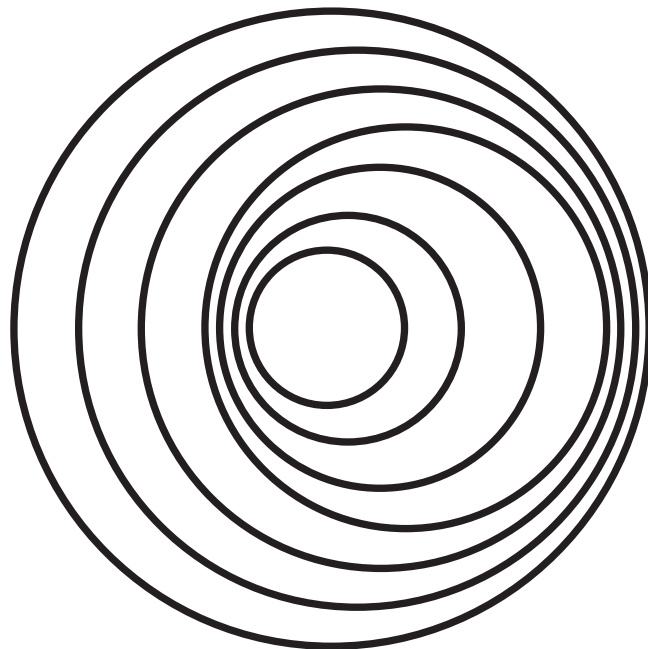


**From Language Lab to Language Center and Beyond:  
The Past, Present, and Future  
of Language Center Design**

Felix A. Kronenberg, Editor



*A publication of the International Association for Language Learning Technology*

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International Association for Language Learning Technology

Liberal Arts – Admin

302 Tichenor Hall

Auburn University, AL 36849

United States

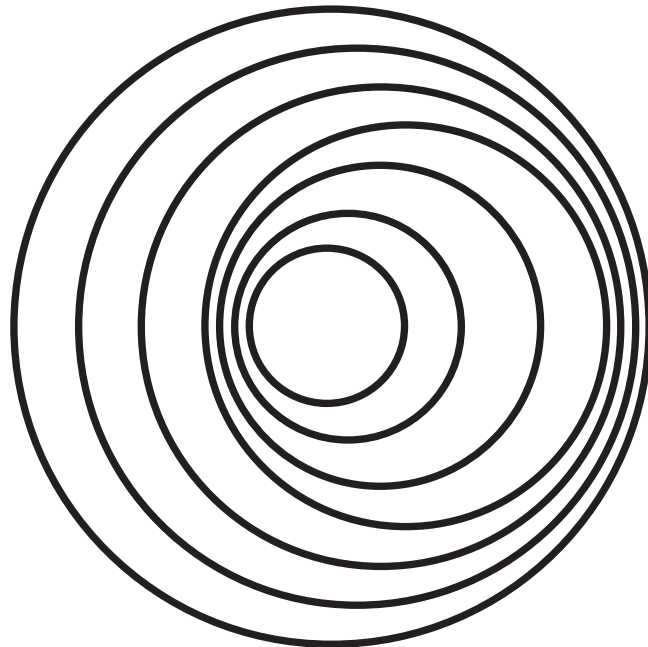
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**From Language Lab to Language Center and Beyond:  
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## **Section II: PRESENT**



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## Chapter 3: The Role of Language Centers in the Professional Development of Non-Tenure Track Language Faculty

Nelleke Van Deusen-Scholl and Suzanne Young  
Yale University

**T**he Modern Language Association (MLA) Committee on Contingent Labor in the Profession notes in its 2011 report, “Professional Employment Practices for Non-Tenure-Track Faculty Members: Recommendations and Evaluative Questions,” that “non-tenure-track faculty members now constitute a majority of the faculty in higher education in the United States and Canada” (p. 1). According to the 2014 MLA Issue Brief on the Academic Workforce, only 28.2% of faculty members at all institutions held full-time tenured or tenure-track appointments, and 53.2% were employed part-time (p. 5, Fig. 3). In 2011, in the foreign languages, according to the same report, “[i]n English, about a third of the faculty (excluding graduate student TAs), hold positions on the tenure track; in foreign languages a little more than two fifths do” (p. 9). According to Laurence (2008, p. 2), citing earlier data, “[i]n two-year colleges, the figure rises to approach 80% for English and almost 87% in foreign languages.” Such a dramatic shift in the academic workforce deserves closer examination. The policy document by the MLA Committee on Contingent Labor (2011) provides a set of guidelines and recommendations regarding the working conditions, rights, and professional opportunities for faculty outside the tenure track<sup>1</sup>. At many institutions, there may be units beyond the departments where non-tenure-track faculty are supported professionally and may find a common intellectual space (cf. von Hoene, 2008, p. 277). For example, writing centers, centers of teaching excellence, and language centers have all played an important role not only in providing resources and funding for non-tenure-track faculty but also in advocating for their status and rights. In this chapter, we will focus specifically the professional development of non-tenure-track language faculty across institutions and the role that language centers can play.

The chapter is organized into three sections: we begin with a brief statistical overview of current trends in academic staffing patterns with a focus on language

faculty; next, we discuss the concept of an academic language center, specifically within doctoral research institutions; and in the final section, we take a close look at the broad range of support for professional development that a language center may offer and will provide specific examples. We end with some recommendations and suggestions for a collaborative model for long-term professional development and intellectual growth. We will also discuss some of the changes in the organization of academic support structures that are currently underway at many institutions, in which language centers are being subsumed under larger structures focused more broadly on teaching and learning.

### **Non-Tenure Track Language Faculty: Statistics and Trends**

In their 2007 paper on the future of the academic profession, Schuster and Finkelstein refer to a “tidal change in academic staffing patterns that is moving, seemingly inexorably, toward creating a predominantly contingent work force” (p. 1). Recent statistics indeed confirm that an increasing number of faculty members in institutions of higher education occupy non-tenure-track or part-time positions. The 2014 MLA Issue Brief: *The Academic Workforce* notes that the trend is both toward more non-tenure-track positions and toward more part-time positions:

- “Excluding graduate student TAs, in 2011 just over a quarter of all faculty members—28.2%—were professors in full-time tenured or tenure-track positions, compared with 33.9% in 2003. In four-year institutions the figure is 33.9% in 2011, compared with 42.0% in 2003. As recently as 1995, the United States Department of Education’s Fall Staff Survey (the other human resources component of the IPEDS) found that tenured and tenure-track faculty members made up 51.3% of the faculty in four-year institutions and 42.3% of the faculty in all institutions.” (p. 8, Figure 6)
- In 1970, part-time faculty members represented only 22.0% of all faculty members teaching in United States colleges and universities. In 2011, the percentage of part-timers had increased to 50% of faculty members in all institutions and 46.5% in four-year institutions (p. 7, Figure 5).

The most recent Report on the *MLA Job Information List* (December 2015) also shows a continued trend toward fewer positions indexed for tenure status in the foreign language JIL—from 63.8% in 2004-05 to 50.4% in 2014-15, although some fluctuations occur from year to year (p.10, Figure 5).

In a comparison of the 1995 and 2005 Fall Staff surveys, Laurence (2008) notes a “dramatic ten-percent point decline in the share of the faculty represented by

tenured and tenure-track appointments” (p. 1). He cautions, however, that “across higher education considered as a whole, the percentage drop in tenured and tenure-track appointments occurred because of increases in the non-tenure-track categories rather than cuts in the absolute number of tenured or tenure-track positions” (p. 1). Thus, there appears to be an ongoing and sustained shift toward non-tenure track positions. Other reports, such as the National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF), show a similar pattern of modest increases in the full-time tenured or tenure-track ranks and much larger increases in the full-time non-tenure-track and part-time employment categories.

Such shifts have significant implications for how institutions and departments view these faculty members and to what extent they are integrated in the overall academic and intellectual life of the institution. In the next section, we outline how a language center—or similar unit dedicated to teaching excellence—can offer a cross-departmental, neutral space within institutions where language faculty can find an intellectual home.

## **Language Centers**

According to Garret (2001, p. 17), over the past several decades, a number of institutions of postsecondary education across the United States, particularly those with multiple language departments or units, have established centers to “coordinate and strengthen the language instruction” on their campuses. As the article points out, the concept of language center is open to multiple interpretations because structures and mandates of such centers vary widely. Patrikis characterizes the core functions of a language center to “provide new opportunities for revitalizing the curriculum, build upon the achievements of individual language programs and share them with others, and most important, provide a focus and a forum for discussing the central issues” (Garrett, 2001, p. 18). Among some of the most important mandates listed by Garrett are:

To provide an intellectual home for language teaching;

- To validate language teaching and learning across the entire curriculum;
- To provide new resources and expertise for the support of language programs;
- To provide a resource for the professionalization of non-ladder language faculty and to improve their status and working conditions.

The language center can also be a space for advocacy and support for the language faculty whose rank and status may leave them without a voice within

their departments. Language centers or language committees can, for example, contribute to or help shape the institutional perspective on the career paths of non-tenure track faculty by suggesting promotional opportunities or more advanced ranks. In addition, language center directors often play an advisory role to the administration that can mediate between the interests of the department, the language faculty, and the administration. Von Hoene and Van Deusen-Scholl (2001, p. 229) suggest that “for the directors of language centers, often faculty whose research specialties are second language acquisition or applied linguistics, the mandate to professionalize lecturers can provide an opportunity to productively—and somewhat subversively—rethink this term as a collaborative process of intellectual development among peers.”

Furthermore, Van Deusen-Scholl and Von Hoene, (2001, p. 233) note that “it is the responsibility of a language center to construct the conditions under which lecturers can reflect upon and rethink the practices, approaches, and the assumptions that guide their work.” They add that “because many lecturers find themselves quite isolated, it is crucial to construct an interdepartmental forum in which lecturers can participate in a critical exchange, a community of reflective practice with peers” (p. 233). We discuss this in more detail in the next section.

The reason for this professional isolation of language faculty within departments of language and literature in the United States can be ascribed to a gradual change in departmental structure which has created a dividing line between the lower division languages courses, taught by non-tenure-track faculty, and the upper division literature courses, taught by tenured or tenure-track faculty (cf. Patrikis, 1995; Levine, 2011; Maxim et al., 2013; Swaffar & Urlaub, 2015).

The 2007 MLA Report by the Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages, “Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a changed World”, drew a significant amount of attention to what has become “the standard configuration of university foreign language curricula, in which a two-or three-year language sequence feeds into a set of core courses primarily focused on canonical literature” (p. 2). This two-tiered configuration “defines both the curriculum and the governance structure of language departments and creates a division between the language curriculum and the literature curriculum and between tenure-track literature professors and language instructors in non-tenure-track positions” (p. 2). The report notes “foreign language instructors often work entirely outside the departmental power structures and have little or no say in the educational mission of their department, even in areas where they have particular expertise” (pp. 2-3).



Citing Laurence (2001, p. 216, table 3b), the 2007 MLA report provides some significant statistics regarding teaching responsibilities in language departments: “. . . in doctoral-granting departments, the teaching of first-year language courses breaks down as follows: full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty members teach 7.4% of first-year courses, full-time non-tenure-track faculty members teach 19.6%, part-time instructors teach 15.7%, and graduate student teaching assistants teach 57.4%.” (p. 6). The report goes on to say that “in BA-granting departments, the breakdown is as follows: full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty members teach 41.8% of first-year courses, full-time non-tenure-track faculty members teach 21.1%, part-time instructors teach 34.7%, and graduate student assistants teach 2.4%” (p. 6). It is clear that beginning-level language instruction falls primarily under the responsibility of non-tenure track faculty who also tend to be charged with training the graduate instructors. This requires specialized preparation and training as well as ongoing professional development (cf. Mann, 2005).

Another related issue raised by Laurence (2008) pertains to the professional qualifications of non-tenure-track faculty; he notes that

Collectively, faculty members teaching off the tenure track have very different degree qualifications from those holding tenured or tenure-track appointments. A doctorate is overwhelmingly the highest degree held by tenured and tenure-track faculty members in four-year institutions; master’s degrees are the highest degree held by the majority of those teaching off the tenure track in four-year institutions and by all categories of faculty members in two-year institutions, including tenured and tenure-track faculty members. (p. 2)

According to the 2014 MLA Issue Brief “The Academic Workforce,” only 25 to 30% of non-tenure track faculty members in English and foreign languages hold a doctoral degree; a master’s degree is the highest degree held for 60.4% of non-tenure-track faculty in foreign languages and 65% in English (p. 11, Figure 9). Bartholomae (2010) also found that “master’s degree holders in full-time and part-time non-tenure-track positions . . . *substantially* outnumber Ph.D. holders in every institutional type,” and suggests that “a master’s degree currently serves as the qualifying degree for teaching off the tenure track (and teaching in the lower division)” (p. 18). While this analysis was based on staffing patterns in English departments, it may have implications for the way in which foreign language faculty are perceived as well: first, it reinforces the departmental divide criticized in the 2007 MLA report; second, as Bartholomae points out, it sets up a sharp distinction between the Ph.D. as research qualification and the MA as a teaching degree (p. 21).

Because of their secondary status within their departments and the general lack of recognition of their professional expertise, many language instructors may not have access to adequate resources and support for their professional activities. Therefore, a language center can play an important role in “creating a context in which the research and professional development interests that lecturers express can evolve and be institutionally acknowledged” (Van Deusen-Scholl, Von Hoene & Møller-Irving, 1999, p. 263). In its recommendations, the 2007 MLA Report also suggests that “a language center or similar structure” can “prove invaluable in boosting the morale of teachers and improving the quality of professional and intellectual life” (p. 9).

In the next section, building on an earlier model developed at UC Berkeley (von Hoene & Van Deusen-Scholl, 2001), we outline a vision for language centers as collaborative spaces of ongoing professional and intellectual growth for non-tenure track language faculty. Rather than taking a top-down approach to professional development, language centers, we argue, should position themselves as participating partners in a community of learning.

### **The Language Center: Faculty Development as Collaboration**

Given the two-tier system in U.S. universities (cf. MLA, 2007; Paesani & Allen, 2012), there are many ways in which language centers can act as partners and advocates for non-ladder language faculty and graduate students, providing both tangible and intangible support. Centers can offer travel grants and funds for instructional innovation, as well as workshops that help faculty to understand opportunities for promotion and professional growth. They can also offer intangible support, in the form of a neutral space in which faculty can meet to discuss teaching methods or departmental initiatives, away from the political ground of their home departments. They can foster a “community of practice” across disciplines, so that language faculty recognize what they have in common, pedagogically, as well as professionally, with those outside their departments. Through a variety of activities targeted at teaching, research, and professional development, the center can foster an open, dynamic, and generative intellectual space in which faculty find their own paths to improved teaching, professional success, and better working conditions. The center can be an advocate for a pathway to promotion for non-tenure track faculty where there may be none, working with the administration and departments to articulate and regularize standards for promotion across departments. Once such a system has been established, the center can take a “backward design” approach to faculty support, offering the kinds of workshops

that will help faculty, no matter where they start on their preparedness for promotion, to take professionalizing steps in a deliberative way.

This pathway to promotion, whether explicit or implicit in a university's culture, will usually involve research in some form, and it is the status and nature of research that often raises difficult questions for non-ladder language faculty. The reasons language instructors may be overlooked by their departments or actively discouraged from professional development are many, usually to do with limits on resources, a narrow view of what language teaching is, or simply ingrained habit. Resources to fund travel to conferences or support for research are limited, and, given that the academy values classic research in the disciplines above other forms of knowledge creation, the resources available to a department are overwhelmingly aimed at ladder faculty. In this common situation, the kind of research that language faculty are best situated to do, what is called "action research" or research based in classroom practice (cf. Farrell, 2015), is not recognized by ladder faculty (and sometimes by non-ladder faculty) as legitimate research that should be fostered and funded. Finally, these attitudes about who matters and what kind of research counts can become such a part of the culture that even those most adversely affected by it—non-ladder faculty—do not recognize it as an imbalance that needs to be corrected. When the resistance to non-ladder research and professional development is more a matter of active suppression on the part of ladder faculty, rather than benign neglect, the disempowered position of non-ladder faculty becomes even more salient and necessary of redress.

Language centers can fill the gap left by limited budgets by providing resources for travel and research, among other things, and, while that is important, it is not enough to "fill the gap," while leaving the system of unequal status and distribution of goods unchallenged. Even more important than offering tangible goods, language centers can work to change the attitudes that stem from the two-tier system of status and worth, and that have negative consequences for the professional development and personal fulfillment of non-tenure track faculty. This includes, for instance, rethinking what counts as research and whether research and teaching are two sides of the same coin or separate activities. As Bartholomae (2010) notes, there is an entrenched division of labor in many humanities departments in the U.S. Tenure-track faculty (now a minority) do little teaching and focus mainly on classic research (producing articles, books, and giving lectures in their field), while non-tenure track faculty do the lion's share of the teaching and produce little research. Bartholomae raises important questions about this division, including the narrowness of the definition of research it implies, the question

whether research should be divorced from teaching, and the status of lower-division courses in a university's vision. Effectively, our universities are now split into "research faculty" and "teaching faculty," and this division, which serves economic and philosophical aims, has negative effects on the status of teaching, especially general education, and on the kind of research that is produced (Bartholomae, 2010, pp. 24-29).

One of the most important suggestions Bartholomae makes for our discussion of what language centers can do for non-ladder faculty is his claim that we should see the split between teaching and research as impoverishing teaching, while also excluding whole categories of valuable research. Language centers can play a role in promoting the status and professional development of language instructors by promoting the concept of action research, so that non-ladder "teaching" faculty can recognize a source of knowledge and power that is already available to them. When they look to their teaching as a source of data and trends in language learning, data that need to be analyzed if the field is to understand its learners, improve its teaching, and build a knowledge base, they begin to see their own authority in a new way, as having some sway beyond the classroom and beyond their university. They can begin to see themselves as shapers of the discipline in which they teach, rather than as instructors of a skill, with a knowledge base developed by others. They begin to interrogate their practice more effectively, to theorize their empirical knowledge in useful ways, and to become knowledge-producers in their own right. The value for the field of language learning is clear if more instructors were to do action research, but the value for the instructor herself is equally important. Language centers can promote action research through grant programs (for travel to conferences and for instructional innovation), but they can also promote the idea of action research through events that highlight faculty activity and through discussion with departments and administrators about what should count as "research" or "having influence on the field" (two common tests of worthiness in discussions of promotion). Until administrators and traditional researchers (tenure-track faculty) recognize the value of action research, the work that non-tenure track faculty are best situated to do and often most interested in doing will not be rewarded, either with respect or professional recognition.

In the role of advocate and facilitator of non-ladder faculty development, though, language centers must be careful not to re-inscribe the power dynamic of the two-tier system by promoting our notions of professional development in a unidirectional way, without listening to the ambitions and concerns of faculty themselves. Von Hoene and Van Deusen-Scholl (2001) have argued that a push

ways to promotion—can feature faculty themselves, both as sources of questions and as sources of information. Even when the format calls for a lecture, as when an administrator may be presenting changes to guidelines to promotion, the format may also include a panel of faculty who can speak to peers about the challenges they faced in the promotion process. In other workshops, faculty may present a conference paper before the event to an audience of their institutional peers, so that they can get advance feedback in order to improve it. Everyone benefits in such settings—the center, by learning more about what faculty are doing, and the faculty themselves, by seeing what is possible in action research. Even in the give-and-take of the open workshop, on, say, “writing in the language classroom” or “using film,” faculty can be asked to give short presentations of classroom practice so that their expertise can be tested and can grow in dynamic exchange with their peers. These chances to perform and get feedback provide support for faculty as they develop professional competencies.

Language centers can also help non-tenure track faculty to take the long view of their professional development and to see disparate parts of their practice as potentially contributing to a whole, something tenure-track faculty learn in their graduate training and have further reinforced in tenure-track appointments. As a first step, language centers can listen to faculty and create interest groups based on their concerns, for example, around heritage language learners or writing in the language classroom. This identification, no matter how tenuous at first, can provide a smaller community within the larger one of like-minded faculty with whom to trade practices and share ideas. Once language faculty begin to identify a “specialization” in this way, they may also begin to see where they fit in the larger picture of research, conference going, and publishing. Alongside this cultivation of interest groups as an expression of a specialization, language centers can encourage faculty to think of particular events (a workshop, a teaching innovation grant, an opportunity to give a paper), as moments in the timeline of an ongoing, comprehensive project. Instead of thinking of funding and development opportunities in a discrete fashion, language centers can present them as steps on a pathway and plan strategically to this end. This may mean that they tie funding for one event to participation in another (for example, offering a one-time teaching innovation grant with an eye towards building an interest group among the grantees) or it may mean that they choose topics for lectures and workshops strategically over a one- or three-year period, so that interest in a given field remains high and faculty can be aware of their growing expertise. It also means that language centers provide opportunities to showcase faculty work and to return the community’s attention to projects from previous semesters or even years, rather than

to professionalize, though seemingly in the interests of non-ladder faculty, may have the effect of a colonizing discourse, enforcing changes from above without regard for the voices of those who are the objects of such pressure. They offer a vision of the language center as a space of reflective professional development, in which language faculty critically analyze their work and direct their own growth as teachers and researchers (pp. 233-34). Indeed, as Varghese et al. (2005) have argued, professionalizing is a “process of becoming,” rather than simply learning a set of skills or acquiring a knowledge base (p. 29). Their work is based on Lave and Wenger’s insight that learning is a process of developing an identification with a group, or community of practice, and one’s membership in that group is dynamic, based on one’s changing participation in it (p. 29). For a language center to be such a community of practice that respects the faculty’s agency and desires, it must create a “collaborative framework” within which faculty can share ideas and develop professional competencies, one that features workshops, interest groups, and lectures as “sites of intellectual exchange” (Von Hoene & Van Deusen-Scholl, 2001, p. 234). This means fostering a sense of mutual benefit in every activity, from individual work with faculty on projects to group discussions to visiting lectures that build the community’s knowledge. The expertise of the language center can be expressed in the choice of lectures, in the advice given to faculty, and in the kinds of workshops organized, rather than in any authoritative gestures that seem to dictate a path for language instructors. In order to become a genuine site of exchange, the language center must engage with faculty as partners, ready to learn from them and to advise rather than acting as a paternalistic extension of the two-tiered system.

One important role language centers can play is as a staging ground, where faculty may experiment with new roles in a collegial environment as they develop professional competencies. Once the goals of professionalizing are clear, both from the institution’s view (what is required for promotion?) and from the individual’s view (what do I want to strengthen in my repertoire?), the center can offer workshops on a variety of topics that will be relevant to faculty at different stages in their development. Faculty preparedness for professional development may be uneven; some faculty have had formal training in research in a graduate program, while others’ training has emphasized teaching exclusively or was in a field different from the one in which they now teach. This raises a challenge for centers that seek to be responsive and inclusive in their offerings. Workshops that start from a collaborative, rather than instructive, standpoint promise to be most responsive to faculty needs. Such workshops—whether on giving a presentation, creating a poster for a conference, pitching a manuscript to a press, or learning about path-

always moving ahead towards the next new idea. They may help faculty rethink previous projects in light of new technological or pedagogical innovations, so that seasoned instructors can capitalize on their experience in the classroom. For example, helping faculty to put a materials project online can be a valuable first step into the public arena for faculty. The mandate of the professional track to raise one's national profile can be approached in an organic way that makes further steps less daunting. In all of these initiatives, the center encourages faculty to get some distance from the day-to-day pressures of teaching and take a more objective, long-term view of the areas of language research on which they would like to make a mark.

The language center is also an important space for graduate student mentoring, especially where a two-tier system that values literature over language means that graduate students get primary training as literary scholars. Indeed, at universities that lack a school of education or a program in SLA, the language center may be the only place where graduate students are introduced to the theory and practice of language teaching that will be important to their success as teachers and as job candidates. Increasingly, too, graduate students on the job market are expected to use technology to promote language learning and cultural competency, and to have some experience with online teaching. Because language centers tend to be sites of technology innovation, they can provide these opportunities for graduate students to experiment with technology and to reflect on its place in language teaching. The training language centers offer may include pre-service pedagogy workshops, practical workshops in the principles of language teaching, and theoretical training in second language acquisition, either formalized in a certificate program or as a set of modular workshops. The language center is the ideal place to host these opportunities for graduate students because it offers a neutral space outside of departmental power structures where graduate students can form cross-linguistic peer groups and cultivate the long view of their development as teachers. As graduate students become more integrated into the life of the center, their openness to new strategies and tools enriches discussions with faculty across the spectrum.

Language centers can address the inequities of the two-tier system by creating a space that is open and collaborative, one that builds trust over time and generates opportunities for faculty to experiment with their teaching. Collaborations between language centers and faculty offer opportunities to reflect on teaching practices and build knowledge in the field. To the extent that the center can foster this kind of reflection and growth through programming, advice, and advocacy,

they are fulfilling their mission to create a community of practice for language teachers. The results of this ongoing collaboration tend to emerge over time, making their mark in profound ways. Faculty begin to feel more validated as professionals in their home institutions, they pursue more professional development opportunities beyond the university, and they see the connections between the two. As the language center advocates for language faculty within a two-tier power structure, discussions about the status and professionalization of language faculty may have long-term, substantive effects on institutional culture. Promoting these discussions raises the profile of language faculty across the university, contributes to the improvement of language teaching, and builds respect for language teaching as a body of knowledge with a long history and a foundation in research.

## **Conclusion**

The ongoing move toward increasing numbers of contingent faculty in institutions of higher education raises important questions regarding the rights, status and professional standing of the non-tenure track faculty. As we have tried to show in this chapter, language centers can play an important role in both supporting language faculty and functioning as a locus of advocacy because they bridge the space between faculty, departments, and administration. They can work with language faculty across departments on policy matters, bring issues of concern to the administration, and provide professional expertise in matters of professional rights or promotional opportunities. They also provide or supplement resources in ways that are tangible (funding, technology support, classroom space) and—equally important—intangible (a space for exchange of ideas and support for teaching). As we have argued, centers should be collaborative spaces for professional and intellectual growth which rather than taking a top-down approach to professional development should participate as partners in a community of learning.

Over the past few years, a number of institutions have begun to broaden their support for teaching and learning by creating units with a broad mission, such as centers for teaching excellence. In some cases, language centers are being subsumed under these institutional umbrella organizations, and while it is encouraging to see that there is an increasing interest in promoting good teaching across all disciplines, at the same time it is important to maintain a continued emphasis on disciplinary expertise. Language education has come a long way in recognizing the specialized nature of its profession, in promoting research that provides a theoretical basis for its pedagogical approaches, and in creating dedicated support structures that bring language faculty together to share their expertise. Particu-



larly at a time when faculty positions continue to shift toward the lesser security of part-time and non-tenure track employment, it is crucial that we maintain our focus on the very specific needs of the language faculty.

## **Note**

<sup>1</sup> According to Rhoades and Maitland (2008), "Unions use the term 'contingent faculty' when addressing the needs of all colleagues who are not on the tenure track. The contracts refer to contingent faculty members by different names—lecturers, adjuncts, and non-tenure track faculty members, for instance. But all names have in common the transitory nature of their academic work" (p. 72). In this paper, we will use the terms non-tenure track or non-ladder faculty interchangeably.

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