

**Teaching Assistant English Language Proficiency Certification**  
**Temple University**  
6/1/2005

The Pennsylvania Fluency in Higher Education Act of 1990 mandates that all instructors with classroom teaching responsibilities who are not native speakers of English be certified in English prior to assuming those responsibilities. Each case of non-compliance could result in a \$10,000 penalty for each course taught by an uncertified instructor or teaching assistant. To comply with the act, universities must certify to the State annually that instructors assigned to teach each course are fluent in spoken English if the language of instruction for that course is English.

To ensure that the university is in full compliance with the law, all graduate student TAs (international, U.S., and resident aliens) who are non-native speakers of English at Temple University must be certified through the process outlined below. To ensure that the same criteria are applied to everyone, college deans and other members of the university administration will no longer certify English fluency for Teaching Assistants.

This TA English Language Proficiency Certification, effective June 2005, supplements the previous policy. The original policy was issued by President Liacouras on July 23, 1991, under the title "Policy and Procedures for Certifying New Instructional Faculty and Staff for Fluency in English." This policy does not affect the provisions of the 1991 policy dealing with faculty.

**1. Target Population**

All International Teaching Assistants (ITAs) as well as all TAs who are not native speakers of English must be tested for oral English proficiency before assuming teaching responsibilities at Temple University. Teaching responsibilities encompass *any interaction with students in an instructional context*. Examples of teaching responsibilities include (but are not limited to) holding office hours, reviewing scores or grades with students, answering questions or working with students in tutoring or support centers, lab review or supervision, leading discussions, assisting students on problem sets, commenting on studio or clinical work, and classroom instruction.

Temple University's Graduate School, Office of International Services, and Human Resources Department are cooperating with the Teaching and Learning Center to identify international graduate students who have been offered teaching positions.

**2. Certification Process**

All TAs who are not native speakers of English will be certified through the ITA Program, administered by Temple University's Teaching and Learning Center.

Oral proficiency in English will be assessed in one of two ways:

- 1) Incoming ITAs and TAs who consider English to be their native or dominant language will undergo an oral interview with the ITA Program Director, who will determine whether they should be exempt from further testing.

- 2) Non-native speakers of English, as well as speakers of English who did not successfully pass the oral interview, need to pass one of the following three tests:
- Test of Spoken English (TSE) offered by the Educational Testing Services (ETS). ETS charges a fee for the TSE.
  - The Speaking section of the new TOEFL test, TOEFL iBT.
  - SPEAK test (a modified version of the TSE) administered by Temple's ITA Program. At present, there is no fee for taking the SPEAK Test.

### **3. Passing Scores**

Effective June 2005, the following scores and restrictions apply.

SPEAK Test Score	TSE Test Score	TOEFL iBT Speaking Score	Score Category	Teaching Activities
≥50	≥55	≥28	Unrestricted Pass	ITA may assume instructional duties without restriction.
45-49	45-54	23-27	Restricted Pass	ITA may assume instructional duties for one semester, but must also be simultaneously enrolled in Ed 10 course; continuation of the assistantship is contingent upon passing Ed 10.
<45	<45	<23	Fail	ITA must complete and pass Ed 10 course prior to assuming instructional duties; ITA may assume restricted duties with no direct interactions with students, e.g. as a grader.

A passing score for the SPEAK score has been raised from 45 to 50 to ensure that Temple requirements are consistent with national standards and the standards of our peer institutions.

### **4. Required TA Training for ITAs**

In addition to passing an English fluency test, ITAs are also required to participate in TA training. ITA instructional training is into the orientation and conference. All ITAs must participate in the Teaching and Learning Center's August TA Conference. All new ITAs must also participate in the New TA Orientation. ITAs who have not participated in the conference and/or orientation will not be permitted to assume any teaching responsibilities, even if they have passed one of the tests. The orientation and conference are scheduled during the week prior to the start of Fall Semester.

### **5. Education 10**

ITAs that score below 50 on the SPEAK test, below 55 on the TSE, or 28 on the Speaking section of the TOEFL iBT must take and pass Education 10 (Ed 10). ITAs who do not pass the class, will need to repeat another semester of Ed 10. Departments are responsible for paying each TA's tuition for Ed 10.

Education 10 is a 3-credit course offered Fall and Spring Semester on Saturdays from 9:00 to 3:00 (with a 30 minute break). The course includes information about teaching in US institutions of higher education (e.g., syllabi, instructional formats, and legal issues, including sexual harassment and plagiarism). The course assignments and activities also address issues of communicating in American English, grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary.

Passing Ed 10 is contingent upon attendance, participation, homework, instructional presentations, and a final exam. The final exam for the course is the TEACH test. This test is a videotaped, panel-rated teaching simulation, which consists of a 5-minute presentation in the candidate's field of expertise and a question and answer session with panel reviewers. The students' skills are rated on a 10-point rating scale in three areas (pronunciation, overall speaking ability, and comprehension). The panels may include faculty members from representative departments, undergraduate students, and staff of the ITA Program.

The 3-credits for Ed 10 should be considered part of the ITA's total course load. Adding Education 10 credits to a full disciplinary course load will be unmanageable and will jeopardize the student's ability to pass the course.

Education 10 enrollment is capped at 12-15 students per section. Additional sections will be offered if necessary.

### **6. Testing Opportunities and Availability**

The ITA program is open throughout the year, including summer (see <http://www.temple.edu/ita>). Departments are responsible for bringing graduate students to campus with sufficient time to be tested. In August and September, SPEAK test rating may take up to two weeks. Students who are assigned teaching responsibilities in the fall can be tested until September 16<sup>th</sup>, but they cannot assume teaching responsibilities until they receive a Passing Score. In addition, they are required to enroll in Education 10 and can drop the course if they receive an Unrestricted Pass score. If they receive a Restricted Pass score, they can assume teaching responsibilities for one semester, but are required to remain in the course.

Graduate students who plan to apply for a TA position in the future should arrange to be tested early. Students who wish to be certified early, may be tested at any point in the year.

### **7. Appeal Procedures**

The SPEAK test cannot be retaken. Students who feel that their proficiency was not fairly assessed should ask a departmental representative to contact the ITA Program Director. The Director and the ITA staff will listen to the tape of the student's test and examine the rating sheets. If they feel an interview is warranted, the student will be asked to participate in an interview with the ITA Program Director. The student's score will be upheld or changed at the discretion of the Director.

If the student disagrees with both the score and the reassessment, they may appeal by requesting to take the TEACH test. The TEACH test involves a teaching simulation (presentation and a question-answer session) in front of a panel. The panel will consist of representatives from the Graduate School, the ITA program, the Teaching and Learning Center, the department in question, and the undergraduate student body.

**Appeals are scheduled only at the following times each year:**

- **Fall Semester Appeals:**           **3rd week of September**
- **Spring Semester Appeals:**       **2<sup>nd</sup> week of February**

**Recommendations**

When offering teaching assistantships to international graduate students, departments are strongly encouraged to:

- Ask students to take and pass the TSE or SPEAK test prior to being offered an assistantship
- Bring students to campus two weeks before classes begin to schedule the SPEAK test and attend TA Training;
- Provide one-semester of financial support before offering a teaching assistantship; this will provide students with the opportunity to take the SPEAK test and/or Education 10 and to learn about Temple's students and teaching culture;
- Reduce students' disciplinary course loads while they are enrolled in Education 10.
- Provide additional support for new ITAs, including faculty or peer mentoring, supervised teaching, and discussion groups.
- Inform all ITAs that they are required to participate in the TA Conference and/or New TA Orientation.