

# EVALUATION AND CERTIFICATION OF THE ENGLISH FLUENCY OF UNDERGRADUATE INSTRUCTIONAL PERSONNEL

In 1990, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania enacted legislation requiring that every member of an institution of high learning who teaches undergraduates be certified as fluent in the English language, if it is not his or her first language. In order to comply with this legislation, Penn instituted a set of requirements that are enforced through training and teaching performed by the Office of English Language Programs.

## I. Undergraduate Instructional Personnel

All persons hired on or after July 1, 1997, as members of the Standing or Associated Faculties, Academic Support Staff, graduate and professional student teaching staff, or as tutors, or for other undergraduate instructional duties (including, for example, leading laboratory or discussion sections or holding office hours), regardless of rank or title, in the Schools of Arts and Sciences, Engineering and Applied Science, Nursing, Wharton or the School of Design, the Annenberg School for Communication, and the Graduate School of Education, must be evaluated and certified as having met the University's standard of English fluency in the classroom before completion of the hiring process. In addition, all individuals who hold appointments elsewhere in the University and who are to be engaged in the teaching, tutoring, or other instruction of undergraduates must also be evaluated and certified before appointment.

Only members of the Visiting Faculty, instructional personnel whose entire undergraduate instruction (including office hours) will be conducted in a language other than English, and graduate students who have no direct instructional contact (including office hours) with undergraduates (e.g. some graders or research assistants) are exempt from this requirement.

## II. Standard of English Fluency in the Classroom

To be certified by the University of Pennsylvania as "fluent in the English language in the classroom," a speaker must always be intelligible to a non-specialist in the topic under discussion, despite an accent or occasional grammatical errors. General and field-specific vocabulary must be broad enough so that the speaker rarely has to grope for words. Listening comprehension must be sufficiently high so that misunderstandings rarely occur when responding to students' questions or answers. While teaching, the speaker should be able to use transitions to show the relationships between ideas, and to set main points apart from added details. When asked an ambiguous question, the speaker should be able to clarify the question through discussion with the student. When asked to restate a main point, the speaker should be able to paraphrase clearly. When challenged, the speaker should be able to defend his or her position effectively and appropriately.

Prospective instructional personnel, regardless of rank or title, who do not meet the above criteria shall not be certified and may not be assigned to any undergraduate instructional responsibilities.

## III. Certification Procedures

### A. Newly-Hired Faculty Members

Prospective members of the Standing or Associated Faculties, or of the Academic Support Staff, regardless of rank or title, shall be evaluated and certified by their department chairperson as to their English fluency in the classroom based on one of the methods of evaluation listed in section IV, below. The department chairperson shall certify their English fluency in the classroom to their dean, or to the dean's designee and the dean shall certify the same to the Provost. In schools having no departments, evaluation and certification shall be carried out by the dean or the dean's designee.

### B. Native English-Speaking Graduate Teaching Assistants

Prospective graduate teaching assistants whose native language is English shall be evaluated and certified by their department chairperson as to their English fluency in the classroom on the basis of one of the methods of evaluation listed in section IV, below. The department chairperson shall certify their English fluency in the classroom to their dean, or to the dean's designee and the dean shall certify the same to the Provost. (This procedure applies to all native English-speaking graduate and professional student teaching staff, including those undertaking instructional duties as tutors, leading laboratory or discussion sections, graders, or holding office hours.) In schools having no departments, evaluation and certification shall be carried out by the dean or the dean's designee.

### C. Non-native English-Speaking Graduate Teaching Assistants

Prospective graduate teaching assistants whose native language is other than English who have not taken either the Test of Spoken English (TSE) or the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview, or who score 55 or below on the TSE or below Superior on the ACTFL, shall be referred by their department chairperson to the English Language Programs (ELP) for professional evaluation of their English fluency in the classroom.

It is anticipated that most graduate students whose native language is not English shall not be sufficiently fluent in the use of English in the classroom to undertake undergraduate instructional responsibilities during their first year of graduate enrollment at Penn. Such individuals may be able to acquire fluency in English in the classroom by enrolling in the ELP's summer International Teaching Assistants Training Program, or during the academic year, by enrolling in the Graduate Division of Arts and Sciences course GAS 600 (fall semester) or the ELP's intensive English language and cultural familiarization courses, or through alternative programs appropriate to the student's needs. Graduate students placed in any of the above programs must be re-evaluated by the ELP before the Director may certify to the Provost that they are fluent in English in the classroom.

### D. All Other Undergraduate Instructional Personnel

All other undergraduate instructional personnel, regardless of rank or title, shall be evaluated and certified by their department chairperson as to their English fluency in the classroom based on one of the methods of evaluation listed in section IV, below. The department chairperson shall certify their English fluency in the classroom to their dean, or to

the dean's designee, and the dean shall certify the same to the Provost. In schools having no departments, evaluation and certification shall be carried out by the dean or the dean's designee.

## IV. Evaluation and Testing

### A. Methods of Evaluation

Department chairpersons and deans shall certify only those prospective instructional personnel whose English fluency in the classroom has been evaluated using one or more of the means of evaluation listed below and has been found to meet or exceed the standard set forth in Section II., above. The following methods of evaluation may be used as the basis for a departmental certification:

- A score above 55 on the ETS Test of Spoken English or a score of 27 or above on the Speaking Section of the ETS iBT TOEFL.
- A score of Superior on the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview
- Academic presentation and discussion (such as a colloquium, lecture, seminar, or scholarly conference presentation) evaluated by two or more members of the standing faculty and/or the English Language Programs staff.
- Extended, in-person discussion with one or more members of the standing faculty, and/or English Language Programs staff on a topic related to the candidate's research interests, teaching plans and/or experience.
- Observation and evaluation of teaching performance in the classroom by two or more members of the standing faculty and/or the English Language Programs staff.
- Videotape of classroom teaching or academic presentation evaluated by two or more members of the standing faculty and/or the English Language Programs staff.

All prospective graduate teaching assistants whose native language is other than English shall be referred by their department chairperson to the English Language Programs for professional evaluation of their English fluency in the classroom, using the SPEAK Test (Penn's institutional version of the TSE) or future replacements, the advisory ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview, or the Interactive Performance Test (IPT) administered by the English Language Programs (described in V.B., below).

### B. Referral to and Consultation with the English Language Programs

Using one of the methods listed above, department chairpersons and deans (or the dean's designee) shall either certify to the Provost that a prospective faculty member or other undergraduate instructional personnel is fluent in English in the classroom or refer them to the English Language Programs for further evaluation before they undertake any undergraduate instructional duties. It should be borne in mind that, at the discretion of the department chairperson or the deans, both native and non-native speakers of English may be referred to the English Language Programs for further evaluation before certification of their English fluency.

The department chairperson or deans may find it useful, especially where the native language of prospective faculty members or instructional personnel is other than English, to consult with the directors of the English Language Programs regarding the advisability of further evaluation or the most appropriate method of evaluation before certification of their English fluency. Prospective graduate teaching assistants with questions regarding the evaluation or certification of their

English fluency in the classroom should consult with their department or graduate group chairperson, or the English Language Programs staff, 110 Fisher-Bennett Hall, 215-898-8681.

## V. Further Evaluation and Appeals

### C. Further Evaluation by the English Language Programs

Prospective instructional personnel who are not certified under section III, above, shall be referred to the University's English Language Programs for further evaluation.

### D. Interactive Performance Test

Graduate students whose native language is not English and who receive scores on the Test of Spoken English (or Penn's SPEAK Test) of between 45 and 55 inclusive may be certified for classroom instruction by passing the Interactive Performance Test (IPT) administered by the English Language Programs. The IPT consists of a 10-minute mini-lecture with a question and answer component on a topic in the candidate's academic discipline.

### E. Evaluation and Certification as Graders with Limited Office Hours

Alternately, and upon the written referral of the graduate group chair, graduate students whose native language is not English and who receive scores on the Test of Spoken English (or Penn's SPEAK Test) of between 45 and 55 inclusive may be certified as graders with limited office hours by passing the Grader Exam administered by the English Language Programs. Graders with limited office hours are defined as graduate students who are responsible for grading exams and assignments and holding individual appointments with undergraduate students for explaining grades and answers to exam questions or assignments. Graders with limited office hours can have no responsibility for classroom teaching, tutoring, recitation, or laboratory sessions. Passing of this exam, which is tailored to one-on-one questions and answers, shall certify graduate students as sufficiently fluent in English to serve as graders with limited office hours, but does not certify them to undertake other instruction duties at a later date.

### F. Appeals of Certification Decisions

Appeals of certification decisions made by department chairpersons may be directed to the appropriate dean and appeals of certification decisions made by deans or by the Directors of English Language Programs may be directed to the Provost.

## VI. Deadlines for Certification and Reporting

In the case of appointment to the Standing or Associated Faculties, all submissions to the Provost's Staff Conference or Mini-Conference for appointments in Arts and Sciences, Engineering and Applied Science, Nursing, Wharton, Design, the Annenberg School for Communication and the Graduate School of Education, and for any faculty members in other schools who will ever teach undergraduates, shall include in the required documentation a certification by the dean stating that the candidate's fluency in the English language in the classroom has been evaluated and found to meet or exceed the University's standard of fluency. The dean's certification shall also include a brief description of the means used to evaluate such fluency and the results of such evaluation.

In all other cases, including graduate teaching assistants and academic support staff, the certification of fluency must be approved by the Provost before final approval of the appointment in the school or

department and prior to the start of the term for which the individual is first hired for undergraduate instructional duties (specifically, by September 1 for the Fall term, by January 1 for the Spring Term, and by May 1 for the Summer term).

Each dean shall report to the Provost, no later than August 1 of each year, that all faculty and other undergraduate instructional personnel (as defined in section I, above) hired since the dean's previous certification have been evaluated for English fluency in the classroom prior to their appointment and were found to meet or exceed the University's standard of fluency.

## VII. Monitoring and Reporting of Complaints

Each school shall put in place one of the following procedures for the ongoing monitoring of English fluency in the classroom of all undergraduate instructional personnel:

- A systematic program of classroom observation of both faculty and teaching assistants by faculty members or English language specialists.
- Inclusion of a question about communication with the instructor on the student course evaluations of all faculty, teaching assistants, and laboratory or recitation instructors each term. (Student evaluations may also be supplemented by peer, alumni, or other teaching evaluation mechanisms.
- Other monitoring mechanisms proposed by the dean and approved by the Provost.

In addition, each school shall ensure that all complaints regarding the English fluency of instructional personnel are reported (with the chairperson's evaluation of the complaint) to the dean and undergraduate dean, and by the dean (with a description of the resolution of the complaint) to the Provost, via the Associate Provost for Faculty Affairs in the case of faculty, and via the Vice Provost for Education in the case of graduate students.

## VIII. Review of English Fluency Standards and Procedures

These standards and procedures shall be reviewed periodically by the Provost's Council on Undergraduate Education, and in the light of Pennsylvania Department of Education regulations, when issued. It also should be noted that each school, at its option, may institute English fluency requirements more stringent than the minimum standards outlined above.

(Source: Almanac, March 18, 1997 (<http://www.upenn.edu/almanac/v43/n26/engfluen.html>); Revised: Almanac, April 21, 1998 (<http://www.upenn.edu/almanac/v44/n30/orfluent.html>))