CONNECTING
Graduate Admissions Practices with Goals
Questions to Consider

ETS and the *GRE®* Program, with the support of the GRE Board, are pleased to share a resource that we hope helps you guide a discussion about your institution's admissions practices or simply reflect upon your own role in the process. We posed these questions to faculty and staff involved in admissions at 58 programs across the United States as part of an effort to learn more about graduate admissions practices and holistic file review. As interview participants reflected on their experience, many said that our questions prompted them to consider and discuss issues they hadn't before. In response, we created this discussion guide to support faculty and administrators who are interested in having the same kind of thoughtful engagement about their graduate admissions practices on their own campuses.

PREPARING FOR THE ADMISSIONS PROCESS

1. When you think about the admissions process, what does success look like?

    a. What are the characteristics of a successful admissions process?

    b. Do you have goals or targets for your program(s) related to enrollment or the "right size" for a cohort? If so, please describe these goals or targets.

    c. What conversations take place to discuss the characteristics of a successful admissions process? When do these conversations occur?

    d. How do you define student success in the program (e.g., program completion, time to program completion, GPA in program, productivity in lab/as researcher, job placement)?

2. What tools/information/materials are provided to help prepare faculty/staff to review and evaluate applicant files and make admissions decisions?

    a. Who has responsibility for this?

3. Are rubrics provided to faculty and admissions committee members who will be evaluating candidate applications?

    a. Who develops them? Are committees tasked with developing rubrics?

    b. What are the elements of the rubric?

    c. Is any training or advice provided on how to use a given rubric?

    d. Does anyone monitor the use of the rubric to ensure consistency in how it is being applied?

    e. Is the rubric reviewed periodically to ensure that it is still addressing your program's needs?

    f. How effective has the rubric been in helping to evaluate applications for admission to your program?

4. What, if any, types of training or professional development do you offer to staff/faculty with regard to admissions best practices?

    a. Who participates in the training — admissions officers, department chairpersons, faculty who will review applications (but are not on admissions committees), admissions committee members?

    b. Is there any training provided or are there conversations with faculty and admissions committee members about implicit or unconscious bias in the admissions process?

    c. What tools/resources are provided or used to mitigate unconscious bias in the admissions process?

    d. Does any of the training content cover interview preparation/skills for applicant interviews? How to use rubrics?

    e. How is the training delivered — workshops, conferences, other?

    f. What are the desired outcomes from the training that is offered?

5. What types of professional development would you like to make available that are not currently provided to staff who are involved in reviewing applications for admissions and/or making selection decisions?

COLLECTING APPLICANT INFORMATION

1. What specific information do you request as part of the admissions process to understand applicants' cognitive skills?

    a. FOR GRADES: How do you evaluate the quality of grades from an institution with which you are unfamiliar?

    b. FOR TEST SCORES:
        i.   Which admissions test scores, if any, does your program require/recommend applicants submit as part of the application for admission?
        ii. How does your program use test scores to inform the admissions process?
        iii. Are test scores used for any other purpose — e.g., to select students for financial aid (including scholarships, teaching assistants, research assistants), for advising, other?

    c. FOR INTERVIEWS:
        i.   How do you decide which applicants will be interviewed?
        ii. Who conducts the interviews? And how formal are they?
        iii. What type of information do you typically try to obtain through the interview?

2. What information, if any, do you request as part of the application process to get insights into the personal attributes of applicants? Examples of personal attributes include motivation, resilience, adaptability, etc.

    a. Which personal attributes are you seeking to learn about?

    b. How do you collect this information — e.g., through questions or essays on the application, interviews, letters of recommendation, request for submission of specific types of materials?

REVIEWING APPLICANT FILES

1. What is the process for reviewing applications for admissions to your graduate programs?

    a. If there is a multistage review process, what happens at each stage of the process?

    b. Who participates in the reviews in the various review phases?

    c. How many people review each application?

    d. Are current students involved in any aspect of the reviews (e.g., conducting interviews with applicants and providing feedback to faculty/admissions committee)?

2. Would you describe the application review process as holistic file review? If so, why? If not, why not?

    a. How do you define holistic file review?

    b. What processes do you have in place to determine whether or not a program's admissions process is holistic?

    c. If holistic file review process is used, does the admissions committee for your programs utilize holistic file review during all stages of the admissions process or only for certain stages?
       i. If holistic file review is done only for certain stages of application review, for which stages is the review holistic? Why is a holistic approach used only at these stages instead of for all stages of application review?

    d. At what point(s) in the application review process are test scores reviewed?

    e. How do test scores impact how you do holistic file review?

3. When applications are reviewed, is a specific rating scale used to rate the applications?

    a. What type of scale is used — e.g., numerical, descriptors?

4. Are different weights or emphases placed on the various pieces of information that are part of the application?

    a. Which aspects of the application/materials/pieces of information are assigned the most vs. the least amount of weight when applications are evaluated?

SELECTING APPLICANTS AND MAKING FINAL DECISIONS

1. How do you use the information collected in the application process to make selection decisions?

2. What is the process for making the final applicant selection decisions?

   a. Who is involved?

   b. How much influence do the people involved have in making the final selection decisions?
      i. Are some people more influential than others in making the final applicant selection decisions? What is the relative influence of individuals such as faculty members who are not on the admissions committee, individual admissions committee members, the graduate program coordinator, admissions committee chairperson, dean?

3. How do test scores factor into the final selection decision?

   a. When evaluating a student's application, do you focus on scores on a particular test? Which one(s)? Why?

   b. Is the focus on the scale scores, percentiles or something else?

4. To what extent does an applicant's need for financial support factor into the admissions decision?

   a. At what stage in the admissions process is financial support considered?

5. How much influence does an applicant's personal attributes (e.g., motivation, perseverance, "grit") have in the final applicant selection decision?

   a. Which of those types of attributes are given most consideration in the selection process?

6. Which pieces of information/materials from the applications are most helpful when evaluating and selecting applicants for admission? Why?

   a. What are the top three pieces of information/aspects of the application that most influence the selection decision?

   b. Does this hold true for students from underrepresented groups (e.g., age, gender, race, ethnicity)
      i. If not, what types of information do you typically find most effective in helping you to select students from underrepresented groups who you feel will be successful in your programs (i.e., graduate from the program)?

7. When selecting students, what considerations are given to the composition of the cohort of admitted students overall/by program (e.g., psychology) and by diversity groups (e.g., race, age, gender, experience)?

   a. What, if any, goals or targets do your programs have to ensure a diverse cohort (e.g., by race, gender, age, experience)?

   b. If the program does not have goals/targets, to what extent is diversity a consideration?

8. Among those involved in the admissions process, who is accountable for adhering to diversity policies/achieving diversity goals? Please describe how.

   a. What, if any, incentives are provided for achieving a diverse cohort?

   b. Are there any penalties or ramifications for not achieving a diverse cohort?

9. What impact do diversity policies/goals/considerations have on the review of applications for students from underrepresented groups (e.g., by race, gender, age, experience)?

   a. If there is an impact: When selecting applicants for admission how, if at all, do the diversity policies and goals impact the factors that are considered or the weight that is placed on various pieces of information in the application such as test scores, GPA, personal attributes, work experience, etc.?

   b. Would it be beneficial to have additional review steps/processes to ensure full consideration for students from underrepresented groups (e.g., by race, gender, age, experience)?

EVALUATING THE ADMISSIONS PROCESS

1. Reflecting upon past students who have been successful in your program (i.e., graduated/ excelled in the program) and those who have either dropped out or failed to meet program requirements, how effective do you think the pieces of information that you use to evaluate applications and make selection decisions are in helping you determine which applicants have the potential to make it through your program?

2. What, if anything, do you think can be done to improve the admissions process?

   a. What information about the skills or discipline-specific knowledge of applicants don't you currently receive that would be helpful to you in making better admissions decisions?

3. How do you measure the effectiveness of the admissions process for your programs?

   a. Do you have a formal process in place to review admissions decisions from previous years and adjust the process/criteria for future admissions cycles as needed?
      i. If so, how do you do this? Who is involved in this review?
      ii. How often do you do this type of review/analysis?

   b. Do you have a formal process in place for looking at graduates of your program (successful students — students who graduate and students who excelled in the program) and the criteria that were used for admitting them?
      i. How does this process work?
      ii. How often do you do this type of review?
      iii. What, if any, changes have you made as a result of these reviews?

   c. Are you measuring your admissions structure (processes, standards, policies, goals) to evaluate its impact on the outcomes of your admissions (e.g., diversity goals, number of admitted students, expected yield, faculty availability for mentoring, availability of financial support)?
      i. If so, how? What outcomes are you measuring against (e.g., goals related to enrollment, diversity)?
      ii. If not, why?

   d. Do you measure the effectiveness of the admissions process in relation to your graduate school's/university's vision (i.e., mission statement/diversity statement)?
      i. If so, how? What outcomes are you measuring against?
      ii. If not, why?

4. At what time intervals are you measuring or evaluating the success of your admissions process (e.g., measured last admission cycle, measured two years ago and looked at the past three years of admissions)?

For more resources to support holistic admissions practices and using
GRE scores, visit **holisticadmissions.org**.

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