

Professional Development

English Mastery

Mary Ellen Butler-Pascoe offers advice on choosing a Master's program in Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language that matches your goals

The first task when choosing a TESOL

(Teaching English as a Second or Other Language) Master's program is to determine your professional options and goals. To accomplish this, it is helpful to understand the wide range of educational purposes that most TESOL Master's programs serve and the various opportunities that holding a Master's degree affords you. Let's first identify some of the constituencies who hire TESOL Master's recipients and examine the ways in which university Master's programs respond to the needs of these prospective employers.

Teaching English as a Foreign Language Programs

TESOL and TEFL Master's programs continue to fulfill the role of training instructors for international positions teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) to university students, professional adults, and K-12 students in even greater numbers than ever before. In a world of increased globalization, English has spread rapidly as a key global language. Ministries of Education in countries throughout the world have taken measures to increase the opportunity for English study in their schools and universities. Many non-English speaking countries now require EFL

instruction to begin in elementary schools rather than secondary grades as was previously the practice. TESOL Master's programs have responded to these trends with methodology courses that address concerns of EFL teachers such as curriculum design for large class sizes, limited budget and materials, integration of technology, and resources to provide authentic language input and increased opportunities for language production.

Teacher training for K-12 schools in the U.S.

The fastest growing segment of the K-12 school population in the U.S. is English Language Learners (ELLs) with a 57% increase between 1995 and 2005 (Payton and Nettle, 2008). In response to the needs of this burgeoning group, several states with the heaviest concentration of ELLs currently require that all K-12 classroom teachers have sufficient knowledge and skills to assist English learners as they undertake the dual challenge of improving their English proficiency while also developing an understanding of subject specific content. TESOL Master's programs frequently embed courses that focus on the needs of K-12 teachers and state certification requirements. Also, there has been a

significant increase in the demand for trainers of English language teachers by public school districts and university teacher education programs that seek to hire K-12 teachers who also hold a Master's in TESOL/TESL.

Adult Education and Basic English Programs

Adult Education programs offering basic English, literacy and U.S. citizenship courses give preference to instructors holding a Master's degree. Teachers in this area benefit from the specialized study and training TESOL Master's programs offer in teaching basic reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills, as well as English survival skills to adult learners. TESOL graduates also obtain knowledge of socio-cultural factors that are so critical to the language acquisition of adults who have frequently been uprooted from their native country and family, and must adjust to a new culture and language.

Community College and University-based Intensive English Programs

Both of these educational settings offer courses designed for students seeking degrees; therefore, their programs typically require that the instructors have a Master's in TESOL and



a strong background in teaching academic English including advanced English grammar. TESOL Master's programs often prepare students for future employment in these settings with courses in applied linguistics and English structure as a foundation for teaching advanced listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills for academic purposes.

English for Special Purposes

Professional organizations and institutions look to TESOL Master's programs to develop instructors for teaching English for special purposes (ESP) such as medicine, law, technology, engineering, and business. To fulfill this need, Master's programs equip their students with specific strategies for integrating subject matter content and English instruction in ESP programs. They develop the expertise to teach a wide range of skills from beginning English for those working at entry level jobs to advanced pronunciation courses for professionals seeking to improve their oral communication skills.

TESOL Doctoral Study at Universities

With the increasing need for ESL and EFL teachers comes the parallel need for Doctoral level teacher educators and program design-

ers of TESOL teacher education programs. TESOL Master's programs are the training ground for prospective Doctoral candidates who conduct research, design, and implement university degree programs, and teach at the Master's and Doctoral levels in institutions of higher education. To prepare students for these academic roles, TESOL Master's programs typically offer a combination of courses which cover the theories of second language acquisition, techniques of second language teaching, curriculum development, linguistics, technology-assisted language teaching, and methods of research.

Guiding Questions for Choosing a Program

1. What types of courses are offered in the program and do they give you the preparation to attain your professional objectives?

While Master's programs should offer a balance of theory and practice, you want to make sure that your particular focus is well covered. If, for example, you are interested in going directly into teaching ESL/EFL after earning your Master's degree, you want to assure that your program features a curricu-

lum with hands-on activities designed for practitioners and opportunities for field work. With the increasing use of technology in English language classrooms, also look for a program that provides first-hand experience in computer-assisted language teaching. If you are interested in immediately pursuing a Doctoral degree, then you should investigate what research opportunities are incorporated into the curriculum and program requirements.

2. How convenient are the classes for your schedule and location, and what are the costs?

If you are currently employed, check course schedules to see if the program offers classes at convenient times for working professionals. If you are in a different state, or country, or have limited days that you can commute to a campus, check to see if any or all of the classes are available online. Compare the tuition rates and fees with similar programs but also check to make sure all courses required for degree completion are guaranteed to be offered in the stated timeframe. Inquire with the Financial Aid Office as to what loans, scholarships, or work-study opportunities might be available to you.