

Western Michigan University Faculty Senate Memorandum of Action
MOA – 20/08
Revision of University Admission Criteria for Doctoral Programs

Name of Council(s)/Committee(s): Graduate Studies Council

Approval Date:
19 November 2020

Implementation Date:
Upon Administrative Approval

Responsible Office(s) and Responsible Enforcement Official(s):
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs; Dean of the Graduate College

RECOMMENDATION:

Remove the University Graduate Record Examination (GRE) requirement for all doctoral programs and allow departments to decide whether they want to continue this requirement for their specific doctoral programs. This would be similar to what is currently in place for master’s degree programs at WMU.

Julie Apker

Name of Chair, Julie Apker, Chair of Graduate Studies Council	12-10-20 Date
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Approve Disapprove Other Action
Comments:

Marilyn S. Kritzman, WMU Faculty Senate President	Date
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Approve Disapprove Other Action
Comments:

Jennifer P. Bott, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs	Date
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Approve Disapprove Other Action
Comments:

Edward B. Montgomery, WMU President	Date
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Faculty Senate
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RECOMMENDATION

Remove the University Graduate Record Examination (GRE) requirement for all doctoral programs and allow departments to decide whether they want to continue this requirement for their specific doctoral programs. This would be similar to what is currently in place for master's degree programs at WMU.

Note: given issues associated with the pandemic, WMUs' Graduate Dean has recently waived this requirement until Fall 2022, based upon the recommendation of the Graduate Studies Council. This MOA recommendation would formally remove the GRE requirement from WMU policy. The timing of this MOA is important because, programs that wish to remove this requirement from within their graduate college language will need to do so during the catalog proof review process (which happens just once per year in the Spring). Per the Registrar, they will **not** need to go through a full curriculum review process.

RATIONALE/PURPOSE

WMU's current formal policy requires all doctoral program applicants to submit Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores. The GRE is an aptitude test believed to assess a person's intelligence or capacity to learn in a manner which can predict success in a student's first graduate program. It is created and sold by the Educational Testing Service (ETS), and currently costs \$205 to take the exam. The GRE consists of six sections, including unscored and research sections, that focus on different elements of verbal and quantitative reasoning and analytical writing, and takes almost four hours to complete.

The perceived advantages of using the GRE are: (a) it is considered a standardized way to compare applicants from various schools and backgrounds; (b) ETS reports that the analytical writing score is a good predictor of future GPA; (c) GRE scores are often used to select fellowship and award recipients; and (d) scores can provide information on an admitted student's areas of deficiencies and need for support.

However, as the number of nontraditional students return for graduate degrees in the U.S.; a growing number of concerns have arisen: (a) there is a negative impact of GRE requirement on diversity efforts, whereby a growing body of evidence shows test disparities exist for students of color, international students, and women (see sources below); (b) tests are expensive, as are test preparation materials and courses; this disadvantages students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds; (c) scores may not accurately predict success in grad school; and (d) doctoral program application reviews should be holistic and not dependent on one major metric. Such issues may deter students from underrepresented groups from applying precisely at a time when there is growing recognition that society in general, and WMU in particular, must be more inclusive.

Specifically, a growing number of studies are raising concerns about the use of GRE scores (Hu, 2020). These problems have focused on the test's inability to have predictive validity for groups such as females, minorities, international and older students. Researchers recommend using writing samples and/or Master's GPA as better criteria.

Even Educational Testing Service [ETS] (2015), the company that owns the GRE, notes the following within their technical report on the use of scores: "Special care is required in interpreting the GRE scores of students who may have had educational and cultural experiences somewhat different from those of the

traditional majority.... Available samples of students from underrepresented groups have been very small” (ETS, 2015, p. 15).

Other researchers have also concluded several problems with the GRE related to nontraditional graduate students. Some researchers have raised concerns about the validity of the GRE for nontraditional older students. Data has revealed that older GRE test takers have lower scores since they have had little recent exposure to formal schooling, have been away from the academic world longer, and have gotten out of the practice of taking tests (House, 1989; Orlando, 2005; Perez, 2011). Even ETS (2014) specifically cautions against giving too much weight to the test for those students who are returning to school after an extended absence.

Some research also reveals that GRE scores were less predictive of success for minority and non-traditional age women, yet decisions about whether to admit such students often heavily rely on GRE scores (Sampson & Boyer, 2001). Females usually complete their program with a higher GPA than what was predicted on the GRE, and this under-prediction was also true for groups who were marginalized because of race, ethnic or international status (Perez, 2011).

Some researchers have found that the context and content of the test is culturally biased and does not reflect the abilities of second and third language speakers such as international students (Mupinga & Mupinga, 2005; Wao et al., 2016). Because vocabulary is often ambiguous and not familiar even to English speaking students, participants must discern the meaning of the word to determine the meaning of a passage. This process slows a student’s thinking process, and by the time they construct the meaning of a word or phrase, they have lost time for the analytical thinking required to properly respond to the item. ETS data reveal that the vast majority of international students score lower than American students.

Even in the STEM fields, research is revealing GRE scores are not an effective tool for identifying students who will be successful in completing STEM graduate programs. For example, Peterson et al. (2018) found that those in the lower quartiles of GRE V or Q scores finished degrees more often than those in the highest quartile; GRE scores also failed to predict time to degree or to identify students who would leave during the first year of their programs. King et al. (2020) noted similar findings in their extensive work on this issue at Vanderbilt and have tallied over 300 departments and programs in the biomedical sciences across the US which have stopped requiring the GRE.

Overall, a growing consensus among those who have reviewed all previous research on GRE advantages and disadvantages, is that faculty should reduce their dependence on entrance examination scores as a predictor on how graduate students will do in graduate school (Fedynich, 2017).

In reference to our peer and competitor universities, there appears to be a “GRExit” in recent years (yes, that is now a phrase being used in higher education), and most of our peer and competitor institutions no longer have a university requirement (see table in the appendix of this document), but instead allow individual graduate programs to make the decision as to whether to require the GRE.

STAKEHOLDERS

All departments with doctoral programs will need to decide if they wish to keep requiring the General GRE scores as part of their admissions requirement. If they decide to do so, they will need to notify the Graduate College so their application requirements within the online system do not change.

For those who decide not to require it, they will also need to inform the Graduate College. Programs with admissions requirements listed within the graduate catalog, will also need to revise this during the catalog proof review process (which happens just once per year in the Spring); per the Registrar, they will NOT need to go through a full curriculum review process.

HISTORY:

- a) Effective date of current version: unknown
- b) Date first adopted: unknown

- c) Revision history: unknown
- d) Proposed date of next review: fall 2024

CURRENT POLICY MODIFICATION (additions in bold and deletions with strikethrough):

General Information/Admissions/Admission Requirements/Doctoral Program Applicant

In addition to the minimum requirements for admission to a doctoral program listed below, ~~many of the University's~~ **individual** doctoral programs ~~may will~~ ask applicants to submit supplemental materials such as letters of recommendation, ~~or~~ an autobiography, or an essay describing the applicant's academic interests and professional goals; to present scores on a ~~specific~~ **Graduate Record Examination General or Subject Test**; to schedule a personal interview with departmental faculty; to present evidence of having completed specific courses with specific grades or of having specific kinds of work or life experiences; or to hold certain degrees or endorsements or certificates (e.g., teaching certificate). For more specific information on each program, read the admission requirements section of the relevant program's listing in this catalog or contact the program's graduate advisor or the department office.

1. Bachelor's degree from an accredited institution, indicated on an official transcript.
2. An official transcript from the institution from which you received your bachelor degree is required, as well as a transcript from institution(s) where any graduate level courses or degrees have been taken/completed. Applicants are not required to submit an official transcript of courses taken/completed at WMU. Departments may request additional course information/transcripts as necessary. Please check the requirements listed for your chosen program at wmich.edu/grad/admissions/landing.php
3. For students who have completed any hours of graduate work, an overall grade point average of at least 3.0 for all graduate work taken beyond the bachelor's degree.
4. ~~Scores on the GRE General Test.~~
5. Evidence of having met any additional admission requirements stipulated by the individual doctoral degree program.
6. Acceptance by the academic unit offering the doctoral program.
Additionally, a doctoral student's academic performance, professional development, research progress, and, where applicable, professional/ethical behavior will be reviewed annually to determine the student's eligibility to continue in the program. Upon the student's initial enrollment, the department shall provide a document to the graduate student outlining the annual review criteria and procedures. The review will assist the student in measuring timely progress toward completion of the program of study and in providing documentation for awards or assistantships or, if deficiencies are apparent, note them and indicate corrections necessary. Uncorrected deficiencies and/or unsatisfactory progress, performance, or behavior may result in a student's dismissal from the program.

POLICY DETAILS

The Graduate College shall establish timelines for notifying all departments with doctoral programs of this revision, and procedures for gathering data on those programs still planning to use the GRE and those who will not continue doing so.

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- Wao, J. O., Ries, R., Flood, I., Lavy, S., & Ozbeck, M. E. (2015). Relationship between admission GRE scores and graduation GPA scores of construction management graduate students. *International Journal of Construction Education and Research*, 12(1), 37-53.

	A	B	C
1	(as of December 2020)	GRE required for all doc programs	GRE not req, but may be req by dept
2	WMU	yes	
3			
4	Other Michigan		
5	Central Michigan Univ	No	Yes
5	Eastern Michigan Univ	Yes, no waivers	
7	Grand Valley State Univ	No	None require
3	Ferris State Univ	No	None require
9	Michigan State Univ	No	Yes
0	Oakland Univ	No	Yes
1	University of Michigan	No	Yes
2	University of Michigan-Dearborn	Yes	
3	University of Michigan-Flint	No	Yes
4	Wayne State Univ	No	Yes
5	Saginaw Valley State Univ	No	Yes
6	Northern Michigan Univ	No	Yes
7	Michigan Tech Univ	No	Yes
8	Lake Superior State Univ	No grad programs	No grad programs
9			
10	MAC		
11	Northern Illinois Univ	No	Yes
12	Eastern Michigan Univ	Yes, no waivers	
13	University of Akron	No	Yes
14	Miami Univ (Ohio)	No	Yes
15	Bowling Green State Univ	Yes	
16	Univ at Buffalo, SUNY	No	Yes
17			
18	Peers		
19	East Carolina Univ	No	Yes
20	Kent State Univ	No	Yes, most require
21	Oklahoma State Univ	No	Yes
22	Portland State Univ	No	Yes
23	SUNY at Binghamton	No	Yes
24	University of Memphis	No	Yes
25	Univ Nevada-Las Vegas	No	Yes
26	Univ Southern Mississippi	Yes, but some programs have waivers	Yes, all programs req some test, GRE, GMAT, etc.
27	Univ Mass Amherst	No	Yes
28			