

Benchmarks for Staffing Translation Departments in Saudi Arabia

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ABSTRACT

The current staffing status at translation departments in Saudi Arabia is inadequate in terms of instructor qualifications, areas of specialization, teaching load, course assignment, and preparation of prospective translation instructors. Since the employment of qualified instructors who are specialized in translation is one of the triad in the preparation of competent female translators and interpreters, this study aims to investigate the current staffing status at translation departments at the College of Languages and Translation (COLT) King Saud University, causes of instructor shortage and current searching and hiring practices. It also aims to establish benchmarks for staffing translation departments in terms of instructor qualifications, the percentage of B.A., M.A. & P.H. D. degree holders and distribution of courses among instructors. At COLT, shortage is temporarily solved by merging classes, by raising the teaching load of instructors, by local recruits who have a B.A. degree, and who are sometimes inadequately qualified. 33% of those work at the department on a temporary hourly basis and this percentage goes up each semester. Classes are overcrowded classes (50-75 students per section), female faculty are over-loaded, overstressed (20-30 hours per week), instructors supervise 6-7 students with a 25,000 word-translation project each. Translation courses and the translation project are sometimes assigned to B.A. holders who do not, have an adequate qualifications training or experience in translation. Some TAs with a translation degree teach general English courses rather than courses at the translation department. To assure quality in preparing future translators and interpreters, the staffing status and policies at colleges of languages and translation were surveyed and benchmarks for instructor qualifications, areas of specialization, teaching load, percentage of B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. holders are established.

Keywords: *understaffing, staffing, faculty shortage, foreign language departments, translation departments, faculty recruiting, language instructor recruiting, EFL faculty, language instructor qualifications.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The issue of staffing departments and colleges has always been an important point of interest in educational research. Surveys of staffing status and related issues in the different subject areas such as the humanities and social sciences, physics, and astronomy (Ivie, Guo & Carr (2005), sociology (Spalter-Roth and Erskine, 2004), history (Townsend, 2004), anthropology (Terry-Sharp, 2001), and philosophy (Hanson, 2001) are available in the literature. Surveys on staffing issues in foreign languages are also available such as the CAW survey, which includes comparable data from anthropology, cinema studies, English, film studies, folklore, foreign languages, linguistics, history, philology, philosophy, composition, and political science (Terry-Sharp, 2001). Another survey by Lu (2003) showed that as tenured faculty in English leave or retire, their tenure-track positions do not get filled. More often, vacancies caused by retirement of tenured professors either suffer from natural attrition or are being

filled by nontenured faculty. According to the Department of Education in the USA, the number of full-time faculty in nontenure-eligible positions went up from 11% in 1987 to 18% in 1998.

In 1999, the Modern Language Association (MLA) surveyed 5,245 departments in two- and four-year institutions in the USA and Canada. 2,182 (42%) of the departments returned the surveys. The survey aimed to find out if English and foreign language departments in colleges and universities hire tenured and tenure-track, full-time non-tenure-track, part-time faculty, and graduate teaching assistants. The survey asked about who taught what in the fall semester of that year, including the number of instructors in each category and the number of undergraduate course sections instructors in each category taught (Laurence, 2001). 98% of English and foreign language departments in four-year institutions reported employing tenured or tenure-track faculty. However, the percentages are lower for English departments offering a two-year associate degree (79%) than corresponding foreign language departments (84%). The MLA data showed that contingent faculty constituted the majority of teaching faculty for English and foreign languages in 2000. Tenured and tenure-track faculty made up only 36.3%. By contrast, part-time faculty, graduate student TAs, and full-time nontenured faculty constituted 63.7% (part-time instructors 31.9%; TAs 22.2% and full-time nontenured instructors 9.5%). Part-time non-tenure-track faculty were employed by 91% of the English departments and 83% of the foreign language departments. The employment of full-time non-tenure-track faculty varied according to the highest degree granted by the English or foreign language department. 86% of the departments offering a Ph.D. and 81% of the departments offering an M.A. degree reported employing full-time non-tenure-track faculty in fall 1999, compared to 59% of the departments offering a B.A. degree and 34% of the departments offering an associate degree.

Furthermore, tenured, and tenure-track faculty constituted 35% of the total number of instructors teaching undergraduate courses in fall 1999. Faculty holding part-time positions accounted for 32% of all instructors in English departments and 29% of all instructors in foreign language departments. In two-year college departments, part-time instructors constituted 62% in English departments and 69% in foreign language departments. In departments that grant an associate degree, 32% of English instructors and 26% of foreign language instructors held tenured or tenure-track positions. Graduate student TAs constituted 45% in English departments and 48% in foreign language departments. In four-year departments, faculty holding tenured, or tenure-track positions constituted 31% in English departments and 28% in foreign language departments. Four-year departments had 54% of English instructors and 46% of the foreign language instructors. Part-time faculty constituted 36% in English and 35% in foreign language.

Moreover, 42% of tenured and tenure-track faculty taught several undergraduate course sections in English, and 41.4% in the foreign language. Part-time faculty taught 28.6% in English and 25.5% in the foreign language. In English departments, undergraduate sections that tenured and tenure-track faculty taught ranged from 59% in departments that offer a B.A. to 31% in departments that offer a Ph.D., compared to 54% in foreign language departments offering a B.A. degree and 26% in department offering a Ph.D. In Ph.D. departments, graduate student TAs taught a plurality of undergraduate sections: 35% in English and 41% in foreign language. Part-time faculty taught an additional 19% of undergraduate sections in English and 14% in foreign languages.

Freshman writing and freshman language constituted half of the undergraduate course sections taught in fall 1999. At the associate degree level, freshman writing constituted 60% of all sections, whereas freshman language constituted 78%.

Furthermore, the MLA survey findings demonstrated that, while undergraduate student enrollments have grown in number, the proportionate size of the professorial faculty has not. Consequently, institutions with doctoral programs assign tenured and tenure-track faculty to advanced undergraduate and graduate courses for which those faculty are most qualified and rely on part-time or full-time adjunct faculty to teach the many sections of introductory writing and language courses. In the doctoral English departments, tenured and tenure-track faculty taught 6% of the freshman writing sections, which constituted 9% of the undergraduate sections taught by faculty. In the doctoral foreign language departments, tenured and tenure-track faculty taught 7% of the freshman language sections, which constituted 13% of the undergraduate sections taught. By contrast, in departments that offer a B.A. degree, tenured and tenure-track faculty taught 42.2% of freshman writing sections and 41.8% of freshman language sections, representing 34% and 37% of the undergraduate sections taught by that group respectively. Tenured and tenure-track faculty in two-year colleges taught the highest percentage of freshman writing and freshman language sections in their departments, 44.8% in English and 40.5% in foreign languages, representing 57% and 77%, respectively, of the teaching they did.

In a dissemination project by TNP (Thematic Network Project), translation and interpreting instructors come from a variety of backgrounds, ranging from academic language specialists with little or no professional experience in translation (other than literary or general translation) to practicing professionals with little academic training or teaching experience. The involvement of practicing professionals in teaching specific skills varies across Europe. Such "practicing professionals" include full-time academic staff, whether salaried or freelance translators, or employed as part-timers by the university. According to a recent survey, the percentage of "professionals" involved in 16 major EU institutions ranged from 5% to 100%, while the percentage of external teachers compared to the total staff ranged from 0 to over 80%. In countries like France, the employment of professionals as part-timers from outside the university is an accepted practice, which is not the case in other countries. Professional involvement is more common in interpreting courses, particularly conference interpreting courses (Martinsen and Toudic, 2000).

The last decade has begun to see the arrival of a new generation of former practicing professionals with a solid academic background and research interests, who have started to take up positions and responsibilities in Translation and Interpreting departments, but in limited numbers (Martinsen and Toudic, 2000).

The MLA survey highlighted a number of difficulties related to the background of the translator training staff themselves, i.e., practicing professionals with no teaching experience in communicating their know-how and professional experience or academic staff who are insufficiently aware of the specific nature of professional translation as opposed to "academic" translation. These problems were sometimes aggravated by lack of sufficient coordination at the course level and lack of clearly defined methodological frameworks for inexperienced instructors. Academic staff sometimes had difficulty dealing with domain-specific texts in disciplines they were not familiar with, which made them avoid truly

specialized documents and to focus on general or semi-specialized texts. The area of specific testing and grading procedures constituted another area of difficulty (Laurence, 2001).

In Saudi Arabia, year after year, translation programs at Saudi state universities are experiencing significant increases in student enrollment. The current staffing status does not accommodate the student enrollment demands. Translation programs are having difficulties in retaining experienced native-speaking teachers and in hiring qualified substitute instructors. 20 years ago, the pre-medical female division at King Saud University (KSU), Riyadh, Saudi Arabia had 400 students and 24 native English-speaking instructors. In Fall 2003, it had 850 students and 7 non-native English-speaking instructors only. 15 years ago, I used to teach one section of a course with 20-25 students. In Fall 2003, I was teaching 5 sections of freshman grammar, with a total of 250 students. In Spring 2004, the number of students went up to 350 for the same course (Al-Jarf, 2004a; 2004b; Al-Jarf, 2006).

To assure quality in preparing future translators and interpreters by translation departments in Saudi Arabia, the staffing status and policies at some translation departments will be surveyed and benchmarks for instructor qualifications, areas of specialization, teaching load, percentage of B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. holders will be established. A recruitment plan to meet the instructor supply needs of translation programs, to prepare future Saudi translation instructors, and to increase the collaboration between departments and decision makers will be provided. Finally, an on-the-job staff development plan, especially for T.A.'s and B.A. holders, will be also provided.

To assure quality in preparing future translators and interpreters at languages and translation colleges, a sufficient number of qualified faculty should be available to teach the variety of courses offered to students. Therefore, the present study aims to explore current staffing status and recruitment policies at translation departments at Saudi universities with a special focus on King Saud University (KSU), the causes of instructor shortage and current searching and hiring practices. It also aims to establish benchmarks for staffing translation departments in terms of instructor qualifications, percentages of B.A., M.A. and P.H. D. degree holders and distribution of language, linguistics, and translation courses among instructors.

2. SUBJECTS

The college dean, vice deans, male and female department heads, program coordinators at the College of languages and translation at King Saud University (KSU), and 2 directors at the Personnel Department at King Saud University participated in the study.

3. DATA COLLECTION

- (i) Demographic data about faculty such as nationality, degree, major, teaching load, courses they teach, number of courses offered by the department, total number of credit hours offered by the department, student enrollment per section, total number of freshman students, and the total number of students enrolled in the department were collected.
- (ii) Department heads and coordinators were interviewed regarding the staffing needs, searching, and hiring processes and practices, communication status between department heads and decision-makers inside and outside the universities, and

communication between departments and job applicants, and how the shortage is covered.

- (iii) The staffing status and staffing policies at some international translation schools and institutes were surveyed.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

Instructors, coordinators, and department head's responses to the open-ended interview-questionnaire were sorted out and analyzed. Quantitative as well as qualitative analyses are reported below.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Staffing Status at COLT

The translation department at KSU has 1640 students, 396 sections, 18 translation project sections and 55 female faculty only. 24% of the female faculty have a Ph.D. degree, 21% have and M.A. degree and 55% have a B.A. degree. Only 33% of the faculty have a B.A., M.A., or Ph.D. degree in translation. 12% of B.A. holders are graduate student at KSU (majoring in applied linguistics) and 10% are on scholarships abroad. The department does not require B.A. holders to enroll in graduate studies nor any training programs. At KSU it takes at least 5 years to finish the M.A. program in linguistics and/or English literature.

5.2 How Is Shortage Covered

Shortage is usually solved on a temporary basis by merging classes, by raising the teaching load of instructors, and by temporary local recruits who have a B.A. degree, and who are sometimes inadequately qualified. 33% work at the department on a temporary hourly basis and this percentage goes up each semester. As a result, classes are over-crowded classes (50-75 students per section), female faculty are over-loaded, over-stressed (20-30 hours per week), translation project supervisors supervise 6-7 students with a 25,000 word-project per student. Translation courses and the translation project are assigned to Ph.D., M.A. or even B.A. holders who do not, sometimes, nor a degree or even experience in translation. Some TAs with a translation degree teach general English courses rather than courses in the translation department. Some classes start 4-6 weeks later than the beginning of the semester. The Current status quo sometimes results in poor quality teaching and poor-quality translation graduates.

Similar situations are found in other countries. According to the Chronicle of Higher Education (CHE), the market for starting creative writing programs has slowed down. A few years ago, the market for creative writing instructors was fairly robust as departments were starting their creative-writing programs. Now many of those positions have been filled, and it is not easy to break into that field (Jacobson, 2003).

In another study, Mondel (2002) found that while students are facing sharp tuition increases, faculty and new graduates are facing difficulties in the academic job market since the recession of the early '90s. MLA reported a sharp decline in job vacancies for English faculty in 2002. The total number of entry-level jobs decreased by 17% in 2002 and there was a 19%

decrease in the total number of academic job openings in 2001. Only 53% of jobs advertised in the MLA's Job Information List were at public universities compared with 60% in 2001.

Furthermore, Montell (2002) noted that many of the positions included in the Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP) Job List and the MLA Job List were for temporary positions, and many positions were listed as "anticipated openings" or openings contingent on budgetary or departmental approval. People in the academic profession are not satisfied with these numbers, because they indicate a decrease in the tenure-track positions as the norm for new hires in colleges and universities. Unless the economy improves, funding is restored at public universities, and endowments at private universities get better returns, growth in the number of positions will not be seen.

Likewise, Benjamin (2003) asserted that the majority of undergraduate instructors hold contingent appointments. These include non-tenure-track part-time faculty and many instructional staff who lack faculty status, an increasing proportion of full-time non-tenure track faculty, and a substantial number of graduate student TAs.

6. SETTING THE BENCHMARKS

In this study, management of translation programs is viewed as a human resource management that encompasses physical and human resources of students, faculty, and administrative staff, and involves the interrelationship between decision-making and resource management. The benchmarks in Table 1 were based on the literature review and specialist opinions.

Table 1 List of Benchmarks for Staffing the Translation Program at COLT

Area	Benchmarks
1. Identifying recruiting needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prediction studies (get stat from ministry of Ed and Admissions Departments) • Instructors resign, retire or transfer at least 6 months before the end of the academic year. • Submit resignation letter early, advertise vacancies early, start recruiting early.
2. Advertise vacancies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertise vacancies early. • Submit resignation letter early. • Use technology (online job center, submit CV online, correspondence, info about job vacancies, webcam). • Job vacancies are advertised early. • Job vacancies are advertised in several ways locally and internationally. • Advertisements gives sufficient information about translation jobs needed at COLT. • Use online advertising. • Job vacancies are advertised in American and British newspapers months before the fall semester begins.

3. Use of technology in recruiting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job vacancies are not advertised on the university intranet nor on the internet (Dave's ESL café). • E-mail is not used in correspondence between job applicants and recruiters. • No online interviews (teleconferencing) (IPA is going to use webcam). • Information about vacancies is not available online (Ad in WATA).
4. Searching and hiring processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start recruiting early. • Searching and hiring processes are fast and efficient. • Department heads and decision-makers inside and outside the university communicate, coordinate, plan collectively and efficiently. • COLT and translation job applicants communicate efficiently and effectively. • Use technology (online job center, submit CV online, correspondence, info about job vacancies, webcam). • Dean, vice-dean, department heads and senior faculty go to different translation and ESL conferences to recruit.
5. Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pay scale and benefits are attractive to candidates and can compete with private institutions and neighboring countries. • Computers, lab, office, commuting, • Pay, benefits and work conditions are good.
6. Having a long-term staffing plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prepare Saudi faculty through graduate studies.
7. Qualifications of faculty recruited	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty should at least have an M.A. degree. • 50% instructors are native speakers. • Hire non-native instructors who have studied abroad. • Hire faculty specialized in courses offered by the department. • Hire faculty with good linguistic and professional competence. • Are computer literate.
8. Specialization of faculty recruited	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty can have a degree in translation and interpreting. • Faculty can have a degree in applied linguistics.
9. Who teaches what	<p>Faculty specialized in translation and interpreting teach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Translation courses. • Interpreting courses. • Translation project.

10. Teaching load	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribute teaching load according to university regulations. • Faculty teaching load is reasonable. • Translation courses • Interpreting courses • Project
11. Translation class size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher-student ratio = 1:20, 1:25 or 1:30 maximum • median enrollment per section = 25.
12. Scheduling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • manage schedule well. • All courses are covered. • Specialized instructors teach specialized courses. • Classes start on time every semester.
13. Financial resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have sufficient funds. • Seek new financial resources, contributions, and endowments.
14. Role of university community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate the public. • All parties involved in recruiting and student admission should be aware of the problem (conference).
15. Adjunct faculty role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give adjuncts and lecturers more of a role in the curriculum.
16. University policies and regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruitment documents go through few channels. • Personnel Department processing candidate documents quickly • Fast visa procedures • Obtain university president's approval to hire part-timers before the beginning of the semester. • May contact procedures with candidates and Saudi embassies abroad easy. • follow up papers.

The of benchmarks in Table 1 were validated by having 6 department heads evaluate it, then amendments were made. There should be a recruitment plan to meet instructor supply needs for translation programs and for increasing the collaboration between translation departments and decision makers.

7. CONCLUSION

This study raised issues about academic staffing at COLT. To assure quality in preparing future translators and interpreters, the staffing status and policies at the College of Languages and Translation at King Saud University was surveyed and benchmarks for instructor

qualifications, areas of specialization, teaching load, percentage of B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. holders were established.

The study recommends following the English Language Center at King Fahad University for Petroleum and Minerals (KFUPM) staffing model because the status of employment at this state university, is ideal with stable freshman student enrollment (1900 students per semester). The class size of not more than 25-30. Five ESP courses with 55 sections are offered each semester. All 100 instructors at the Language Center are native speakers of English from USA, Canada, the UK, and Ireland, with an M.A. degree in TEFL. The instructor's teaching load is 20 hours per week. The pay, benefits and work conditions are good. Very few instructors resign. Job vacancies are advertised in American and British newspapers months before the fall semester begins. The dean goes to the TESOL conference for recruitment. A recruitment plan for meeting the instructor supply needs of the translation departments at Saudi universities and increasing the collaboration among translation departments and decision makers nationwide is called for.

Translation departments should have a recruitment plan to meet the instructor supply needs of translation programs, to prepare future Saudi translation instructors, and to increase the collaboration between departments and decision makers. An on-the-job staff development plan, especially for T.A.'s and B.A. holders, should be set as well.

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