To: Graduate Department Representatives
From: Keely Austin, Director of Communication and Language Support
              Elliott Walters, Assistant Director of Language Support Programs
Re: Guidelines for Assessing English Language Proficiency in Graduate
              Admission; Communication and Language Support Services

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Welcome back to the Fall 2022 semester at CMU. We are writing to offer updates on

- guidelines for assessing language proficiency,
- use of scoring thresholds,
- legal considerations related to graduate admission, and
- support for students for whom English is not their first language.

GUIDELINES FOR ASSESSING LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

The purpose of these guidelines is to offer updated resources and a framework for using language assessment 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. We recommend that departments continue accepting TOEFL (iBT, iBT Home, Essentials), IELTS, IELTS Indicator, and the Duolingo English Test (DET) as options for demonstrating language proficiency for the 2022-2023 academic year and 2023-2024 graduate application cycle.

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 score of current students to determine what scores were most appropriate.

2) Set realistic minimum scores, including subscores, for applicants to your program. Over the course of the 2022-2023 academic year, Communication and Language Support can offer information sessions about how to interview international students as well as how to navigate language and cultural differences for program administrators, faculty, and staff who interact with graduate applicants.

   Graduate students at CMU must have sufficient language to

   - participate effectively in classes, seminars, and collaborative work
   - write comprehensive exams, formal academic papers, theses, and dissertations; and
   - communicate effectively with learners if they are required to TA.

Graduate students need to have the fluency to handle academic work from the beginning of their studies. Carnegie Mellon does not offer basic language acquisition classes, nor would our students have time to attend such classes concurrent with full-time academic work. Language support for international and multilingual students is available through Communication and Language Support which offers workshops, success series, and individual consultations.

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.

3) Accept TOEFL iBT, TOEFL iBT Home, TOEFL Essentials, IELTS, IELTS Indicator, and DET with the thresholds listed in the charts below for recommended and minimum scoring.

4) Register with Duolingo as an institutional partner in order to receive certified scores. https://englishtest.duolingo.com/edu

USE OF SCORING THRESHOLDS

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

- be expected to handle challenging verbal tasks early on, including teaching recitation classes, working in multi-disciplinary research teams with clients, giving presentations, writing academic papers without extensive support, and interviewing within a year or two for jobs in the US; or
- have limited time to develop language skills once in the US as is likely with many MA 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 Communication and Language Support programs for several semesters to assist with academic fluency; note 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 minimum scores as the default requirement for I-20 issuance if

no TOEFL/IELTS/DET standard has been set by an individual college or program.

Recommended Composite/Overall Score Thresholds

CMU Thresholds	Composite Score **TOEFL IBT, TOEFL Home**	Composite Score **IELTS, IELTS Indicator**	Overall Score **DET**
Recommended	100	7.5	120
Minimum	86	6.5	110
Subscores recommended: **Speaking** (TOEFL and IELTS) **Conversation** (DET)	25	7.5	120

For calibration purposes: CMU Undergraduate Admission requires a TOEFL Composite of 102 or higher (80th percentile) and a 25 on each TOEFL subscore.   An IELTS composite of 7.5 or higher and minimum subscores of 7.5. The required DET composite is 135 with subscores of literacy 135, conversation 130, comprehension 145, and production 113.

Importance of Subscores

Subscoring is also critical to assess as it offers the department a more nuanced understanding of an applicant's English language proficiency relating to communication needs that are specific to the department or discipline. For instance, if your program is writing-intensive, it would be important to understand an applicant's English writing abilities as a factor in being successful as a student. If your program requires a student to teach, the speaking and listening subscores are particularly useful to consider. Take time to evaluate the communication skills needed to be successful in your program's curriculum. A composite score alone is not likely to be sufficient in making good decisions about future success.

TOEFL and IELTS Subscore Thresholds

Subscore Categories	Thresholds **TOEFL iBT and TOEFL Home**	Thresholds **IELTS and IELTS Indicator**
Reading	Recommend=25 Minimum= 22	Recommend=7 Minimum= 6.5
Listening	Recommend=25 Minimum= 22	Recommend=7 Minimum= 6.5

Speaking	Recommend=25 Minimum= 20	Recommend=7.5 Minimum= 6
Writing	Recommend=25 Minimum= 22	Recommend=6.5 Minimum= 6

DET Subscore Thresholds

DET's subscoring combines modalities, resulting in 4 categories: literacy (reading and writing), comprehension (reading and listening), conversation (speaking and listening), and production (speaking and writing).

DET Subscore Category	Thresholds
Literacy	Recommend=115 Minimum=105
Conversation	Recommend=120 Minimum=95
Comprehension	Recommend=125 Minimum=115
Production	Recommend=110 Minimum=90

Linking subscores to ITA Language Certification Scores

Students have the following options for ITA Language Certification:
1. ITA Test through Student Academic Success
2. TOEFL speaking score
3. IELTS speaking score

ITA Certification Score	TOEFL Speaking Subscore	TOEFL Essentials	IELTS Speaking Subscore
Pass	28-30	12	9
Restricted 1	26-27	11	8.5
Restricted 2	22-25	9	7
Assessment Test Option not used	Below 22	Below 9	Below 7

Pass- All TA assignments (undergraduate and graduate) including lectures, recitations, labs, and studios; can also serve as sole instructor for a course.
Restricted 1- TA assignments (undergraduate and graduate) for recitations, labs, office hours, and studios.
Restricted 2- One-on-one sessions: e.g., office hours or tutoring, instructor assistant for labs or studios (if supervised by an instructor present in the lab or studio, and not responsible for safety instructions or for giving presentations).

If your department requires students to have a higher ITA Language Certification than suggested in 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
- motivation to improve language
- amount of time available for language work at the Student Academic Success Center
- 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), and
- individual learning styles and personality factors correlated with successful language learning.

LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

Acting on behalf of the University and in accordance with US federal law governing I-20 issuance, OIE may only issue I-20 documents 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/DET in the charts above) as the default requirement for I-20 issuance if no TOEFL/IELTS/DET standard has been set for graduate applicants by your department or college. 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 in addition to 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. Questions about these legal requirements may be directed to Linda Gentile, in the Office of International Education (OIE) by calling 412-268-5231 or emailing lgentile@cmu.edu or oie@andrew.cmu.edu.

SUPPORT FOR STUDENT COMMUNICATION SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Communication and Language Support (formerly the ICC and GCC)–a program in the Student Academic Success Center–has a wide range of programs for communication skill development tailored to international and multilingual students, including workshops, success series, and individual and group consultations. Many resources are available to explain the variety of services offered, and our staff members are ready to consult with programs, faculty, and staff to help identify which services may best fit the needs of students in a department or college.

For more information, visit the Student Academic Success Center located on the 1st floor of Posner Hall, or contact us at success@andrew.cmu.edu.