

S.87-76

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY
Memorandum

To: Senate

From: N. Heath
Secretary, S.U.A.B.

Subject: English requirements
for non-native speakers: SFU/Douglas College
ESL Program

Date: 87/11/16

At the meeting held on 21 October 1987, the Senate Undergraduate Admissions Board took action which gives rise to the following motion:

***That the English language requirements for non-native speakers of English be amended as follows (see paragraph 4, p. 16, 1987-88 Calendar - proposed changes are underlined):**

Using the above factors, applicants who in the judgement of the University, do not have sufficient experience or skills in written and spoken English will be required to achieve a satisfactory score on a standardized English test acceptable to the University. The test must include a writing component.

The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the Test of Written English (TWE) are acceptable tests for this purpose. The minimum scores required for admission are 570 for the TOEFL and 5 for the TWE.

A minimum score of 600 for the TOEFL will be accepted if an applicant does not offer a TWE score.

That the University's ESL program, administered on behalf of the University by Douglas College, be discontinued, effective twelve months from the date of Senate approval of this amendment.

That this policy be subject to annual review by S.U.A.B.*

NH:sf

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

Memorandum

To: SUAB

From: N. Heath
Secretary, SUAB

Subject: Douglas College/SFU ESL
Program. SUAB 176 (Revised)

Date: Nov. 17, 1987

Background:

Concern over language deficiencies of some international students led to the adoption by Senate of the mandatory testing and remedial ESL program which began in May 1983. The English requirement at that time was a minimum TOEFL score of 570. A major drawback of the TOEFL is the lack of any measure of creative writing ability; receptive skills only are tested.

The test developed by Douglas College for SFU students is a full day comprehensive diagnostic test, including reading, comprehension, verbal and written components. It is taken almost exclusively by new students who have already met the University's TOEFL requirement. It is specifically aimed at university-level students, who are expected to show some level of sophistication in their use of English for academic purposes. The remedial English courses are given at an advanced level. Students must achieve mastery of the material within their first two semesters in order to continue in their studies at SFU.

However, several serious disadvantages have become apparent in the four years that the program has been in operation. These are:

1. No demonstrable effect on academic performance of students.
2. Deters better-qualified students due to lack of credit in first semester.
3. Deters some students because of cost (\$405 per course or \$2025 for full semester ESL load. Equivalent 15 semester hours load at SFU costs \$1410 [visa students]).

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- 4. Scheduling and logistical problems in attending two institutions in the same semester.**
- 5. Testing is not carried out independently - suspicion among students of vested interest among instructors.**
- 6. Ex-students of other colleges (public and private) frequently are found to be in need of further ESL training, after completion of ESL programs in their first college, causing students and other institutions to question the test's validity.**
- 7. Only two versions of test currently available - content is by now well-known among local institutions, putting out-of-town students at a disadvantage.**
- 8. Test is available only locally. Students' registration plans often require complete revision after test results are released.**
- 9. Procedures for administering the test and resulting mandatory courses are administratively complex and subject to error.**

The writing component (TWE) of TOEFL has been introduced quite recently and now offers a means of measuring English writing ability, wherever the student is located. This provides significantly more information on the student's readiness for university study than does the TOEFL alone. The Test of Written English (TWE) has been offered by ETS on a pilot basis for over a year. It is available at only three or four of twelve TOEFL sittings per year. It consists of a half-hour essay taken at the beginning or end of the regular TOEFL. It is expected that the test will be offered more frequently in the future, but a decision to offer TWE as a required component of the TOEFL has not yet been made.

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The TWE essay question will normally ask a student either to compare and contrast two opposing arguments or points of view and defend a position in favour of one, or to describe and interpret a chart or graph. The TWE is scored on a 1-6 holistic scale and the test result is included on the official TOEFL score report. The scoring is as given on the attached "Scoring Guidelines".

An option to allow a student without the TWE to attend the University is necessary, because the TWE is not available at every TOEFL session and students might be unable to secure registration in one of the three or four testing sessions per year. A minimum score of 600 would roughly equate with the TOEFL scores of native English speakers and would indicate that a student's writing ability should be no worse than that of their English-as-a-first language fellow students. Although it would be desirable to screen all new students for English writing proficiency, this option has been rejected as too costly.

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Scoring Guidelines

The Test of Written English is the thirty-minute writing test administered at the July, November and May TOEFL administrations. This is the scoring guide that readers use to score the TWE.

Scores

- 6** Clearly demonstrates competence in writing on both the rhetorical and syntactic levels, though it may have occasional errors.

A paper in this category

- is well organized and well developed
- effectively addresses the writing task
- uses appropriate details to support a thesis or illustrate ideas
- shows unity, coherence, and progression
- displays consistent facility in the use of language
- demonstrates syntactic variety and appropriate word choice

- 5** Demonstrates competence in writing on both the rhetorical and syntactic levels, though it will have occasional errors.

A paper in this category

- is generally well organized and well developed, though it may have fewer details than does a 6 paper
- may address some parts of the task more effectively than others
- shows unity, coherence, and progression
- demonstrates some syntactic variety and range of vocabulary
- displays facility in language, though it may have more errors than does a 6 paper

(continued)

- 4** Demonstrates minimal competence in writing on both the rhetorical and syntactic levels.

A paper in this category

- is adequately organized
- addresses the writing topic adequately but may slight parts of the task
- uses some details to support a thesis or illustrate ideas
- demonstrates adequate but undistinguished or inconsistent facility with syntax and usage
- may contain some serious errors that occasionally obscure meaning

- 3** Demonstrates some developing competence in writing, but it remains flawed on either the rhetorical or syntactic level, or both.

A paper in this category may reveal one or more of the following weaknesses:

- inadequate organization or development
- failure to support or illustrate generalizations with appropriate or sufficient detail
- an accumulation of errors in sentence structure and/or usage
- a noticeably inappropriate choice of words or word forms

- 2** Suggests incompetence in writing.

A paper in this category is seriously flawed by one or more of the following weaknesses:

- failure to organize or develop
- little or no detail, or irrelevant specifics
- serious and frequent errors in usage or sentence structure
- serious problems with focus

- 1** Demonstrates incompetence in writing.

A paper in this category will contain serious and persistent writing errors, may be illogical or incoherent, or may reveal the writer's inability to comprehend the question. A paper that is severely underdeveloped also falls into this category.