Role of GRE Scores in Graduate Admissions

Report of the Graduate College Executive Committee
Background

- Recent questioning of value and costs of GREs – and dropping of requirement.
  - Burdens on applicants
  - Implications for diversity
  - Declining application rates to PhD programs
  - Predictive value? Recent studies.

- The Graduate College has never required GREs for admission, and no longer requests them for fellowships.
  - Different programs need to use different criteria, so a uniform admissions procedure is inappropriate.
  - Procedures should be reviewed.
  - Guidelines regarding (in)appropriate use of GRE scores.
What is the GRE?


“The GRE test does not predict graduate or doctoral completion rates. It was never intended to do this. Rather, the test provides a measure of graduate school readiness by assessing skills that are necessary to handle graduate-level work: verbal and quantitative reasoning, critical thinking and analytical writing. Investing more money in research that proves the same point over and over is wasteful when there is so much need in the graduate community for research that: identifies what characteristics are correlated with completion; develops more inclusive admissions processes that will help to identify which applicants have the academic skills as well as the personal attributes to be successful; and creates programs that will support students in their chosen programs.”
What is the GRE?

From A Balanced Approach to GRE Score Use (ETS):

• “GRE scores should never be used as the sole criterion by which applicants to graduate programs are denied admission.”

• “… large numbers of prospective graduate students in a variety of subgroups are adversely affected by a cut-score policy…”

• “The GRE Program recommends the use of a balanced approach to admissions and fellowship decisions, using GRE scores as one factor among various factors that have been shown to be indicative of an applicant’s potential for success in graduate and business school.”
1. The GCEC requests that departments review their admissions procedures, with special regard to the utility of GREs, to determine what criteria will best lead to a diverse and successful student body, and what criteria are most useful to determine who has appropriate preparation for their program, and to consider what additional support they may need to provide students to ensure success in the program.
2. The GCEC strongly recommends that departments using GREs follow ETS guidelines: do not use a GRE cutoff as a sole criterion for rejecting applicants; do develop alternative or additional indicators of applicants’ readiness, and/or create programs to provide support for applicants who they wish to accept who are not adequately prepared to succeed. Program modifications should not use a GRE cutoff score as a sole criterion for eliminating applicants from consideration.
Reviewing Admissions

- Admissions is program-specific, so departments are encouraged to consult the literature on best practices in their own disciplines.

- One should be wary of relying on any single admission criterion.
  - None are known to be predictive
  - Others may have similar problems to the GREs
  - Standard safeguards against bias should be used

- Multiple — program specific — criteria should be considered: e.g., work samples, statements, grades, letters, interviews, GREs, ....

- Examples of GRE-free admissions are found in the report.