

BA-PIER MEETING FEBRUARY 16, 2012 MINUTES by Virginia Spinelli [vspinelli@menlo.edu]

The BA PIER meeting on February 16, 2012 at Chabot-Las Positas College District Office was called to order at 1:10 PM. Lisa Harris welcomed members and asked those present to identify themselves and their school or organization represented. A copy of the sign-in sheet is attached.

Members were welcomed by our hosts, Cindy Balero from Las Positas College and Dolly Balangitao from Chabot College.

Carol Qazi and Chigusa Katoku, Mission College presented information on the process to become an iBT TOEFL Testing Center. Carol and Chigusa first started investigating the process approximately one and a half years ago.

They pursued becoming a center largely due to the fact that the old paper based TOEFL, which is used by ESL schools, did not meet the needs of Mission College. It seemed that many of their student population were passing the test with a 500 score although their ability to be successful in regular College classes was minimal. These particular students were achieving at a low level in their ESL classes. The paper based TOEFL does not evaluate the student's essay writing.

It was Carol and Chigusa's opinion that a school should not expect to make money on the iBT TOEFL administration. There is some monetary compensation given based upon the number of students tested. However, there are equipment and staff costs involved in administering the test that need to be considered. Mission College is involved in the program as a service to their students and to provide an appropriate assessment tool for transfer from ESL classes to full-time regular academic classes.

There are three main steps involved in becoming certified for iBT TOEFL administration:

1. Site approval – School must have a dedicated computer lab with a minimum of 15 available and working computers. Pictures of lab are taken and distance between computers is measured. Compensation is based upon number of students tested. For example: If 24 are tested, the compensation is \$ 620.
2. Proctor training and staffing – Proctor training is on-line and very technical. Training takes between 4-5 hours. After training an hour exam is given to the future administrators. There must be at least two staff present at each iBT test administration. Tests are given Fridays or Saturdays. It is expected that testing dates will require a six hour day for each staff person. The on site testers do not need to handle initial registration. The test center must be open to the outside public to register. Results usually will be available in two days or less.
3. Technical qualifications – Required headsets and cameras are provided free to each testing center. Staff must run demos on each computer. A working phone line must be installed in the room. There must be more computers than the number of students to be

tested. This is because if there is a computer malfunction, another computer must be immediately available.

Members asked questions regarding the center program and described ways that it might fit into their particular school. It was highly suggested that schools have their counsel and/or purchasing department review the contract that will be generated by Educational Testing Service.

Louis Gecenok, San Jose State University provided a Q & A session about Practical Training Issues.

Louis outlined regulations and procedures added April 2008. Pre and Post completion OPT were separated. Cap Gap concept was added. It allowed students to petition for H1B status while still in F-1 status during OPT and continue to work until Oct. 1. Allowed OPT students in STEM majors (Science, technology, engineering and math) to receive a 17 month extension to be utilized after the end of regular OPT. Thus, allowing 29 months of OPT for students in these majors. Qualifying majors are based upon SEVIS CIP codes that appear on the second page of each I-20. Only companies that participate in E-Verify are authorized to employ STEM students for the 17 month extension. Applications for STEM extensions must reach USCIS prior to the date that the student's standard OPT expires.

We were reminded that USCIS will send back OPT applications if they reach USCIS more than 90 days prior to completion of degree. The merits of applying online vs. paper application for Post-completion OPT were discussed. Online application is very helpful if student is applying close to deadline. Many DSO's do not use the process. However, those who were able to consistently use the online method seemed happy with results. When online application is used, a student must report in person for a biometric appointment. This is not required with a paper application. It is difficult for those far away from a biometric center without a car to use the online process.

The concept of "tolling" was introduced. If an application reaches USCIS on time and the applicant's status expires prior to receiving an answer for change of status, etc., a student is allowed to legally remain in the U.S. to await the answer.

A student had received her EAD card for Post Completion Practical Training. However, SEVIS was not showing her application had been approved. The help desk opened a ticket to research the situation. Prior to the ticket being satisfactorily completed, the student started a job. Members of BA PIER felt that the student's record should be updated to reflect the company employing the student prior to the approval being posted in SEVIS. The general feeling was that there was no danger in this, since a copy of the EAD card could be produced as evidence of approval if needed.

A case was presented where a prestigious company was requiring documentation from a school stating that a student was enrolled in an internship class, when accepting a part-time unpaid

internship while on OPT. Since class enrollment is not part of the post completion OPT process, suggestions included having the PDSO educate the company regarding the Post completion OPT rules and process. Others discussed ways of allowing the student to enroll after completion of degree. The downside to enrolling would be further cost to the student.

If an undergraduate student who has applied for OPT fails a class during the last semester of the student's program with a reduced course load, the opinion was given that the student should be allowed to complete the degree while working part-time under OPT. If a graduate student only has a graduate project to complete, they should be allowed to pursue OPT full-time.

Students may now only have OPT once at each academic level. There is an expectation that students will progress from the lower to higher levels of education. For example if a student receives OPT for a Bachelor degree and then for a Master's degree, she would not be able to receive OPT after completion of a certificate program.

It was reported that the Nebraska Service Center seems to be giving more scrutiny to students' ability to prove that they have not been unemployed for 90 days or more. They are examining this closely, especially during STEM applications. Currently there are no reports of this happening in CA Service Center. However, it is still important for students to make sure that they are able to report either paid or volunteer work within the 90 day window. We were reminded that PDSO's and DSO's are only to report information given to them by the student regarding employment. PDSO's and DSO's are not responsible to report PC OPT violators. Students may average 20 hours per week of paid or unpaid employment and be in compliance.

It was reported that SEVIS II will probably not be in place until 2013 or 2014.

Inna Zaltsman clarified leadership roles for Northern District Region XII officers. Inna is currently Northern District Past Chair. Olga Paly is currently the new Chair for Northern District. Our next BA PIER meeting will be June 21, 2012 at Holy Names in Oakland. A SEVP rep has been invited to the next meeting. The topic is to be decided. It probably will be immigration regulations.

The Northern District NAFSA Conference will be held March 28 at JFK University in Pleasant Hill. We were reminded that the Conference is what participants make of it. Port of Entry Officers for SFO and Deferred Inspections Officers and CBP in San Francisco will be present. Olga Paly may be reached at ovp@unex.berkeley.edu. We have a new email address for the whole team at region12north@gmail.com. If you have not already signed up to be part of the LIST SERV please do. We need to expand the list. The conference will cost \$ 50 on early bird registration and \$ 80 on site.

Lunch promises to be interesting and served a different format. There will be a light breakfast. We already have quite a few proposals.

Oct 22-26, 2012 will be the dates for the Region XII NAFSA Conference at the San Jose downtown Hilton. Inna Zaltsman and Trish Reiff will be the Conference Co-Chairs. They are looking for volunteers of all sorts for the conference. Leaders of a specific volunteer group should have previously been to a NAFSA Conference. You may email Inna at innaz2008@gmail.com if you are interested. Region XII has a Facebook Page now and Inna asked that we "Like" it and Read the newsletter. Please remember that evaluations of the conference help. The conference information should be online by April 1 and early registration deadline should be sometime in June. Travel grants information should be out in August.

Some members volunteered to summarize the National Conference at our next BA-PIER meeting on June 21. Other volunteers would also be helpful.

We were reminded to watch for Academy Training sessions for newcomers. Also, just prior to closing the meeting it was suggested that PCOPT participants get a letter from their "employer" if they are fulfilling OPT requirements with a non-paid position.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 3 PM.