

Holistic Admissions Suggestions

University Senate Equity, Inclusion and Anti-Discrimination Advocacy Committee

Context: An increasingly important goal in graduate admissions is to increase diversity. One way to accomplish this is to use what has been termed *holistic admissions*, which places emphasis on the entire application package, rather than emphasizing quantitative aspects alone. Below are some starting recommendations for holistic admissions practices (sources follow).

1. Use a diverse set of review criteria that includes elements such as community service, leadership experience, and personal hardships that have been overcome.

Rationale: This model has led to increased invitations for individuals from under-represented groups. Waiting for evidence on these practices will lead to the status quo being perpetuated.

2. Uniformly assess criteria in a standard way for each applicant.

Rationale: This will guard against biases that may lead or contribute to racial disparities.

3. Develop a rubric to consistently guide the admissions process.

Rationale: It is both ethically and legally important to have demonstrable standards

4. Use the Experiences, Attributes, and Academic Metrics (EAM) model. Using a flexible method of assessing capabilities with balanced consideration of applicants' experience, attributes, and academic metrics permits assessment of applicants as a whole, rather than only by academic rankings.

Rationale: Considering all three of these elements in a balanced way helps to see the individual's potential value as a student and a future professional. Selection criteria determine who will be offered the opportunity to be accepted; holistic admission review is a proven strategy that promotes inclusivity.

5. Identify qualitative and quantitative attributes of applicants who have high probability to succeed and who contribute to and benefit from university learning environments.

Rationale: Decisions should not be based on 1 or 2 factors evaluated out of context of barriers, advantages, and experiences; consider intersecting factors to make individualized decisions.

6. In addition to typically considered academic factors, nonacademic factors to consider include: geographic background, personal attributes, extracurricular activities, service, and leadership and extenuating circumstances.

Rationale: Nonacademic factors can help the unit to assess an applicant's promise and capacity to benefit from and contribute to learning environment and University mission.

7. Consider "distance traveled" as a metric in the admissions process.

Rationale: Under-represented minority (URM) and disadvantaged students sometimes have lower GPAs and standardized test scores than non-URM or non-disadvantaged students. By using a tool to adjust these metrics for disadvantage, we can potentially eliminate barriers in the admissions process for URM and disadvantaged students.

8. Consider having a diverse admissions committee that includes not only faculty but alumni and students, ideally who represent different identities. If this is not possible, provide training for members of admissions committees, particularly if there is an interview component.

Rationale: These strategies can help to alleviate bias.

9. Not requiring GRE scores for admissions can allow for more URM students to be accepted in graduate programs. Other qualitative measures in the admissions process, such as letters of recommendation, interviews, and personal statements, work well for selecting qualified students. Emphasize use of strategies to facilitate retention of URM students that support academic success such as mentoring programs and fostering inclusive environment.

Rationale: Students who were admitted to a biomedical sciences graduate program had a wide range of GRE scores, from the lowest to highest percentiles. However, the association of GRE scores to academic and career achievements was weak, with many students in lower GRE percentiles authoring publications and obtaining positions as postdocs and tenure-track faculty.

Sources

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