

Women in Business Education Presents

# MOMENTUM

Empower the Next Generation of Female Business Leaders

## How to Implement Holistic Admissions Strategies in Your Business School

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GRE Client Relations Specialist  
ETS



# Overview

- About ETS
- The Search for Desired Evidence in Application Portfolios
- Purpose, Benefits, Drawbacks and Mitigations of Application Criteria
- Using a Holistic Admissions Process
- GRE Scores: Benefits and Limitations



**Maria Kirilova**

# About ETS



# About ETS



ETS is a nonprofit,  
501(c)(3) organization



Mission is to help  
advance quality and  
equity in education



70+ years of experience  
in educational research  
and assessment



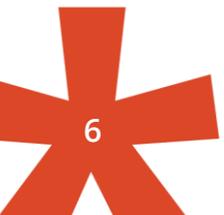
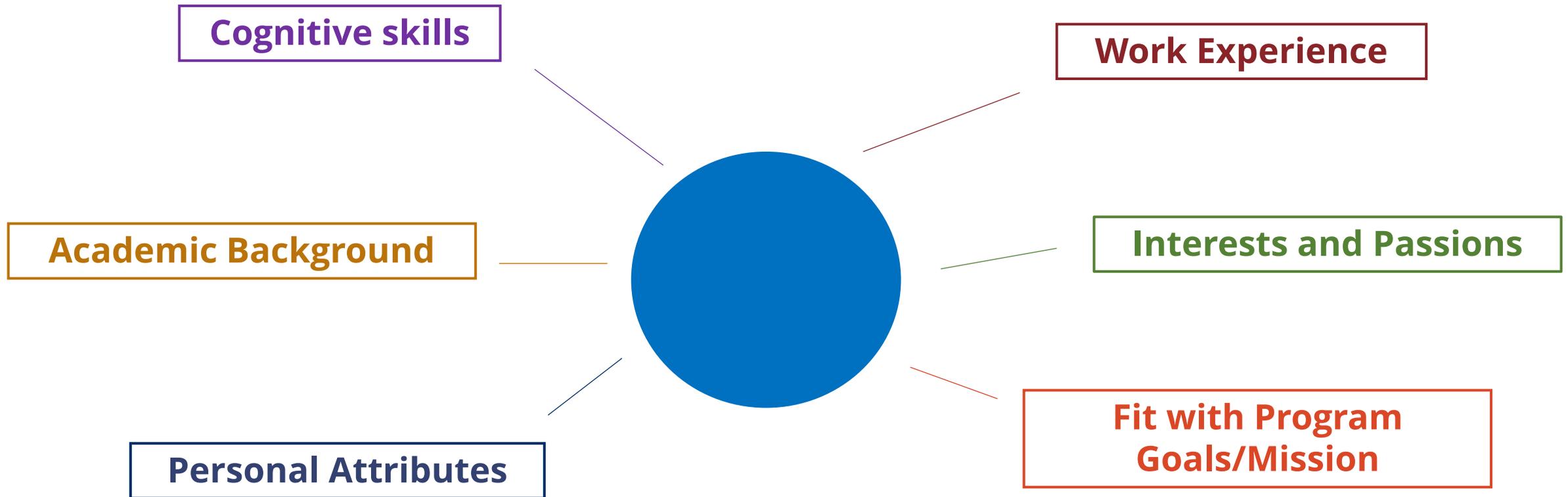
Develops, administers and scores  
50 million tests annually in 180  
countries, including programs for  
the U.S. and other governments



Significant annual investment in  
researching solutions  
focused on improving  
educational outcomes for all

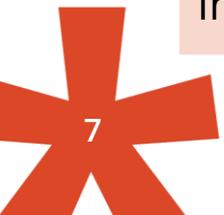
# The Search for Desired Evidence in Application Portfolios

# The search for desired evidence



# Where is the desired evidence?

Evidence	Cognitive Skills	Academic Background	Personal Attributes	Work Experience	Interests and Passions	Fit with Program Goals/Mission
Undergraduate Transcript & GPA	◆	◆			◆	◆
GRE® Scores	◆					◆
Personal Statement			◆	◆	◆	◆
Statement of Purpose		◆	◆	◆	◆	◆
Letters of Recommendation			◆		◆	◆
Résumé & Research Experience				◆	◆	◆
Interviews			◆	◆	◆	◆



# Review of Application Criteria

Purpose, Benefits, Drawbacks and Mitigations

# Application criteria purpose, benefits, drawbacks and mitigations

Application Criteria	Purpose	Benefits	Drawbacks	Mitigation
<b>Undergraduate Transcript &amp; GPA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Specialized experience</li> <li>Academic ability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Growth over time</li> <li>Challenging coursework</li> <li>Passion for subject</li> <li>Well-roundedness</li> <li>Cross-discipline interests</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Varying institutional rigor</li> <li>Different grading scales</li> <li>Pass/fail options (COVID19)</li> <li>Grade inflation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Examine in context</li> <li>Read between the lines</li> <li>Look for evidence of challenging coursework, growth</li> </ul>
<b>GRE® Scores</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cognitive skills</li> <li>Grad readiness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Objective benchmark</li> <li>Equal opportunity</li> <li>Research-based</li> <li>Fairness reviews</li> <li>Professional standards</li> <li>Board of grad deans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overweight/cut scores</li> <li>Tendency to combine scores</li> <li>Prep investments vary</li> <li>Group score differences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider relevant scores</li> <li>Go holistic</li> <li>Use a rubric</li> <li>Avoid predictive emphasis</li> <li>Use alternate review processes</li> </ul>
<b>Personal Statement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Passions</li> <li>Personality</li> <li>Potential</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Humanizes objective, quantifiable info</li> <li>Unique experiences, backgrounds, POVs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Especially subjective; perceptions dependent on reviewer factors</li> <li>Subject to explicitness of instructions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Needs to provide insights on persistence and resilience</li> <li>Gather input on application directions</li> <li>Have multiple reviewers</li> <li>Use descriptive rubric</li> <li>Target info committee is seeking</li> </ul>



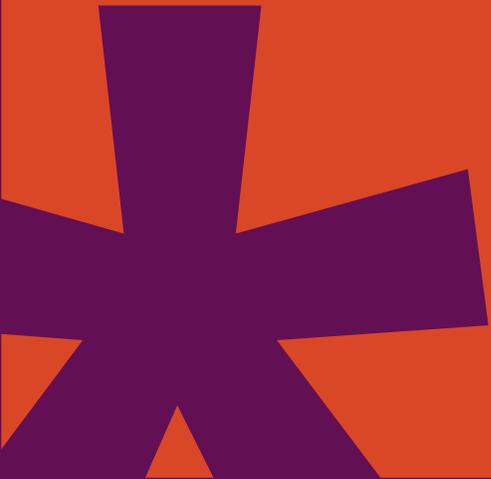
## Application criteria purpose, benefits, drawbacks and mitigations (continued)

Application Criteria	Purpose	Benefits	Drawbacks	Mitigation
<b>Statement of Purpose</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reason for applying to program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Student's experiences as prep for advanced study</li> <li>If applicant is a good fit</li> <li>Applicant's career plans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Purpose not understood unless instructions are clear</li> <li>Disagreement with applicant's career goals</li> <li>Often heavily coached and edited</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Needs to align with program goals</li> <li>Provide clear instructions on content expected</li> <li>Have several reviewers read</li> <li>Use a rubric</li> </ul>
<b>Letters of Recommendation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Third-party assessment and endorsement</li> <li>Attributes</li> <li>Ability to succeed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Authentic perceptions of achievements, potential</li> <li>Concrete examples of subjective traits</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Highly subjective; positive bias</li> <li>Prone to gender bias</li> <li>Courtesy vs sincerity</li> <li>Some are student authored</li> <li>Reviewer bias</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Pay attention to language, examples</li> <li>Articulate dispositions; request examples</li> <li>Provide a standard form with metrics</li> <li>Diverse group of reviewers</li> <li>Use a rubric with intentional instructions for recommender</li> </ul>

## Application criteria purpose, benefits, drawbacks and mitigations (continued)

Application Criteria	Purpose	Benefits	Drawbacks	Mitigation
<b>Résumé &amp; Research Experience</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practical application of classroom concepts</li> <li>• Specialized experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skills and dispositions to contribute to the field</li> <li>• Proof of practical skills that can be advanced</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Influenced by socioeconomic factors</li> <li>• Can be incomplete due to relevancy questions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understand role and impact of privilege</li> <li>• Use explicit directions</li> <li>• Use consistent format</li> </ul>
<b>Interviews</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fit between student's aspirations and department's offerings</li> <li>• Verbal and nonverbal communication skills</li> <li>• Interpersonal and intrapersonal skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More insight into candidate</li> <li>• Can ask questions about points in application</li> <li>• Another piece of information to get best perspective on student</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Overreliance on interviews</li> <li>• Influenced by conscious and unconscious biases</li> <li>• If unstructured, may not provide the information needed</li> <li>• Cultural differences might cause some students to be at a disadvantage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standardize interview and use a rubric.</li> <li>• Be intentional about purpose of the interview</li> </ul>

# Using a Holistic Admissions Process



# Foundational work for holistic admissions “promising practices” and subsequent materials



## **Campus visits**

71 interviews with deans and faculty in the following disciplines:

- Life sciences
- Physical sciences
- Engineering
- Social sciences
- Arts & humanities
- Education
- Business



## **Literature review**

Examined published works related to graduate admissions from early 1950s to present



## **Other sources**

More than a dozen other sources, including *Holistic Review in Graduate Admissions: A Report from the Council of Graduate Schools*

See sources at [www.holisticadmissions.org/navigate/more-information/](http://www.holisticadmissions.org/navigate/more-information/)

# What is “holistic admissions”?

At its core, holistic admissions is about considering **all information** to get the fullest picture of everything that an applicant can bring to a program.

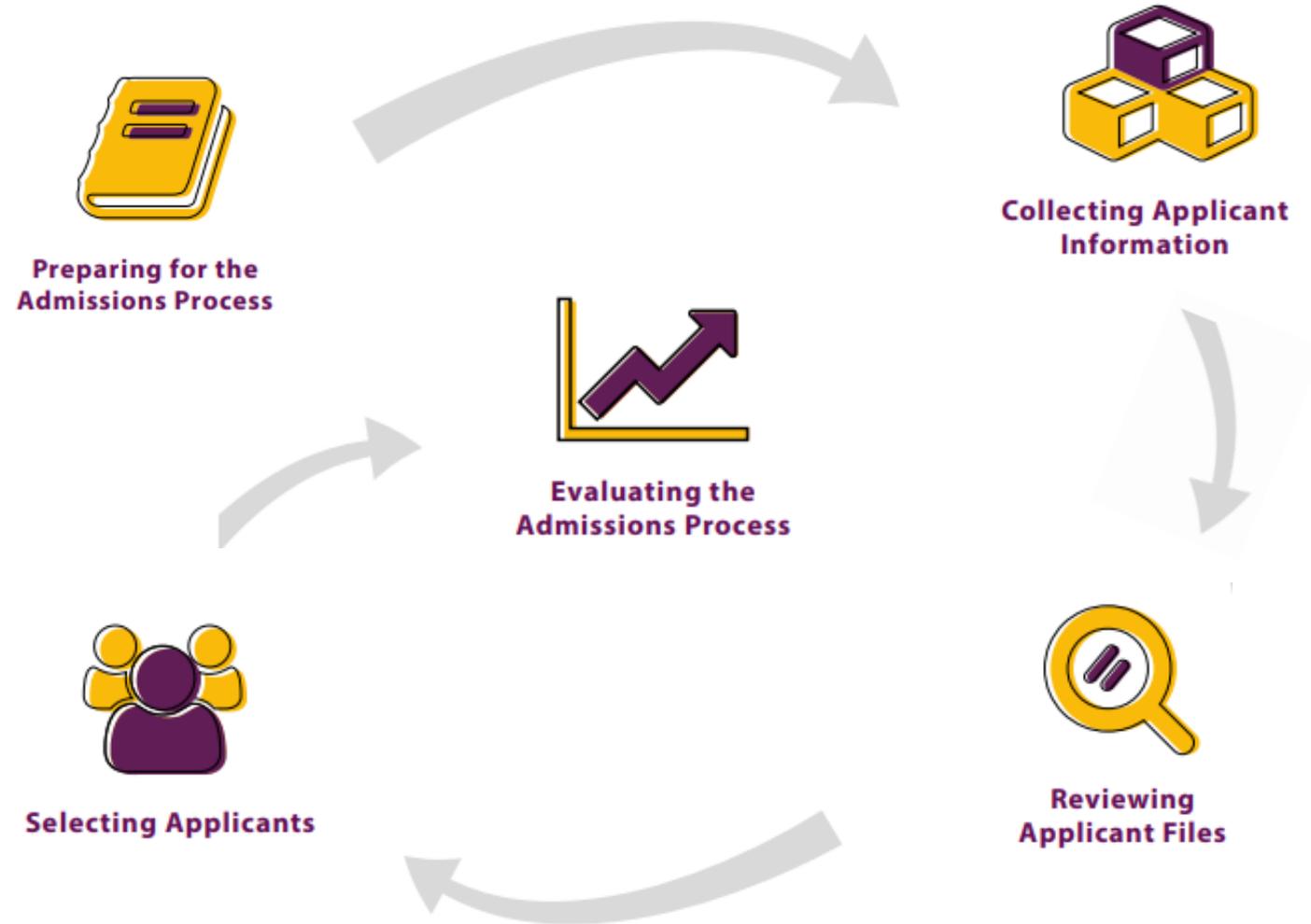
But it’s not just about **what** information is considered, but **how**. Programs that are **advanced** in their holistic admissions practice typically:

- Avoid using threshold (or cutoff) scores that are determined using only undergraduate GPA and *GRE*<sup>®</sup> scores, as that may prevent candidates with other desirable qualities from being considered.
- Give thought to the weighting of various components of the application — and the order in which those components are reviewed — to consider all information about an applicant in a fair and equitable way.

## Information typically considered in holistic review

- **Undergraduate record**, including grades, transcript and reputation of undergraduate program
- **Standardized test scores** that provide evidence of graduate readiness, such as GRE scores, and English-language proficiency (as needed), such as TOEFL<sup>®</sup> scores
- **Recommendations**
- **Personal statement or statement of purpose**
- **Internship and work experience**
- **Research experience**
- **Demographics**, such as gender and ethnicity

# Holistic practices can be embedded within each step of the admissions process



# Step 1. Preparing for the admissions process



- ✓ Set goals and guiding principles.
- ✓ Structure processes to achieve your goals.
- ✓ Consider committee composition and training.



*"We must commit to holistic evaluation to get a true sense of who an applicant is and can become."*

## **Janet Rutledge**

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC), and GRE Board Past Chair

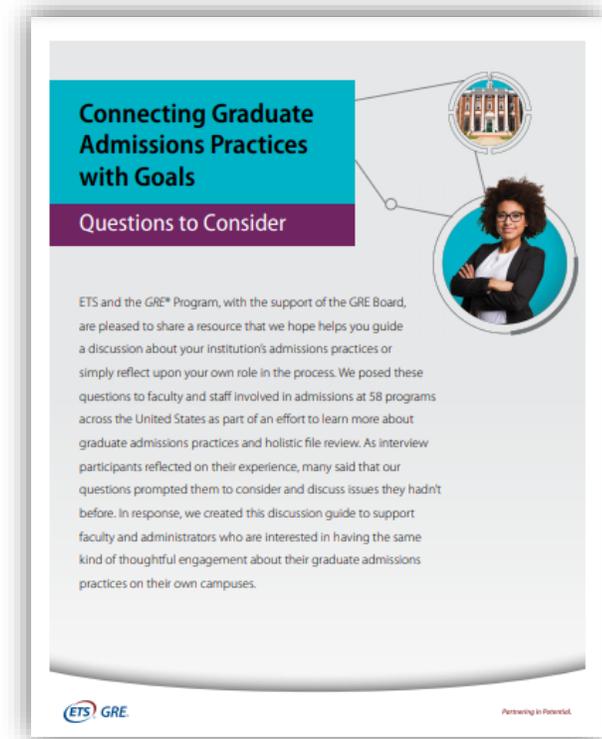
# Step 1. Preparing for the admissions process:

## Set goals and guiding principles

- ✓ Define success and evidence of success.
- ✓ Set goals that align with the mission of the program.
- ✓ Establish guiding principles so all parties understand how the goals will be achieved..
- ✓ Once established, goals and guiding principles can inform every step of the process.

### Setting Goals

A discussion guide to facilitate a conversation on your campus



[Download here.](#)

# Step 1. Preparing for the admissions process:

## Consider committee composition and training

- Consider whether there is a balance of influence among team members.
- Ensure a variety of perspectives and experiences are reflected.
- Provide faculty opportunities to:
  - Learn about less familiar undergraduate schools.
  - Work with undergraduate students from underrepresented groups.
- Discuss or offer training about the role of implicit (unconscious) bias and how to avoid it.

### Training the Committee

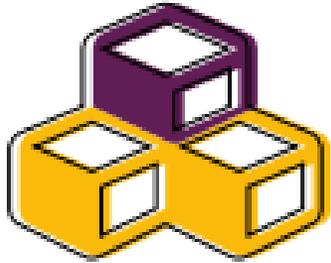
Cornell Graduate School provides an excellent faculty resource

### Implicit Bias Resources Webpage

Shares curated videos and links to other training materials

Visit [here](#).

## Step 2. Collecting applicant information



- ✓ Determine evidence needed to evaluate applicants.
- ✓ Ensure application explicitly requests it.
- ✓ Collect comparable information from all applicants.



*“A complete assessment of each applicant is important to identifying the best graduate students for your program. Using GRE scores is essential in having a full understanding of the potential of each applicant.”*

### **Maureen Grasso**

Professor of Textile Sciences and Former Dean of the Graduate School, North Carolina State University, former Dean of the University of Georgia Graduate School, and Graduate Education Advisor with ETS

## Step 3. Reviewing applicant files



- ✓ Adopt a truly holistic review process.
- ✓ Consider multiple criteria.
- ✓ Explore alternate processes.



*“A holistic process inclusive of both objective and subjective measures is inherently fairer and more respectful to applicants, while also helping programs better meet their needs.”*

### **Michael Cunningham**

Associate Provost for Graduate Studies and Research and Professor of Psychology and Africana Studies at Tulane University, and Chair of the GRE Board Services Committee

## Step 3. Reviewing applicant files: Explore alternate processes

- ✓ Determine alternate review processes to avoid the framing bias.
- ✓ Consider withholding information about UGPA and GRE scores until personal statements are reviewed or interviews are conducted.
- ✓ Ensure all participants review application materials in the same order and completely independently.

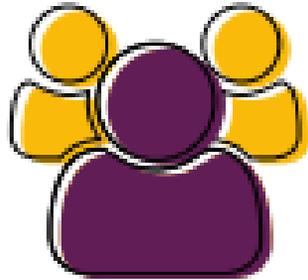
### Alternate Methods

Georgetown University School of Medicine on mitigating bias.

**Unconscious Bias  
in Interviewing  
and Letters of  
Recommendation**

View [here](#).

## Step 4. Selecting applicants



- ✓ Balance quantitative and qualitative measures.
- ✓ Consider composition of the class as a whole.
- ✓ Use a scorecard or rubric for consistency.



*"Making admissions decisions is an art and a science. Information about personal attributes and passions, found in personal statements and recommendations, serves as the art. Information about applicants' critical thinking skills, provided through GRE scores, serves as the science. Both are important."*

### **JoAnn Canales**

Dean Emeritus of Graduate Studies, College of Graduate Studies, Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, Senior Scholar-in-Residence Emerita, Council of Graduate Schools, and former GRE Board member

# Step 4. Selecting applicants: Use a rubric

- ✓ Use tools to help ensure that reviewers evaluate applicants consistently and in alignment with program goals.
- ✓ Give more points to information the program values more and fewer points to less important information.
- ✓ Recommend actions based on total score ranges.

## Rubric Example

A sample scorecard with links to more examples



**Using a Holistic Admissions Scorecard for Fair and Consistent Application Review**

Various definitions agree that, at its core, holistic admissions is a method in which reviewers consider all available information to get a more complete picture and view an applicant in light of a program. Implemented appropriately, it can support a fair and inclusive process that helps to identify applicants that effectively meet program needs and support institutional goals.

Programs conducting holistic admissions typically:

- use evidence and information from multiple sources to gauge applicants' knowledge, skills, experiences and personal attributes;
- avoid using the holistic (or total) score that we determine using only measures of academic experience and cognitive skills, such as undergraduate GPA and GRE® General Test scores, as the key metric candidates with other desirable attributes from being considered;
- give thought to the weighting of various components of the application, and the order in which those components are reviewed to consider all information about an applicant in a fair and equitable way.

Some programs use scorecards (or rubrics) to help ensure that reviewers evaluate applicants consistently and in alignment with program goals. With such a tool, a range of points is assigned to each component of the application based on the program's goals. Components considered more important receive more points than components considered less important. And for each component, reviewers can assign a range of scores depending on whether the evidence received demonstrates the skills, experiences and attributes desired.

In the example below, provided for illustrative purposes, a program is intentionally prioritizing applicants who have research experience.

Component	Maximum Points
Research	5
Letters of Recommendation (LORs)	3
Work experience/ CV	3
Understanding of our culture	2
CPA	4
Personal statement	2
GRE® scores	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>25</b>

[Download here.](#)

# Sample rubric for illustrative purposes

Component & Max Points	Points values
<b>Research</b> Max = 5	3 – 1 yr UG + work/ internship research 2 – 1 year of UG research 0-1 – less than a year <i>1-2 extra for publications, posters, awards, etc.</i>
<b>Letters of Recommendation</b> Max = 3	3 – very strong letters 2 – moderately strong letters 1 – below average letters -1 – red flag in letters
<b>Work exp./CV</b> Max = 3	2 – 2+ years related work exp. 1 – 1-2 years related work exp. <i>1 extra for volunteer work</i>
<b>UG curriculum</b> Max = 2	1 – extensive science coursework <i>1 extra for high UG challenge</i>
<b>UGPA</b> Max = 4	4 – 3.7 to 4.0 3 – 3.4 to 3.69 2 – 3.2 to 3.39 1 – 3.0 to 3.19

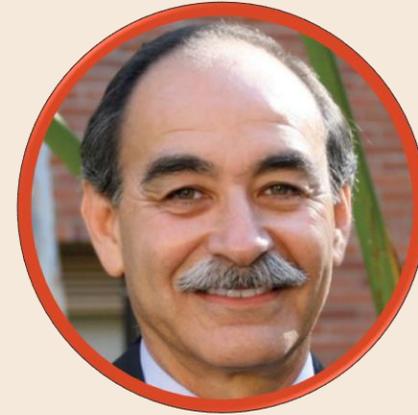
Component & Max Points	Points values
<b>Personal statement</b> Max = 3	2 – suggests strong fit 1 – suggests good fit 0 – unclear fit -1 – poor fit <i>1 extra for hardship, disadvantage</i>
<b>GRE Quantitative Reasoning</b> Max = 2	2 – 164-170 1 – 160-163 -1 – less than 142
<b>GRE Analytical Writing</b> Max = 2	2 – 5.0-6 1 – 4.0-4.5 -1 – less than 3
<b>GRE Verbal Reasoning</b> Max = 1	1 – 150-170 0 – <150
<b>Total Score:</b>	<b>20-25 – Strong admit</b> <b>17-19 – Admit</b> <b>14-16 – Probable admit</b> <b>10-13 – Probable deny</b> <b>0-9 – Deny</b>

Find several more examples [here](#).

## Step 5. Evaluating the admissions process



- ✓ Evaluate outcomes data against inputs.
- ✓ Reflect on past students to gain insight.
- ✓ Understand typical reasons for dropping out.



*“Be careful about placing blame for low completion rates on inputs considered during admissions. Completion is more often caused by what happens after enrollment, and programs and institutions can often influence outcomes by developing strong mentorship programs and a culture of inclusion.”*

### **Carlos Grijalva**

Emeritus Professor of Psychology and Neuroscience and Former Graduate Associate Dean at the University of California, Los Angeles, and Graduate Education Advisor with ETS

# Step 5. Evaluating the admissions process:

## Measure outcomes

- ✓ Evaluate outcomes against admissions data to ensure desired goals are achieved.
- ✓ Look for patterns that can help refine admissions practices in subsequent cycles.
- ✓ If goals haven't been met, review your strategies for recruiting and nurturing relationships.
- ✓ Consider doing a regression analysis using an appropriate sample size. This can help determine how well the various components can predict student success, however your program defines success.

### Analyze Inputs

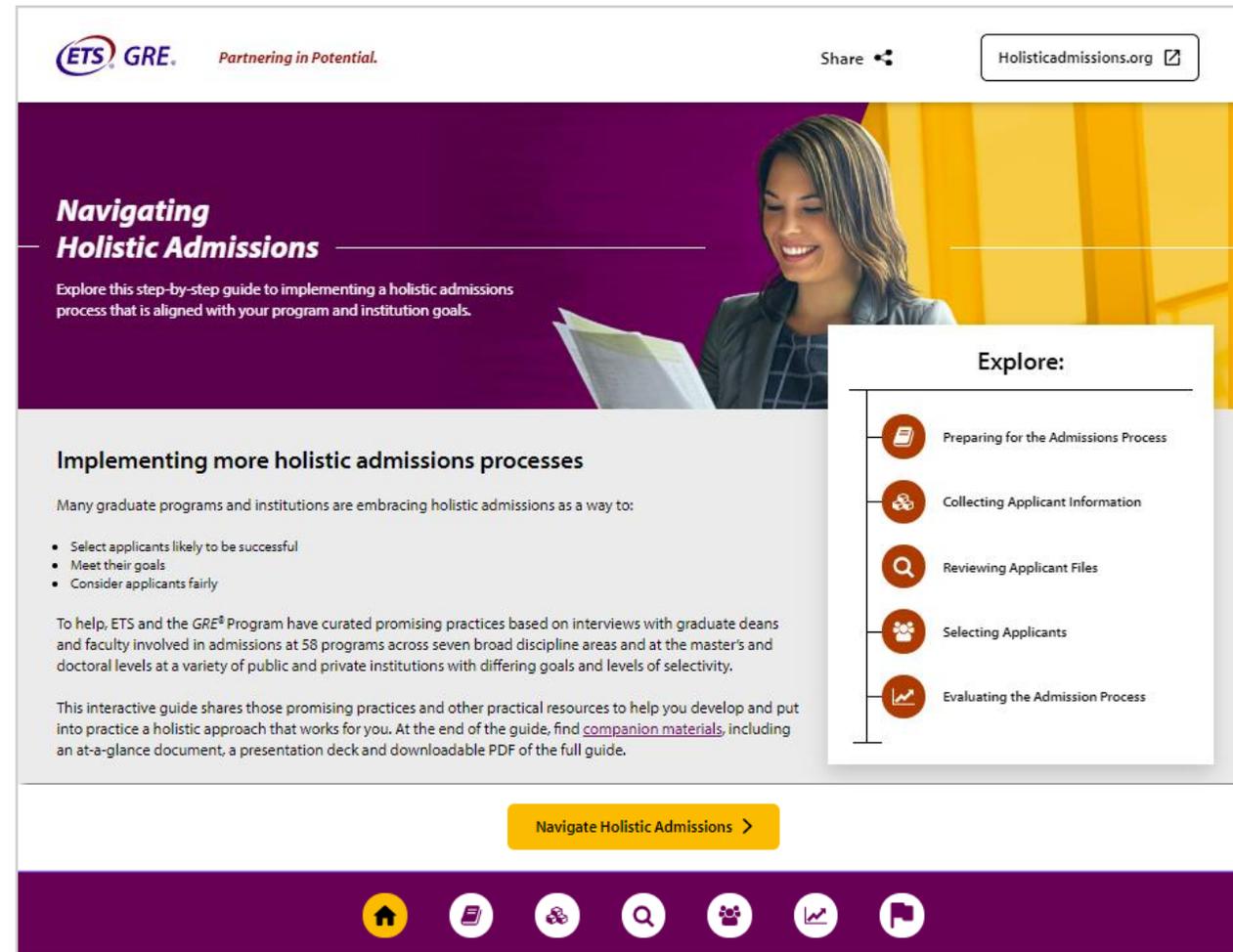
Implement a data-driven approach to increase diversity.

**A Model for Holistic Review in Graduate Admissions that Decouples the *GRE*<sup>®</sup> Tests from Race, Ethnicity, and Gender**

[Read here.](#)

# “Navigating Holistic Admissions” digital guide

This robust resource provides research-based guidance, examples from programs, and **downloadable content** that can be emailed, printed and shared. The entire guide is also available as a PDF and a PowerPoint deck.



Resource: [Navigating Holistic Admissions Digital Guide](#)

# *GRE*<sup>®</sup> Scores: Benefits and Limitations

## What are the benefits of using *GRE*<sup>®</sup> scores?

- ✓ Helps identify which applicants are graduate-ready
- ✓ Enables applicants from different backgrounds to be compared fairly
- ✓ Balances out more subjective information
- ✓ Levels the playing field for applicants who aren't as well resourced as their peers

See: [Four Facts about the \*GRE\*<sup>®</sup> General Test](#).



*“GRE Analytical Writing scores provide information about applicants’ ability to construct and evaluate arguments and articulate complex ideas. Programs can access applicants’ actual essay responses through ETS Data Manager. These responses are more authentic than personal statements, which are often coached and refined before submitting as part of the application.”*

### **Steve Matson**

Professor of Biology and Former Dean of the Graduate School, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and Graduate Education Advisor with ETS

# What are the limitations of using *GRE*<sup>®</sup> scores?

- ✓ Test scores can't offer insight about all qualities or factors that may predict academic or career success.
- ✓ No single measure can represent a person's potential, yet many programs use GRE scores as cutoff scores, thus disadvantaging some students.
- ✓ On average, members of different groups perform differently on the test, which can be addressed through holistic review.

See: [www.holisticadmissions.org/be-informed/](http://www.holisticadmissions.org/be-informed/)



*"GRE scores are complex measures that are frequently used inappropriately. It is important for review committees to obtain training to better unlock the value of GRE scores."*

## **Bill Andrefsky**

Edward R. Meyer Distinguished Professor Emeritus and Former Graduate Dean, Washington State University, and former graduate education advisor with ETS

# Predictive validity of the *GRE*<sup>®</sup> tests

A [meta-analysis](#)\* of **82,659 students** by University of Minnesota found that, **across master's and doctoral programs**, the *GRE*<sup>®</sup> General Test ...

Is a valid predictor of:

- ✓ Overall graduate GPA
- ✓ Comprehensive exam scores
- ✓ Publication counts
- ✓ Faculty ratings

Correlates positively with:

- ✓ Degree attainment
- ✓ Research productivity

Has stronger predictive validity than undergraduate GPA and letters of recommendation

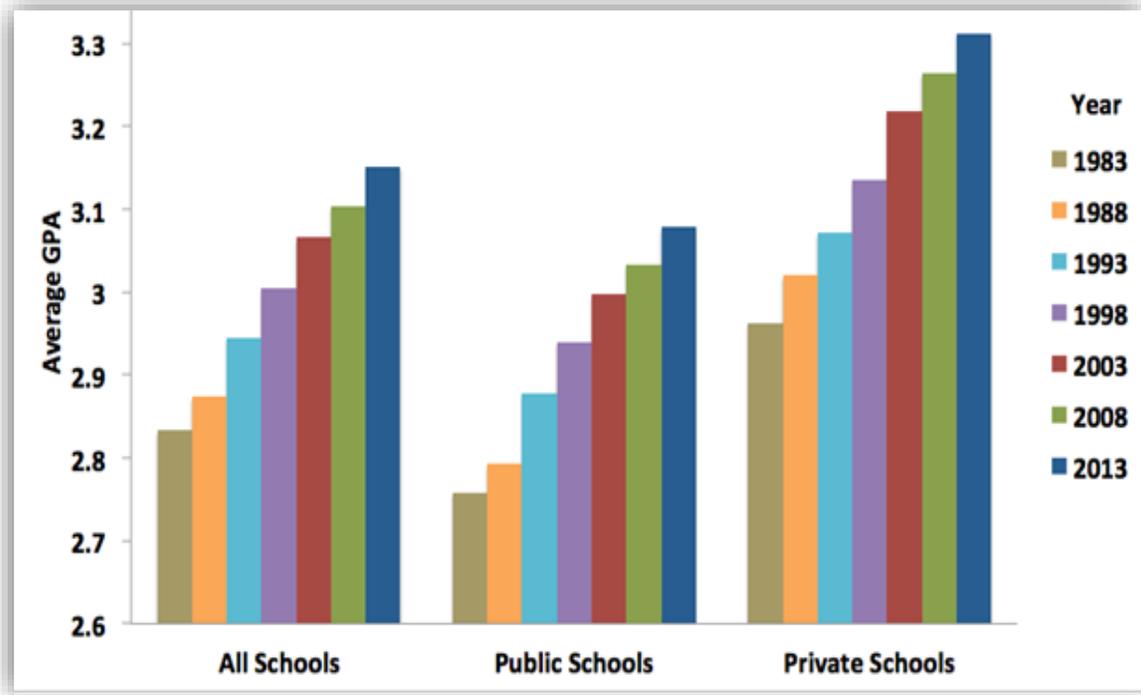
Research also shows:

GRE Analytical Writing scores are the best or 2nd-best predictors of future GPA, across master's and doctoral programs

The value of the test in identifying students likely to struggle

\* This same meta-analysis found that **GRE Subject Test** scores are better predictors of graduate school success than *GRE*<sup>®</sup> General Test scores or undergraduate GPA.

# All components of the application have imperfections



Source: [gradeinflation.com](http://gradeinflation.com)

Educational opportunities and life circumstances can have a substantial influence on all components of an application, including:

- ✓ Letters of recommendation
- ✓ Reputation of the undergraduate institution
- ✓ Personal statements
- ✓ Undergraduate GPA

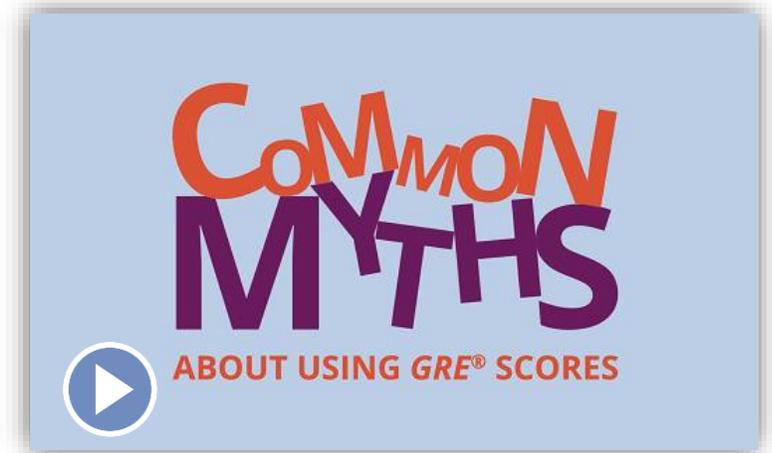
## Only *GRE*® Test Scores:

- ✓ Are backed by ongoing research
- ✓ Meet and exceed industry psychometric standards
- ✓ Have processes to ensure they are as free from bias as possible

See: [ETS Fairness](#)

# Your questions answered

- + Are the GRE tests valid and reliable?
- + Why do some people say the tests are biased?
- + How can an admissions committee mitigate GRE score variances between demographic groups?
- + Will dropping use of the tests help remove barriers for people from underrepresented groups?
- + Can dropping the tests help increase student diversity?
- + What would help increase campus diversity?
- + What exactly is holistic admissions?
- + Can using GRE scores as part of a holistic process help increase diversity?



Discover more at [www.holisticadmissions.org/be-informed](http://www.holisticadmissions.org/be-informed)



# Stay Informed

Sign up to receive the latest *GRE*<sup>®</sup> news, updates, webinar dates and more.

[www.ets.org/gre/update](http://www.ets.org/gre/update)



*Partnering in Potential.*

Join us for a webinar about holistic admissions



Get strategies and resources for evolving your process at every stage of the admissions cycle.

Graduate programs are increasingly adopting holistic admissions as a way to clearly see applicant potential, fairly admit qualified students and achieve diversity goals. In this presentation, you'll learn about the main principles underpinning holistic admissions and various approaches you can adopt to make your process truly holistic.



# To get more information

- **Holistic Admissions Strategies**
  - Visit [www.holisticadmissions.org](http://www.holisticadmissions.org)
- **GRE® Tests and Services**
  - Visit [www.ets.org/gre/institutions](http://www.ets.org/gre/institutions)
- **If you have questions:**
  - Maria Kirilova - [mkirilova@etsglobal.org](mailto:mkirilova@etsglobal.org)

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# MOMENTUM

## Thank you!

Maria Kirilova

GRE Client Relations Specialist

ETS

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WiBE