Procedure to Request a Waiver for English Language Competency

October 2011 (revised October 20 2015)

The English competency tests (TOEFL, IELTS, PTE A, etc.) are designed to give graduate program admissions committees some information to judge potential for success. A reasonable level of English competency (reading, listening, speaking, and writing) are important skills for student success in the nationally-competitive MSU graduate education environment. It is our collective responsibility to ensure, as best we can, the potential for success, by using these standard test scores, which are backed up with considerable research on reliability, in the admissions process.

The policy of requiring English language test scores, and the minimum University scores for each kind of test (TOEFL, IELTS, PTE A, etc.) acceptable to MSU are established by the University Committee on Graduate Studies. The policy and scores are in the Academic Programs catalog: http://www.reg.msu.edu/AcademicPrograms/Text.asp?Section=111#s335. Many programs establish score minimums higher than the MSU standard. The MSU English Language Center provides the necessary expertise for interpretation of the scores and is the Grad School’s partner for this activity.

There is a process for automatic waivers and for non-automatic waivers of the requirement of test scores for applicants “whose first language is not English”.

AUTOMATIC waivers by the Office of Admissions:

• Bachelor’s degree earned in the U.S. (or other English-speaking country). If a copy of the (old) English language competency scores is available, please send to Admissions. The BA or BS program should be a regular 4-year degree the majority of credits earned in the U.S. (or other English-speaking country), not 100% online, not an “experiential” degree that is based on credit for life experiences and/or not earned at a branch campus in a non-English-speaking country.

• Bachelor’s degree earned at MSU, the majority of credits earned while on our campus.

• Master’s degree earned at an AAU institution (see http://www.aau.edu/about/article.aspx?id=5476) on a U.S. campus. Helpful if English language competency scores are included (even if old) for the student’s admission into the master’s program

NON-AUTOMATIC waivers process:

PRIOR to submitting an RAF, please request the waiver and wait for a response.

1) A letter of request (can be an email) from Department Chair or School/Program Director justifying why the English competency tests score should be waived.

By way of example, reasonable justifications might include (but not limited to) one or more of these:

• Full-time work experience in the U.S. for 2+ years (in an English-speaking environment)
• Letter of support or comment from the MSU English Language Center (ELC)
• Non-AAU institution earned Master’s degree earned in the U.S. or other English-speaking country.
• Admission of a sponsored student who is funded to study English prior to academic coursework and/or who will take an English competency exam once s/he arrives on campus. These students are provisionally admitted, but still need a score prior or a waiver.
• International applicants for 100% ONLINE graduate programs.
2) Letter (email) from the Chair or Director should have the additional approval (i.e. signature or email sign-off) from the collegiate (lead) Graduate Associate Dean.

3) Letter (email) should then be sent to the Dean of the Graduate School, Graduate School, Chittenden Hall; 466 W. Circle Dr.; East Lansing MI 48824 OR approvals@grd.msu.edu

The Graduate School will make a decision after reviewing the material (and/or consulting with the ELC).
If approved, the Graduate School will send the request and approval (for regular admission) to Admissions.
If approved for provisional admission, the department, college and Admissions will be notified.
If not approved, a response will be sent to the requesting unit with a copy to the appropriate college dean’s office.

DEPARTMENTS ARE EXPECTED TO MONITOR STUDENT PROGRESS CAREFULLY IF THEY RECEIVE A WAIVER FOR THE REQUIREMENT OF A PRE-ADMISSION ENGLISH LANGUAGE COMPETENCY SCORE!
We have a collective responsibility to help students succeed.