To: Graduate Department Representatives

From: Amy Burkert, Vice Provost for Education
        Jen Gilbride-Brown, Assistant Vice Provost for Student Academic Success & Equity
        Linda Gentile, Director of Office of International Education

Re: Update on student language support and guidelines for assessing English language proficiency in graduate admissions in light of COVID-19 for 2020-2021.

Date: September 11, 2020

As we embark upon an academic year like one we have never known, we wanted to offer some [updates on support for students for whom English is not their first language](#) as well as [guidelines for assessing language proficiency](#), and [legal issues](#) related to graduate admission.

UPDATE: ICC is now fully integrated into STUDENT ACADEMIC SUCCESS

The Intercultural Communication Center is now fully integrated into Student Academic Success. We are grateful for the strong foundation built by the ICC team lead by Peggy Heidish for many years and carried forth by numerous members of her team, notably Rebecca Oreto. Rebecca made a huge impact at CMU in advancing language support and proficiency assessment. Rebecca is pursuing other opportunities and is no longer at CMU. We wish her well and offer her our deep thanks.

Academic support services previously delivered by separate offices (Academic Development, Intercultural Communication Center, Global Communications Center, Disability Resources, Tartan Scholars, and Graduate Education) are integrated into the new **Student Academic Success Team and Center** as of Fall, 2020! The Center is both virtual (www.cmu.edu/student-success) and will be physical (Posner Hall) when we return to in-person delivery mode. This new organizational shift allows the university to better leverage its support for undergraduate and graduate students in a clear, coordinated, equitable, and data-driven way. During the upcoming academic year, we will be continuing to offer a wide range of student academic support and are piloting several new programs. In-person ITA testing, language skill development workshops, 1-1 language support, and ITA clearance processing remain important parts of what we do in Student Academic Success. Elliott Walters (ewalters@andrew.cmu.edu) and Diane Hightower (ddhighto@andrew.cmu.edu) stand ready to work with you to determine how best to support your students- using tried and true techniques alongside new strategies we are piloting.

GUIDELINES FOR ESTABLISHING LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY THRESHOLDS
The purpose of these guidelines is to offer updated resources and a framework for using scores to understand the English language proficiency of students for whom English is not their first language. Issues for the students, programs, and the university can arise when students with

less than the required proficiency are admitted. COVID-19 has had a dampening effect on applicants' abilities to access testing, and scorers' ability to complete evaluations and provide results to institutions. As of 9/1/2020, TOEFL is offering a TOEFL Plus for China Solution for students in Mainland China who are currently unable to take the TOEFL due to testing suspensions. The key issues with this solution is that the speaking section will not be scored. All other sections are scored as usual. Institutions will receive the video file and can self-score using a TOEFL rubric. Departments can elect to use the rubric to score video files of applicants. We are, however, recommending departments consider the DuoLingo English Test[1] as an acceptable alternative for demonstrating language proficiency, in addition to the TOEFL and IELTS tests, for the 2020-2021 graduate admission cycle. There will be a **Zoom meeting with DuoLingo representatives on September 28th from 10:30-11:30am** for anyone interested in learning more about this test. More information is available below or by following this link.

Recommended plan of action for departments:
1. Determine the English skills that students in your department need (e.g., interact in research teams, serve as TAs, interview for jobs, or present to funding agencies), and then screen for those skills. Some departments have found it useful to review the scores of current students to determine what scores were most appropriate.
2. Set realistic minimum scores (including sub-scores) for applicants to your program.
   a. Student Academic Success will be offering information sessions about how to interview international students and navigate language and cultural differences over the course of the 2020-2021 academic year for faculty and staff who are interviewing graduate applicants.
   b. Recognize that graduate students at CMU must have sufficient language to:
      i. Participate effectively in classes, seminars, and collaborative work
      ii. Write comprehensive exams, formal academic papers, theses, and dissertations
      iii. Communicate effectively with learners if they are required to TA
   c. Students need to have the fluency to handle academic work from day one. Carnegie Mellon does not offer basic ESL classes nor would our students have time to attend intensive ESL classes concurrent with full-time academic work.
   d. Standardized language assessment should be required for all applicants for whom English is not their first language, including those who attended other academic programs in the US.

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[1] *The Duolingo English Test (DET) is an online, accessible alternative to other standardized proficiency tests of English listening, reading, writing, and speaking competencies. Subscores and overall score are offered. The scores are highly correlated to those of the TOEFL and IELTS, and results are available within 48 hours.There will be a Zoom meeting with DuoLingo representatives on September 28th from 10:30-11:30am for anyone interested in learning more about this test. More information is available below or by following this link.

e. Accept TOEFL/TOEFL online, IELTS, and DuoLingo English Test (DET) (which we are piloting for 2020-2021) with the thresholds attached for minimum and recommended scoring.

3. Consider publicizing this change with the following language:

    a. *For XXX Admissions, in addition to TOEFL and IELTS, we will now accept the online Duolingo English Test for applicants for whom English was not their first language.* These tests include a proficiency composite score, section subscores, video interview, and writing sample which are shared with CMU [department] when you send your results. Certified results are available within 48 hours of the test session. Minimum and recommended score follows our TOEFL and IELTS minimums using percentile equivalencies and are indicated in the chart below. For more information, please visit the websites for the Duolingo English Test.

4. Register with DuoLingo as an institutional partner in order to receive certified scores.

Minimum and Recommended Scores

The recommended and minimum scores indicate advanced versus basic command of language skills needed for academic work and to master material presented in English. The recommended score is appropriate for students who will:

- be expected to handle challenging verbal tasks early on (e.g., TA recitation class, work in multi-disciplinary research teams or with clients, give presentations, write academic papers without extensive support, interview within a year or two for jobs in US); **OR**
- have limited time to develop language skills once here (e.g., many M.A. programs).

Only use the minimum score if students are:

- not expected to handle challenging verbal tasks (e.g., presentations, group participation, job interviews), and not required to reach the highest levels (Pass or Restricted I) on the ITA test; **OR**
- will have time during the program to attend the Student Success communication support programs for several semesters to assist with academic fluency; note, however, that any improvement will likely be minimal since the investment of time needed to attain significantly higher fluency is generally not possible given the demands of graduate work.

NOTE: OIE will use mium scores as the default requirement for I-20 issuance if no TOEFL/IELTS/DET standard has been set. Note: Recommendations are for **2020-2021 only**; as more data becomes available, we will update our guidelines.nim

Recommended Composite/OVERALL Score Thresholds

CMU Thresholds	TOEFL / TOEFL Online Composite Score	IELTS Composite Score	DuoLingo English (DET) Test** Overall Score
Minimum	84/120 (47th percentile)	6.5	105/160
Recommended	100/120 (79th percentile)	7.5	120/160 and above

For calibration purposes: Undergraduate Admission requires a TOEFL Composite of 102 or higher (80th percentile) or a IELTS Composition of 7.5 or higher. They also recommend at least a 25 on each subscore.

DET overall score correlations at .77 or higher with TOEFL and IELTS composites.

INSERT Importance of subscoring and holistic preparation for academic needs*

Sub-score Thresholds

Thresholds	TOEFL and TOEFL online	IELTS	DuoLingo English Test
Reading	Minimum= 22/30 (49th percentile) Recommend= 25/30 (65th percentile)	Minimum= 6.5 Recommend= 7	See chart below
Listening	Minimum= 22/30 (52nd percentile) Recommend= 25/30 (69th percentile)	Minimum= 6.5 Recommend= 7	
Speaking	Minimum= 18/30 (22nd percentile) Recommend= 25/30 (83rd percentile)	Minimum= 6 Recommend= 7.5	
Writing	Minimum= 22/30 (54th percentile) Recommend= 25/30 (78th percentile)	Minimum= 6 Recommend= 6.5	

Duo Lingo English Test subscoring (new July 2020)

DuoLingo has released a subscore feature of the DET as of July 2020. DET takes a different approach to the subscoring component of the assessment. Rather than reporting on the different components of language (reading, listening, speaking, writing) as discrete scores, the DET report subscores that reflect the integrated nature of these components. The DET subscores are:

Literacy: *writing* and *reading* integrated modalities (C-test, writing, yes/no text)

Comprehension: _reading_ and _listening_ integrated modalities (C-test, dictation, elicited speech, yes/no text, yes/no audio)
Conversation: _speaking_ and _listening_ integrated modalities (speaking, dictation, elicited speech, yes/no audio)
Production: _speaking_ and _writing_ integrated modalities (speaking, writing)

Because the overall score is NOT a total of the subscores but rather the product of an algorithm, the recommended and minimum thresholds are the same as the overall score.

DuoLingo English Test Subscore Category	DuoLingo English Test Subscore (reported as ranges that represents standard error of measurement)
Literacy	Minimum= 105 (50th percentile) Recommend= 115 (65th percentile)
Comprehension	Minimum= 115 (50th percentile) Recommend= 125 (70th percentile)
Production	Minimum= 70 (30th percentile) Recommend= 100 (80th percentile)
Conversation	Minimum= 95 (50th percentile) Recommend= 105 (70th percentile)

Research suggests a moderate to strong relationship between DET subscores and TOEFL, IELTS subscores. Specifically, the correlations between the TOEFL and DET subscores all range between .59 and .69. More information is available here:

- Subscore Whitepaper
- Subscore Webinar
- Updated Technical Guide
- Subscore Concordance

There will be a Zoom Q&A with two DuoLingo representatives on Monday, September 28th from 10:30a-11:30a. This is an opportunity to talk with DuoLingo about the instrument and have questions addressed.

Topic: DuoLingo English Test Discussion with CMU Graduate Programs
Time: Sep 28, 2020 10:30-11:30 AM Eastern Time (US and Canada)
Join Zoom Meeting
https://cmu.zoom.us/j/98904184412
Meeting ID: 989 0418 4412
Passcode: 365610

Legal Considerations:

- OIE requirements for I-20 issuance: Acting on behalf of the University and in accordance with US federal law governing I-20 issuance, OIE issues I-20 documents only to students who have met established admission requirements, including English proficiency. It is the responsibility of the admitting department or college to determine an admission standard for English proficiency, implement and document the means of assessment used in admission decisions, and report this information to OIE for I-20 document-issuing purposes. OIE will use the minimum scores (see Guidelines for Using TOEFL /IELTS above) as the default requirement for I-20 issuance if no TOEFL / IELTS standard has been set. US federal law requires that OIE staff legally attest that such standards have been met.

- Federal regulations governing F-1 students require admission records, including proof of English language proficiency, to be retained by the admitting body and available for Department of Homeland Security inspection (upon request) for the entire period of the student's enrollment at Carnegie Mellon plus any authorized post-completion Optional Practical Training (which may extend up to 36 months post-graduation in some cases) plus 3 years. Failure by the admitting department to uphold admission standards and retain documentation can result in sanction(s) against the university, including the university's loss of the ability to enroll international students.

Linking subscores to ITA Language Certification Scores, 2020-2021

Students have the following options for ITA Language Certification
1. In-person, ITA Test through Student Academic Success
2. TOEFL speaking score
3. NEW: DuoLingo English Test "production" subscore (due to scoring issues with TOEFL in China)

We will update you with new tables as it relates to automatic scoring using the new options (for this year only) in early fall semester so that you can use other scores for certification for the Spring testing period. The TOEFL table remains the same:

TOEFL Speaking Sub Score	ITA Certification Score
28-30	Pass
26-27	Restricted 1
22-25	Restricted 2

Below 22	Cannot use TOEFL Option

Pass- Eligible for all TA duties and sole instructor assignments
Restricted 1- Eligible for all TA duties
Restricted 2- Eligible for one-on-one interactions only (office hours, tutoring, lab assistants)

If your department requires a higher ITA Language Certification than they would place on the above chart, please consider the following factors that impact student improvement:
- Age when the speaker began learning English,
- Number of years using English before coming to CMU (some students have years of practice; students who have not had this experience may need years in the US before they reach the same level),
- Whether English is a second rather than third or fourth language (multilingual speakers tend to learn additional languages more easily),
- Motivation to improve language,
- Amount of time available for language work at Student Academic Success
- Amount of authentic language practice available during the graduate program (e.g., not in a research group with students primarily from the same country, ample opportunities to communicate academic information to people other than advisor),
- Individual learning styles and personality factors correlated with successful language learning.

Feel free to contact Student Academic Success with questions or concerns about language assessment issues for applicants to your program (success@andrew.cmu.edu or ewalters@cmu.edu)