

Increasing International Enrollment at Youngstown State University

I. Introduction

As part of the strategic planning process, a task force was convened in Spring 2007 to examine international enrollment issues. Approximately 58 graduate international students were enrolled in Fall 2007. The Academic and Strategic Plan calls for an increase in international enrollment from around 1% of FTE to 3% of FTE, or approximately 318 international students enrolled in graduate, undergraduate, and intensive English programs. It also calls for the increase of graduate enrollment to 15% of FTE, or 650.

GOAL II 2: Increase graduate FTE to 650 by 2013. [Academic Colleges; School of Graduate Studies and Research; Provost's Office]

GOAL II 4: Promote internationalization of the YSU student experience ... increase the international student headcount on campus to 3% by 2013. [Center for International Studies and Programs; Academic Colleges; School of Graduate Studies and Research]

II. Recommendations on Graduate International Admission

The graduate school must continue to play the essential role of ensuring that that entry into graduate study is available only to applicants whose academic records provide solid evidence that they can succeed in their intended program of study. Applicants should meet university standards, and any exceptions to these standards should meet established criteria, and those criteria must be fairly applied.

The task force recommended a number of changes to current practice that will lead to higher international enrollment in the Graduate School while maintaining the academic integrity of the graduate programs.

A. *Practices Regarding International Admissions*

The following recommendations are consistent with the current Graduate Policy Handbook and will not require new policy.

1. While the authority over admission to the School of Graduate Studies should remain with the Dean of Graduate Studies (or his/her designee), the determination whether an applicant meets the admission requirements of individual graduate programs should rest with the graduate program chairs in consultation with the department chairpersons, members of the graduate faculty in the individual graduate programs, and the deans of their respective colleges.
2. Requests for exceptions to the Graduate School's admissions policies must be initiated by the graduate program chairs and must have the support of the department chairperson and college dean before being submitted to the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research.
3. Evaluation of foreign academic credentials should be the responsibility of the Center for International Studies and Programs.
4. Provisional Certificates, which are issued by the same authority that issues the final diploma, and certify that the student has completed all requirements for the degree, should be accepted as evidence of degree completion for up to 12 months after they are issued.

5. Provisional, special (non-degree), transient and restricted graduate admission should be available to international students on the same basis as domestic students.
6. Credential evaluations from established reputable services should be accepted, provided that the service adheres to the *General Guiding Principles of Good Practice for Educational Credential Evaluation* established by the National Association of Credential Evaluation Services (NACES)¹.
7. At the request of the graduate program chair, applicants whose English Proficiency score on a standardized test is within the Standard Error of Measurement (SEM) for that instrument should be considered for regular admission, if there is compelling evidence that his or her English proficiency is sufficient for academic study *in that particular program*.
8. At the request of the graduate program chair and with the approval of the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research, exceptional graduate applicants whose English proficiency is measured to be between 500-550 on the Paper-Based TOEFL (or equivalent) may be granted Provisional Admission, and be required to enroll in a departmentally-approved combination of academic courses and noncredit courses in the intensive English Language Institute until proficiency is demonstrated.
9. At the request of the graduate program chair and with the approval of the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research, exceptional graduate applicants who are deemed to be otherwise academically admissible, but lack the required English language proficiency, will be granted the status of *Contingent Admission*, and will be required to enroll in the English Language Institute until they meet the university's requirements.

B. Recommendations for changes to Graduate Policy Regarding International Admissions

In addition to the above, the task force recommended that several graduate policy changes be taken under consideration by the Graduate Council. Current policy specifies that all applicants (including international) must possess “a bachelor’s degree from an accredited college or university²” although in practice, international applicants are required to possess the “equivalent” of a U.S. bachelor’s degree. The following policy recommendations propose to make the higher standard into official policy, while providing clarification for meeting the standard of “equivalent” of a U.S. bachelor’s degree.

1. Degree Required for Regular Admission to Graduate Study
 - a) Policy Wording

Change to wording of the Graduate Policy Handbook Section IIIA 3a to read, “A bachelor’s degree from a regionally-accredited college or university in the United States OR a comparable degree from a post-secondary college university, accredited by the appropriate authority(ies), in another country.”

¹ cf. <http://www.naces.org/codeofgoodpractice.html>

² *Graduate Policy Handbook* Section IIIA 3a

b) Comparability of Degrees

A degree from an accredited post-secondary institution will generally be considered comparable if it represents the standard credential for entry into graduate study in the home country, AND meets one of the following criteria:

- It represents a minimum of four years of full-time post-secondary study;
- It represents three years of post-secondary study in an educational system comprising a combined primary and secondary education of at least thirteen years of study;
- It represents three years of post-secondary study AND is accompanied by original documentation verifying at least one year of additional post-secondary study at an accredited institution of higher learning.
- It is evaluated by a professional international credential evaluator with an established, reputable service that adheres to the *General Guiding Principles of Good Practice for Educational Credential Evaluation* established by the National Association of Credential Evaluation Services (NACES)³ and judged to be comparable to a U.S. bachelor's degree.

If the applicant's credentials do not meet the above criteria, the Dean of Graduate Studies can make a determination that a specific 3-year credential is comparable to a U.S. bachelor's degree if the Graduate Program Chair presents compelling evidence that the three-year program is objectively and demonstrably sufficient to ensure that the student can matriculate into a particular YSU graduate degree program without deficiencies. Such evidence must include:

- a course by course analysis of those courses in the three year bachelors program which guarantee that the student has no deficiencies for the YSU graduate degree program in question;
- a comparison of those courses against appropriately corresponding YSU courses; AND
- an explicit listing of the kind and source of information being used for such course by course analysis—information;

The Dean of the School of Graduate Studies and Research will evaluate such evidence and, at his/her discretion, interview the concerned graduate program chair, the faculty and/or convene an ad hoc subcommittee of the Policy Committee of the Graduate Council for consultation. Should the Dean approve the program, that program would be added to the SGSR approved program database.

2. Bridge Program

Establish a "Bridge" program for 3-year degree holders that will make them eligible for graduate admission. The content of the Bridge program should be individualized to some degree based on the above analysis. The duration of the Bridge program can vary between a semester to a full year, depending on the student's prior academic experiences (i.e., readiness for the Graduate program).

3. Reduce Graduate Application Fee by eliminating the Credential Evaluation portion.

YSU's Graduate Application fee for international students—\$75—is the highest in the state of Ohio university system. The fee comprises an application fee of \$30 + a credential evaluation fee of \$45. With our current applicant pool, the credential evaluation fee generates less than \$5,000 per year, does not fund its stated purpose, and acts as a significant deterrent for international graduate applicants, who are applying to multiple institutions. The international application fee should be the same for international and domestic students.

³ cf. <http://www.naces.org/codeofgoodpractice.html>