UIUC Policy Statement
Regarding the Appointment of Non-Native English Speaking
Graduate Students as Teaching Assistants

Since 1980, at the direction of the Office of the Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, the monitoring of non-native English speaking teaching assistants has been the responsibility of each academic unit. Effective Fall 1988, only those non-native English speaking graduate students who passed initial, prescribed oral English proficiency screening assessments and who participated fully in the All-Campus ITA and TA Orientations were eligible to teach. The following policy was created to respond to Illinois Senate Bill 1516.

The UIUC policy incorporates three major programs:

A. Screening
B. Development and Improvement
C. Monitoring

A. SCREENING PROGRAM

The screening program consists of two parts: An initial screening that is an audio-taped English test called the TSE or SPEAK; and a final screening that is a videotaped microteaching session in the All-Campus ITA and TA Orientations.

1. Initial Screening: All non-native English speaking graduate students applying for appointments as teaching assistants at UIUC must first satisfy the English proficiency admission requirements of the Graduate College and the appointing academic unit. Effective June 1996 for the TSE and March 1997 for the campus SPEAK, students must receive a minimal score of 50 to satisfy the oral English proficiency requirements. Final screening will take place at the orientations described in Section B of this communication.

a. Off-Campus Screening. When the TSE is available for off-campus screening, prospective teaching assistants are encouraged to take it. The costs of that assessment (fees imposed by the testing service) may be borne by the prospective teaching assistant or the admitting academic unit of the UIUC.

b. On-Campus Screening. In those cases when a prospective teaching assistant has not taken the TSE, or has taken it but received a score lower than is required in section A.1. of this document, he or she is required to take the SPEAK assessment on the UIUC campus and receive a passing score.

The campus SPEAK assessment is administered three times each calendar year: fall, spring and summer terms. There is no fee for taking the campus SPEAK.

1 In 1996, Educational Testing Services (ETS) revised the TSE (and subsequent SPEAK) format and scoring rubric. This new score of 50 reflects the revision and is the substitute for the previous passing score of 230.
**APPEALS:** An appeal process is provided for those who "fail" the campus SPEAK assessment. Two weeks following the reporting of the SPEAK results, a panel will assemble to review appeals. This review panel shall include one representative from the Graduate College, the Division of English as an International Language, the Office of Instructional Resources, the appointing academic unit (non-voting), and a native, English speaking member of the undergraduate student body. The panel will be chaired by the representative from the Office of Instructional Resources. Reservations for each appeal may be made only by the academic unit providing the teaching assistantship.

If the appeal is granted, the prospective teaching assistant is eligible to participate in the campus ITA and TA Orientations. If the appeal fails, the prospective teaching assistant must participate in language improvement activities (see B.2. below) before he or she is eligible to retake the SPEAK.

2. **Final Screening:** Final screening takes place during the TA and ITA Orientations. In those cases in which the orientation staff become concerned with a prospective TA's ability to communicate in English during the videotaped micro-teaching sessions, the videotape will be viewed by a committee of faculty members and educational specialists. If the committee decides that the prospective teaching assistant has an insufficient level of oral English proficiency, the academic unit will be immediately notified. The notification will be documented and forwarded to the unit and the Office of the Provost. Units are strongly encouraged to provide such graduate students with teaching assistantships that do not involve direct instruction of undergraduates until they have sufficiently improved their oral English proficiency.

**B. DEVELOPMENT AND IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM**

There are two components to this program: the campus-wide International TA and All-Campus TA Orientations, and the on-going campus, oral English proficiency activities and classes.

1. **The All-Campus ITA and TA Orientations.** All prospective non-native speaking teaching assistants who have passed the TSE, SPEAK or SPEAK appeals as described in Section A. are required to participate in the campus ITA and TA Orientations the semester before they teach. These orientations take place before every fall and spring semester.

2. **Ongoing Campus Improvement Activities.** All prospective teaching assistants who have not passed the screening program are not qualified to teach in the classroom. These individuals are required to participate in at least one semester of language improvement activities before they are eligible to retake the SPEAK or participate in another orientation. The activities can include one or more of the following:

   a. Registration in ESL courses which are specifically designed for current and prospective non-native English speaking teaching assistants, e.g., ESL 404, ESL 406, and/or other courses that may be recommended in individual cases by the Division of English as a Second Language.

   b. Special tutoring programs arranged by the student or the department, with verification of an acceptable level of participation.

**C. MONITORING PROGRAM**

The non-native speaking teaching assistant's oral English proficiency is to be monitored and documented by the academic unit in which instruction takes place. It is recommended that the faculty
member selected to supervise the non-native teaching assistants be responsible for the following monitoring activities:

1. Visit or videotape the instructional setting, i.e., laboratory, lecture, discussion, recitation, studio, office hours, etc., of the non-native English speaking teaching assistant during the first two weeks of the semester in which they provide instruction. Follow up sessions with evaluation and feedback by a faculty member, supervisor or OIR/DEIL staff member is essential.

2. Distribute, collect and summarize student feedback surveys at the end of the first three weeks of the first semester in which the non-native English speaking teaching assistant provides instruction. The feedback forms must include items which address the oral English proficiency of the teaching assistant. The Division of Instructional Development in the Office of Instructional Resources has surveys designed to assist in this monitoring activity.

3. Collect, review and respond to student comments (solicited or unsolicited), early semester surveys and end-of-semester evaluations regarding the oral English proficiency of non-native English speaking teaching assistants. If a problem in oral English proficiency is detected, it is to be dealt with immediately by the academic unit providing the instruction. Assist the teaching assistant in reviewing their feedback and modifying that oral English which might be significantly and negatively effecting their teaching. Follow the "Procedures for Review of Instructor's Ability to Communicate in English" in the UIUC Code on Campus Affairs and Regulations Applying to All Students. (See attachment for current code.)

4. File all screening, improvement and monitoring information in the office of the academic unit in which the non-native English speaking teaching assistant provides instruction.