Graduate Council Minutes   Graduate Council

12-5-2002

Graduate Council Minutes - December 5, 2002

Graduate Council

University of Tennessee

Members Present

Robert Auge, Stephen Blackwell, Sherry Cable, Edward Caudill, Kathleen Davis, Wayne Davis, Greer Fox, Paul Frymier, Nan Gaylord, Thomas George, Carol Harden, George Hoemann, Roxanne Hovland, Majid Keyhani, Sam Morton, Naima Moustaid Moussa, Stefanie Ohnesorg, Mary Papke, Linda Phillips, Mary Rogge, Gerald Schroedl, Otto Schwarz, Marlys Staudt, Thomas Turner, Gretchen Whitney, Handel Wright.

The Graduate Council of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville was called to order
at 3:00 p.m., Thursday, December 5, 2002 in the Board Room, 8th Floor Andy Holt Tower,
by Dr. Majid Keyhani, Chair.

1. Minutes of the Preceding Meeting

    The minutes of the October 17, 2002 meeting were approved as distributed.

2. Committee Reports

    - Credentials

      Dr. Kathleen Davis, Chair, presented the report from the Credentials Committee.
      Those faculty members approved to direct doctoral dissertation research are as
      follows:

Faculty Member	Academic Department	Approval Period
Choo, Hahn	Materials Sci. & Engin.	Until tenure decision
George, Easo P.	Materials Sci. & Engin.	Until tenure decision
Hu, Bin	Materials Sci. & Engin.	Until tenure decision
Jones, Brynn H.	Genome Sci. & Tech.	5 years
Kline, Diane	Health, Safety & Exer.	Until tenure decision
Rawn, Claudia	Materials Sci. & Engin.	Until tenure decision
Stalder, Kenneth	Animal Science	Until tenure decision
Larimer, Frank	Genome Sci. & Tech.	5 years

      Graduate Council approved the report.

    - Graduate Deans Group

      Dr. Edward Caudill (Chair) reviewed the items discussed in the November 21, 2002
      meeting of the Graduate Deans Group: The proposal for "Improving the English of

International Students at UT;" the procedures related to proficiency exams, with information provided by Dr. David Dupper, College of Social Work; and the status of the Admissions Reporting Database Project.

- Graduate Student Association

  Mr. Sam Morton (GSA President) presented an update of Graduate Student Association activities. He presented information on the upcoming 11th annual Love Your Libraries Fun Run.

3. Other Business

Dr. Keyhani presented the campus group (Dr. Jim Gehlhar, Director of the Center for International Education, Dr. Jeff Mellor, Professor of Modern Foreign Languages and Literatures and administrator of the SPEAK Test on campus, Mr. Jim Hamrick, Director of the English Language Institute, and Mr. Dan Valentine, Speech Pathologist from the Speech and Hearing Center) who developed the attached report, "Improving the English of International Students at UT: Report and Recommendations." A recommendation for a pilot project for Spring 2003 will be made to the Dean of Graduate Studies.

A motion was made by Dr. Edward Caudill and seconded by Dr. Gretchen Whitney to express Graduate Council endorsement of the pilot project. The Graduate Council voted to approve the endorsement.

4. Announcements

No announcements were made.

The meeting adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kay Reed, Secretary to the Graduate Council


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NEXT GRADUATE COUNCIL MEETING
Thursday, January 23, 2003
3:00 p.m.
8th Floor Board Room, Andy Holt Tower
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Improving the English of International Students at UT: Report and Recommendations

The current curriculum offers only one course to international graduate students wishing to improve their written and spoken English at the University of Tennessee. Beyond that, the support system for these students is degraded and fragmented. We propose re-establishing a respectable, integrated system of help with relatively modest expenditures and adjustments in current practice and offer a proposal for a pilot program immediately implementing central aspects of this system.

Currently Available Resources

Within the curriculum, there is only one course targeted at helping international graduate students strengthen their command of English, English 121, which is focused on developing writing and reading skills commensurate with curricular demands placed on them as students. Formal classes in English language skills are available at the English Language Institute, but various institutional and financial barriers have discouraged referring students to ELI for additional language work.

On the extracurricular level, there is currently some help offered in the Hearing and Speech Center administered by Audiology and Speech Pathology. There is also some help for working on specific writing projects in the Writing Center administered by English, and there are very limited and dated materials in the Language Resources Center administered by Modern Foreign Languages and Literatures. The coordinator of the SPEAK Testing Program counsels individuals on improving their English largely by utilizing informal opportunities.

The Affected Population and their Skills

About 970 international students are matriculated at UT, of whom about 70% are graduate students. This report focuses on the needs of graduate teaching assistants who represent a larger proportion of the population and who with appropriate English proficiency can serve as teachers.

Entrance Requirements: Listening Comprehension and Reading

The Graduate School requires a TOEFL score of 550 (paper based) or 213 (computer based) for graduate students entering the university. Some departments require a higher score. Undergraduate students must present a TOEFL score of 523 (paper based) or 193 (computer based) to enter the university. The TOEFL Test focuses on the skills of listening comprehension, grammatical awareness, and reading comprehension.

Most students with TOEFL scores also take the Test of Written English (TWE). Very few incoming students take the Test of Spoken English (TSE).

Speaking   There is no general assessment made of spoken language skills for undergraduates. Graduate students appointed to a teaching assistantship must take the SPEAK Test (administered on campus at no charge to departments or students) or present the Test of Spoken English (TSE) (administered at testing centres established by ETS and costing approx. $125 per student).

Unconditional approval (≥ 50): Students who achieve a score of 50 or above may be assigned (at the department's option) to any classroom instructional role without further condition.

Conditional (probationary) approval (45): Students with a score of 45 may be assigned (at the department's option) to any classroom instructional role with the following further conditions: (1) the student meets with the SPEAK Test coordinator to confer about his/her strengths and weaknesses and about suggested remedies, (2) the student's instruction be observed jointly by a member of the department and by a person outside the department. Jointly, the observers use this empirical observation to decide:
    (a) if the TA may continue to teach without further conditions,
    (b) if further observation is warranted,
    (c) if the TA should be assigned to other duties.

Limited Assistance (approval for one on one contact) (40): Students with a score of 40 are approved for duties involving one on one instructional contact, e.g. tutoring, assistance at the laboratory bench, etc.

Not Approved for Instructional Contact (<40): Students with a score below 40 must improve their spoken English before assuming duties at higher levels discussed above.

There continues to be a significant rise in the numbers of students taking the SPEAK Test. Score distributions for recent years are as follows:

Fall 2002			Academic Year 01-02			Academic Year 00-01	
SPEAK Score Level	**Percentage of Students Achieving This Score**		**SPEAK Score Level**	**Percentage of Students Achieving This Score**		**SPEAK Score Level**	**Percentage of Students Achieving This Score**
60	2%		60	1%		60	2%
55	4%		55	9%		55	11%
50	16%		50	13%		50	16%
45	29%		45	30%		45	28%
40	26%		40	26%		40	26%
<40	23%		<40	17%		<40	16%
Fall 2002	N=112		Year 01-02	N=149		Year 00-01	N=129

Writing   Graduate entrants normally take the English Placement Examination (EPE) administered by the English Department. This test emphasizes reading, writing and grammar-application skills. A recent bachelor's degree from an accredited US institution typically exempts entrants from the obligation to take the EPE or to enroll in English courses. Depending on their

scores, graduate students are (a) exempted from further work in English at UT, (b) placed into English 121, or (c) referred to the English Language Institute for further proficiency building. This third option has not been used much, partially because of structural impediments discussed below.

Approximately 175 EPE tests were given in Fall 2002 and the distribution of assignments was as follows:

Fall 2002

EPE Score Level	Raw Number	Percentage of Students Achieving This Score
Exempt	65	38%
131 (UG)	21 (13 ISEP)	12%
121 (Grad)	66	38%
121 (UG)	21	12%
ELI	0	0%
Fall 2002		N=173

Spring 2002

EPE Score Level	Raw Number	Percentage of Students Achieving This Score
Exempt	10	21%
131 (UG)	7	15%
121 (Grad)	17	35%
121 (UG)	10	21%
ELI	4	8%
Spring 2002		N=48

Fall 2001

EPE Score Level	Raw Number	Percentage of Students Achieving This Score
Exempt	99	46%
131 (UG)	19	9%
121 (Grad)	58	27%
121 (UG)	38	18%
ELI	3	1%
Fall 2001		N=217

Spring 2001

EPE Score Level	Raw Number	Percentage of Students Achieving This Score
Exempt	13	43%
131 (UG)	5 (1 ISEP)	17%
121 (Grad)	12	40%
121 (UG)	0	0%
ELI	0	0%
Spring 2001		N=30

Fall 2000

EPE Score Level	Raw Number	Percentage of Students Achieving This Score
Exempt	100	49%
131 (UG)	23	11%
121 (Grad)	67	33%
121 (UG)	16	8%
ELI	0	0%
Fall 2000		N=206

Spring 2000

EPE Score Level	Raw Number	Percentage of Students Achieving This Score
Exempt	8	25%
131 (UG)	3	9%
121 (Grad)	21	66%
121 (UG)	0	0%
ELI	0	0%
Spring 2000		N=32

As a rule, four sections of English 121 are offered in the Fall and one is offered in the Spring. One section of 131 (the parallel course to English 101, but for non-native undergraduates) is offered in the Fall and one section is offered in the Spring. Enrollment in 121 is capped at 17, and enrollment in 131 is capped at 21. Unlike graduate students, undergraduates in 131 may represent a highly diverse population, ranging from permanent resident immigrants with experience in American high schools to freshly arrived international students intent upon returning to their country after completing their education.

Structural Impediments to Coordination of Improvement of English Skills

Impediments: There are several organizational or structural impediments that hinder prospective international teaching assistants (ITAs) from taking full advantage of classes and other resources offered at UT. These organizational impediments can be placed into four broad areas:

1) Social/Cultural: Many students believe that time invested in improving their English language skills is not productive, particularly in comparison to time that could be spent in their departmental activities, including departmental courses. In some cases students who receive recommendations for continued English instruction feel that they will inevitably fall behind their academic cohort. In almost all cases, new international graduates experience a bewildering array of new procedures, routines, and responsibilities. Those who arrive on campus not anticipating that they will need to improve their language skills are likely to be discouraged by English requirements.

2) Academic: Students who invest time in English language learning may not be able to enroll in courses required for their degree program, and they (and often their advisors) are reluctant to delay enrolment in prerequisite classes or infrequently-taught classes.

3) Legal: Most ITAs enter the U.S. on student visas, which require students to enroll on a full-time basis. The INS allows some latitude in the full-time requirement for students in their first semester. Some graduate students, including some whose EPE scores exempt them from English 121, would be well-served by reducing their credit load and enrolling in non-credit ELI courses, or by seeking other language support. Some students choose not to reduce their course loads due to their, or their advisors', misunderstanding of the INS requirements or fear of the severe consequences of a misstep.

4) Financial: For ITAs, tuition waivers do not apply to non-credit ELI courses. Even students who would like to avail themselves of ELI offerings, but who arrive at UT expecting to pay no tuition find paying extra for ELI courses burdensome.

Recommendations: The above impediments have various sources and affect individual students in different ways. Nevertheless, the University should do everything possible to eliminate impediments that discourage students from taking advantage of opportunities to improve their English skills. The following recommendations, taken as a whole, would help create a perception that UT wants ITAs to improve their language skills so that they can take full advantage of a wide range of academic and professional opportunities:

1) Create an institutional expectation that it is normal for ITAs who are non-native speakers of English to have to invest some time, early in their programs, in improving their English and teaching skills. Information regarding this expectation should be included in promotional literature,

application materials, web sites, and departmental program descriptions. This expectation should be shared with students, administrators, graduate program directors, and others.

2) Graduate programs should account for the needs of ITAs when creating course schedules. This may require offering courses more frequently, or adjusting course sequences.

3) Language support classes, labs, and other learning experiences for non-native speakers of English should be scheduled frequently, and at times which will make them accessible to most graduate students.

4) All advisors should be informed that INS allows for some latitude in the full-time study requirement for international students in their first semester of study.

5) Allow tuition waivers to be applied to courses offered by ELI.

Need for Funding of University-Wide (non-Curricular) Resources

The SPEAK Test determines the intelligibility and scope of the speech of prospective ITAs. In the past, those who had pronunciation difficulties were referred to the (now defunct) undergraduate pronunciation course in Audiology and Speech Pathology. Others were referred to the Speech Center administered by Audiology and Speech Pathology. Changes in the licensure requirements for speech pathologists have reduced the number of clinical hours graduate student trainees can spend in working with non-native speakers of English. This has reduced the capacity of the Hearing and Speech Center to address the needs of international students referred to them, while demand for service has risen. Though the Hearing and Speech Center has continued to provide informal classes for improvement of English, the demand on clinical time outstrips resources. Increased funding of clinicians (or clinicians in training) in the Speech Clinic, especially those with interest and expertise in the special problems of non-native speakers of English, would help meet demand in this area. It seems that evening and weekend hours might be attractive to international students and represent times when these facilities are not now in use.

The Writing Center exists to help any students needing assistance in improving their writing skills. Students may avail themselves of these services directly, be referred by a faculty member, or be required by a faculty member to improve their English skills before being issued a grade of record. In practice, a number of international students emerging from English 121 continue to come to the Writing Center during the course of their studies. Informal inquiries indicate that the number of staff with special interest and expertise in the problems of non-native speakers is not adequate for current demand. Here, too, augmentation of the staff would improve our service to this target population.

The Language Resource Center awaits significant upgrading from a tape lab to a computer based facility. The current lab is used for SPEAK Testing. Because of its age, replacement parts are no longer manufactured and used parts have been scavenged from other institutions retiring

similar installations. Once a computer based lab has been installed, a new testing procedure will have to be devised because ETS materials currently assume a tape based lab.

There are some rather dated ESL language materials on the shelves of the Language Resource Center (LRC), but no group of materials for English has been systematically collected and maintained. LRC staff has been reduced by two thirds in recent years. To achieve its potential for delivering existing instructional materials in ESL, a staff position with special expertise in this area is needed, and a collection of materials (and links to Internet resources) should be maintained.

Since the restructuring of the Learning Research Center in the mid 1990s, there has been a loss of a significant teaching support resource to which ITAs, as well as their American counterparts, can be referred for principally pedagogical issues.

Longer Range Development of Curricular Resources

The Committee has identified the following groups of international students whose needs can be met through the curriculum. In shaping these recommendations, we worked from the following groupings:

	Poor/Group A	Mediocre/Group B	Borderline/Group C
Speaking/ Listening Skills	SPEAK 30	SPEAK 40	SPEAK 45

A further special population can be identified that is not easily fit into the above matrix: students whose command of English syntax, grammar and vocabulary may be quite advanced, but whose pronunciation, intonation, speech rapidity and melody (or some combination of these) are distracting. We call this *Speaking Group D*.

	Poor/Group A	Mediocre/Group B	Borderline/Group C
Writing/ Reading Skills	no pass, referral to ELI	conditional for 121	eligible for 121

It should be noted that these skill groupings are **not** coordinated. A student whose oral level is Group A may be in Group C in written work, and vice versa. Assignments to skill groups need to be made independently.

Group A Speaking/Listening Provided the institutional impediments can be removed, the English Language Institute has the staff, materials, and expertise to develop courses for students at this level, most of whom are prospective TAs. We envision classes of 6 contact hours per week, no homework, intensive speaking and listening practice, and other skill-building activities. Class size would be limited to 16. Attendance mandatory.

Groups B and C Speaking/Listening We propose the institution of a new course in the English curriculum (tentatively: English 125: Oral Communication for Academic Purposes) to offer higher

level speaking practice, including mock teaching and question/answer sessions, inter-cultural training in classroom routines and interactions, and intensive conversation practice. Class size: limited to 16. Attendance mandatory. 5 contact hours per week, plus mandatory additional 1 hour of work in Language Resource Center. S/NC grading. We believe that appropriate staffing could be found for such a course if funding materializes.

Group D Speaking We propose the reintroduction of a course along the lines of the former course Audiology and Speech Pathology 126, focusing specifically on accent correction, adjustment of speech rhythm, speed, and even voice quality. We envision that this course would make intensive use of the facilities and expertise in Audiology and Speech Pathology and be open also to students in the general student body as well as those identified through testing.

Group A Writing Provided the institutional impediments can be removed, the English Language Institute already has the courses in place for students at this level. The highest level of ELI courses in this area (108) seems to articulate well with English 121, but removal of structural impediments could open this opportunity to additional students.

Groups B and C Writing English 121 is designed for this target population. It appears that not every eligible student for 121 currently enrolls in it in the first semester of eligibility. This results from the interplay of several factors: (1) number of sections offered and times at which they are offered, (2) resistance from students (and/or supervising faculty and departments) to acknowledge that the English writing requirement is co-equal with departmental duties, assignments, or class demands in the area of study. In the Fall 2001, Spring 2002 and Fall 2002 semesters, the problem of students not taking the class in the first semester has been largely eliminated by a streamlining of the process of adding new sections to meet the need.

It is possible that another English course, tentatively at the 400 or 500 level, could be offered in the future to build on and/or maintain skills developed in 121, or to provide support to international graduate students writing theses and dissertations.

Cost

We estimate the per section internal cost of any of these proposed curricular offerings to be $4000 per 3 hour unit. As six-hour units, both the ELI courses and English 125 would be $8000

Assignment to these Curricular Offerings

We can use the current testing regimen (SPEAK Test and English Placement Exam) for placement into these offerings. Enrollment in the courses focusing on improvement of speaking skills would be preferentially granted to students who have failed to make a satisfactory score on the SPEAK Test and then to other students as space permits.

Students holding a teaching assistantship but who cannot perform teaching duties because of their SPEAK score could be assigned to these courses *in lieu of the time they would have required to spend if they had been teaching.*

<u>If such a procedure is implemented, it is in our view essential that assignment to these English courses not be viewed as an ***add-on*** to current duties, but as a genuine ***exchange*** of English instruction for other duties.</u>

Expected Outcomes and Overall Costs

Language learning is dependent on a number of factors, only some of which are under our control as we make these proposals. Psychological motivation and language aptitude are two critical factors which no curriculum or course offering can materially change. Our proposals stress modest class size and gradation by levels of achievement and similarity of needs, which seem to us to promise greatest success. We do not and cannot promise that one semester of language work will be a "magic pill" to move students from one given score to another, but without such offerings, improvement is certain to be much more haphazard and spotty. This is our current experience at UT.

On the assumption that every one of the students scoring below 50 on the SPEAK Test availed themselves of an appropriate class, we would have about 6 additional classes this semester, for an approximate internal cost of $72,000. Cost of the augmentations of the three identified non-curricular resources, Hearing and Speech Clinic, Writing Center, Language Resource Center, are more difficult for us to estimate, since some of them may already be in progress without our knowledge, but each of these units needs additional staff and some may need a materials budget. On the assumption that every one of the students taking the EPE could be placed as needed in offerings of the ELI or additional sections of 121, an additional cost of $6,000-12,000 would be incurred. Based on approximate numbers and past experience, we believe that one or two sections of the pronunciation course (126) would meet current needs, at an estimated cost of $12,000 plus tuition waiver and benefits.

Recommendations for Immediate Action

(1) **Implementation and funding** of an experimental section of a Course for Prospective International Teaching Assistants for Spring 2003. (prospectus below). As a pilot offering, this course would address the collective needs of Groups A, B, C in the Speaking Category.

(2) **Funding** for Spring 2003 of a 20 hour per week staff position in the Speech and Hearing Center devoted exclusively to working with international students needing principally pronunciation work. As a pilot project, this initiative would address the needs of persons in Group D Speaking. Long term, it could accommodate research designed to maximize the efficiency and benefit of this service.

(3) **Implementation** of these policies impacting English training:

> (a) Inform all advisors that INS allows for some latitude in the full-time study requirement for international students in their first semester of study.
>
> (b) Allow tuition waivers to be applied to courses offered by ELI.

Pilot Course for Prospective International Teaching Assistants:[1]
Issues in Spoken English in the University Classroom

Description: This course designed to help prospective international teaching assistants (ITAs) improve their spoken English language skills in a variety instructional settings, including classes, labs, tutorials, and student conferences. The course is designed to prepare ITAs for their instructional duties. The course also provides an overview of the subcultures and pedagogies which are characteristic of classrooms in U.S. research universities. The is a course of the English Language Institute (ELI). ELI faculty will provide instruction to help students develop discourse skills and teaching strategies.

Goals and objectives: Students who successfully complete seminar will be able to demonstrate:
(1) Increased proficiency in spoken English for successful communication in instructional settings. The course will include:
   (a) Compensating strategies to reduce miscommunication, including use of visuals, handouts, technologies, rephrasing questions, etc.
   (b) Discourse markers and strategies for a range of functions and situations (discourse for presenting new information, defining terms, presenting problems, asking and taking questions , using examples, etc.).
   (c) Non-verbal/verbal communication issues with emphasis on common communication problems (volume, tone, proxemics, eye-contact).
   (d) Correction of common syntax problems that interfere with communication.
(2) Increased phonological accuracy. The course will provide instruction in:
   (a) Awareness of phonemic problems associated with individual student's first languages
   (b) Practice in word-level and sentence level stress and intonation
(3) Increased awareness of the norms associated with American undergraduate classrooms. Students will increase their ability to communicate in cross-cultural academic settings by learning
   (a) Characteristics and expectations of American undergraduate students
   (b) Classroom management techniques.
   (c) Characteristics of effective undergraduate instructors.
(4) Knowledge of key issues related to intercultural communication, including:
   (a) Selected components of culture and their effect on communication
   (b) Strategies for improving communication across cultures

Activities: The seminar will participate in a variety of in-class and out-of-class activities, which may include:
   (1) In-class lectures/discussions
   (2) Observations of undergraduate classrooms/teachers
   (3) Presentation of short "micro-lessons" and with instructor/peer feedback
   (4) Panel discussions with successful ITAs
   (5) Computer-mediated instruction in spoken English
   (6) Instructor conferences
   (7) Practice with *Pronunciation Power* software in ELI computer lab (practice with other software as indicated)

Evaluation: Individual Micro-lessons prepared by participants in the Seminar

Proposed Texts:
   TESOL Discourse transcripts
   Linda Grant. *Well Said*. Heinle and Heinle
   Ann Wennerstrom. *Techniques for Teachers*. University of Michigan Press.

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[1] As a pilot offering, this course would address the needs of Groups A, B, C in the Speaking Category.

Instructional Staff: ELI or other faculty member to be determined

Class Meetings: Class will meet for 10 hours per week for 13 weeks (course to begin in second week of semester and conclude one week before final exams). Attendance mandatory.

Enrollment: Enrollment capped at 15 students who have scored 30-45 on SPEAK. Participation is in lieu of departmental duties that cannot be performed because of score on the SPEAK Test. Selection of participants in this pilot course will be made on the basis of SPEAK scores, departmental needs, and space available.

Classroom Facilities:
       Standard classroom with moveable seating
       PC lab with sound cards, headsets, and microphones.