified language speakers, hired on a need basis, to a more professionalized language teaching track. The roles played by the different stakeholders are also described. Major accomplishments are presented and the problems of this professionalization option are pointed out.

More and more universities across the US are requiring the study of a foreign language as part of their students' core education, and are also implementing demanding FL requirements, that in some cases go beyond the typical 3/4 semester sequence. Highly rated research institutions are not an exception, and some of them have recently initiated important changes toward a more visible role of FL education, mostly because of the institution's internationalization efforts. Associated to this interest in sound FL programs, they also face the challenge of recruiting language instructors to meet the new curricular needs.

What I will be presenting here is just an example or "case study" on how a top-rated research institution and a FL department confronted a change in the university's curriculum that brought with it the implementation of a FL requirement. This new demand brought with it the need to (a) change the culture of a literature-oriented research department, and of the university as a whole, with respect to FL education; and (b) redefine the language teaching body. I will describe how the Spanish Language Program and its faculty evolved due to the university's changing needs, from a group of untrained TAs and a few rotating native speakers, hired on a need basis, to a more professional language teaching staff. I will also address the many challenges encountered along the way, all of them related to what has been called "the politics of foreign language instruction." I will discuss the different dynamics that came into play along the process (prestige, institutional power and hierarchy, tension between research and teaching, the language versus literature dichotomy, issues of differential status) and the changes accomplished. I will also briefly describe the results of a survey administered to departmental faculty, intended to gather some insights on their beliefs about FL instruction, FL teacher status, and the role of the FL teacher within the department.

How to professionalize language teaching when language study is considered "... the mere acquisition of skills with no intellectual content" (Kramersch, 2000, pp. 320) and when many obstacles exist for the institutional integration of foreign language learning and teaching?

Two years ago I arrived to a traditionally literary/cultural studies oriented department, as a Language Program Director<sup>2</sup> with an advanced degree in Spanish Applied Linguistics. I was aware of the fact that I had not been hired for my potential as a scholar within the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) field, but to be an administrator and curriculum developer, and to prepare the department for the soon-to-be-implemented FL requirement. At Duke University the field of Second Language Acquisition/Foreign Language Pedagogy does not have an established place, and for this reason LPDs hold regular rank, non-tenure track positions. This reflects the same differential status given to the LPD position in many departments of these characteristics. As Kramersch (2000) states, "[...] *Their association with language instruction tends to devalue their field of research a priori [...]*" (Kramersch, 2000, pp. 320).

At the moment I arrived to my new position, the lack of a foreign language requirement, along with the absence of an applied linguistics culture, and the consequent low status associated with language teaching, had created a situation where language instructors were a clear underclass within the department. A preliminary needs analysis was conducted intended to shed some light into the current status of the Spanish Language Program. With respect to teaching staff, that need analysis yielded the following conclusions: (a) courses were taught by Graduate Students (TAs), visiting students, and a small group of rotating native speakers, most of them unqualified; (b) no regular-rank faculty member in the department taught Spanish language classes, which reflected a clear separation between language and literature/cultural studies; (c) instructors and

TAs were sent to teach language with no previous preparation and, in some instances, without enough proficiency in the foreign language.

In preparing the department for the new influx of students, one of the main concerns, if not the major one, was finding an adequate teaching staff. As a LPD, my role was not only to assist in the professional development of Graduate Students (GSs) as teachers, but also, and more crucially, to put together a team of educated foreign language instructors. At the beginning of the 1999-2000 academic year, one year before the implementation of the new FL requirement, the Spanish language program had an enrollment of approximately 350-400 students per semester. Around 35% of the Spanish instructors were GSs, and some 30% were untrained, unqualified visiting exchange students. Only 22% of the language teaching staff were full-time language instructors, who taught the majority of Spanish language classes (see Figure 1). Except for 2 instructors holding an MA in Applied Linguistics (Indiana U.) and an ESL degree (U. of Iowa) respectively, no instructor had qualifications to teach a foreign language. This group is what Redfield (1989) has defined as "quasi-faculty" (Redfield, 1989, pp. 3). There was no pre-service or in-service training, and only GSs took a general, one semester, methods class. Visiting exchange students and instructors (in the majority of cases with no training or education to be FL teachers) were not required to attend pre-service or in-service education courses or workshops. Both visiting exchange students and instructors taught 2-4 classes per semester, and they were paid on a per-course basis (\$3,000 to \$5,000 per course). The average salary for a full-time instructor, hired on a one semester or one-year basis, was \$25,000 (see Figure 3). Contracts for language instructors did not include benefits, and neither office space nor computer was available for language faculty (see Figure 4). This situation is well known as the "revolving door approach to FL teaching."

With the advent of Curriculum 2000, the administration's commitment made it possible to reduce class sizes from 22 to 15 students per classroom. This reduction, along with the expected increase in enrollment (35% with respect to the previous year) created a crucial need to change the shape of the department's faculty.

When facing the issue of staffing our language program, we had at least the four options mentioned in Redfield (1989). The first option was to create a separate language teaching staff, which involves hiring a group of language instructors (called lecturers or senior lecturers in many institutions); the second option, called "the professional option" is to hire faculty with research and teaching interests in the field (a difficult task, considering that, as Redfield mentions "the intellectual field is relatively low-status, like the activity it studies" (Redfield, 1989, pp. 3); the third option is what Redfield class "utopian". It proposes that regular rank faculty teach language classes as well, and share the "burden". However, as Redfield states, *"it involves the unreasonable expectation that the more powerful will cooperate on equal terms with the less powerful"* (Redfield, 1989, pp.3) The last option that Redfield (1989) calls "egalitarian" consists of assigning language classes on the basis of age, so the youngest faculty in the department teaches language. However, in this type of departments, where Assistant Professors are expected to get tenure, teaching language increases the tension between teaching and research, and presents a threat to promotion.

A whole year of discussions went by, both within the department and with the administration. We argued that the appointment of a SLA specialist was only "a small step toward a professional solution" (Roche, 1996, pp. 1), and that some change in departmental politics needed to accompany this step, mainly the hiring of faculty members specialized in SLA and Pedagogy, *"a body of specialists who were involved and competent and whose interest in*

*language teaching went beyond the lesson plan"* (Roche, 1996, p. 1). As Roche (1996) states, "[...] *anything less, despite the best of intentions, will be a patchwork solution.*" (Roche, 1996, p. 1)

Soon enough we realized that hiring specialized tenure-track faculty was impossible, due to the above-mentioned dynamics (issues of power and status, the language versus literature conflict, lack of regard for the academic and scholarly respectability of the SLA field, to mention a few). We had to settle for a combination of the professional and *lecturer* options, hoping we could put together a group of professionals thoroughly educated in SLA and FL teaching, "[...] *yet, by statute, second-class citizens*" (Redfield, 1989, p. 2).

A search was conducted to identify candidates with a background in SLA, Applied Linguistics or FL Pedagogy. After numerous discussions both within the department and with the administration, two possible models came up: the administration's model was the Lecturing Fellow (an ABD student in Spanish Literature or Linguistics, who would take the position while pursuing a tenure-track job elsewhere). The department's model was a full-time professional Instructor, educated in the field, with no interest in pursuing a tenure-track job. I will classify these two categories, following Schein (1972) as the *occupational* model, versus the *professional* model. We finally had to settle for a compromise solution: four lecturing fellows and six instructors, with one-year contracts renewable for 3 years, a \$30,000 starting salary with benefits. No professional development funding was associated to these positions

Our search was less than successful, and we did not attract many candidates with the desired qualifications; in fact, most of our applicants were ABD students in Literature or cultural studies who were clearly attracted to a very strong Literature graduate program. To palliate the effect of untrained instructors, we decided that all incoming faculty would have to complete two



requisites to be able to teach: (a) attend a 25-hour pre-service orientation (for many of them the first contact with the FL education field) and (b) take a graduate *Teaching Spanish as a Foreign Language* class, an in-service course that would provide them with a minimal knowledge base so they could perform their jobs as educators from a more informed perspective.

At the beginning of Fall 2000, of the 16 instructors in the Spanish language program (excluding GSs), only 19% had Applied Linguistics/Foreign Language Pedagogy or similar education, and 75% had no previous education in these fields (see Figure 2). Lost battles at that point were the provision of a faculty professional development fund for all instructors (and here, once more, questions of power, status, and equality of non-regular rank faculty versus regular rank faculty arose, both within the department and the administration); (b) the provision of office and computer needs for everyone (see Figure 4); (c) the goal of having 100% professional language faculty. The faculty body was split this way: 38% GSs, 19% Visiting faculty, and 42.3% (versus the 25% from the previous year) full-time Instructors (see Figure 1).

Although substantial progress was made with respect to the previous year, we could not help but feel that we were working under the "patchwork approach" This group of instructors still felt like an underclass. Their office location in the department (the basement) was a perfect metaphor of the situation. However, more progress took place during the second semester of that academic year: we went from 19% to 29% of instructors with SLA/FL Pedagogy background (see Figure 2); we increased to 35% the number of instructors with an office space, and to 47% those with computer equipment (see Figure 4)

Over the course of this Spring 2001 semester (4th semester), we have made substantial progress towards professionalization within our department, by reducing further the number of Visiting faculty (from 19% to 8%), and by hiring more educated faculty. Starting Fall 2001 62%

of our instructors will have a degree (MA or similar) in SLA/FL Pedagogy or related fields (see Figure 2) Salaries for next year have been increased to \$36,000-\$38,000 (see Figure 3), and all instructors will have access to one professional conference or workshop funded by the department. We have managed to find and retain office space for 69% of the language instructors, and 81% will have their own computer equipment (see Figure 4).

In sum, the major accomplishments have been a plan for recruitment and retention, and contract upgrades for language teachers, including funding for professional development. From this more professional option, everyone, from students to administration, is benefiting. Our students are being exposed to a better FL learning environment, and because the university invests more in FL instructors, they invest more in the language program and their students.

Is this enough to call this language teaching group professional? Schein (1972) in his book *Professional Education: Some new directions*, delineates criteria which separate the concept of *profession* from that of *occupation*. According to Schein " *the professional ... is engaged in a full-time occupation that comprises his principal source of income [...] is assumed to have a strong motivation and a stable lifetime commitment to that career ... [...] possesses a specialized body of knowledge and skills that are acquired during a prolonged period of education and training...*" (Schein, 1972). We certainly have language instructors who match that profile, and our goal is to increase that number to 100% (aside from GSs). However, as Roche (1996) mentions, SLA research and SL pedagogy reveal that professionalization of second language instruction needs to include a through education of instructors in many different subjects (psycholinguistics, culture and xenology, SLA, descriptive linguistics, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, pedagogy and methodology, to mention some). There is a knowledge base that all language instructors need to acquire, both before teaching and while teaching. This would

entail staffing FL departments with instructors with advanced degrees (possibly PhDs) and consequently creating regular rank and/or tenure-track positions. In the type of research institution described in this paper, this would require a radical change in the culture of the university as a whole, and of each FL department. We are far from that. SLA/FL Pedagogy is still not recognized as a legitimate scholarly enterprise (reflected by the fact that no SLA specialist on campus has a tenure-track position). In my department, language is still taught by the powerless, and language teaching is still viewed as a service occupation. We have made important material progresses, but a more fundamental change has not occurred.

What is needed is for departments to rethink the role of the applied linguist and the FL instructor, to cross the bridge between the language versus literature dichotomy; the deep divide between regular rank (literature) and non-regular rank (language) faculty, that are currently present in many FL departments.

To investigate a little further this divide within our department and section (Spanish), we administered a survey to these two distinct groups of faculty, in order to determine how FL teachers perceived themselves, their profession, and role, and (b) how regular rank faculty perceived FL teachers and their profession. Participants were asked to state their degree of agreement with various statements about the FL teacher profession and their role in the FL department. The survey was administered online to 23 Spanish language teachers (with an 85% response rate), and 18 regular rank, non-language teachers (with a 62% response rate). We found that differences on issues related to FL teacher's training and responsibilities were relatively small, compared to the important differences on questions related to power, prestige, and equality. With respect to the ideal characteristics of an effective FL teacher, we found, not surprisingly, that the language teaching group was more "in tune" with current trends on FL

instruction. This group placed more importance than the non-language group on aspects of good practice, like the following: (a) using Spanish as lingua franca in the classroom (see figure, trying not to dominate the classroom when they taught, not correcting every single error, considering students' needs, not depending on the textbook, or being familiar with national standards or the SLA/Pedagogy field). In general terms, however, both groups appeared to believe that a FL teacher needs some background and education in the field, and that knowing the language or being a native speaker are not enough to be an effective FL teacher (although a good percentage in both groups considered that good enough!). Both groups defined FL teaching as a professional activity (63% and 62% respectively) and they both agreed (although in small percentages) that a teaching portfolio is the best measure of effectiveness of a FL teacher (33% and 39% respectively). Regular rank faculty gave more weight to students' evaluations (32% vs. 21%).

However, the differences are more noticeable when we enter the territory related to power, status, and professional and intellectual value. Only 10% of regular rank faculty consider FL learning and teaching a scholarly field, versus 20% of instructors. In fact, 26% of regular-rank faculty views FL teaching as the teaching of a "skill" (26%). When asked later to indicate their level of agreement with the statement: "teaching a FL is a scholarly enterprise", 76% of regular-rank faculty showed disagreement, versus 52% of language teachers. Likewise, 78% of regular rank faculty disagreed with the statement that language teachers are scholars (vs. 13% language teachers). Paradoxically, although regular rank faculty agreed that a good FL teacher should be familiar with SLA principles and research in the field, when presented with a more direct statement (Every college FL instructor should have an advanced degree in SLA or related areas), 78% disagreed. Here we can observe how the implications of hiring people with advanced degrees in SLA "threaten" the traditional departmental structure. A similar response was obtained

on the even more direct issue of hiring tenure-track faculty in the SLA field. Only 36% of regular rank faculty disagreed with the general statement "no FL instructors should be in tenure-track positions", but when confronted with the prospect of hiring tenure-track instructors to teach FL, 85% of regular rank faculty disagreed. It is important to notice that 61% of the language teachers also disagreed with this idea, although it is plain to see how language teachers without advanced degrees may also feel threatened by the prospects of regular rank faculty positions in the language program. Finally, only 4% of the regular rank faculty agreed with the idea that they should teach foreign language (vs. 92% language teachers)

Four questions related to the "perks" that FL teachers should have associated with their jobs. As for the need for departmental support for professional development, again important differences arose (100% of language teachers agreed, vs. 53% of regular rank faculty). When presented with a more "egalitarian" issue (non-regular rank faculty having the same resources as regular rank faculty) 100% of the language teachers agreed in contrast with 53% regular rank. However, on issues that do not impact directly on power or status relationships (regular salary increases for FL teachers) there was a more general consensus (100% language teachers vs. 75% non-language teachers). As for duration of contracts, 42% regular rank faculty agreed that FL teachers should have long-term contracts and in some instances permanency. 58% disagreed, most likely because of the "permanency" issue. In contrast, language teachers mayoritarily agreed (97%).

Finally, one question on the survey was extremely revealing. When asked how FL teaching and FL teachers are valued in the department, 45% of language instructors responded that they did not feel valued at all, and 32% felt undervalued. In contrast, regular rank faculty thought that FL teachers are very valued (8%) or valued (52%) and only 40% felt they are

undervalued or not valued at all. This is a good indicator of how deep the division is between these two professional groups within one department.

In sum, we feel that important advances have been made towards professionalization, and we are confident that we will continue to improve the situation during the next academic year. However, professionalization is not only about getting better salaries for FL teachers, or finding them an office space where they can professionally perform their duties. As important as these material advances are, they are only at the surface of a more fundamental problem. Professionalization is about radically changing the culture of a literature-oriented FL research department, and of the university as a whole, with respect to FL education, and FL educators. It is about finding the place and status of SLA/FL Pedagogy within the academic community, and about research institutions and departments like mine acknowledging that professionalization of FL teaching can only happen if the intellectual

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Figure 1.

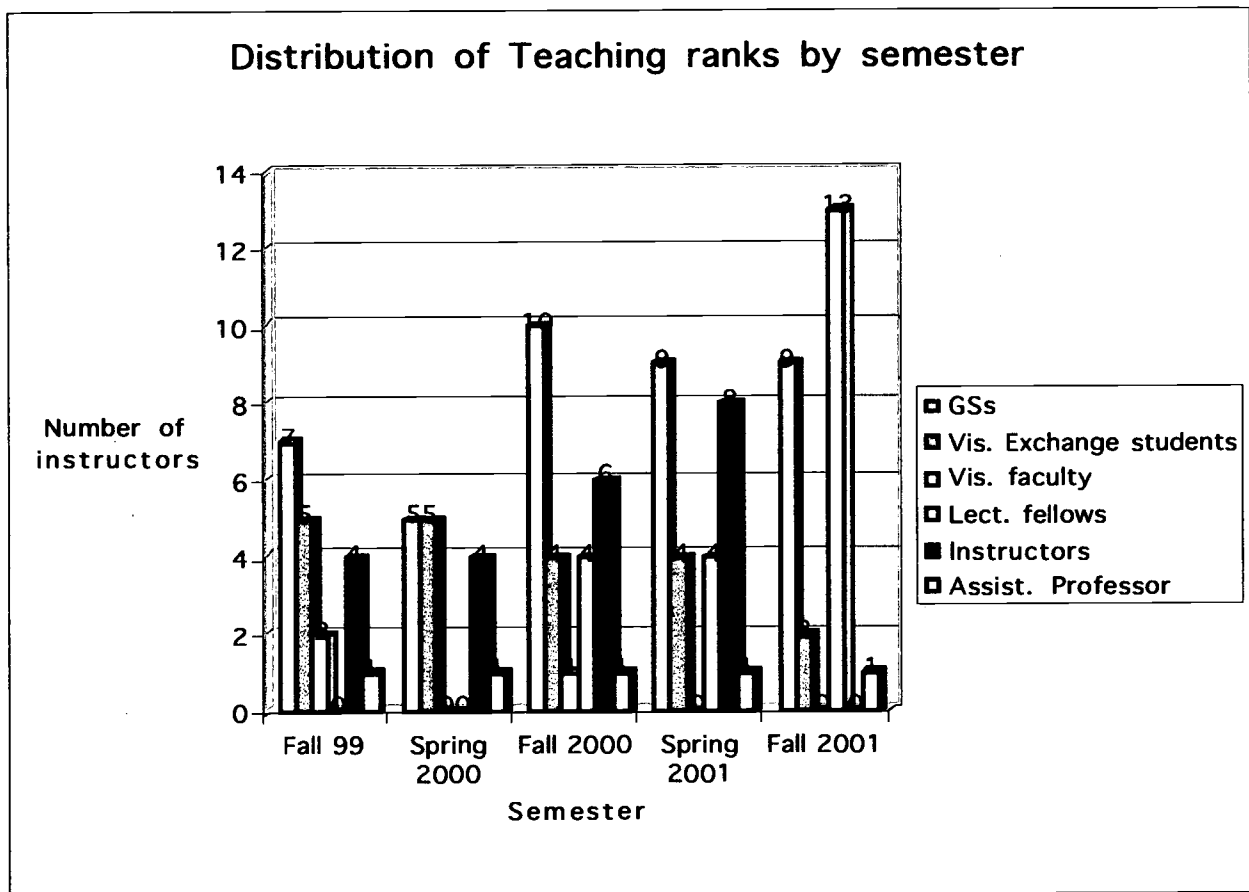




Figure 2.

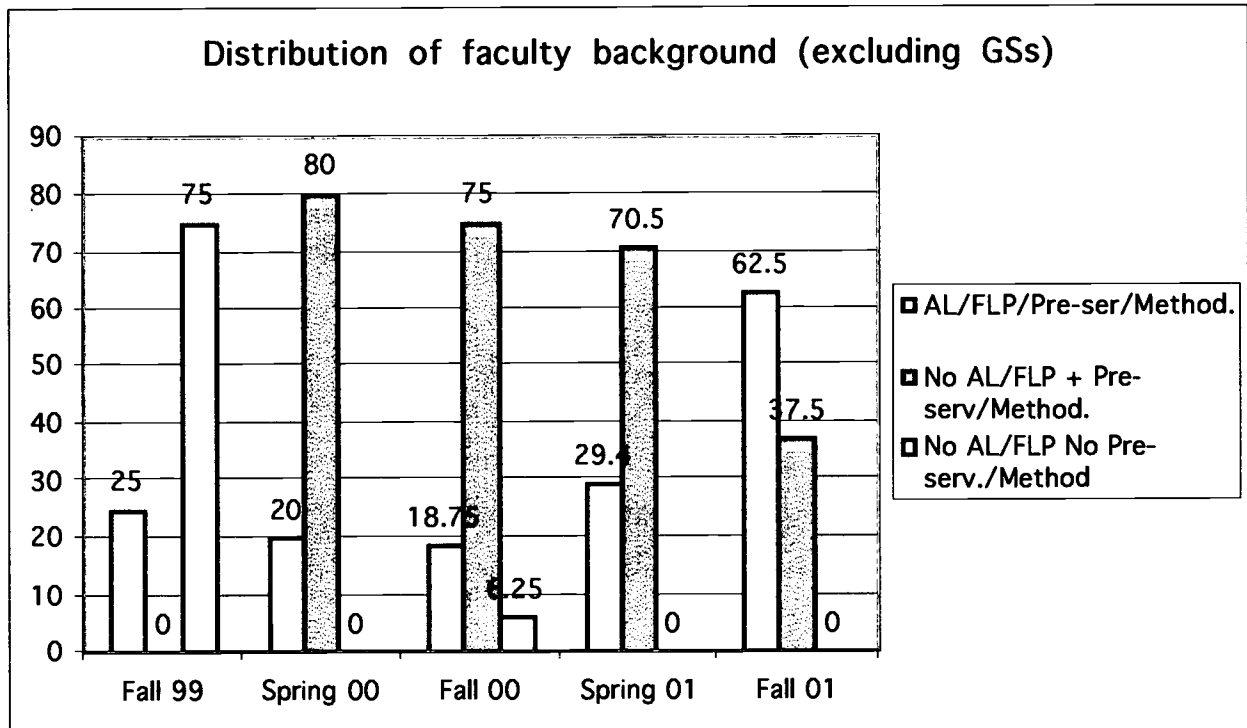


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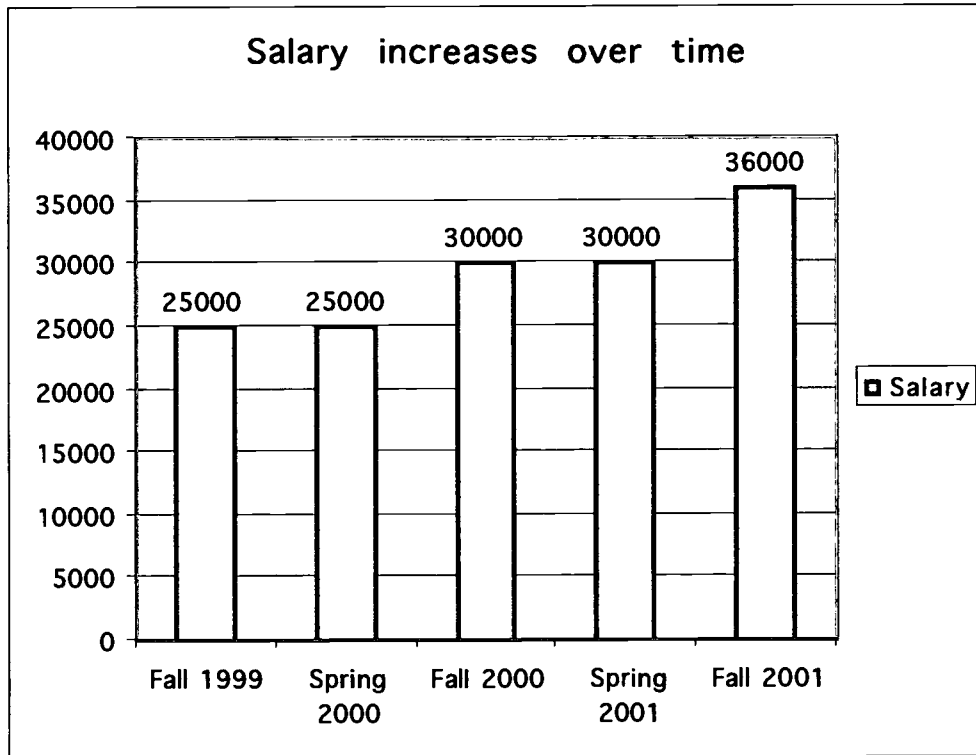


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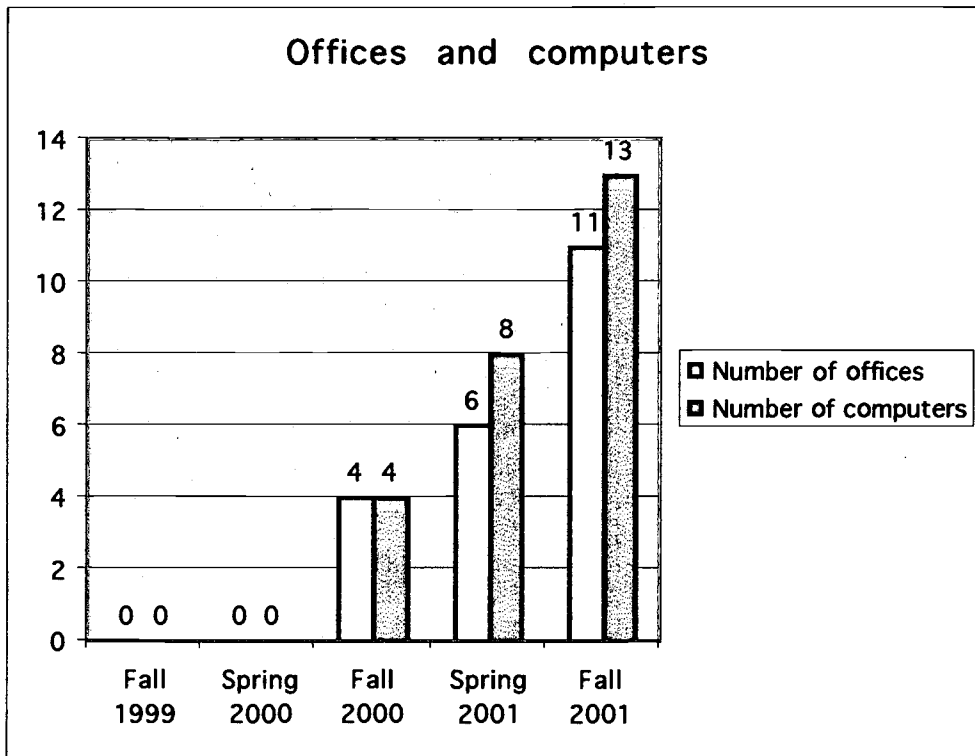


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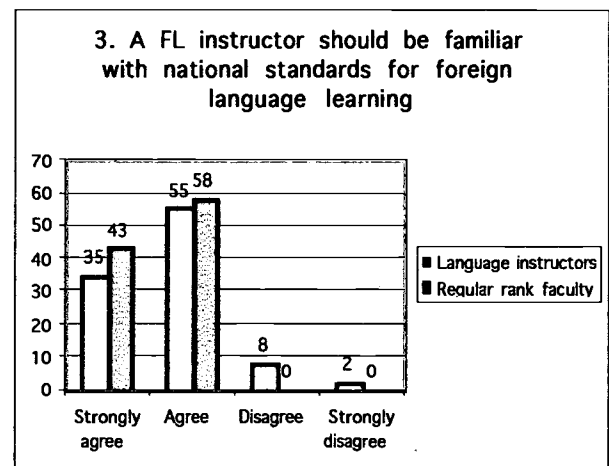
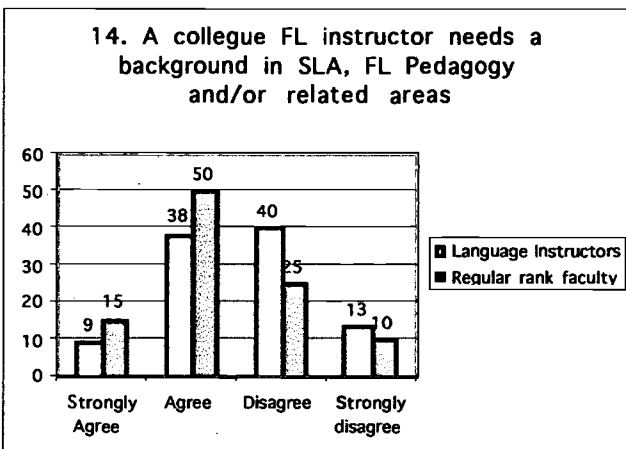
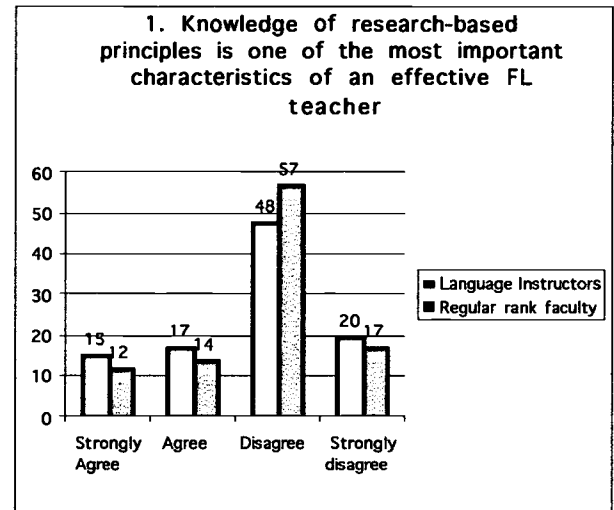
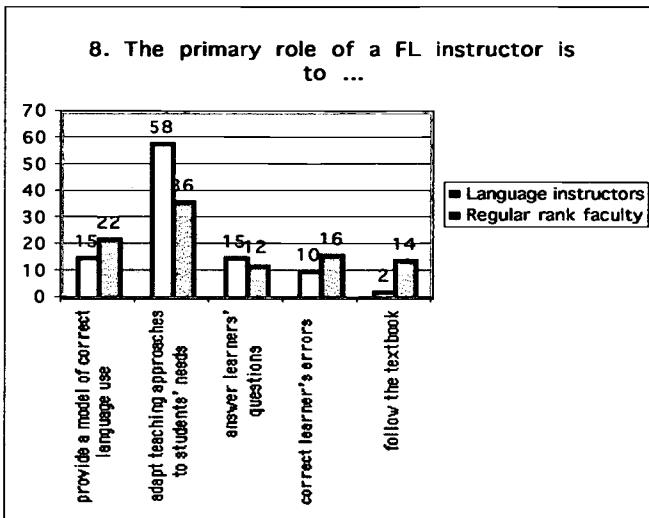
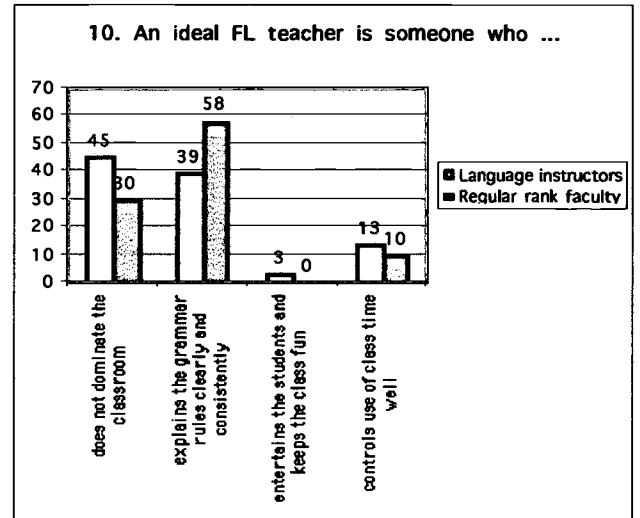
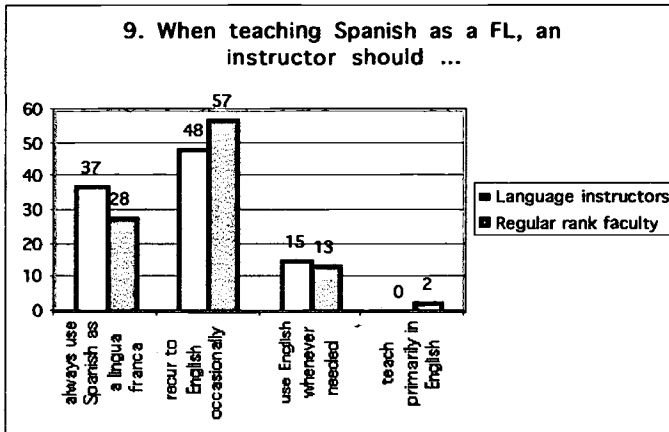


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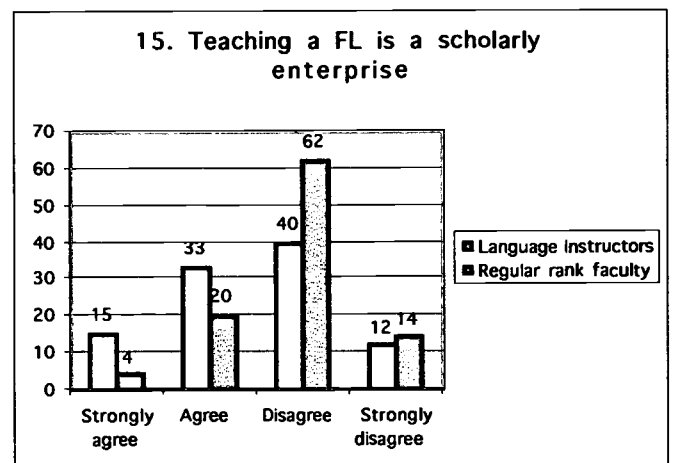
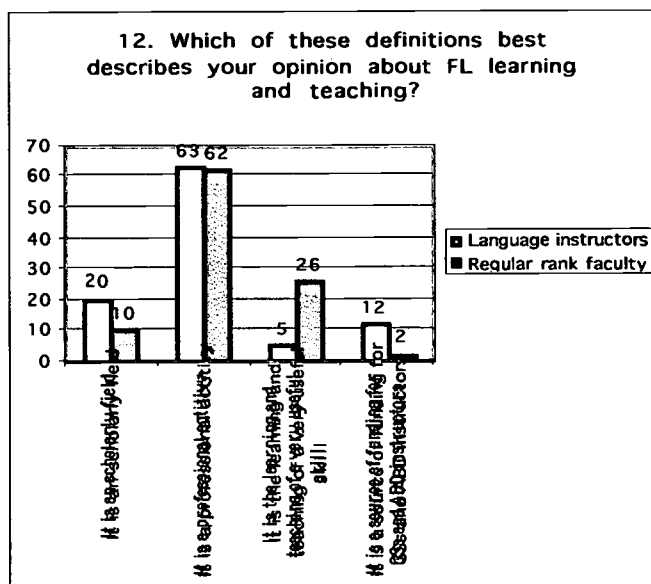
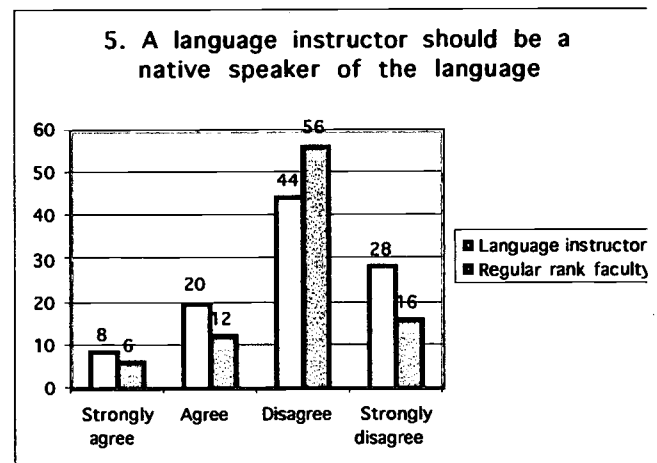
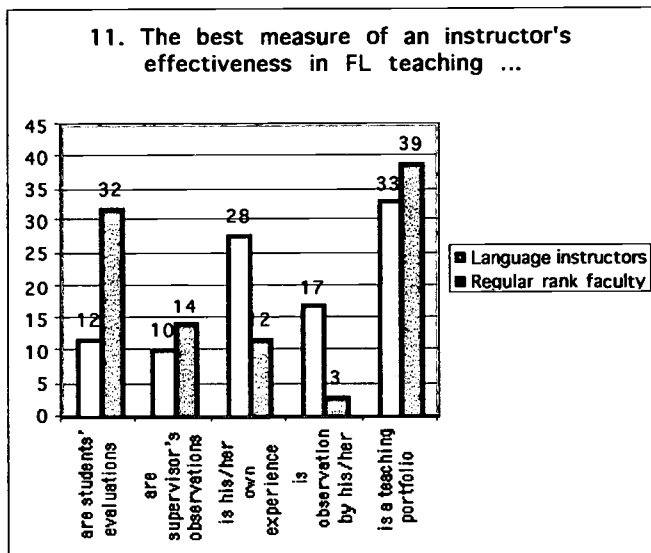
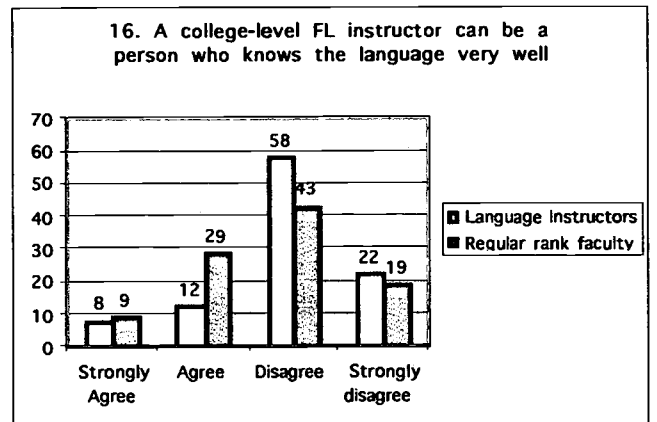
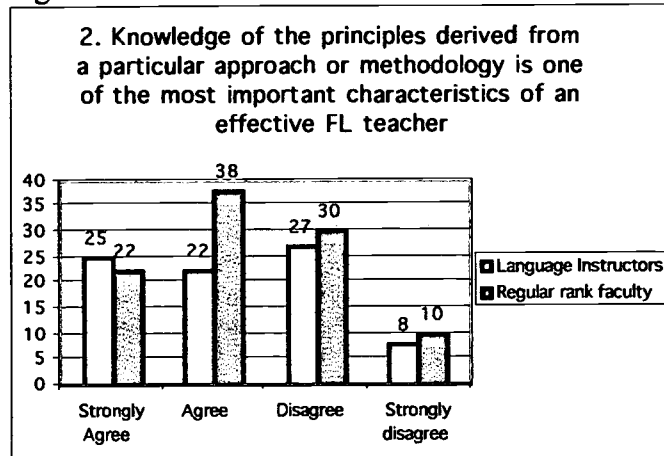


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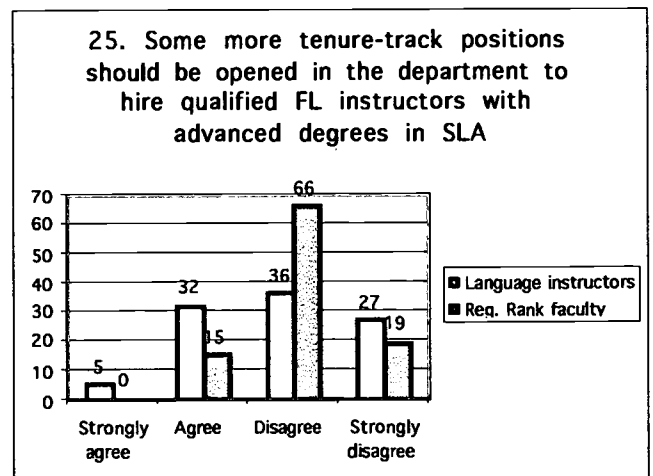
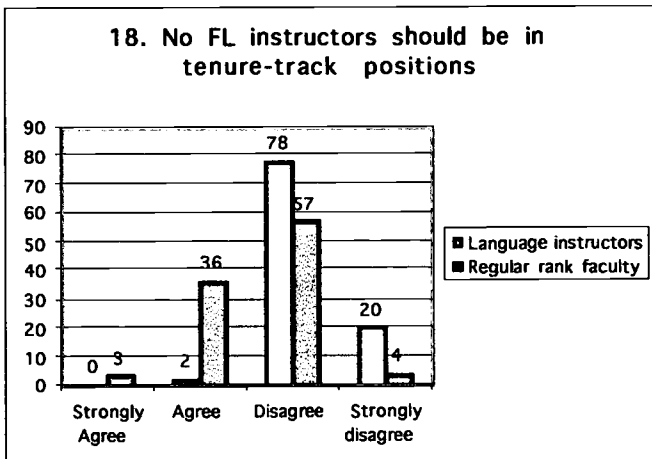
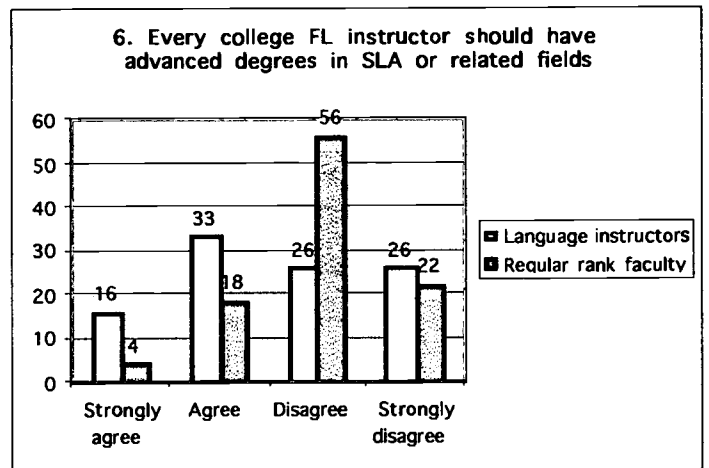
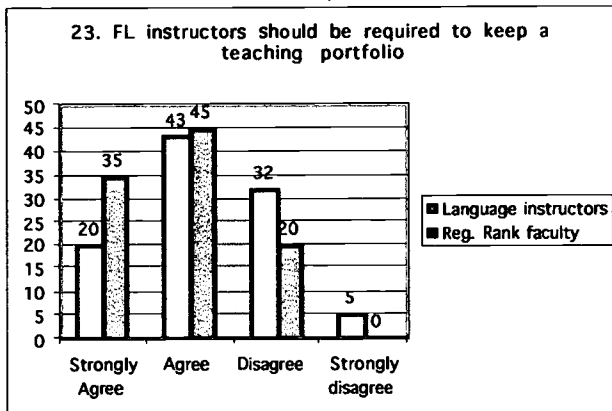
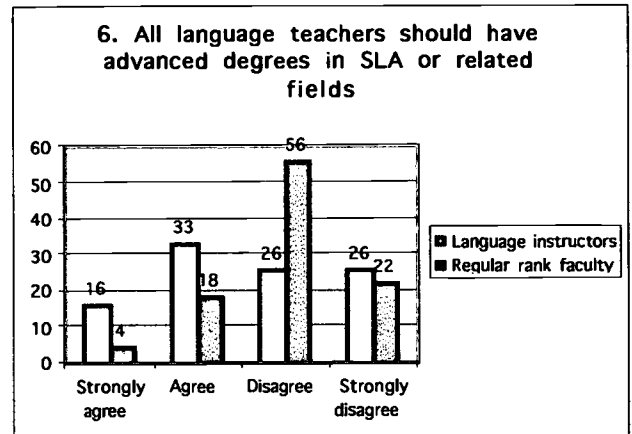
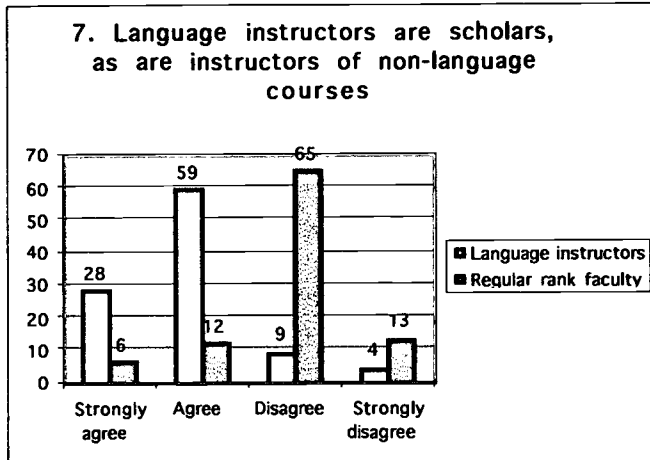
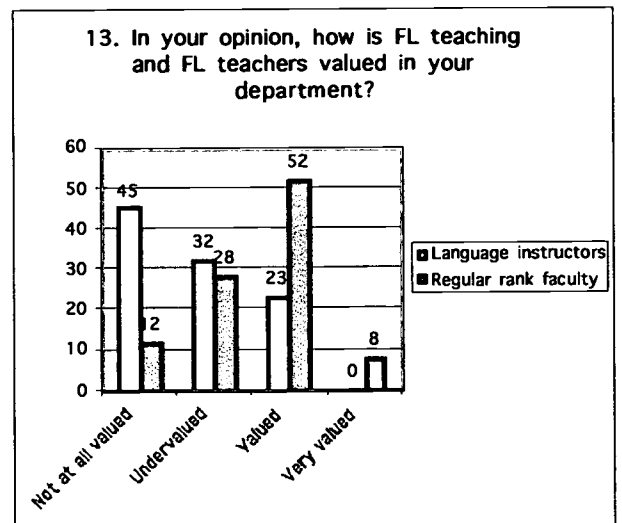
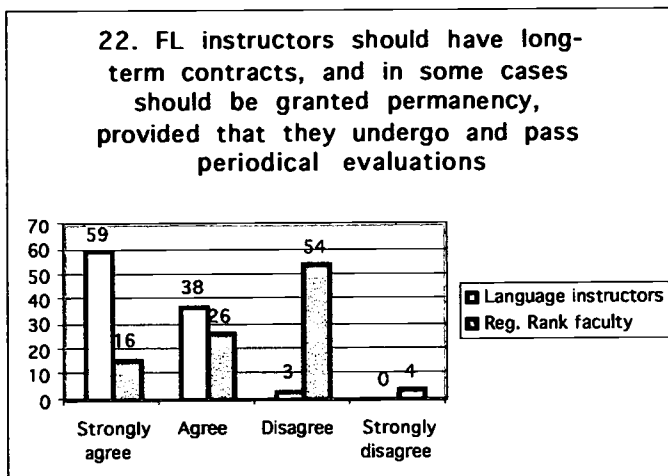
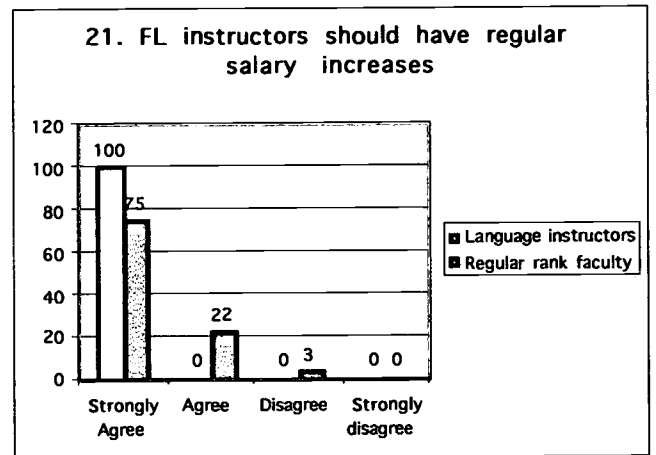
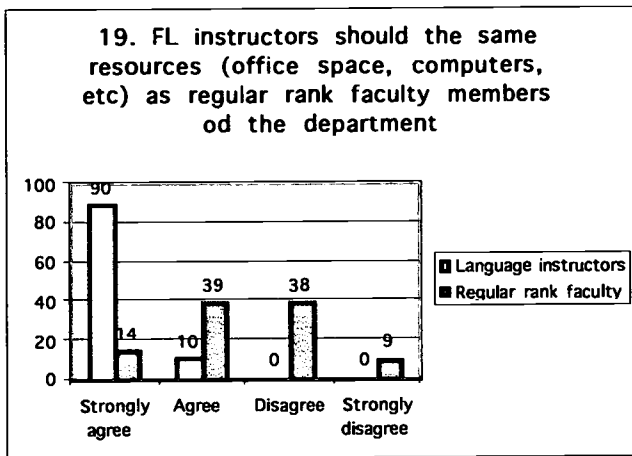
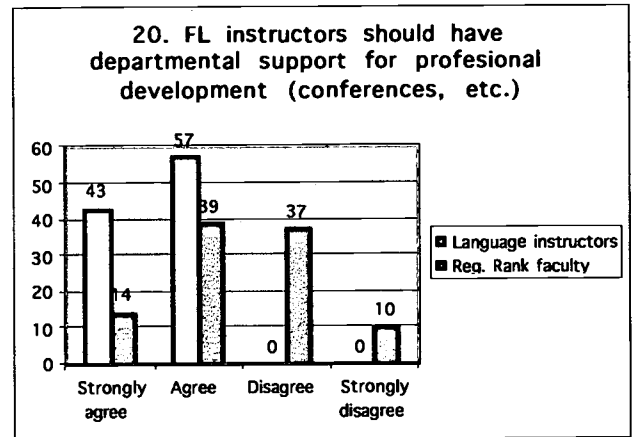
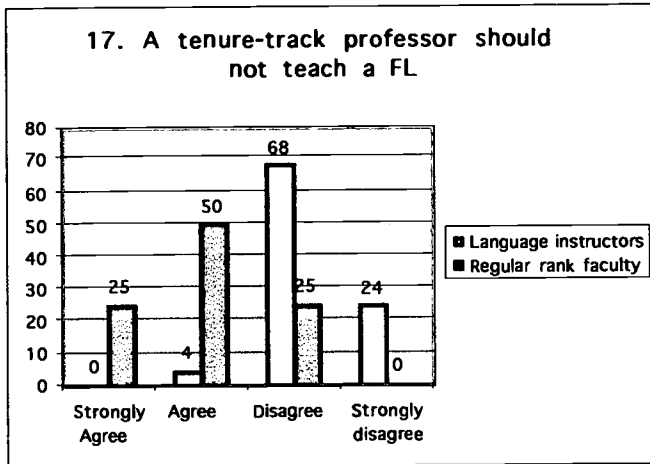


Figure 8.



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<sup>1</sup> Thereafter referred to as FL.

<sup>2</sup> Thereafter referred to as LPD





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