



Date: April 14

Dear Deans, Chairs, Faculty Advisors for GSI Affairs, Head Graduate Advisors, and GSAOs,

We write to you today about revisions to the oral English proficiency policy for GSI appointments that were approved by the Graduate Council at its March 7, 2022 meeting. The goal of these changes is to recognize the diverse paths that students may take to achieve oral English proficiency and to better serve those students who would benefit from additional linguistic support from the GSI Center's Language Proficiency Program. Changes to this policy are italicized below and will be reviewed with GSAOs at their April 14, 2022 meeting with Graduate Division staff. The revised policy revisions will go into effect on July 1, 2022 but will not impact hiring offers that have been extended prior to April 15, 2022.

Should you have questions about these changes, please contact the GSI Teaching & Resource Center, gsi@berkeley.edu.

Lisa Garcia Bedolla
Vice Provost for Graduate Studies and Dean of the Graduate Division

Eve Sweetser
Chair, Graduate Council

**Revised Oral English Proficiency Policy for Prospective GSIs
Approved by Graduate Council, March 7, 2022**

(Revisions to current policy are italicized below.)

To be eligible for appointment as a GSI, graduate students who do not speak English as a native language need to demonstrate oral English proficiency in one of the following ways:

- *Complete all of their undergraduate education (with the exception of a study abroad year) and receive an undergraduate degree from a college or university in the U.S. or another country in which English is the sole language of instruction (with the exception of instruction in foreign language departments) and the primary spoken language of the community*
- or
- Achieve a speaking section subscore of 26 or above on the TOEFL taken within the last two years
- or
- Achieve a speaking subscore of 8 or above on the IELTS test taken within the last two years.
- or
- Take and pass the [Oral Proficiency Test \(OPT\)](#).

As is in the past, departments should note that each of these is a minimum standard that satisfies the requirement for teaching eligibility. The standards of individual departments may be higher. If a department believes that a student has met the requirement but may not be linguistically



ready to teach, the department should reach out to the GSI Teaching & Resource Center for further assessment and support.

Exemption Requests

Multilingual students who have not completed all of their undergraduate work at a college or university where English is the sole language of instruction (with the exception of instruction in foreign language departments) and is the primary spoken language of the community may submit an oral proficiency questionnaire to request an exemption interview from the GSI Teaching & Resource Center if they:

- a. received a degree from but did not complete all of their undergraduate education (with the exception of a study abroad year) at a college or university in the U.S. or in another country in which English is the sole language of instruction (with the exception of instruction in foreign language departments) and the primary spoken language of the community;*
- b. completed all of their undergraduate education (with the exception of a study abroad year) and received an undergraduate degree from a college or university in the U.S. or in another country in which English is the sole language of instruction (with the exception of instruction in foreign language departments) but not the primary spoken language of the community;*
- c. completed a graduate degree (e.g., a Master's degree) but not their undergraduate degree in the U.S. or another country in which English is the sole language of instruction (with the exception of instruction in foreign language departments) and the primary spoken language of the community;*
- d. have lived continuously in the U.S. or in another country in which English is the primary language for a minimum of four years.*

Students whose exemption requests are approved will not need to take the Oral English Proficiency Test (OPT) offered on the Berkeley campus. Students whose exemption requests are not approved will need to take the OPT.

Support from the Language Proficiency Program

Guided by Graduate Council policy, the GSI Center's Language Proficiency Program helps multilingual graduate students establish their linguistic readiness to work as GSIs. Its goal is to decrease barriers for multilingual graduate students to access GSI positions, while at the same time strengthening their oral English proficiency to support their success as GSIs. This support includes providing recommendations to prospective GSIs who do not meet the oral English proficiency requirement, administering the Oral Proficiency Test to assess and provide feedback to prospective GSIs on their oral English proficiency, offering an oral English proficiency course for prospective GSIs, and providing one-on-one language consultations to prospective and current GSIs. For further information, please see the Language Proficiency Program webpage at or email Language Proficiency Program staff at langpro@berkeley.edu.