To: Department Contacts  
From: Peggy Heidish, Director  
Re: Recommendation that Singapore applicants take the TOEFL exam  
Date: February 1, 2012

A number of departments have asked our advice about requiring TOEFL (or other standardized language assessments) for applicants from Singapore. I strongly recommend that Singaporean applicants, like other nonnative English speakers, be required to submit a TOEFL score for the following reasons:

- English is seldom the “native language” of Singaporean applicants. When they refer to English as their “first language” what they mean is that English is the primary language they’ve used for academic work, or that it is the first language learned after their mother tongue (try asking applicants what their “mother tongue” is rather than first language).

- English is an “official” language in Singapore because of the need to have one common language since many people there are native speakers of other languages (a situation similar to India).

- It is not unusual for Singapore students to have language issues (e.g., unable to pass the ITA test, difficulty writing in the style expected in the US, pronunciation difficulties), and we often see these students at ICC once they realize that language is hindering their success at CMU.

- A number of “Singapore” students are actually international students/ nonnative English speakers who moved to Singapore solely for undergraduate or master level work.

- Singapore students are required to take the ITA test (and some have not been able to pass).

- Singapore English is significantly different than North American English; attending an English medium school in Singapore does not guarantee that an applicant would have the fluency expected here.

Given the serious consequences if a nonnative English speaking student begins graduate work without the needed level of fluency, and the small investment required to take the TOEFL test, it does not seem worth the risk to waive the test requirement.