Revisiting iBT issue

• At its 13 April 2009 meeting the Graduate Council passed a policy change that designated the iBT speaking section score as replacing the SPEAK test score in evaluating the English language proficiency of international students seeking teaching assistantships at OSU. A minimum iBT speaking score of 26 (out of 30) was adopted as replacing the SPEAK test score of 50. Implementation of this policy was set by Dean Francis as Winter 2010.

• The Chemistry Department realized that the proposed implementation of this policy which involved denying GTA appointments to students with iBT scores of less than 26 would devastate its GTA pool leading ultimately to a loss of 75% of the GTAs. The Chemistry Department petitioned the Graduate Council for relief from this policy.

• At its 6 November meeting the Graduate Council took up this issue and ultimately passed a policy statement that addressed this issue from the point of view of the Chemistry GTAs. That policy stated:

Current policy statement regarding iBT and Chemistry’s Graduate Teaching Assistants

1. The Grad School will continue to review applications for admission from international students using their stated criteria for TOEFL, iBT and IELTS scores.

2. When a prospective Chemistry student is not allowed to hold an assistantship on the basis of their iBT speaking score, the Chemistry department will be notified and given an opportunity to appeal the decision. This appeal right will be restricted to cases where the student has an iBT speaking score more than 18. (The student will not be notified of the occurrence of the appeal until the appeal is fully resolved.)

3. If the Chemistry department wishes to offer a student with a non-passing iBT speaking score an assistantship, the department must:
   a. Guarantee that the new graduate student will be enrolled in **IEPA 098NC. COMMUNICATION FOR IGTAs (3)** upon arrival (with the department paying the cost of this training). The course **IEPA 098NC. COMMUNICATION FOR IGTAs (3)** must be offered at a time when GTAs can attend without interfering with their class and teaching schedules.
   b. If at all possible, assign the graduate student chores (such as paper grading, reagent preparation, etc.) that do not require personal contact with undergraduate students.
   c. If (b) above is not possible, pair the graduate student with language problems with another TA who is a native speaker of English in the laboratory or classroom environment.

The Chemistry department will maintain documentation for each student of how conditions (a), (b), and (c) were met.
If the Chemistry department meets these conditions, the student will be admitted with support.

4. The Chemistry Department will continue its rigorous monitoring of the quality of GTA performance using student evaluations and the evaluations of the supervising professors. (Chemistry does insist upon quality performance of its GTAs.) The Chemistry Department will document for each student the results of their evaluation of the student’s performance as a GTA. The Chemistry Department will report the results of this evaluation yearly to the Graduate Council.

This policy, as worded, applied only to the Chemistry Department and its GTAs. It has been pointed out that a more general wording is needed for this policy. The Graduate School has provided the following new policy statement that avoids this difficulty.

**Proposed New Policy statement regarding iBT and Chemistry’s Graduate Teaching Assistants**

1. The Graduate School will continue to review applications for admission from international students using their stated criteria for TOEFL, iBT and IELTS scores.

2. When a prospective student is not allowed to hold an assistantship on the basis of their IBT speaking score, the department will be notified and given an opportunity to appeal the decision. This appeal right will be restricted to cases where the student has an iBT speaking score $\geq 18$. (The student will not be notified of the occurrence of the appeal until the appeal is fully resolved.)

3. If the department wishes to offer a student with a non-passing (18-25) iBT speaking score an assistantship, the department must:
   (a) Guarantee that the new graduate student will be enrolled in **IEPA 098NC COMMUNICATION FOR IGTAs (3)** upon arrival (with the department paying the cost of this training). The scheduling of **IEPA 098NC** will be coordinated with the departments so that students can attend the course and conduct teaching assistantship duties.
   (b) If at all possible, assign the graduate student chores (such as paper grading, reagent preparation, etc.) that do not require personal contact with undergraduate students.
   (c) If (b) above is not possible, pair the graduate student with language problems with another TA who is a native speaker of English in the laboratory or classroom environment.

   The department will maintain documentation for each student of how conditions (a), (b), and (c) were met.

   **If the department meets these conditions, the student may be admitted with support.**

4. The department will monitor the quality of GTA performance using student evaluations and the evaluations of the supervising professors. The department will document for each student the results of their evaluation of the student’s performance as a GTA.
The Graduate Council is asked to approve this technical revision of the previous policy.

- Subsequently the Graduate School posted on its website a new Graduate School policy regarding these issues. It is as follows:

  - English Language Testing and Training Policy for International GTAs
  - All international GTAs (IGTAs) whose native language is not English are required to take the Internet Based TOEFL (iBT) test before serving as graduate teaching assistants. Test scores for incoming students can be reviewed using the Banner student information system or confirmed by contacting the Graduate School staff.

  - Departments are advised to include in their offers of graduate teaching assistantships the specification that students receiving iBT speaking sub scores of less than 26 will be required to undertake further English language training and that the cost of such training may be the responsibility of the student.

  - IGTAs with iBT speaking sub scores of 26 or above should have no significant language difficulties. It is anticipated that IGTAs with scores in this category should be fully competent to complete assignments requiring significant student-teacher interaction.

  - For IGTAs scoring below 26, departments should use the Guidelines for the Assignment of International GTAs to make assignments commensurate with the level of English language proficiency and should monitor and ensure effectiveness and competence in the IGTA's fulfillment of assignment.

  - IGTAs scoring below 26 will be required to undertake further English language training, the level of which will be determined by the original score received. Departments are expected to pay for the course designed specifically for IGTAs (IEPA 098NC, Communication for IGTAs). This three-credit course will be offered only fall term and is tentatively scheduled late on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. Please check the OSU course catalog for confirmation of the time and date: http://catalog.oregonstate.edu/CourseDetail.aspx?subjectcode=IEPA&course number=098NC.

  - The specific course work required will depend upon INTO-OSU's course recommendation and course availability during the term in which further training is needed. IGTAs enrolling in INTO-OSU courses other than the IGTA course should notify their INTO-OSU instructors that they are potential GTAs and will need to be evaluated as such. They should also request that the instructor fill out the GTA evaluation form at the end of the term.

  - IGTAs will be evaluated by the INTO-OSU staff at the end of the term in which further language training has been undertaken. INTO-OSU will make a recommendation as to whether English language proficiency is sufficient, limited, or that further training is necessary. INTO-OSU will take into consideration the training policy and Guidelines for the Assignment of International GTAs when making a recommendation.

  - Students who perceive unsatisfactory performance by graduate teaching assistants due to inadequate language proficiency should present their complaints to the department chair/head employing the GTA. A complaint can also be given to the student's advisor, head advisor, or academic dean of the college offering the course, who in turn will forward it to the appropriate department chair/head. The performance of the GTA will be investigated by
the department chair/head and, if a problem is found to exist, appropriate action will be taken. The department chair/head will report complaints and actions taken to the academic dean and the graduate dean.

- Departments employing IGTAs shall maintain on file records of assignments and any remedial action taken should there be questions or complaints about IGTA performance.
- **Guidelines for the Assignment of International GTAs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>iBT Speaking Sub Score</th>
<th>Assignment Considerations</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26 and above</td>
<td>No significant language difficulty is anticipated. A score of 26 has characteristics of near-native speaking ability. Language proficiency usually includes demonstrated audience awareness, cohesive and well developed responses, limited deficiencies in fluency, vocabulary, grammar or pronunciation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>25 - 23</td>
<td>Assignment should be made recognizing that the IGTA has language limitations. The graduate teaching assistant must attend the IGTA course. INTO-OSU may recommend alternate courses when the IGTA course is not offered. Departments should provide close ongoing monitoring of progress in the IGTA assignment and in language skills development. Characteristics in this range may include strong but understandable accent, labored and deliberate pronunciation, possible difficulty with free-response items, halting speech patterns or vocabulary limitations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>22 - 18</td>
<td>Teaching assistant is expected to undertake further English language training, the level of which will be determined by INTO-OSU recommendation and course availability during the term in which further training is required. In the absence of alternate courses, INTO-OSU may recommend the IGTA course be taken. Only assignments involving minimal student-teacher interaction should be made if possible. Departments should provide close ongoing monitoring of progress in language skills development.</td>
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- **There are some possible inconsistencies between the details of the Grad School website policy and that passed by the Graduate Council on 6 November. These are indicated by a yellow highlight above. These should be resolved before the new policy is established. They are:** (a) who pays for the GTA training (b) the use of GTAs with scores in the 18-22 category. (c) language in which the Graduate School suggests policies about undergraduate education.