

Language Proficiency Requirements for Teaching Assistants

Policy Statement

High standards of English language proficiency are required for nonnative English-English-speaking graduate and undergraduate students who are appointed to teaching assistant (TA) positions.

All nonnative English-English-speaking graduate and undergraduate Teaching Assistants (TAs) will demonstrate proficiency in spoken English appropriate to the demands of their teaching assistantship. Appendix: English Language Proficiency Requirements provides language eligibility requirements applied to different teaching assistant responsibilities. Proficiency is assessed in one of the following ways:

1. English Language Proficiency (ELP) rating earned through coursework with the Center for Educational Innovation (CEI);
2. Speaking section of TOEFL iBT (internet-based Test of English as a Foreign Language).
- 2-3. Speaking section of IELTS (International English Language Testing System)
- 3-4. SETTA (Spoken English Test for Teaching Assistants) test (Twin Cities campus) or alternative test chosen by system-Crookston, Duluth, Morris, and Rochester campuses.

Scope

This policy governs all TA appointments (Job codes 9511, 9512, 9513, 9515, 9517, 9518, 9519, 9571, 9574, and 9575) held by nonnative English-English-speaking graduate and undergraduate students.

Exclusions

All other graduate and undergraduate assistant appointments are excluded from coverage under this policy.

Proficiency Requirements

Proficiency levels and required scores for various types and levels of TA duties are found in Appendix: English Language Proficiency Requirements.

Policy Exceptions

Departments may submit a request for exceptions to the Assistant Director of the Center for Educational Innovation for consideration and approval.

Reason for Policy

In support of ~~high-high~~ quality undergraduate education, the University requires evidence of English language proficiency of its nonnative speakers of English employed as TAs ~~evidence of English language proficiency~~. This policy also serves as a response to a request from the Minnesota Legislature, to ensure that classroom TAs for whom English is a second language are proficient in speaking, reading, and writing English, ~~from the Minnesota Legislature~~ (in their see 1985 First Special Session Laws/ Chapter 11, Section 7 subdivision b).

This requirement engenders continuing cooperation of each academic department in maintaining high standards of ~~English-English~~ language

communication skills for all nonnative speakers of English who provide instruction at the University ~~of Minnesota~~ (University).

Procedures

- *Registering for TOEFL iBT and University of Minnesota International Teaching Assistant (ITA) Test*

Forms/Instructions

There are no forms associated with this policy.

Appendices

- *English Language Proficiency Requirements*

Frequently Asked Questions

- *FAQ: Language Proficiency Requirements for Teaching Assistants*

Contacts

Subject	Contact	Phone	Email
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Definitions

CEI

Center for Educational Innovation. CEI is a division of the Office of the Vice Provost for Faculty and Academic Affairs.

Cleared

Eligible for teaching assistant duties without required enrollment in English communication coursework.

English Language Proficiency (ELP) Rating

An assessment of a nonnative teaching assistant’s spoken English proficiency and eligibility for a teaching assistant assignment.

Nonnative speaker of English

~~A person for whom the primary language in the home during childhood was not English, and who received all or most of their elementary, secondary, and undergraduate education outside the United States.~~

A multilingual person for whom the primary language in the home during childhood was not English, and who received all or most of their elementary, secondary, and undergraduate education outside the United States.

Spoken English Test for Teaching Assistants (SETTA)

A ~~15-15~~-minute assessment of a prospective nonnative teaching assistant's spoken English proficiency while teaching topics in their field.

TA

Teaching Assistant.

Test of English as a Foreign Language internet Based Test (TOEFL iBT)

The speaking sub-score of this test is used to assess a prospective nonnative teaching assistant's ability to use English to perform academic tasks.

Responsibilities

Collegiate Director of Graduate Studies or Designee

- Informs potential graduate students/teaching assistants of English Language Proficiency policy upon offer of admission to graduate program;
- Informs potential graduate students/teaching assistants of any additional departmental expectations regarding assignments of TA duties;
- Schedules incoming graduate students to meet with a CEI representative to discuss language testing and coursework options;
- Refers to ~~password-password~~-protected Web Reports for student eligibility before making TA assignments; and
- Contacts CEI with any language-related questions, complaints, or requests for exceptions.

Center for Educational Innovation

- Advises interested nonnative English-English-speaking graduate and undergraduate students about testing and course work options;
- Routinely arranges for SETTA testing and makes this information available to departments;
- Provides English communication coursework to meet the needs of prospective TAs;
- Evaluates effectiveness of programming;
- Administers proficiency tests at the end of each semester of coursework;
- Maintains records on eligibility of current and former students;
- Communicates with departments each semester; and
- Submits ELP status reports to the Human Resources Management System in a timely manner.

Nonnative English-English-Speaking Prospective Teaching Assistants

- Meets with a CEI representative to determine testing and coursework Enrolls in and completes coursework with CEI as required; and
- Registers and takes the SETTA test, if appropriate.

Responsible Administrator/Supervisor of Undergraduate TA Position

- Informs applicants for an undergraduate TA position of English Language Proficiency policy;
- Schedules nonnative English-English-speaking undergraduate TA applicant to meet with a CEI representative to discuss language testing and coursework options;
- Refers to password-password-protected Web Reports for student eligibility before making TA assignments; and
- Contacts CEI with any language-related questions, complaints, or requests for exceptions.

Related Information

- *Academic Job Codes and Titles* (Graduate Assistants section)
- Administrative Policy: *Academic Appointments with Teaching Functions*
- Registration materials and information about the SETTA test (TBD)
- Information on classroom communication coursework and other services offered by the *Center for Educational Innovation*
- Guidelines and policies related to Graduate Assistants
- Information on *Graduate Writing Course for Nonnative speakers of English*.
- Minnesota Statute (1985 First Special Session Laws/Chapter 11, Section 7, subd b)
- [International Student and Scholar Services](#)

History

Amended:

February 2012 - Definition of a Nonnative speaker of English was changed for clarification.

Amended:

June 2010 - Comprehensive Review. Policy was expanded to include undergraduate TA's. The TOEFL iBT test replaces the SPEAK test. General edits made and the procedure and appendix.

Amended:

November 2007 - Policy converted to the new University-wide format for administrative policies.

Amended:

January 2003 - Title revised to: Language Proficiency for Teaching Assistants. Updated information was added and policy was reformatted.

Amended:

August 2000 - International Student SPEAK Test

Effective:

January 2003 - Since 1983 the University of Minnesota Twin Cities Campus has offered a two-fold program of screening nonnative speakers of English to determine their eligibility for teaching and to prepare them for the classroom. In 1985 during its first special session, the Minnesota legislature drafted the following language in Chapter 11, section 7 of its Laws:

The university is requested to continue to ensure that classroom teaching assistants for whom English is a second language are proficient in speaking, reading, and writing English. The University is requested to report the actions it is taking on this matter to the legislature by January 15, 1986.

Two standard-setting Committees worked to determine the communication standards for the Twin Cities Campus. Members of one committee consisted of department chairs, directors of graduate studies, directors of undergraduate studies and TA supervisors. Members of the second committee consisted of undergraduate students from various disciplines. The recommendations from these two standard-setting committees were forwarded to a decision-making committee. This committee consisted of the Vice-Provost for Undergraduate Education, the Vice President of Human Resources, and College Deans or their representatives. After reviewing the recommendations of the standard-setting committees, the decision making committee set the score of 55 as the score necessary for clearance for TA assignment on the Twin Cities Campus.