iTEP Case Study:
J-Check

Assessing the English Proficiency of J-Scholars at Northwestern University

About iTEP

The International Test of English Proficiency (iTEP) was introduced in 2008 to modernize English language assessment with on-demand scheduling, 24-hour grading, and accurate test data. iTEP provides a convenient and cost-effective testing option delivered in a highly secure test center environment or remotely at-home.

iTEP offers academic testing for secondary schools and universities for both admissions and on-campus ESL programs. iTEP also offers a range of career testing used by companies around the world to determine English proficiency needed for hiring and promotion decisions. For more information see www.itepexam.com.

Case Summary

In 2015, new US government regulations for J-Scholars (Exchange Visitors) put Northwestern University in the position of needing to implement an English language proficiency assessment process for their incoming J-Scholars. Beyond the need for institutional compliance, some J-Scholars were arriving on campus with low English language skills. This lack of English language proficiency caused tremendous issues for the International Office and caused problems for the J-Scholars themselves as they navigated insurance, university forms, in-class teaching, and other daily activities requiring not just speaking, but reading, listening, and writing skills.

After a thorough review and one year pilot testing program, Northwestern selected J-Check J-Scholar

Testing as the primary English proficiency assessment option for incoming J-Scholars. J-Check is a testing platform that utilizes the iTEP Academic Plus exam. Northwestern cited: a comprehensive language assessment, ease of use, security, cost competitiveness, and results within 24 hours as critical decision factors for selection of J-Check featuring iTEP.

The Problem: Assessing the English Proficiency of J-Scholars at Northwestern University

In 2015, new US government regulations for J-Scholars (Exchange Visitors) put Northwestern University in the position of needing to implement an English language proficiency assessment process for their incoming J-Scholars. With this new regulation, the US State Department began auditing universities hosting J-scholars to ensure compliance.

| Federal Regulation 22 CFR 62.10(a)(2)

The exchange visitor possesses sufficient proficiency in the English language, as determined by an objective measurement of English language proficiency, successfully to participate in his or her program and to function on a day-to-day basis.

At most universities like Northwestern, the process of evaluating English proficiency for J-visa scholars has been historically left up to the recruiting academic department, where in many cases, the hosting faculty member personally vouched for his/her invited guest's English proficiency. This "honor system" approach was not seen as up to the standards of the new policy requiring an "objective measurement" and documentation of the English language assessment used.

Thus, Northwestern University needed to find and implement an English language proficiency testing and documentation process that put the institution in compliance of Federal policies and helped decrease issues of low-level English fluency. This process also needed to be convenient and culturally sensitive to the many users from around the world.

The Approach

Each year Northwestern University hosts approximately 700 J-Scholars who come to campus to conduct research, teach, and engage in cultural and educational activities. J-visa scholar categories that universities often host include: Research Scholar, Short-Term Scholar, Professor, Physician, Specialist.

These exchange visitors include graduate and post-graduate level individuals who come to campus to work on research projects with Northwestern professors. Frequently invited are also prestigious faculty members from Northwestern's partner universities around the world. These faculty members hold doctorates and are often leading global experts in their academic field.

In 2015 Northwestern began reviewing their current English language proficiency assessment tools as well as other products on the market. The goal was a quantitative measurement tool that could provide a general language skills assessment without the intensity of a typical admissions exam. In addition, convenience, cost, and cultural sensitivity of the international guests were considerations.

Around this time, while attending a NAFSA conference, Northwestern administrators learned about Jameson Global and its new product called J-Check. In 2017/2018 a successful pilot program for J-Check was undertaken at Northwestern with J-Scholars from a number of different academic departments. In 2019, Northwestern University began using J-Check as their primary English proficiency assessment tool for incoming J-Scholars.

> " *J-Check allowed us to have the greatest experience at a prestigious university, like Northwestern. I strongly recommend taking the test as it will give you the opportunity of an incredible adventure.* "
>
> **Lic. Julieta Peluso, J-Scholar from Argentina**

The iTEP Solution

J-Check J-Scholar Testing, featuring iTEP Academic Plus, proved to be the right solution for Northwestern University. The J-Check testing platform was designed specifically to allow J-visa scholars to undergo English proficiency testing in the privacy and convenience of their own offices or homes. There is no need to require international faculty members the inconvenience (and often cultural awkwardness) of scheduling and taking an exam at a test center. The battery of security measures in place by J-Check and iTEP ensure the integrity of the score results.

By using the iTEP Academic Plus exam, the University receives a comprehensive English language assessment report on grammar, listening, reading, writing, and speaking. This is not a speaking only test. Thus, Northwestern was able to set uniform, clear, and campus-wide English language proficiency requirements for all J-Scholars.

The process for prospective J-Scholars is simple and convenient. They go to www.jchecktest.com and click on Northwestern's logo to read the instructions. Within 24 hours of payment processing, they receive both the official J-Check test ID and a complimentary test ID to try out. J-Scholars may take the test at any time and day of their choosing – no scheduling necessary. The official test is 80 minutes in length. The official score report will be delivered to the test-taker and the J-Check partner school within 24 hours guaranteed.

Since 2018, Northwestern University has welcomed to campus hundreds of J-Scholars using J-Check to assess and document English language proficiency. For more information contact Patti Jones, J-Check President at pattij@jamesonglobal.com.