GRADUATE CURRICULUM CHANGE MEMO

Date: 10/18/2022

From: Dr. Rebecca Reid, Department of Political Science and Public Administration

Through: Dr. Gaspare Genna, Department of Political Science and Public Administration

Through: Dean Bencomo, College of Liberal Arts

To: Martine Ceberio, Graduate Council

Proposal Title: Add Duolingo as Alternative to TOEFL for MA POLS applications

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The Department of Political Science and Public Administration seeks to add Duolingo as an option for applications to the MA in Political Science program. Currently, the MA in Political Science requires TOEFL as a test of English proficiency. We seek to add Duolingo as an alternative to TOEFL in our graduate application requirements. In other words, applicants can complete their MA Political Science program application with either the official Duolingo or TOEFL scores. We propose our minimum score required for admission in Duolingo is 110, which is equivalent to Graduate School standards of TOEFL scores of 550 and TOEFL ibT score of 79.

The reason for this inclusion is three-fold. First, TOEFL exams remain prohibitively expensive and inaccessible to many potential graduate applicants. Second, Duolingo offers monitored testing that is functionally equivalent to TOEFL standards. Third, in light of these two points, many other universities and graduate programs have already incorporated Duolingo in their application requirements—which make them more attractive to potential applicants and thereby reduces our program's ability to compete with these other graduate programs.

Form for Proposed Changes to Graduate Admission Criteria

Institution: University of Texas at El Paso

Program Name: MA in Political Science

Degree Level (Master's, Doctoral): Master's

Institutional Contact:

    Name: Gaspare Genna, Department Chair

    E-mail: ggenna@utep.edu

    Phone: x6066

A. Summary:

The Department of Political Science and Public Administration seeks to add Duolingo as an alternative or option in the MA Political Science program applications. Currently, the MA in Political Science requires TOEFL as the only acceptable test of English proficiency. We seek to add Duolingo as an alternative to TOEFL in our graduate application requirements. In other words, applicants can complete their MA Political Science program application with either the Duolingo or TOEFL scores.

The reason for this inclusion is three-fold. First, TOEFL exams remain prohibitively expensive and inaccessible to many potential graduate applicants. Second, Duolingo offers monitored testing that is generally equivalent to TOEFL standards. Third, in light of these two points, many other universities and graduate programs have already incorporated Duolingo in their application requirements—which make them more attractive to potential applicants and thereby reduces our program's ability to compete with these other graduate programs. We discuss each of these points below.

Accessibility
One of the fundamental tenants of UTEP's mission is access and excellence. Yet, our program lags behind this goal in "increasing access to excellent higher education" when we require only TOEFL exams for our MA Political Science graduate applications. TOEFL exams remain prohibitively expensive and inaccessible to many potential graduate applicants. For example, TOEFL costs, on average between $180-325 (US dollars) and official scores can only be sent to 4 schools before charging additional fees for each additional school. Duolingo costs $49 (US dollars) and applicants can send the official scores (and sub-scores) to an unlimited number of schools. Similarly, TOEFL exams are available in approximately 500 testing locations in the United States and about 4500 worldwide but wait times to register and take the test may take weeks or months; while Duolingo testing is available virtually anywhere and thus does not require applicants to schedule testing appointments or travel to testing sites. In addition, TOEFL exams take 3 hours to complete and typically takes a week for scores to become available. Duolingo testing, on the other hand, takes 1 hour to complete and certified scores are available in 48 hours. Duolingo testing thus reduces the barriers students face in applying to graduate programs.

In short, Duolingo is thus more flexible, accessible, and affordable for students required to take an English proficiency exam in order to qualify for graduate programs. As will be discussed in the next

section, this increase in access does not reduce the quality of the English proficiency testing. Duolingo scores is strongly correlated with TOEFL (and IELTS) scores, making it reasonable alternative to TOEFL.

Equivalent Quality of Testing

Duolingo offers monitored testing that is generally equivalent to TOEFL standards. Duolingo testing is monitored and proctored by humans and AI (with security algorithms to detect suspicious behavior). Testing requires a front-facing camera, a well-lit room, reliable internet, and applicant identification (passport, driver's license, or government-issued ID). A combination of AI, computer vision, and human monitoring by trained proctors verify the test-taker identity. Test-takers cannot wear headphones or earphones (where face and ears must be visible and unobscured), and test-takers must be alone with no communication, writing utensils or paper. Test-takers cannot look away from the screen or leave the test window for any reason. Tests are automatically canceled if a test-taker attempts to access external applications or plugins during the test.[1] The test disables keyboard actions as well. The tests are proctored in a blind, anonymous, multi-round review process where later rounds are performed by certified ESL educators. Furthermore, institutions can review a short video and writing sample taken from each test-taker's test session.[2]

Duolingo tests scores are highly correlated with TOEFL scores.[3] For example, Ye (2014) finds that student TOEFL scores matched those of the Duolingo test, as well as finds that Duolingo test and retest scores are accurate and reliable.

Maintaining Graduate Program Competitiveness

Duolingo is accepted in over 2,000 institutions worldwide, including 1,114 graduate institutions worldwide. In the United States, more than 1,700 universities accept the Duolingo test. These include universities like the University of Arizona, Arizona State University, George Mason University, West Virginia University, University of Florida, Washington State University, University of Texas at Dallas, University of Colorado, the University of Texas at Arlington, the University of North Texas, Texas A& M University, Colorado State University, University of Alabama, University of Vermont, Carnegie Mellon University, Indiana University, Rice University, Indiana University, Washington University in St Louis, Iowa State University, University of Oklahoma, Western Michigan University, University of Kansas, and the University of Houston. These high—and growing—numbers of accepting institutions demonstrating confidence in Duolingo scores as a measure of English proficiency.

In order to remain competitive as graduate program and increase enrollment, the MA in Political Science needs to similarly reduce barriers to access to attract qualifying students. Adding Duolingo as an alternative to TOEFL reduces barriers for interested students to apply to our graduate program, thereby increasing applications and potentially enrollment. UTEP Student Affairs' division

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[1] The test-taker has three attempts to retake test before they must purchase a new test. Each person cannot purchase more than two tests in rolling 30-day window.
[2] https://duolingo-papers.s3.amazonaws.com/other/det-security-proctoring-whitepaper-2021-11.pdf
[3] Ye, F. (2014). "Validity, reliability, and concordance of the Duolingo English Test." *University of Pittsburgh School of Education.*

Form for Proposed Changes to Graduate Admission Criteria

of Student Assessment & Testing Office promotes Duolingo testing and includes it in required scores where students can directly submit their Duolingo scores to UTEP.[4]

Selecting the minimum score

We have determined that a Duolingo score of 110 is the minimum acceptable score for MA Political Science admission. Our department selected this score for two reasons. First, this score of 110 equates to existing Graduate School requirements of a minimum score of 79 on the TOEFL internet-based test (TOEFL ibT).[5] The below chart illustrates the conversion between Duolingo and TOEFL ibT.

Duolingo	TOEFL iBT
160	120
155	119
150	117-118
145	113-116
140	109-112
135	104-108
130	98-103
125	93-97

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[4] https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/testing/tests/international-admission-test.html; https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/testing/tests/required-scores.html
[5] http://catalog.utep.edu/admissions/graduate/graduate-student/

Form for Proposed Changes to Graduate Admission Criteria

120	**87-92**
115	**82-86**
110	**76-81**
105	**70-75**
100	**65-69**

Second, our international students who seek admission to our graduate program generally require teaching assistantships in order to afford attending our program. The teaching assistantships mandate higher levels of demonstrated English proficiency in order to ensure quality assistance by teaching assistants. As most universities accepting Duolingo require a minimum score of 100-110, we fall at the upper range of this average. Nonetheless, our score remains consistent with comparable universities in Texas. For example, the University of Texas at Arlington accepts a Duolingo (minimum) score of 105; the University of North Texas accepts a Duolingo (minimum) scores of 100; and the University of Houston Graduate School accepts Duolingo (minimum scores of 105).

B. <u>Details:</u> Use the template below to create a side-by-side table showing the current graduate admission criteria and the proposed graduate admission criteria.

Current Unconditional Admission Criteria	Proposed Unconditional Admission Criteria
Application form and application fee	Application form and application fee
Official undergraduate (and graduate) transcripts	Official undergraduate (and graduate) transcripts
Two letters of recommendation	Two letters of recommendation
Statement of purpose	Statement of purpose
Official GRE scores	Official GRE scores
Official TOEFL scores (foreign students only)	Official TOEFL or Duolingo scores (foreign students only)
Other supporting materials	Other supporting materials

CURRICULUM CHANGE PROPOSAL

APPROVAL PAGE

Proposal Title: Add Duolingo as Alternative to TOEFL for POLS MA application requirements

College: College of LIberal Arts   Department: Department of Political Science and Public Administration

DEPARTMENT CHAIR

I have read the enclosed proposal and approve this proposal on behalf of the department.

_____   12/2/2022
_____

Signature   **Date**

COLLEGE CURRICULUM COMMITTEE CHAIR

I have read the enclosed documents and approve the proposal on behalf of the college curriculum committee.

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Signature   **Date**

COLLEGE DEAN

I have read the enclosed documents and approve the proposal on behalf of the college. I certify that the necessary funds will be allocated by the college in support of this proposal.

_____   _____

Signature   **Date**