ISSUE I: FACULTY QUALIFICATIONS

Questions for thought:
- What skills should faculty have?
- What education should faculty have?
- Should all faculty have both or should the pool of faculty have all?
- Should fulltime and parttime requirements be the same?

ISSUE PAPER: What constitutes a quality faculty in interpreter education?

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Academic credentials, cohesiveness, and institutional support are critical benchmarks of a credible interpreter education faculty. There are two categories of qualifications for a credible, qualified interpreting faculty-the category of qualifications that each faculty member needs to exhibit, and the category of qualifications that may be shared by members of a faculty. Additionally, in defining a quality faculty it is essential to define the needs that must be met by a program or institution in order to support and encourage credible qualifications in the faculty.

Qualifications for all faculty: All full time faculty need to be experienced, skilled interpreters. This is important regardless of the specific courses each faculty member teaches. Clearly, faculty who teach interpreting must understand interpreting. However, faculty who focus on sign language development must know how to deal with the sign language needs of interpreters, needs that are much different and more complex than those of communicators. It is not enough to be a consumer of interpreting services; faculty need to understand the interpreter's perspective.

Faculty also need academic qualifications. While such credentials may or may not have a bearing on interpreting, they are crucial to the credibility of interpreting programs housed in academic institutions. Most institutions have such requirements, but teachers in fields such as ours, that have no obvious "terminal degree," often try to waive these restrictions or indefinitely extend the time they take to get this education. The more degrees faculty have, the more credible the program is to the academic community around it. Obtaining these degrees is not a waste of time. Although there is little opportunity to get degrees in interpreting education, there are many fields of study that can be easily applied to interpreting. These include linguistics, second language teaching, communications, education, and any field that employs interpreting graduates-for example, an interpreting teacher with a background or degree in counseling is a definite asset to a course that focuses on counseling settings. Thus, an academic credential is necessary both as a basic requirement of academia and because it is valuable to the teaching of interpreting.
Faculty need to demonstrate a continued interest in improving their teaching and learning about the field. This can be demonstrated in a variety of ways. Attending conferences, taking classes, teaching workshops, conducting research, and publishing articles all demonstrate such interest. It is, of course, important to distinguish between quality and quantity. A faculty member needs to attend local, state, and national conferences. Likewise, a faculty member needs to demonstrate both a breadth and an depth of skills and knowledge about interpreting, being able to teach a variety of skills and topics.

Skills to be shared by faculty: While faculty in interpreting programs need to be skilled in a variety of areas, each faculty member does not need, and should not be expected to be, an expert in all areas of interpreting. Different members of a faculty will have different interests and strengths. Needs of a program should be considered and evenly shared by the faculty. One member needs to have native fluency in ASL; one needs to have native fluency in English. It is helpful if the interests and strengths are diversified. If one teacher is interested and experienced in education and interpreting, another should be strong in community interpreting; another in deaf/blind interpreting. Someone needs to be interested in mentoring processes; someone needs to be interested in language development. Specific faculty bring a variety of strengths to a program; these should be encouraged and taken into account when searching for faculty. Thus, interpreting programs need to evaluate not only overall skills and experience, but the fit of those skills and experience into the overall needs within the program.

Commitments needed from the institution: It is an unfortunate situations that many programs are forced to teach most of the courses through the exclusive use of adjunct faculty. This situation, while, monetarily advantageous for the institution, is disastrous for a program. It is essential for a program to be successful that the courses be coordinated and sequenced and that all the faculty understand the sequencing and progress expected from course to course. Adjunct faculty are valuable members of a program, adding a breadth and depth that could not otherwise be achieved by only one or two full-time faculty. However, use of adjuncts as the primary faculty often leads to courses that do not sequence properly. Adjunct faculty, in my experience, are usually not required (or invited) to attend program faculty meetings, to have input into the coordination of courses, or to participate fully in the advising and evaluation of students. There is little cohesion among faculty and courses when institutions rely on adjunct rather than full-time positions for the primary faculty positions.

Institutions need to require professional development from interpreting faculty. This means providing support and encouragement for faculty to obtain further education. In my experience, the faculty are eager to take advantage of such opportunities. While it would be wonderful if institutions provided for travel, tuition, and expenses to all meetings (a few actually do this!), it would be a start if faculty were provided with release time to attend without losing pay. I have heard of programs that will support only one faculty member’s attendance at any given meeting. Some faculty have the
opportunity to attend national conferences only once every several years. Such attitudes by institutions need to be changed from discouraging to encouraging faculty growth and development. I realize that this problem is not unique to our field—it is a widespread problem in academia. We need to actively demonstrate encouragement and support of interpreting faculty in our own field in order to begin convincing institutions of the importance of faculty development.

**Conclusion:** Most of us involved in the education of interpreters at this point in time have gotten into the field as the result of our experience as interpreters; few have an education that is directly related to interpreting. There is very little opportunity for interpreter educators to learn about interpreter education. Our field is in the position of having growing opportunities to teach interpreters and few options for preparing (and eventually certifying) teachers. Faculty of interpreting programs are acutely aware of this problem. It is very difficult to find qualified teachers to fill positions in interpreting programs; in most parts of the country it is difficult to find and retain adjunct faculty.

The positive side of this situation is that those who are active in interpreter education are those who are dedicated and motivated to continually improve their programs and extend their own understanding of interpreting and interpreter education. A striking example of this was an interpreting educator's seminar last May that was sponsored by spoken language interpreters but opened to sign language interpreters. Half of the participants were from sign language programs. The need for more training for us is clear; the willingness to take advantage of the training is evident.

As interpreter educators, we need to demand high qualifications from our faculty and high levels of support from the institutions that we work in. Such qualifications can be demonstrated in many ways, as discussed above, and such support does not need to be limited to monetary support. We need to continually encourage faculty to be skilled interpreters and teachers, to be continually learning and contributing to the field, and to be active in educating institutions about our needs for professional development.