

Recommendations for Use of the GRE in Admissions for 2020/2021

Council of Chairs of Training Councils (CCTC)¹
October 1, 2020

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has created an immediate need to modify many aspects of education and training in health service psychology, as well as opportunities to consider alternatives that may have benefits that extend beyond the virus pandemic. Use of the GRE in admissions is one area requiring modification; as GRE testing has been disrupted for both the general and subject tests, doctoral programs are faced with decisions about whether and how to modify their requirements for GRE tests as part of the graduate admission process.

The document reflects consensus among CCTC members that decisions regarding use of the GRE test involves consideration of both health/safety and equity/inclusion issues. This document focuses on 2020/2021 admission cycle, but the CCTC encourages programs to consider the role of the GRE in their admissions processes moving forward, given that issues related to equity and inclusion will likely not be resolved even when COVID-19 no longer restricts test access. The CCTC recognizes that varying opinions, needs, and constraints will affect individual training programs' decisions regarding admissions and selection processes, and thus offers a set of principles and recommendations to guide doctoral programs' decisions regarding use of GRE tests during the 2020/2021 admissions cycle, and their communication with prospective applicants.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- **Health and safety** should be prioritized when making decisions about requiring applicants to complete the GRE Tests for admissions.
- **Equity and inclusion** should be considered when making decisions about requiring applicants to complete the GRE Tests for admissions. The COVID-19 pandemic, civil uprisings, and other local and national events may impact optimal performance on the GRE. These events have an unequal impact on applicants, more significantly impacting applicants from groups that have been marginalized, oppressed, and under-resourced.
- **Clear and consistent communication** from doctoral programs to applicants regarding requirements for GRE Tests are critical for applicants to make decisions that require them to consider potential risk to their health and safety.
- **Time-limited decisions** about the use of the GRE Tests for admissions can be focused specifically on the upcoming recruitment year, and do not necessarily require a permanent change to the use of the GRE Tests for admissions.

¹ Thanks to the Council of University Directors of Clinical Psychology for providing the foundation for this document.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Develop explicit decision on GRE.** Doctoral programs that currently require (or recommend) the GRE General Test or Subject Test should select among three options when considering their policy for using the GRE in admissions in the 2020/2021 recruitment season:
 - Continue to require or recommend the GRE
 - Make the GRE optional (i.e., applicants can submit, programs can use GRE info, but neither is required)
 - Eliminate the GRE and not include it in decision making

2. **Consider pros and cons of GRE decision options.** Doctoral programs should consider the pros and cons of requiring the GRE for admissions in the 2020/2021 recruitment season:
 - Continue to require the GRE
 - Pros:
 - Consistency with past practice may allow cross-cohort comparisons on this metric (although see below for possible reasons for non-comparability across cohorts)
 - Provides a common metric for all applicants (although see below for possible reasons for non-comparability across individuals)
 - Increases the amount of data for decision-making
 - May be required for some scholarships
 - Cons:
 - Fewer applicants may apply to the program
 - Applicants are forced to consider taking the GRE despite public health concerns
 - Some applicants may be unable to take the GRE due to personal or public health concerns
 - GRE scores may be impacted by the pandemic, civil uprisings, and other events; however, programs will not be able to determine which applicants are impacted and which are not
 - May increase inequity in graduate admissions given the unequal impact of the pandemic and disparate personal resources
 - Unclear how programs will handle applicant requests to waive the GRE requirement
 - Unclear how programs will address applicants who report that their GRE scores were lowered by testing circumstances or stress

- Make the GRE Optional
 - Pros:
 - Allows flexibility for applicants; does not require taking the GRE (health, costs)
 - Applicants can submit their “best application” (i.e., submit good scores), consistent with other aspects of the application (i.e., best letters, best statement, best experiences)
 - Provides an opportunity for programs to experiment with reviewing applicants without GRE scores
 - Cons:
 - Difficult to evaluate applicants equally given differential information
 - Applicants with GRE scores may be favored over those without scores
 - Impossible to differentiate if the student did not take the GRE or took the GRE and obtained low scores.
 - Students may evaluate the “optional” nature differently (e.g., some evidence² that female applicants interpret this option as a continued requirement, whereas male applicants interpret it as truly optional)
 - Students without GRE scores may be disadvantaged in consideration for university scholarships
- Eliminate the GRE and not include it in decision making
 - Pros:
 - All applicants are reviewed based on the same requirement
 - Avoids health and fairness concerns associated with attempting to take the exam during the pandemic
 - Provides an opportunity for programs to experiment with reviewing all applicants without GRE scores
 - Cons:
 - Applicants who have already taken the GRE and want to submit their scores may be disappointed or feel unfairly disadvantaged
 - Programs will need to develop a process for make admissions decisions without the GRE

² Ongoing (as yet unpublished) work reported in Miller, C., & Posselt, J. (2020, October 1). *Strategies for Equity-Based Holistic Review*. Workshop presented at the University of Missouri Graduate School by the Inclusive Graduate Education Network Alliance (IGEN). IGEN is an NSF-Funded program to increase participation and success of underrepresented students in STEM disciplines.

- Programs may overweight information that is even more impacted by inequity and exclusivity (e.g., coming from a prestigious undergraduate institution)
 - Students may not qualify for some scholarships
 - It may be difficult to keep admitting faculty from seeing GRE scores that are submitted (e.g., an applicant listing their scores on their CV)
3. **Communicate clearly.** Doctoral programs should consider clear and consistent language about requirements related to the GRE for admissions in the 2020/2021 recruitment season. Sample language could include:

- Continue to require the GRE
 - “Our program is requiring the GRE General Test for admission to the fall 2021 class.”
- Make the GRE Optional
 - “Our program has made the GRE General Test **optional** for admission to the fall 2021 class. You may submit scores if you have them, and they will be considered by the admissions committee. Applications without GRE scores will be given equal consideration.”
- Eliminate the GRE and not include it in decision making
 - “Our program has **eliminated** the GRE General Test for admission to the fall 2021 class. We will NOT accept or consider GRE scores for applications submitted this fall 2020. Applicants should NOT submit their GRE scores through ETS nor report their scores in the application portal or on their CVs or personal statements.”

Programs who retain the GRE as required or optional should consider providing prospective applicants with information from ETS about addressing potential financial and safety concerns:

- GRE fee waiver information: <https://www.ets.org/gre/subject/about/fees/reduction/>
- GRE testing at home due to COVID-19 to address the pandemic safety concern: <https://www.ets.org/s/cv/gre/institutions/update/>

4. **Develop decision-making rubrics.** Doctoral programs who make the GRE optional or eliminate the GRE should develop a rubric for evaluating applicants without the GRE.