

## Part 1 English language proficiency: uncovering the hidden value on your campus

Institutions prioritizing English language policies for international students see tangible ROI, with improvements in retention, recruitment, and institutional reputation. As universities navigate a globally competitive landscape, ensuring international students are thriving within their academic communities is critical.

For international students to thrive, they need a robust skill set to navigate challenges, the self-assurance to flourish in academic and social settings, and the determination to reach their full potential.

Effective English language proficiency (ELP) policies are especially important as the U.S. reasserts itself as a premier destination for international education. The 2023 rebound to over 1 million international students marks a significant post-pandemic milestone (Open Doors, 2023). This reaffirms the global demand for U.S. higher education and highlights the need for well-designed policies that support international student success. To fully leverage the opportunity of this moment, you must consider several factors including:

### **Tailoring policies is essential.**

A one-size-fits-all approach to ELP policies may not adequately elevate the unique factors that enable academic progress and social integration of international students. Regular reviews can ensure the best results.

### **Assessments provide valuable insights into language development.**

Valid, reliable, and comprehensive assessments like IELTS, which focus on real-world language usage, can shape student approaches to language learning, supporting their success in international higher education.

### Case study: Kwame's story

Kwame's stellar academic record and glowing recommendation letters from his English-medium school in Ghana made him a prime candidate for graduate admission to a prestigious American university. The admissions committee waived the usual English proficiency requirements, assuming he had adequate pre-enrollment experience with academic English.

This decision, while well-intentioned, set the stage for Kwame's struggles. The academic English used in lectures and textbooks was far more complex than what he was accustomed to. He felt lost in class, unable to keep up with the rapid pace or decipher the nuanced vocabulary. The cultural references woven into discussions further deepened his sense of isolation.

Apprehensive to admit his difficulties with a language he thought he knew well, Kwame retreated into himself. He interpreted his academic struggles as a personal failure, and despite his efforts, his grades continued to drop.

Overwhelmed and disheartened that the dream he had worked so hard for was slipping away, Kwame withdrew after completing only 9 of the 36 required credits. His departure was a significant loss for both Kwame and the university. For Kwame, it was a shattered dream and a blow to his self-esteem. For the university, it was the loss of a promising student and the anticipated \$27,000 in tuition revenue for the remaining 27 credits.

**Strategic ELP policies offer multiple benefits.**

Well-designed ELP policies empower international students to thrive from day one. By ensuring students are prepared academically and culturally, these policies enhance the overall campus experience, boost retention rates, and reduce melt.

**U.S. institutions can lead the global education market.**

By proactively refining ELP policies, institutions can attract high-achieving international students, create a diverse and vibrant campus community, promoting student success and driving higher graduation rates.

The power of ELP assessments goes far beyond measuring language skills. Our multi-part series will explore these factors and more, to equip higher education leaders with the knowledge and tools to harness this untapped potential, translating raw data into actionable insights that foster a thriving and inclusive academic community.

Case study: **uncover more insight**

What information did the institution and student miss out on by waiving the English proficiency requirement?

How did waiving the English proficiency requirement disempower Kwame and the institution?

Empower your institution and students to achieve their international education goals. IELTS can help your institution effectively assess and support your applicants' language proficiency, at the admissions stage and beyond, ensuring students have effective communication skills in a wide range of contexts.

Read more IELTS  
Professional Series  
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