English Language Proficiency Verification Requirement for J-1 exchange visitors

Effective January 5, 2015, the US Department of State (DOS) is requiring that all prospective/new exchange visitors coming to US universities in J-1 status demonstrate sufficient English proficiency before the university may issue the DS2019 documentation needed to bring the scholar here.

In principle, this regulation is not new. The DOS has always required J-1 sponsors to determine that a prospective exchange visitor "possesses sufficient proficiency in the English language to participate in his or her program," without specifying how that should be accomplished. What is new is that DOS now requires sponsors to determine sufficient English language proficiency using "objective measurement" and “to retain evidence of how they measured applicants’ English language proficiency...”

The Department of State released the following guidance to illustrate the level of proficiency that will be required of all new J-1 scholars:

“The Department believes that not only is an exchange visitor’s success in his or her particular program dependent upon sufficient English language capability, but good English communication skills are essential to ensure the health, safety, and welfare of exchange visitors. Moreover, the Department continues to find that too many exchange visitors lack sufficient English proficiency to perform their jobs or complete their academic programs; to navigate daily life in the United States; to read and comprehend program materials; to understand fully their responsibilities, rights, and protections; and to know how to obtain assistance, if necessary. Accordingly the Department adopts a modified version of the regulatory language governing the Trainee and Intern categories as the program-wide standard for determining the English language proficiency of exchange visitors. The Department reminds sponsors to retain evidence of how they measured applicants’ English language proficiency so that it may be made available to the Department upon request.”

The methods established by the Department of State for determining English language proficiency are as follows:

1. Through a recognized English language test;
2. Through signed documentation from an academic institution or English language school; or
3. Through an interview "conducted by the sponsor" in-person, by videoconference, or by webcam.

Any one of these methods will suffice to determine English proficiency at Rutgers. However, it is strongly recommended that the English proficiency verification be completed prior to extending the invitation/offer letter.

1. **English Language Proficiency Test**

Center for Global Services (CGS) recommends that results of either the IELTS (International English Language Testing System) or TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) be accepted as they are the most widely utilized tests in higher education and are available throughout the world:

a) IELTS overall score of 5.5 or higher
b) TOEFL (internet based) overall score of 65 or higher, or computer based score of 183 or higher, or paper based score of 513 or higher

2. **Signed Documentation from an Academic Institution or English Language School**

CGS recommends accepting a transcript showing enrollment and grades from a post-secondary academic institution where English is the primary language of instruction.

3. **Documented Interview Conducted by the Sponsoring Institution**

In most cases, the sponsoring faculty member will conduct and document the interview, but departmental procedures may vary in this regard. The interview must be conducted as a video interview (for example, using Skype, Google, MSN or smartphone apps such as FaceTime) unless the scholar being invited is personally known to the host faculty, in which case a telephone interview is sufficient.

Once the interview is conducted, the interviewer must complete and sign the English Proficiency Verification Form and pass it on to the department administrator for further processing. NOTE: the English Proficiency Verification Form contains a simple check-box rubric to help the interviewer easily describe the general level of English proficiency of the prospective visitor. The interviewer need not be an expert in English language testing.

This new procedure has been folded into the GAIA Centers online J1 application process, which serves Rutgers-Camden, Rutgers-New Brunswick, and Rutgers-Newark.

**Documenting via the Online J-1 DS-2019 Request Program:**

CGS recommends the following procedure for department administrators/Primary Preparers.

a) Receive a completed and signed ‘English Proficiency Verification Form’ including applicable proof in the form of test scores or transcripts from the host faculty or other interviewer;

b) Upload the completed English Proficiency Verification Form (including applicable proof) via the Online J-1 Program;

**We have added a new radio button named, “English Language Proficiency Verification documents” to the ‘Uploads & Notes tab.’**

**Note:** CGS is required to keep a copy of this English Proficiency Verification Form including applicable proof, confirming the method used to determine English proficiency. All verification documents must be received before a DS-2019 can be issued. **Failure to do so will cause Rutgers University to lose Department of State certification to host J-1 exchange visitors.**