



Pre-Meeting Workshop  
**Holistic Review in Graduate  
Admissions**

**CGS Annual Meeting**  
**Scottsdale, AZ**  
**December 6, 2017**

# Agenda

- Introduction and context (Maureen McCarthy)
- Predictive validity of GRE scores (Ambika Mathur)
- Discussion at tables and reporting out (all)

BREAK

- Shepherding conversations around holistic review (Carol Genetti)
- From GRE to rubric (Stanley Dunn)
- Rubric activity and reporting out (all)
- Wrap up / Q & A



# Holistic Review of Graduate Applications: The National Perspective



Maureen Terese McCarthy  
December 6, 2017



# Holistic Review

Giving serious consideration to **all the ways** an applicant might contribute to a diverse educational environment.

*--Grutter v. Bollinger et al. (2003)*



## First-time enrollment of underrepresented minorities is growing (2015-2016)

Hispanics/Latinos **10.9 %**

Black/  
African Americans **11.8 %**

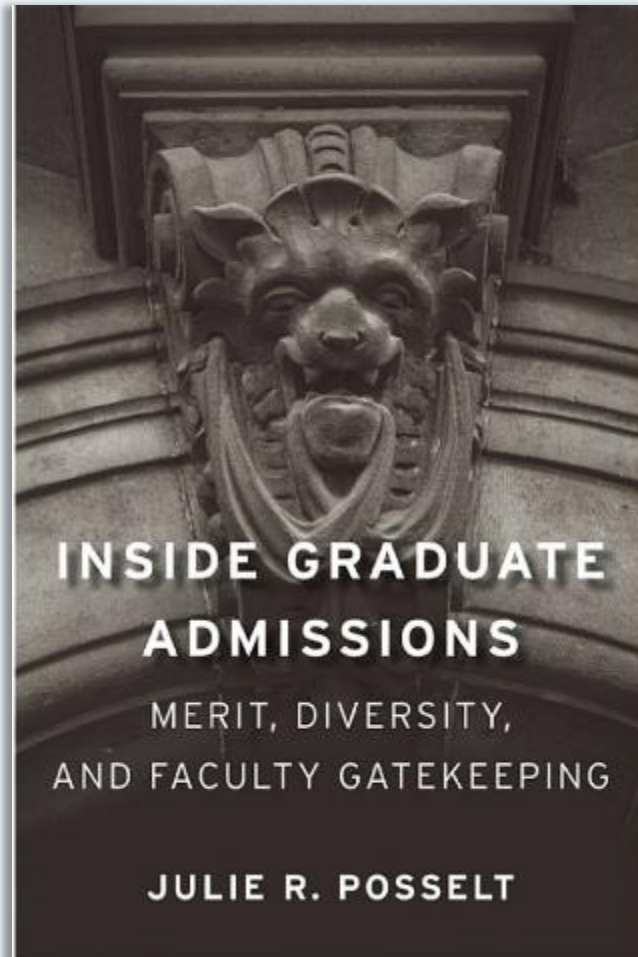
Asians/  
Pacific Islanders **0.2 %**

American Indian/  
Alaska Natives **10.9 %**

Source: 2017 CGS Graduate Enrollment and Degrees



# The first cut



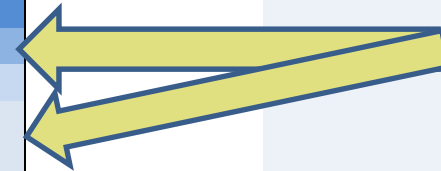
Faculty saw [grades and GRE scores] as useful measures for the first cut in part because they could be used to quickly compare applicants.

--Julie Posselt (2014)



## Importance of application materials to screening, admissions, funding

	Master's	Doctoral
<b>Initial Screening</b>		
Academic Transcripts	77%	71%
GRE, GMAT, LSAT	56%	62%
Letters of Recommendation	53%	57%
CAE, TOEFL (language tests)	52%	47%
<b>Final Admissions Decision</b>		
Academic Transcripts	70%	55%
Letters of Recommendation	68%	67%
Personal/Research Statement	63%	64%
Interviews	52%	48%
<b>Funding Decision</b>		
Academic Transcripts	37%	39%
Letters of Recommendation	32%	40%
Personal/Research Statement	29%	39%
GRE, GMAT, LSAT	25%	30%



Source: 2015 CGS Graduate Student Life Cycle Survey



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Source: 2015 CGS Graduate Student Life Cycle Survey



Reforms to graduate admission can work with the current pragmatism rather than against it by developing **more efficient approaches to holistic review** and strengthening incentives for diversity.

--Julie Posselt (2014)



# First Principles

- Diversity is essential.
- Admissions criteria should align with mission and goals.
- To reform admissions, think beyond admissions.

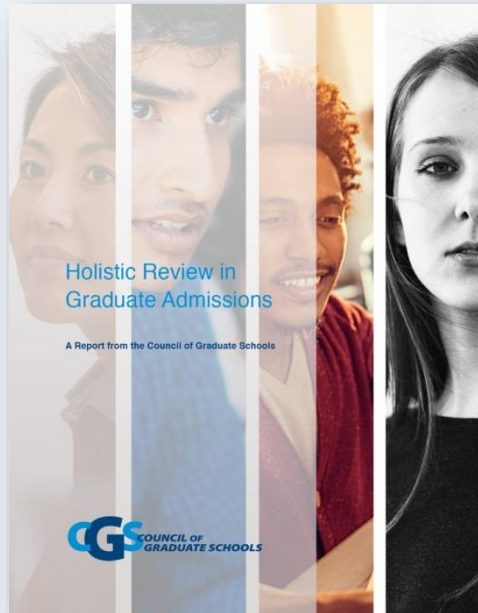


# Promising Practices

- Demonstrate clear commitment.
- Analyze department-specific data.
- Consider alternative funding models.
- Support admissions committees.



# Additional Resources



- Project report  
Kent, J. & McCarthy, M. T. (2016).  
[Holistic review in graduate admissions](#)
- CGSnet.org  
[Project web page](#)
- Email Maureen  
[mmccarthy@cgs.nche.edu](mailto:mmccarthy@cgs.nche.edu)

# **Predictive Validity of the GRE for Graduate Student Success**

**Ambika Mathur, Ph.D.  
Associate Provost & Dean, Graduate School  
Wayne State University**

Council of Graduate Schools  
12/6/2017



# Background

- Standardized tests are widely used to assess merit to pursue graduate study despite questions of sole reliance on scores
- Yet, basing admissions decisions on test scores results in the exclusion of capable students from graduate studies
- We need a better strategy



# Discussions at Wayne State

- Anecdotes about qualified applicants with low GRE scores being denied admission and/or going on to successful careers elsewhere
- But some faculty continue to view standardized tests as the gold standard metric for graduate school readiness
- Presentation of data from other institutions is not convincing





# WSU Projects

- **GRE Outcomes Project:** Do GRE scores predict meaningful graduate outcomes?
- **GRE Experiment:** To what extent do faculty rely on the GRE scores when considering applicants from under-represented groups?



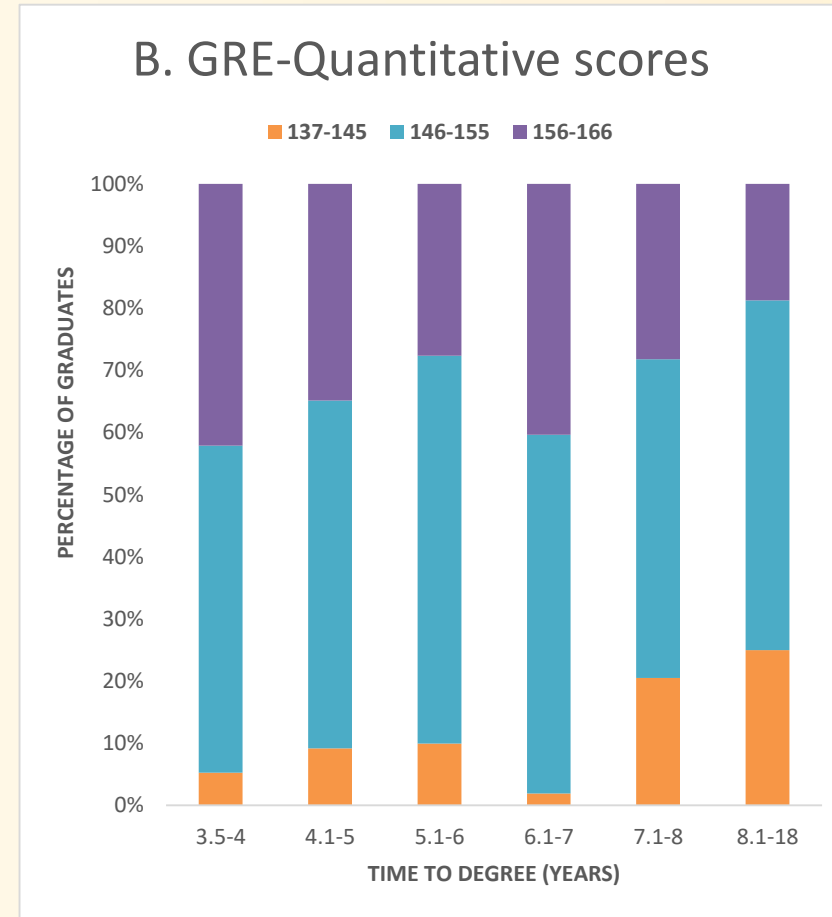
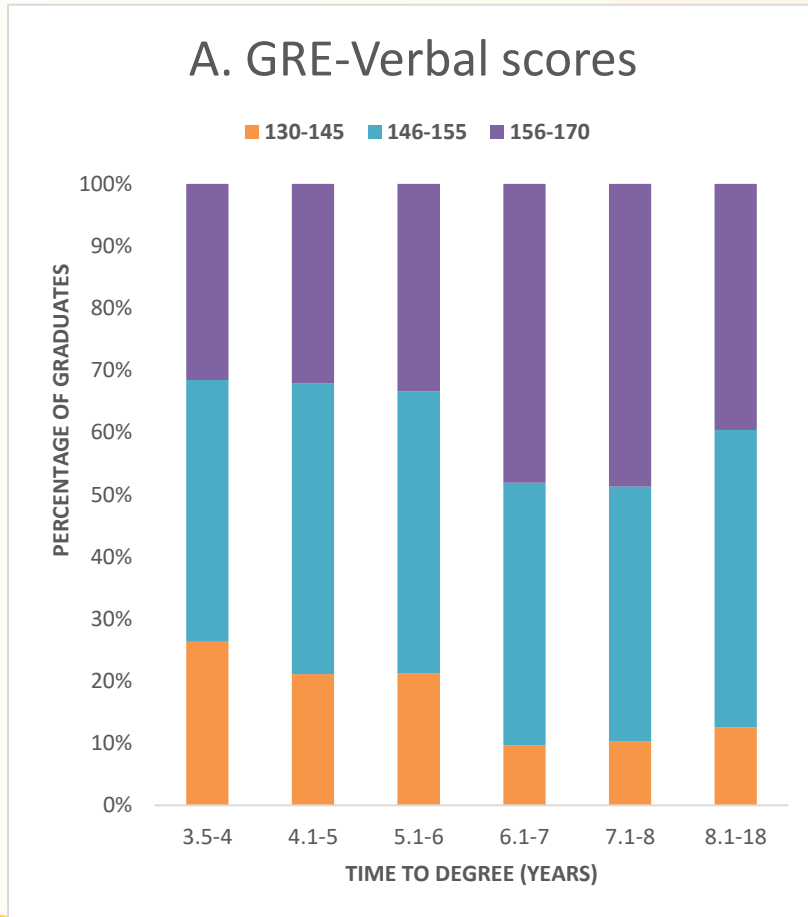
# GRE Outcomes Project

Do GRE scores correlate with success in  
graduate school?

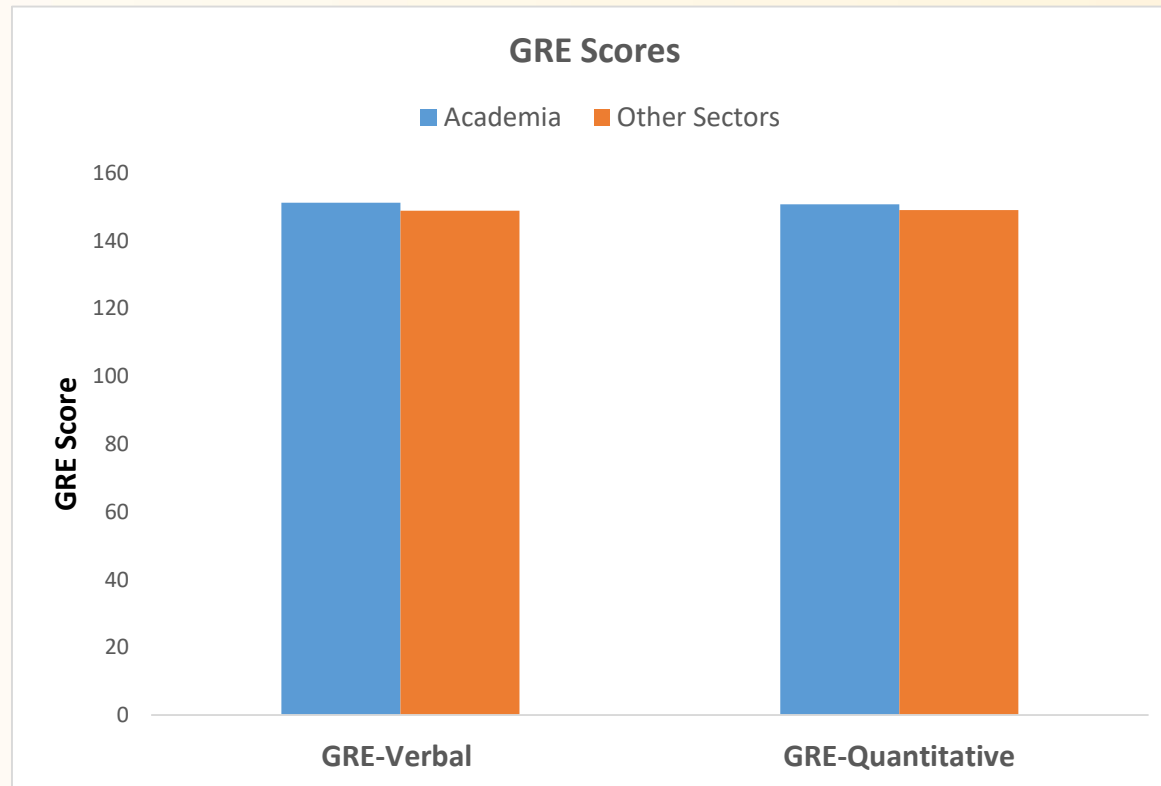
1999-2014 alumni data



# GRE scores do not correlate with TTD



# GRE scores do not correlate with career outcomes



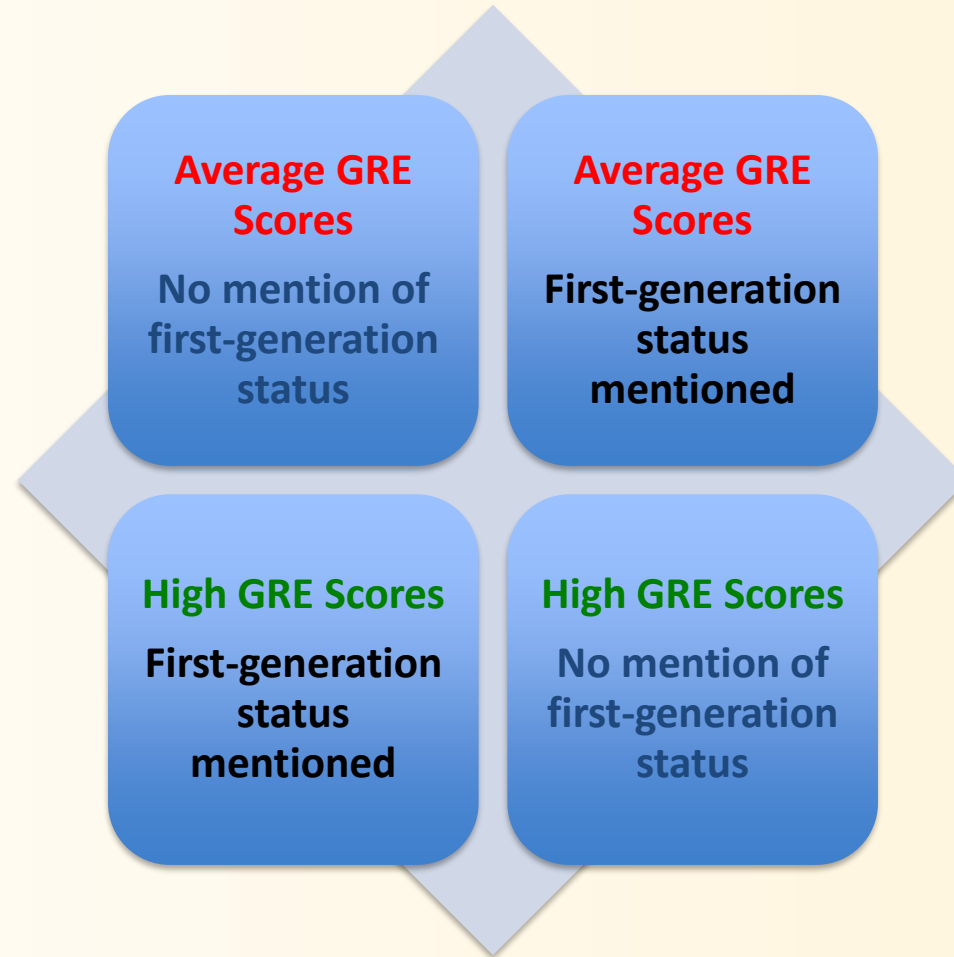
# GRE Experiment

- **Purpose:** To understand the extent to which GRE scores factor into admissions decisions for first-generation college students
- **Design:** Faculty were randomly assigned to rate ONE of 4 vignettes of a doctoral applicant that differed by GRE score and first-gen status

Cano, A., Wurm, L.H., Nava, J., McIntee, F., & Mathur, A. (in press). Applicant and faculty characteristics in the doctoral admissions process: An experimental vignette study. *Strategic Enrollment Management Quarterly*.

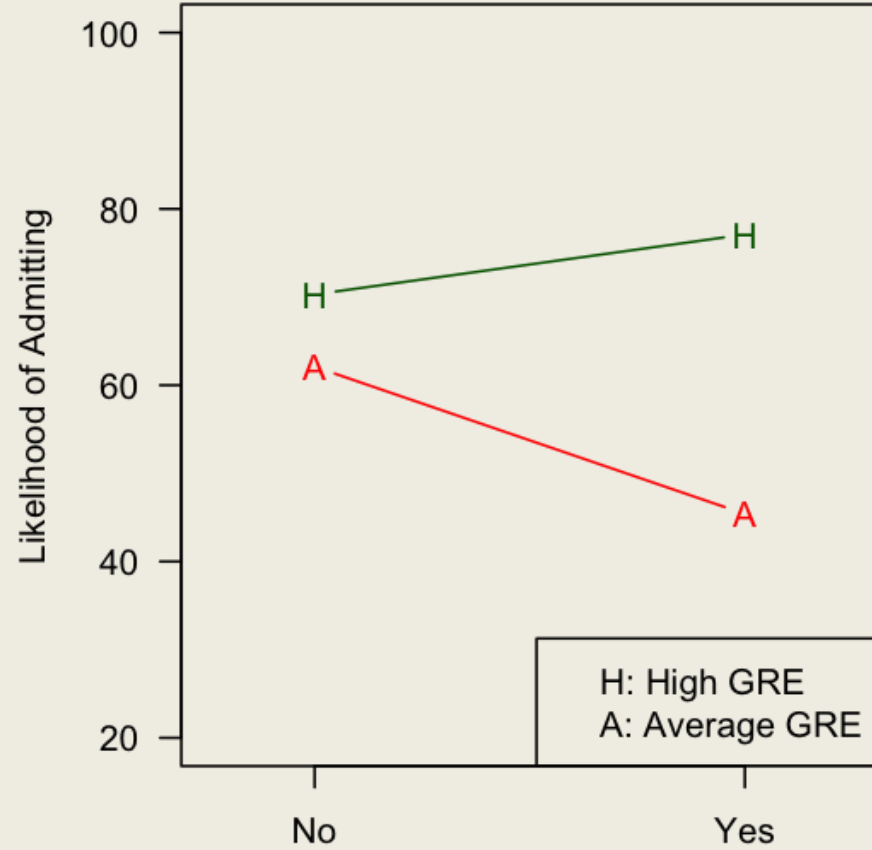


# GRE Experiment



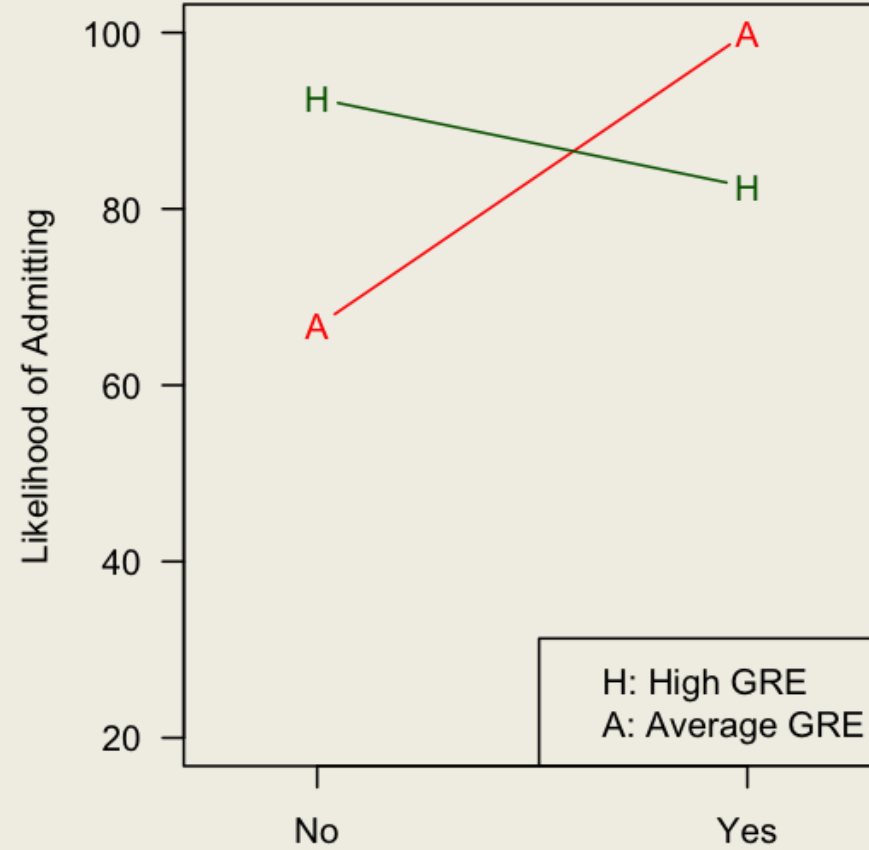
# GRE Experiment

## Non-First-Generation Participant



Vignette Mentions First-Generation Status

## First-Generation Participant



Vignette Mentions First-Generation Status

# Conclusions from WSU Experiments

- GRE does not predict meaningful outcomes but is weighted heavily in the admissions process at WSU.
- We need a better system to evaluate applicants based on valued predictors of success to ensure an equitable and inclusive process.





# Portfolio Review

- Consider a broad range of characteristics and experiences that predict success (Kent & McCarthy, 2016)
- Conversations in Graduate Council and Council of Deans, with Graduate Directors, and Provost's Office (2016-17)
- Convened Graduate Admissions Committee (2016-17)



# Portfolio Review Toolkit

- What is Portfolio Review?
- Guidance on steps to develop the process:
  - Create a plan
  - Apply and assess
  - Evaluate and revise
- Case studies of portfolio review at WSU:  
<https://gradschool.wayne.edu/faculty/portfolio-review-examples>



Degree programs

Postdoctoral scholars

Ph.D. students

Master's students

Funding for students

**Faculty/staff resources**

Graduate faculty

Graduate Council

Faculty awards

Program proposals

**Recruitment and retention**

**Doctoral admissions guidelines**

Portfolio review resources

Portfolio review FAQ

AGRADE

Mentoring



[Home](#) > [Faculty/staff resources](#) > [Recruitment and retention](#) > [Doctoral admissions guidelines](#)

## Portfolio review for doctoral admissions

Recent research on graduate student success has yielded important findings regarding graduate recruitment, admissions, retention, graduation, and job placement. In response to this research, the Graduate School convened the Graduate Admissions Committee to assist and advise in creating a "toolkit" for graduate admissions at Wayne State. The following guide is designed to support graduate programs in intentional and consistent review of applications, aligning with nationally recognized best practices.

### What is portfolio review?

Portfolio review is a method of improving the graduate applicant selection process so that admissions decisions are made consistently and with attention to programmatic and strategic needs.

Portfolio review emphasizes a spectrum of candidate qualities and attributes to determine the applicants most likely to

<https://gradschool.wayne.edu/faculty/portfolio-review>



# Incentivizing Portfolio Review

- Link Graduate School academic program review as well as funding for recruitment funds, fellowships, scholarships, and awards to development and implementation of portfolio review





# Table Discussions and Reporting Out

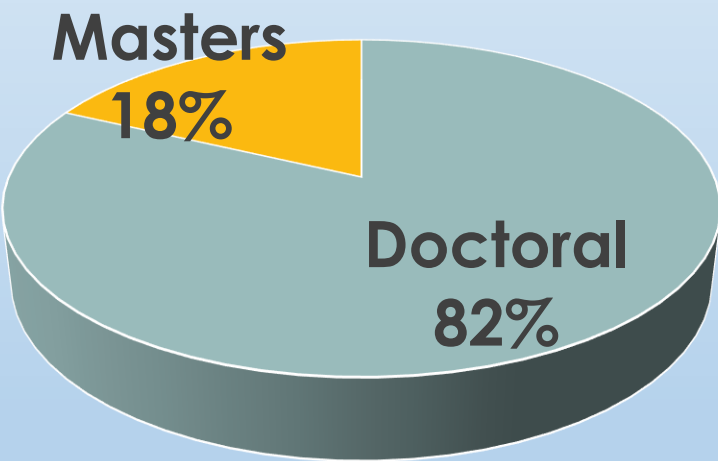
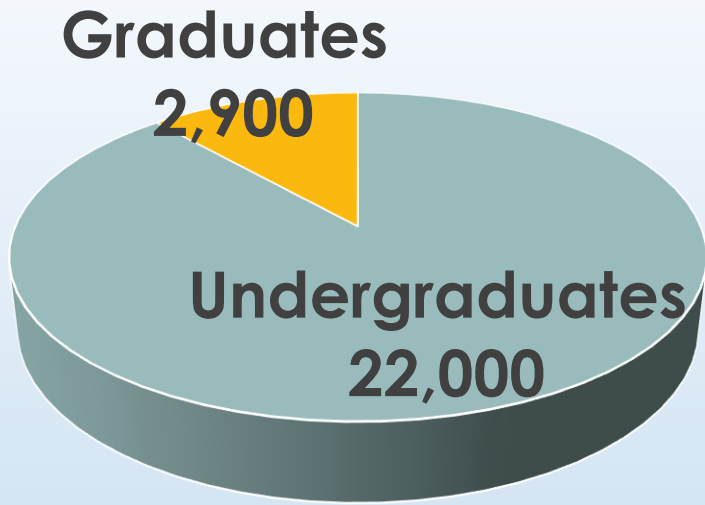


# Shepherding Conversations around Holistic Review

Carol Genetti

Anne and Michael Towbes Graduate Dean

**UC SANTA BARBARA**  
Graduate Division



## UC Santa Barbara Enrollments

# Diversity at UCSB: Undergraduates

- Hispanic Serving Institution
- 28% Chicano/Latino
- 34% URM overall
- 39% undergraduates receive Pell grants
- 42% undergraduates are first-generation



# Diversity at UCSB: Graduate Students

- 26% International
- Among domestic, 16.4% under-represented minority

# 2 Steps in Admissions

- Admissions decisions are made by faculty
- Each department nominates a certain number of students for a campus-wide competition for the most prestigious fellowships
- Faculty committees read nominations and select students to be awarded fellowships

# Campus Myth

*“Only students with superb GRE scores will be given a central fellowship.”*

# Year 1: 2012-13 Fellowship Memo

- “Nominators should speak to:
  - Academic excellence
  - Outstanding records of accomplishment
- AND
  - Nominees’ experiences of economic or educational disadvantage
  - Engagement in research focused on problems related to individuals or groups who have experienced economic or educational disadvantage in society
  - Participation in a federal- or state-funded academic/research preparation program (such as McNair Scholars)”

# Year 2: 2013-14 Fellowship Memo

- Maintained former wording in fellowship nomination memo

# Year 3: 2014-15 Fellowship Memo

- Provided 2-page instructions to *fellowship committees* on holistic review
- Included it in the call memo for central fellowship nominations
- 3 categories: Academic record, research potential, commitment

# “Commitment”

- Overcoming adversity
- Achievements over time
- Community service, especially related to the discipline or to professional accomplishments
- Leadership potential
- Special talents or skills
- Personal and professional ethics

# Year 4: 2015-16 Fellowship Memo

- Maintained wording and procedures from the previous year



# Year 5: 2016-17 Fellowship Memo

- Provided *statistical evidence* that fellowship committees do not rely on GRE scores in selecting fellowship recipients
- Expanded criteria in discussion of holistic review on fellowship nomination memo
  - Academic Performance
  - Skills and Research Potential
  - Diversity Contributions
  - Motivation and Personal Characteristics

# Academic Performance

- Publications
- Conference presentations
- Writing samples
- GPA in major
- Standardized test scores
- Overall GPA
- Evidence of improvement

# Diversity Contributions

- First-generation in family to attend college
- Non-traditional background (e.g. veterans, refugees)
- Evidence of overcoming disadvantages
- Impact of background on academic achievement
- Contributes diverse viewpoints to academic discussion
- Potential for leadership in increasing equitable access
- Research and/or community engagement that informs discussions of diversity in higher education

# Skills and Research Potential

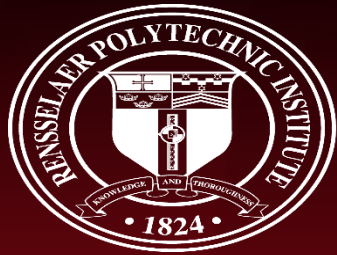
- Communication skills
- Mastery of the discipline
- Analytical/critical thinking ability
- Use of literature
- Organization
- Reasoning and argumentation
- Past research experience
- Relevant work experience
- Scholarly engagement
- Fit of interests with the program
- Promise of innovative scholarship
- Technical skills
- Professional engagement

# Motivation and Personal Characteristics

- Passion/enthusiasm
- Motivation
- Collegiality/professional networks
- Curiosity
- Creativity
- Independence
- Breadth of perspective
- Open-mindedness
- Resourcefulness
- Positive self-concept
- Realistic self-appraisal
- Ability to work well in teams
- Leadership and community involvement

# Year 6: This year's nomination memo

- We will be **masking GRE scores** on fellowship nomination materials
- Provided short rubric for fellowship committees



# Rensselaer

## From GRE scores to Rubric

Stanley Dunn

Vice Provost and Dean, Graduate Education

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute

December 6, 2017



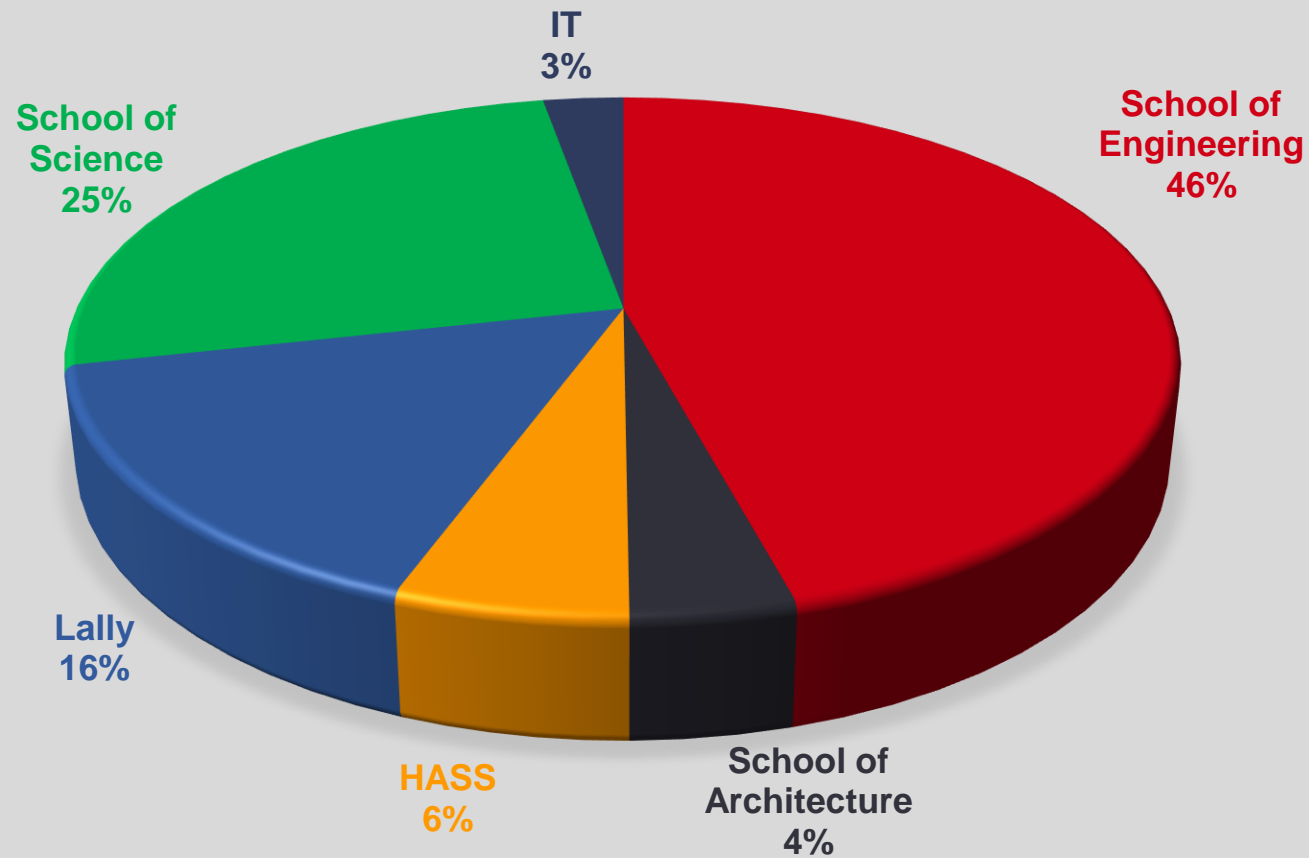
- Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute was founded in 1824
- The nation's oldest technological research university
- The university offers degrees in Engineering; the Sciences; Information Technology and Web Sciences; Architecture; Management; and the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences.





1254 Graduate Students  
61 Masters Programs  
43 Ph.D. Programs

## ENROLLMENT FALL 2017





- STEM dominant institution
- Keep GRE because of US News ranking
- History of an Institute minimum with a waiver process
- Some faculty ready to dispense with GRE but rely on evidence of laboratory skills
- Phase in use of personal attributes over several admissions cycles

## Step 1: The ETS PPI “test”

- Assessment of personal attributes
- 5 evaluators from 3 different units
- Use was socialized at GPD meetings
- Longitudinal study – predictive of GPA and TTD
- Free for GRE registrants
- Was used until discontinued by ETS

# The Personal Potential Index (PPI)

- Knowledge and Creativity
  - Has a broad perspective on the field
  - Is among the brightest persons I know
  - Produces novel ideas
  - Is intensely curious about the field
- Communication Skills
  - Speaks in a clear, organized and logical manner
  - Writes with precision and style
  - Speaks in a way that is interesting
  - Organizes writing well
- Teamwork
  - Supports the efforts of others
  - Behaves in an open and friendly manner
  - Works well in group settings
  - Gives criticism/feedback to others in a helpful way
- Resilience
  - Accepts feedback without getting defensive
  - Works well under stress
  - Can overcome challenges and setbacks
  - Works extremely hard
- Planning and Organization
  - Sets realistic goals
  - Organizes work and time effectively
  - Meets deadlines
  - Makes plans and sticks to them
- Ethics and Integrity
  - Is among the most honest persons I know
  - Maintains high ethical standards
  - Is worthy of trust from others
  - Demonstrates sincerity



## Step 2: ETS permission to use PPI

- The Rensselaer Success Indicator (RSI)
- External evaluation of personal attributes
- Missing the normed database, roughly equivalent to standardized reference
- Added use of personal statement
- Faculty began requesting to use RSI instead of GRE

## Step 3: Filling out the rubric

- Revise the RSI
- Introduce four overarching themes of the application review
  - Academic accomplishment
  - Professional experience
  - Aspiration to drive, focus and commitment
  - Capacity to learn and improve

- Prior Academic Experience
- A Set of Professional Experiences
- Standardized Evaluations





## Knowledge, Skills and Abilities

- References (20)
- GRE or RSI (20)

## Academic Capacity

- Prior Academic Experience (40)

## Depth of Experience

- Statement of Goals (20)
- Professional Experience (20)

## Knowledge, Skills and Abilities

- References (20)
  - Professionally motivated
  - Sound decision maker
  - Intellectually capable
  - Responsible
  - Ethical
  - Open to growth
- GRE or RSI (20)

## Academic Capacity

- Prior Academic Experience (40)
  - Undergraduate GPA
  - GPA from last 30 attempted credit hours
  - Prior graduate GPA



## Depth of Experience

- Statement of Goals (20)
  - Written form
  - Specificity of goals
  - Evidence of drive and focus
- Professional Experience (20)
  - Degree of responsibility
  - Evidence of decision making



# Rensselaer

why not change the world?®



# **Rubric Activity and Reporting Out**