

FGSR Guidance on Admission Standards and English Language Proficiency

FGSR Council sets the minimum admission standards for all graduate programs offered by the University of Alberta. Departments (and non-departmentalized Faculties) are free to set higher standards. The minimum FGSR standards are the default rules if no other rules are stated.¹

With respect to admissions, the minimum rules include an English language requirement, which can be demonstrated by the possession of a degree from an academic institution recognized by the University of Alberta, in which the language of instruction is English,² or by a satisfactory score on an approved English language test. FGSR Council has agreed to recognize five English language tests. These are: the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL),³ the Michigan English Language Assessment Battery (MELAB),⁴ the International English Language Testing System (IELTS),⁵ the Canadian Academic English Language (CAEL) Assessment,⁶ and the Pearson Test of English Academic (PTE Academic).⁷ The minimum acceptable scores are as follows:

TOEFL	550 (paper-based) or a total score of 88 with a score of at least 20 in each skill area (internet-based) (iBT = internet-based test)
MELAB	85
IELTS	a minimum overall band score of 6.5, with at least 5 on each test band
CAEL	overall minimum score of 60 with at least 60 on each subtest
PTE Academic	overall score of 59

Note that there are two kinds of IELTS tests: “Academic” and “General Training”. Applicants for admission need to take the Academic IELTS, which has different reading and writing components than the “General Training” IELTS. Note too that the paper-based TOEFL includes the Test for Written English (TWE) component, while the internet-based TOEFL automatically includes an essay rating component similar to the TWE. Do not confuse an ITP TOEFL with an iBT TOEFL; a TOEFL ITP test result is not acceptable for admission purposes.

Individual graduate programs remain free to require higher English language test scores, and many programs have opted to do so, based on past experience, or because comparable programs at other institutions have opted for higher scores,⁸ or if the discipline requires strong

¹ See section 203.2 of the Calendar, available online at:

<http://www.registrar.ualberta.ca/calendar/GradStudies-and-Research/Regulations/203.2.html>

² A list of countries and universities that satisfy the English language proficiency requirement can be found at:

<http://www.gradstudies.ualberta.ca/en/applyadmission/elp/elpexemptions.aspx>

³ <http://www.ets.org/toefl>

⁴ <http://www.cambridgemichigan.org/melab>

⁵ <http://www.ielts.org/>. Note that IETLS has its own guide to setting score requirements, found here:

http://www.ielts.org/institutions/global_recognition/setting_ielts_requirements.aspx

⁶ <http://www.cael.ca>

⁷ <http://pearsonpte.com/pteacademic/Pages/home.aspx>

⁸ See, for example, U of T’s English proficiency requirements at:

<http://www.gradschool.utoronto.ca/Admissions/english-proficiency-requirement.htm>

English writing and reading skills. Those departments whose graduate students serve as TAs will need strong speaking skills scores. Others have raised their total and component score requirements to meet the undergraduate admission requirements with respect to TOEFL, where the minimum score is 580 (paper-based) and 86 (internet-based), but with a minimum score of 21 in each skill area and CAEL (where the minimum score is 70).⁹

Departments (or Faculties where non-departmentalized) wanting higher standards may choose to impose these, making use of their internal processes (such as the graduate committee, departmental Council, and possibly Faculty Council), before sending the desired changes to the Dean of FGSR to ensure that these standards are written into the university's Calendar. Proposed changes need to be made using a two-column format that allows for a side-by-side comparison of the current language in the Calendar and the proposed wording for any changes.

As to where such changes are made, every graduate program has an entry in section 205 of the Calendar. Each entry usually contains a section on "Entrance Requirements". Drafting advice is provided below. Please also ensure that the Calendar entries for your graduate program are up-to-date and accurate. Students read and rely upon what is specified in the Calendar with respect to program offerings, required courses, optional courses, GPA requirements etc.

In some graduate programs, where a student presents a TOEFL score that meets or exceeds the minimum total score requirements, but where the speaking or listening scores are 18 or 19, departments have a practice of contacting the student by phone or Skype to determine the student's level of speaking and listening comprehension. If the student is able to carry on a conversation, and if the listening skills meet your expectations, a supporting letter addressing the low TOEFL score can be added to the documents supporting admission. It is your call.

Suggested Clause for Your Use

To increase the minimum test scores for all your graduate programs, wording such as this can be added to the "General Information" section of the applicable Calendar entry:

205.#.1 General Information

Entrance Requirements

The Department of X requires higher English language test scores than those acceptable to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research (see §[203.2.4](#)). The minimum acceptable TOEFL score is 580 (paper-based) with a TWE of 5 or 93 (Internet-based) with a minimum score of 22 in each individual skill area. The minimum acceptable score for the IELTS (academic version) is 7.5 with a minimum of 7 on each test band, and the minimum acceptable CAEL score is 70 with a minimum of 70 on each subtest.

⁹ See section 13.3 of the Calendar, available online at:
<http://www.registrar.ualberta.ca/calendar/Admission/UndergradPrograms/13.3.html>