

UNL Graduate Council Agenda
November 4, 2021
Location: Zoom
2:30 p.m.

Present: Andrew Donesky, Geoffrey Friesen, Laurie Lee, Xu Li, Eric Rodene, Kara Viesca, Brenda Wristen; Conducted by Dean Debra Hope. Guest: Alisha Hanshaw.

Approval of Minutes from October 7, 2021

Motion to approve the minutes from October 7, 2021. Motion passed.

English Language Requirements Discussion

Alisha Hanshaw, Assistant Dean of Graduate Enrollment, reviewed the prior discussion and current requirements for English language proficiency.

Current Policy: Admitted non-native English speaking students who have not attended a US institution or foreign institution whose mode of delivery is English must prove English proficiency by testing (TOEFL, IELTS, DuoLingo exams with equivalent scores). DuoLingo comes with a significantly reduced fee compared to the other two. They must take the initial test prior to arrival. Then upon arrival they take the UNL required ELT. Based on that score, they may need to take ENGL 887 with the data entered into PeopleSoft. Chris Dinsmore works with the PIESL program that administers the ELT.

Prior discussion: The ELT is no longer addressing the need of either students or programs. Among the Big 10, all institutions have an English requirement. UNL has the lowest threshold.

Additional discussion today:

The purpose of the discussion today is to determine what next steps might be and how the decision would be made. The University system does not have a policy regarding English proficiency. The decision lives with the UNL Graduate Council.

A new policy must define what qualifies as “proficient” and who and how that determination is made without bias. In addition, it will be important to determine whether there are other needs students may have post-admission regarding speaking and writing English.

The following topics were discussed:

- The current ELT test is not helpful for students or programs. The timing of the test is a burden to students. Their schedule may already be set by time they arrive which may make them unable to take ENGL 887 in their first semester.
- We do not want to disadvantage the students who struggle with English, recognizing students may need continued support. There are discipline differences in the level and type of proficiency that is needed (writing vs speaking). For those students who wish to remain in the US or an English-speaking country, they must be prepared for their future job search.
- Interviews are used in some programs as part of the admission process. Some faculty use those interviews to consider English proficiency, but this process is not standardized and is subject to bias if not handled carefully.
- Options for consideration for the Graduate Council are:

- to establish a minimum test score cutoff and allow colleges to set their own higher cutoff as a more flexible standard may better meet the needs of programs.
- eliminate a minimum requirement and leave it to colleges to determine. There was concern this would be difficult to monitor over time with changes in leadership.
- It would be helpful to further define the goals of an English proficiency requirement. It was noted that we do not want to disadvantage undergraduate students in classrooms taught by non-native speakers. This is tied in with ITA and the policy that states Graduate Studies will inform programs if their students are approved to teach.
- TOEFL score is one of the few quantitative scores we can rely on.

Summary for future discussion:

1. Eliminate the ELT or the review the minimums for ENGL 887?
2. What resources do we have in place to support students whose native language is not English?
3. What support needed post admission?

Dr. Viesca and Dr. Hanshaw will work with Chris Dunsmore to review the data to bring back to the Graduate Council. Graduate Council members agreed to review policies at other institutions within their own discipline lens for their requirements/practices.

Discussion of Course Proposals

There was a template/policy guidance developed by Luz Sotelo, Dr. Carr and Dr. Viesca to assist with review of syllabi/courses. The Graduate Studies office will look for the template and distribute it to members of the Graduate Council. This will assist with consensus of the scope for review.

Graduate Student Assembly Report

Eric Rodene summarized the last Assembly meeting. Andrew Donesky stated that GSA leaders are hoping to work with Graduate Studies more closely.

Committees will develop specific goals, beyond the major concern about stipend levels. Committees and primary foci include the following:

Academic Affairs – *Minimum Stipend level*, Ombuds/conflict resolution process (work with LJ McElravy)

Communication – organize/develop files, update website

Diversity & Inclusion – Title IX issues, *Disability Access*

Graduate Travel Awards Program: Travel awards are available (they need faculty reviewers)

Professional Development – funds for events within graduate programs for events, etc. (working with Lisa Rohde)

Quality of Life – Long and short term mental health needs and services at Counseling and Psychological Services (work with Dr. Bellows), health insurance, *parking*

VP of Finance – Fees

Announcements

Dean Hope reported that there was a meeting today to address concerns about delayed payments for NSF fellows. If Council members hear additional concerns, please let Dean Hope know.

Dean Hope reported that she is monitoring reports from the COVID Task Force to ensure that any policies for the spring meet the needs of graduate students.

Motion to adjourn. Motion passed.

Adjourned 3:51 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Eva Bachman, Ph.D.