Holistic Admissions:
Why It Matters and How Programs Are Addressing It Now

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Today, I will share

- Benefits of holistic admissions

- Promising practices that institutions are using now.

- Resources that can help.

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Benefits of holistic admissions

- ✓ It is fairer to the applicant.

- ✓ It enables programs to gain a clearer picture of an applicant's potential fit.

- ✓ It supports achieving program and institutional enrollment goals, as well as outcomes goals.

Holistic admissions is about being inclusive, not exclusive

Scores are essential because they:
- support institutions' efforts to identify which applicants are academically prepared for graduate-level study
- provide a common, objective measure to help programs compare applicants from different backgrounds.

However, they are just one piece of the puzzle and should <u>always</u> be considered along with other pieces of information.

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Public support for using *GRE®* scores as part of holistic admissions

THE HECHINGER REPORT *Covering Innovation & Inequality in Education*

" Some graduate programs have identified dropping the GRE as a solution to increase diversity. In an unequal society, equity will not present itself clearly with the elimination of one piece of the admissions puzzle, especially when so many of the other pieces are subjective — and therefore susceptible to our biases. Instead, it's necessary for the focus to shift toward eliminating layers of institutional bias for underrepresented groups across every educational level and to move the blame away from one single aspect. Disregarding the one piece of an admissions packet that levels the playing field across race, gender and socioeconomic status is a step back to when social class was a determining factor in the college admissions process. Admissions processes that use standardized assessments, coupled with more subjective measures like essays, internships and interviews, are inherently fairer and more respectful to applicants, while also helping institutions achieve their diversity goals. "

Michael Cunningham, professor of psychology and Africana studies, Tulane University
https://hechingerreport.org/opinion-making-campus-diversity-real-starting-in-kindergarten/

Public support for using *GRE®* scores as part of holistic admissions

"Coming from an undistinguished college where I lacked access to famous letter-writers, I hoped the GRE would be an equalizer for me... it's not clear to me that, on balance, the GRE confers significant advantages to high-income students, given that (i) high-income students are more likely than low-income students to attend [liberal arts colleges] or well-regarded research schools, which already serve as proxies for excellence; (ii) because high-income students are more likely to attend selective schools, they're more likely to have famous letter-writers..."

Undergraduate student

"I had somewhat poor grades as an undergraduate for a variety of good and bad reasons. I think I had somewhat strong letters from somewhat known people. I also had notably strong GRE scores. My impression is that the scores helped significantly when applying to grad school, since without them the strong letters and the poor grades would have sort of cancelled each other out. I think I was a relatively strong grad student and, in any case, I now have tenure."

Faculty member

www.insidehighered.com/admissions/article/2018/09/17/decision-penns-philosophy-department-renews-debate-about-gre

How to move toward a holistic admissions process

- We don't know of a "best way," but we can share "promising practices."

- ETS's research

  - 71 on-campus interviews with deans & faculty to learn about current admissions practices and challenges

  - These interviews and extensive literature review informed the curation and development of 12 promising practices

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Work together to set goals and strategies to achieve them

- Agree upon goals early on and structure entire admissions process (recruitment to enrollment) to achieve them

- Be explicit about plans to identify and recruit desired populations and how to assess desired attributes

- Determine the role and importance of each component of an applicant's file

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What can help: Discussion Guide
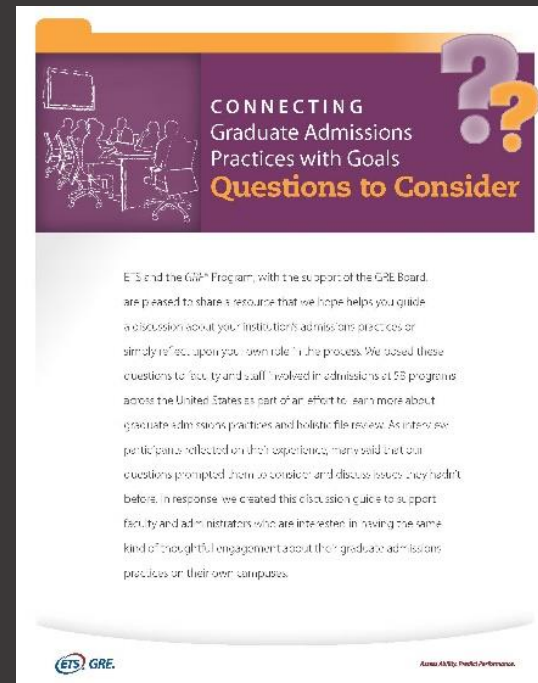
*Available at **holisticadmissions.org***

Promising Practices: Diversify the Admissions Committee

Institutions that make a commitment to diversity and inclusion could consider the composition of the admissions committee so that diverse perspectives and experiences are represented and reflected.

What can help: Providing Context

Faculty opportunities to:

- Learn about less familiar undergraduate schools, especially minority-serving institutions and those with large first-generation student populations.
- Work with undergraduates from underrepresented groups.

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Promising Practices: Increasing Understanding

Determine and communicate the application review and selection process so all decision makers understand:

- Enrollment goals, strategy and process

- How to evaluate each component of the application
  - Role and importance
  - Order of review
  - What inferences can be made

- How to mitigate unconscious bias
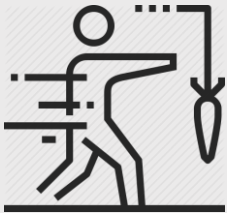
- How disagreements will be resolved
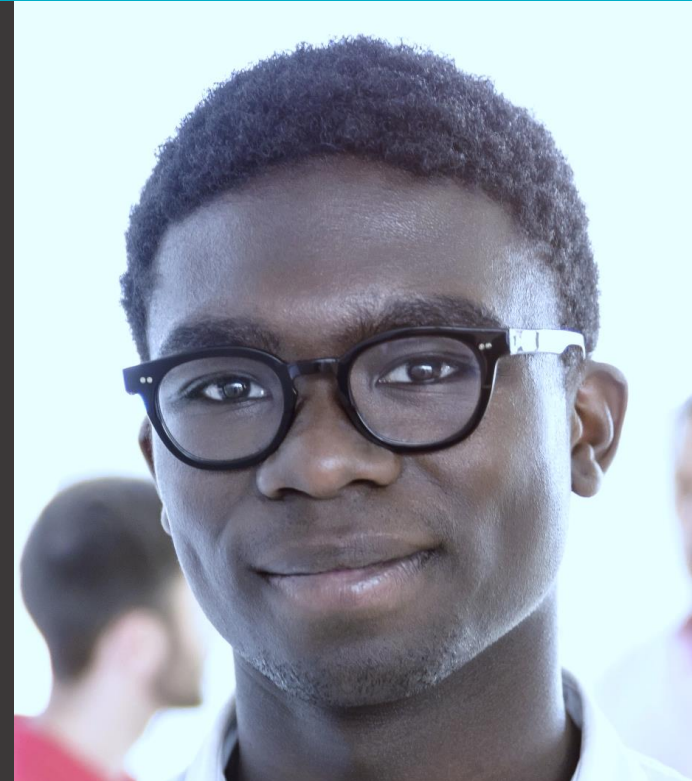
Making the **Implicit Explicit**
Creating Performance Expectations for the Dissertation
Barbara E. Lovitts

Determine and communicate the application review and selection process so all decision makers understand:

What can help:
An example

Desired Attribute

Related Component

Unrelated Component

Review multiple components — even when narrowing the pool — and don't over rely on any one component

- If using cut scores, add another component
- Quantify traditionally qualitative components
- Align rubric weighting to goals
- Review components in order of priority based upon enrollment goals
- Consider an alternative review process

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Review multiple components and don't over rely on any one component

What can help:
(Sample scorecard for illustrative purposes)

Component	Maximum Points
Research	5
Letters of Recommendation (LORs)	3
Work experience/CV	3
Undergrad curriculum	2
GPA	4
Personal statement	3
GRE® scores	5
Total	**25**

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Component & Max Points	Points values	Component & Max Points	Points values
Research Max = 5	3 – 1 yr UG + work/internship research 2 – 1 year of UG research 0–1 – less than a year *1–2 extra for publications, posters, awards, etc.*	**Personal statement** Max = 3	1–2 – quality of writing, maturity *1 extra for overcoming challenges, contribution to diversity*
LORs Max = 3	3 – high on all 6 attributes 2 – high on 5 attributes 1 – high on 4 attributes	*GRE*® **Quant** Max = 2	2 – 164–170 1 – 160–163 -1 – less than 142
Work exp./CV Max = 3	2 – 2+ years related work exp. 1 – 1–2 years related work exp. *1 extra for volunteer work*	**GRE AW** Max = 2	2 – 5.0–6 1 – 4.0–4.5 -1 – less than 3
UG curriculum Max = 2	1 – extensive science coursework *1 extra for high UGI challenge*	**GRE Verbal** Max = 1	1 – 150–170 0 – <149
GPA Max = 4	4 – 3.8 to 4.0 3 – 3.5 to 3.79 2 – 3.2 to 3.49 1 – 3.0 to 3.19	**Total Score:**	20–25 – Strong admit 17–19 – Admit 14–16 – Probable admit 10–13 – Probable deny 0–9 – Deny

Sample scorecard for illustrative purposes

Review multiple components and don't over rely on any one component

What can help:
Alternate review processes

Multistage   **Two Pool**   **Separate and Convene**

Consider ways to set criteria that would allow applicants to be <u>included</u> in the review, rather than <u>excluded</u>

- Ask programs to commit to focusing on at least three screen-in criteria. If using GRE and GPA to make first cut, add at least one more criteria

- Each applicant, then, has at least three opportunities to be placed into the review pool, helping to ensure that qualified applicants aren't overlooked due to performance on just one measure

What can help:
An example

One graduate school made two changes to their application:

- Request applicants provide information about specific educational experiences
- Request recommenders rate applicants on a specific set of skills and applicants

This information can be used in the screen-in process to create the applicant pool for review.

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Promising Practices: GRE Scores as a Positive Indicator

Consider *GRE®* scores a useful, positive indicator of an applicant's preparedness for graduate study.

- Scores should only be used in consultation with other materials
- Consider the amount of emphasis placed on scores if GRE scores are not consistent with other materials
- GRE scores provide the most valuable information when they are required of all applicants and can be especially helpful when the undergraduate institution is unfamiliar to reviewers

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Resources to help you get started

Two ... : the
san ... view
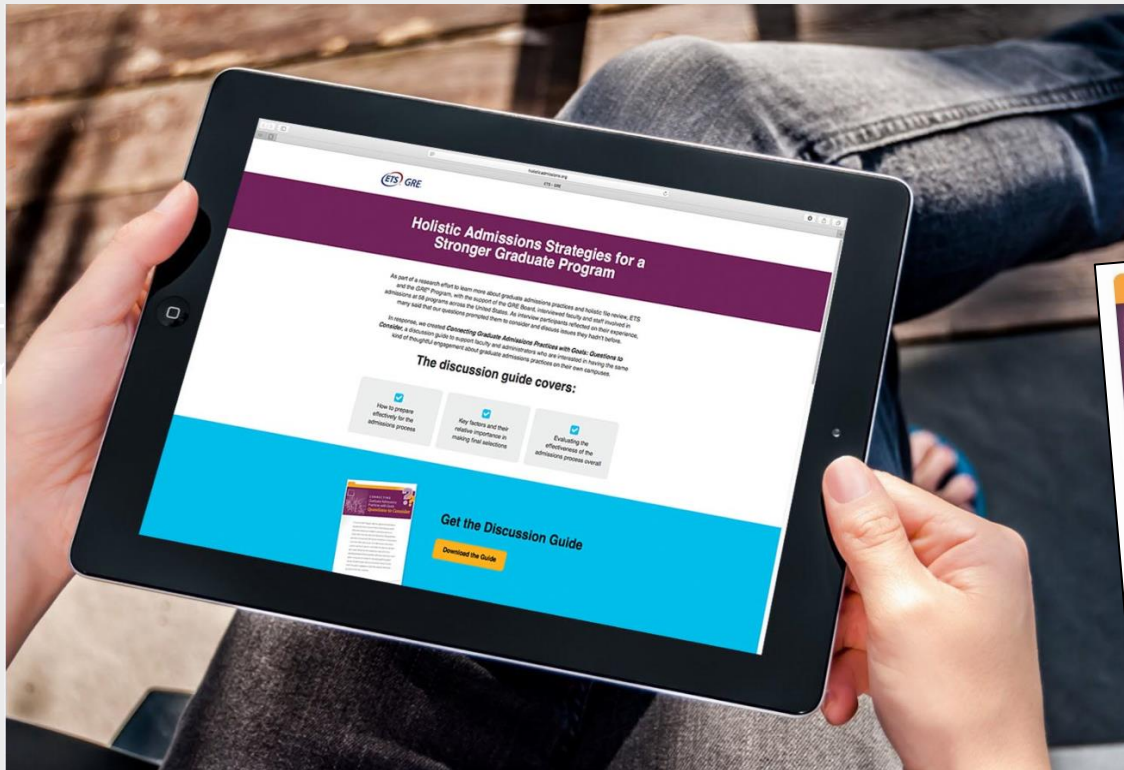
Includes expanded sample scorecard!

Created by ETS, grounded in research, and available at www.holisticadmissions.org

Thank you!

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