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Headline: International students struggle with TOEFL test

The TOEFL exam is just one of the options OU allows to fulfill the English proficiency requirement for international students' admission; however, some students have issues concerning the test.

The Test of English as a Foreign Language, better known as the TOEFL, is the most used test for international students at OU. The test comprises four sections: reading, listening, speaking and writing. Many students feel the test creates a lot of stress, as it can be very challenging.

"It's torture," said Chinese Ph.D. student Xiao Liu. "It was challenging for me... I felt very anxious and pressured."

One of the reasons behind this pressure is the cost of the tests, as many students must take the test multiple times. In the United States, the cost of the TOEFL is \$195, but the rate varies by country. The cost of this exam can be an issue for international students.

"Especially those who are from rural areas who do not have much but want to pursue these options of studying abroad and getting exposed to different cultures... it's really costly for those people," Ph.D. student, Waleed Wasti from Pakistan, said.

Despite the cost, colleges and universities across the country have concluded that the TOEFL is one of the best ways to determine if students are prepared to learn in an English-speaking environment.

"Many students don't understand why we are asking them for English proficiency, but... we need to make sure those students are ready for that level of English instruction in college," International Admissions counselor Sheetal Gowda said.

Some students do not understand why these tests are required because they feel as if they do not prepare you well enough for life in an English-speaking country.

"It's just a one-time thing. You can cram over a few days," Wasti said. "It may prepare you for a short period of time but not for the entire duration."

Though some students who studied English during their education at home can cram for a few days, most did not begin learning English until they decided to move to the United States. Studying for the TOEFL can be a long, vigorous process for these students.

"I think [I studied] for maybe one and a half years," said Roxana Poushang Bagheri, a Master's student from Iran. "For the speaking part, I took a class once a week...but for the other parts [I studied] every day."

Despite the intense studying, many students still find particular portions of the test challenging, each different for every person. However, multiple students noted the listening portion to be especially difficult. Unlike in everyday conversation, the test does not allow students to ask for the audio to repeat.

"When you miss one part, you can't just go back and listen again," Bagheri said. "It was really stressful for me."

Much like the listening portion, the speaking section also has its downfalls. During the speaking portion, students freely speak on a given topic for 45 to 60 seconds. Wasti noted that speaking into the microphone seems awkward and does not prepare students for real-life

conversation. He suggested it might be more beneficial to have someone to converse with while taking the exam.

"If you're talking to a person, you look at their expression and see if they are understanding or not. If they are not, you try to change your train of thought or how you say it," Wasti said.

Concerns such as these also arose when talking about the written portion of the exam. Liu mentioned the grammar portion of the writing seemed too rigid, suggesting there should be more flexibility in phrasing answers.

"[It would be nice] if we could just give diverse answers to certain questions, not just a very fixed one," Liu said.

As the students have lived in the United States, each one has found that a standardized test does not show someone's true capability as an English speaker. They have also found that you cannot wholly learn English until you have been immersed in the language.

"The English language for me is more important than just the exam," Liu said. "The education is more important than the practice and the scores... we don't need an exam to prove whether we pass or not."