Proposal for Creating an Academic Policy for Accommodation in Testing Situations for Nonnative Speakers of English

REPORT FOR THE UNIVERSITY SENATE

University Senate Academic Policies Committee

Brief History of the Issue
For many years international students and U.S. citizens and permanent residents who are not native English speakers have reported difficulties with completing course tests within the time limits of typical 50-minute and 75-minute class periods. Some instructors have routinely given extended time to such students that enabled the students to demonstrate their mastery of subject matter being tested. Other instructors have refused the accommodation, leading to poorer performance on tests.

The Committee for Teaching and Learning of English as a Second Language and English as a Foreign Language recently worked to develop a testing accommodation policy for students for whom English is not the native language. As a result, the following policy is proposed.

Points Discussed by Committee:

The need for a testing accommodation policy that would allow non-native speakers of English the opportunity to fully demonstrate course understanding on tests.

The accommodation would be provided only to students whose English proficiency shows the need for the accommodation.

The policy would give the opportunity for the accommodation to all students who need it, rather than leaving it to individual instructor decision.

If approved, this policy will be included in the Student Services and Standards Handbook, [page11 in the 2008-09 edition], immediately following the Disability Accommodation Policy and Procedure.

In the Faculty and Academic Staff Handbook, the following statement will be added to the functions of the Academic Skills Center (page 2.15):

Provides diagnostic assessment of English proficiency for individual students who are U.S. citizens/permanent residents. International students may obtain such assessment in the Department of Foreign Languages.

Pros:

Provides students who are non-native speakers of English the opportunity to demonstrate their course knowledge with extended time (time and a half).

Provides an appropriate means to evaluate students for eligibility for the testing accommodation.
Requires verification of need for accommodation every semester.

Cons:
Students must seek verification every semester.

MOTION FOR THE UNIVERSITY SENATE

The University Academic Policies Committee by a vote of 8 votes for and 0 votes against recommends to the University Senate that the following language be added to the academic policies section (Chapter 7, immediately preceding “Early Testing in Freshman Courses”) of the Faculty and Academic Staff Handbook:

In courses that require tests taken during class time, students who are non-native speakers of English may request extended test-taking time (time and a half). To determine eligibility, English proficiency is evaluated by the Academic Skills Center (for U. S. permanent residents/citizens) or by the Department of Foreign Languages (for international students). Students approved for the accommodation are given a verification form to present to their course instructors. Students must provide verification during each semester at least one week before the test for which accommodation is needed. Verification is valid for one semester.

The accommodation policy does not apply to other forms of evaluation (e.g., papers, projects, group presentations) or to situations in which students must demonstrate clinical or similar skills.

Implementation Date: Fall semester 2009

Dr. Robert E. Hollon, chair, on behalf of the University Senate Academic Policies Committee