From: Dean and Vice Provost Robin L. Garrell  
Sent: Tuesday, September 22, 2015 2:45 PM  
Subject: Revised English as a Second Language Placement Exam (ESLPE) Policy for Graduate Students

UCLA Graduate Division

To: Deans, Department Chairs  
From: Robin L. Garrell, Vice Provost for Graduate Education & Dean, Graduate Division  
Re: Revised English as a Second Language Placement Exam (ESLPE) Policy for Graduate Students

Synopsis. The Graduate Council has revised the English as a Second Language Placement Exam (ESLPE) policy for graduate students. Effective Fall 2015, incoming students who scored at least 100 on the TOEFL iBT (internet based test) or at least a 7.5 overall band score on the IELTS exam will no longer be required to take this placement exam.

Background. For many years, the UCLA ESLPE has been required of all entering UCLA graduate students who as applicants were required to take the TOEFL or IELTS exam, and who have not otherwise satisfied the ESL requirement.* The TOEFL and IELTS exams are used as part of a student’s complete application to determine whether the student meets the requirements for admission to UCLA.

The ESLPE is different. It was designed and refined by UCLA faculty to determine whether an incoming student has the language proficiency needed to succeed in his/her undergraduate or graduate program and, if not, to determine the appropriate additional English language education that will be required for that student. The ESLPE is a one-hour written test in which students are asked to write in response to a topical prompt. Two ESL experts in Writing Programs score each exam. The student’s score determines which if any ESL classes he/she must take prior to graduation from UCLA. The levels of ESL classes range from ESL 33B (lowest) to 33G (highest). Please refer to the Schedule of Classes for course descriptions.

The Graduate Division plays an administrative role in enforcing the ESLPE policy. First, Writing Programs pulls reports of graduate admissions data to determine who is required to take the ESLPE. Writing Programs then notifies the students and administers the exam, which should be taken before or during the first term in which the student is registered and enrolled. Writing Programs places holds on students’ records if they are required to take ESL courses and do not register in a timely way for them. The student’s academic department or program is expected to monitor enrollment in and satisfactory completion of the required ESL courses, which should be completed before advancement to candidacy. Students who as applicants were required to take the TOEFL or IELTS exam and who wish to hold teaching apprentice appointments at UCLA must also take and pass the Test of Oral Proficiency (TOP) exam before beginning their appointment.

Policy change and rationale. This policy change was motivated by the large number of graduate students who must take the ESLPE exam and the fact that more than 60% of those who...
have taken the exam in recent years were not required to enroll in any ESL courses. Also, many students retake the exam, hoping to avoid taking ESL courses, with little or no change in their test results. Over-testing and re-testing have placed significant burdens on our proficient students and the staff in Writing Programs.

Last spring, the faculty in Writing Programs proposed to the Graduate Council two revisions of UCLA’s policy that would bring it into alignment with best practices at our peer institutions, many of which use TOEFL and IELTS cut-off scores as the basis for waiving their placement exam requirement. There is general agreement among ESL experts that an overall TOEFL score of 100 is sufficient evidence of proficiency to justify waiving the placement exam requirement for graduate students.† Acting on the recommendation from our Writing Programs faculty, the Graduate Council approved the following changes in UCLA’s ESLPE policy for graduate students, effective Fall 2015.

1. **International graduate students who have scored 100 or above on the TOEFL iBT exam, or who received an overall band score of 7.5 or above (equivalent to >102 on the TOEFL) should not be required to take the ESLPE.**

2. **International graduate students will not be allowed to retake the exam.**

Looking ahead: we are conducting research that would provide guidance to programs on how they might utilize of TOEFL and IELTS sub-score data in making their admissions decisions and in advising new graduate students. We look forward to engaging your faculty and staff in those discussions.

*The Graduate Council has waived this requirement for students in modular programs, such as GEMBA, and the M.S. Engineering online degree programs.

†The maximum total TOEFL score is 120, with 30 points each for reading, listening, speaking and writing. In calendar year 2013, an overall score of 100 corresponded to the 82nd percentile among all test takers, the 79th percentile for graduate level students in non-business programs, and the 78th percentile for graduate-level students in business programs.