Georgia Tech | Center for Teaching and Learning

International TA Program
TA proficiency screening information
Academic Year 2021-2022

Background

International graduate students are a vital part of the Georgia Tech experience! Along with their intellectual and social contributions to the institute, they often serve as part of the teaching community in various ways. One of these ways is as a teaching assistant. As a teaching assistant, a graduate student may be asked to grade papers, monitor tests or exams, oversee a lab, hold recitation sessions, work as a tutor, or even teach a class or course. In preparation for these duties, the University System of Georgia (USG) is required by the State of Georgia to screen international students for language proficiency in teaching prior to being appointed a TA, as follows:

> **University System of Georgia (USG) Board of Regents Policy:**
> **8.3.5.2 Graduate Assistants**
>
> USG institutions employing graduate assistants shall develop procedures to:
>
> 1. Provide appropriate training to support and enhance these assistants' teaching effectiveness;
>
> 2. Conduct regular assessments of and annually evaluate, based on written procedures and including results of student and faculty evaluations, of each assistant's teaching effectiveness and performance; and,
>
> 3. **Assess competency in English and, if needed, provide training in English language proficiency.**

At Georgia Tech, the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) administers the screenings and offers training for international teaching assistants (ITAs). To that end, the following description and procedures are in place for ITA screening. For more on CTL see https://ctl.gatech.edu/

Questions about the ITA Program or assessment procedures should be directed to Sarah Kegley at skegley3@gatech.edu

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What is the ITA screening?

- The ITA screening assessment was developed by TESOL experts to assess prospective ITAs' ability to communicate with sufficient accuracy and interpersonal communicative competence to successfully work with undergraduate students at Georgia Tech.
- It is a face-to-face interview that takes place during the summer before the ITA begins to TA. This screening is meant to elicit English language skills necessary for effective communication within typical TA settings in the U.S. academic context.
- It is not a test of your knowledge in your field of study; it is designed to elicit language, however, in order to assess competence with terminology within your academic discipline as well as your competency and skill in negotiating meaning with undergraduate students, including engaging with student questions and responses.
- The test is not specifically a test of teaching, either. Instead, it is meant to assess competency of the use of language necessary to complete teaching tasks effectively.

Who must take the ITA screening test?

- International students who *are required to submit TOEFL (or IELTS, or other language test score) for admission*, and whose TOEFL speaking score is below 26 (IELTS 8.0, or the equivalent on other instruments), should be screened for TA assignment using GT's ITA screening assessment.

  - *What if I was a TA at another university before coming to GT?*
    If you were a *graduate* TA at another institution before coming to GT, please participate in the ITA screening regardless; this will ensure that we are following USG and GT policy.

What is the test like?

- The (virtual) face-to-face test is structured to last between 20 to 30 minutes, and consists of the following three components, all with a live interviewer:
  - Introductory question/answer segment.
  - Sample delivery of a field-specific concept, interpretation of an academic visual, and/or discussion of common academic topics.
  - Simulation of an office-hour interaction between a TA and student with follow-up questions.
- No advance preparation is needed. During the screening, the prospective TA's accuracy, fluency, and communication effectiveness are evaluated.

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ITA screening procedures

1. Once a graduate student has been *admitted* to Georgia Tech, their school TA coordinator will coordinate with the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) ITA program to send names of those who may be asked to serve as TAs.
2. The ITA program manager will contact each student at the email you have given to admissions (not your GT email unless it is already active).
3. **In accordance with current university policy, all TA screenings will be conducted remotely using a free web conferencing platform.**
4. **You will need a microphone and camera, and your passport with photo** (or other approved ID). The screenings will be recorded so that they may be passed on to the raters.
   a. The ITA screening assessment is administered via web conference on *Bluejeans* (a virtual meeting platform similar to *Zoom* or *Skype*) in the semester prior to the students' arrival on campus, and is scored on a standard rubric by a trained TESOL expert. The results of the assessment are communicated to the student and the student's academic unit at Tech to be used to determine the ITA's development needs.
5. Screenings are currently being offered on a rolling basis. (Summer 2020-Fall 2020)
6. The results of the screening, along with recommendations, is given to the student's departmental TA coordinator within one week.
7. The CTL International TA program manager will be happy to discuss your scores and create a plan for TA support with you. Please email skegley3@gatech.edu to request a consultation.

What areas does the screening assess?

➢ The ITA screening assesses five general categories of language use: grammar, fluency, pronunciation, listening comprehension, and discourse/strategic competency.

Results and ITA coursework/support

➢ The screening assessment will be used to refer ITAs for enrollment in CETL 8802, International TA Development, a language and culture support course, and to determine follow-up professional development.
➢ The recommended course should be completed in or before the first semester of the TA assignment and will be required for continued assignment to TA positions. For Fall 2021, *International TA Development* will be delivered as a two-credit hour, pass/fail course through the Center for Teaching and Learning: **CETL 8802.**

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Final notes on the ITA program screening for AY 2021-2022

Serving as a TA can be an exciting and challenging opportunity for any graduate student. International graduate students have unique needs as they begin these new responsibilities, often in a new language and a new educational culture. Through assessment and support, the International TA Program ensures international TAs are prepared for success in this role.

The most important factor for the ITA screening is confidence and command of the appropriate level of speaking and listening proficiency to take on the challenging responsibilities of teaching in academic English within the Georgia Tech environment.

Students who believe they need extensive language training (in writing and/or speaking and listening) are strongly encouraged to contact the **Georgia Tech Language Institute** at https://esl.gatech.edu/ for more options.

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For more information on the Center for Teaching and Learning, see ctl.gatech.edu