Letter from Provost Randhawa to Fisk and Loveland re iBT/Chemistry issue.

Martin and Walt,

At a recent meeting of the External Advisory Board of the Department of Chemistry, the issue of flexibility on testing for English proficiency for GTAs was raised. Kevin has summarized it below. We (OSU) need to set and maintain our standards on English proficiency for admission and for serving as GTAs. I think the question was around “flexibility” and I do not know the issue well enough to comment on it.

I would appreciate a conversation/follow-up with Kevin Gable, Chair of Chemistry on this issue, who I have copied on my email.

Thanks,

Sabah

The Graduate School’s response to the elimination of the English Language Institute was to impose a required score on the internet-based TOEFL (iBT) prior to them allowing a student to receive GTA support. This is in stark contrast to prior practice of evaluating a student once they were here (the SPEAK test, formerly administered by the ELI) and implementing remedial action as needed (results of the SPEAK test resulted in advisory recommendations that we took to heart but were not mandatory).

The result of this action has been that all of our incoming international students--15 of them--failed to meet the Graduate School's new requirement. We have been granted latitude to admit and hire them this fall only, and all of them are enrolled in an INTO class on remedial English (at Department expense--I'll be unable to support student travel to meetings this year). This despite the fact that we traveled to the students' home countries and interviewed them in person before committing to bringing them into the program. The Graduate School has completely discounted both our direct experience with the students and our track record for getting new international GTAs up to speed.

We have been seeking more flexible alternatives (that include performance standards for the GTAs) through the Graduate Council. Walt Loveland would be a good person to consult as he knows the full history through his participation on the Graduate Council. We are particularly concerned that other schools who have used the fixed test score standard have had to lower the bar on student quality in order to admit enough domestic students to fill the need—and then wind up terminating those students after one or two years because they are academically uncompetitive.