

# Implementing Best Practices in Master's Admission



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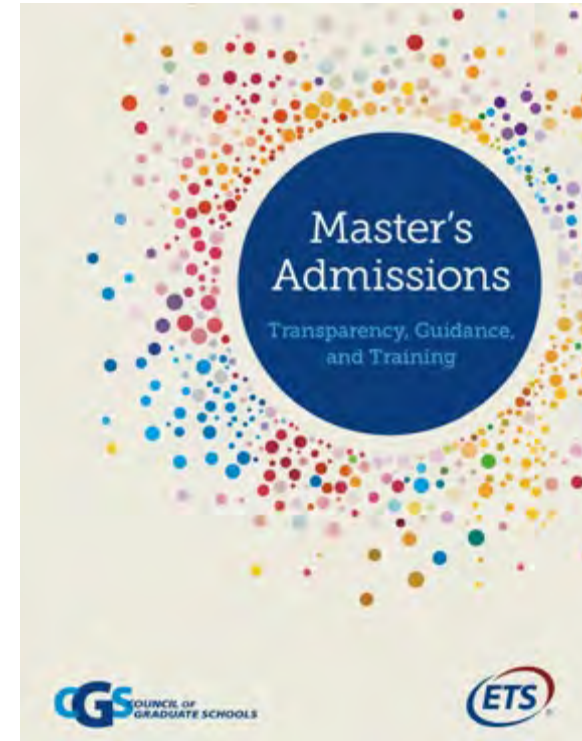
# SIUE Profile

- PUI; Doctoral/Professional Institution
  - 50 Master's programs, EdD, DNP, 4 cooperative PhD programs with SIUC
    - Undergraduate Enrollment: 10,800
    - Graduate/Professional Enrollment: 2200
  - Fourth highest for research expenditures per NSF HERD in our Carnegie Class.
  - Mission
    - Southern Illinois University Edwardsville is a student-centered educational community dedicated to communicating, expanding and integrating knowledge. In a spirit of collaboration enriched by diverse ideas, our **comprehensive and unique array of undergraduate and graduate programs** develops professionals, scholars and leaders who shape a changing world.



# CGS/ETS Study on Master's Admissions Attributes

- Improve master's education through evidence-based guidance on connecting successful admissions practices to characteristics of student success
- Without evidence to support of admissions practices
  - Some segments of the population may lose out on access
  - Employers may miss out on diverse leadership ready employees
  - Our master's programs could fail to attract talent needed to meet the rigors of degree completion and post-degree success



# CGS/ETS Study on Master's Admissions Attributes

## Main Guiding Questions

- What admissions processes are currently used in master's education?
  - What attributes are currently used in admissions decisions to predict success?
  - What evidence is currently used to evaluate those attributes?
  - How do programs define success?
- What are the “missing pieces” in the current admissions evaluation practices?
  - What attributes do we not evaluate for and what evidence is missing that would be useful to the evaluation process?

# CGS/ETS Study on Master's Admissions Attributes

- Four regional focus groups of master's program directors and graduate deans
  - October 2017, results used to inform national survey
- Two national survey: master's program directors and graduate deans
- Post colloquium discussion: with various stakeholders

## **Based on focus group results, for this study:**

- Primary program(s) focus identified: professional or research
- Categories of potential for graduate student success
  - Degree completion
  - Program fit
  - Potential for post-graduate success

# CGS/ETS Study on Master's Admissions Attributes

## What do master's programs look for in applicants?

- Potential to complete coursework rated as Very Important
  - 79% of research focused programs
  - 84% of professional focused programs
  - From post discussion, Completion of coursework rated higher than completion of degree
- Other items were more area or discipline specific, for example:
  - Research focused programs rated completion of capstone requirements as Very Important (75%)
  - Health sciences rated the potential of fulfilling an internship/practicum as Very Important (72%)

# CGS/ETS Study on Master's Admissions Attributes

## What attributes are used to predict student success?

- Degree completion
  - critical thinking and analytical thinking were weighted as Very Important
- Program fit
  - Past academic performance, critical thinking, and analytical thinking were weighted as the most important
  - Other items more discipline specific, for example:
    - Health sciences and public administration rated professionalism as Very Important
- Potential for post-graduate success
  - Professional focused programs rated professionalism as Very Important (78.8%)
  - Research focused programs rated research related skills more heavily; analytical and critical thinking (71%)

# CGS/ETS Study on Master's Admissions Attributes

## **What evidence is used to evaluate these admissions attributes?**

Academic transcripts were required by 99% of the graduate schools.

- Ranked highly to evaluate past academic performance
- Transcripts used to evaluate cognitive and non-cognitive attributes
  - The depth and breadth of content knowledge in the discipline as evidence for critical and analytical thinking
  - Course repeats, withdrawals, number of majors, number of institutions seen as non-cognitive weaknesses; lacking persistence (grit)
  - Return to successful performance following a poor performance seen as evidence of persistence (grit),



# CGS/ETS Study on Master's Admissions Attributes

## What evidence is used to evaluate admissions attributes?

- Undergraduate GPA
  - All Graduate schools required a minimum GPA for admission
  - GPA as evidence of cognitive attributes similar to academic transcripts
    - Upper division GPA's were used in some areas to better define competencies within discipline specific areas

# CGS/ETS Study on Master's Admissions Attributes

## What evidence is used to evaluate admissions attributes?

- Standardized test scores were used to evaluate cognitive attributes
  - Test scores were seen as evidence of multiple forms of rigor
    - Rigor of basic cognitive skills in screening large applicant pools.
    - Interestingly, also rigor required to maintain a graduate program's national ranking or disciplinary accreditation standards,

# CGS/ETS Study on Master's Admissions Attributes

## **What evidence is used to evaluate admissions attributes?**

- CV or resume were used to determine past work experience or past research experience
  - Used as measure of cognitive attributes
  - Used to evaluate non-cognitive attributes of integrity, multicultural competency, and adaptability.
- Work history provides insights into desire to further advance expertise or acquire a new area of specialization; used as evidence of program fit.

# CGS/ETS Study on Master's Admissions Attributes

## What evidence is used to evaluate admissions attributes?

- Letters of recommendation are heavily relied on to assess both cognitive and non-cognitive attributes
  - Cognitive: knowledge and skills
  - Non-cognitive: a slew of attributes including persistence, dependability, collegiality, adaptability, ability to work under stress, integrity, time management, professionalism, concern for others, curiosity, creativity, leadership.

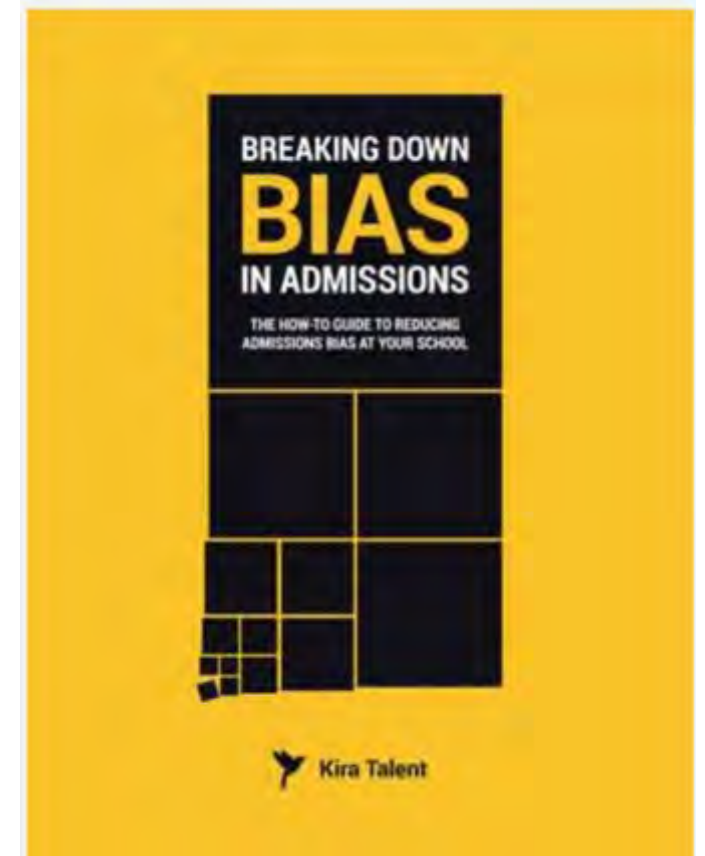
# CGS/ETS Study on Master's Admissions Attributes

## Implications

- Across all disciplines there was a heavy emphasis on traditional measures of critical and analytical thinking
  - Interestingly, these were also used for assessing potential for program fit (prerequisite knowledge)
  - Rigor of the applicant's prior institution was used as a heavy weighting factor but the definition of rigor is ill defined, which reduces the transparency of the admissions process
- A major barrier is predictive limitations between admissions criteria and student success
  - Particularly, evidence linking non-cognitive attributes with student success is lacking
- Absent clear guidelines the application materials, particularly academic transcript, personal statements, and letters of recommendation are very subjective
  - Weight of evidence is influenced by the perceived reputation of the undergraduate institution, program, or the author of the recommendation letter

# Biases that impact admissions Decisions

- Biases are human, they are not something we can simply eliminate.
- By recognizing biases exist, we can build our processes to help reduce the impact.



[kiratalent.com/bias/](http://kiratalent.com/bias/)

# Cognitive Biases

## Examples

- **Ingroup Bias:** Giving preference to a person or organization that aligns with one's own group.
- **Groupthink Bias:** When members of a group set aside their own opinions, beliefs, or ideas to achieve harmony.
- **Halo Effect:** When one remarkable quality influences other factors in a decision.
- **Stereotype Bias:** An oversimplified understanding of a particular type of group, person, or thing.

# “Biased” Processes

- **Lack of Consistent Training:** New graduate program directors following different processes than their predecessor.
- **Unclear Reviewer Criteria:** Rating a student on a scale of 1-5 on “leadership” without a clear definition of “leadership.”
- **Lack of Consistent Reviewing Practices:** Students getting screened in with different practices, i.e., pre-interview or phone call in the application process.
- **Decision Fatigue:** Admissions reviewers may be overworked and exhausting, affecting decisions on applicants.



# A Few Strategies to Reduce Bias

- Have reviewers report their feedback individually so they do not influence each other's opinions.
- Use consistent rubrics to evaluate an applicant's file across reviewers to ensure each applicant is evaluated on the same criteria.
- Have annual training available for faculty and staff who evaluate applicants.

# Master's in Speech-Language Pathology

- **Goal:** *Improve assessment of soft skills and non-cognitive attributes. Improve consistency of reviews across applicant pool. Mitigate groupthink bias. Reduce the dependence on GPA.*
- **Approach:**
  - *2 minute video responding to specific prompts uploaded to YouTube*
    - *“You’re working on a session plan for your client and you have a tight deadline. You find that you’re unable to complete your plan because your supervisor is unavailable to answer a few key questions. How do you deal with the situation?”*
  - *A rubric developed for video assessment*
  - *Admissions team members review individually, scores combined*
  - *And it allows for to add new important pieces of evidence such as oral communication, adaptability, working under stress*



# Implementing Best Practices in Master's Admissions

Lisa Armistead, Ph.D.

Graduate Dean and Professor of Psychology

Georgia State University

# Georgia State University Context

- **R1 university with over 53,000 students**
  - ~7100 are graduate students
  - 10th most ethnically diverse university
- **Offer 250+ degrees across Associate, Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral level**
- **Graduate School established September 2019**
  - Decentralized
  - Central Graduate Admissions office implemented with Spring 2018 admissions cycle
  - Central admissions criteria=Baccalaureate degree

Policy Studies

7 Master's  
3 Ph.D.

Nursing & Health  
Professions

6 Master's  
3 Doctoral

Public Health

1 Master's  
1 Ph.D.

Biomedical  
Sciences

1 Master's  
1 Ph.D.

Arts

6 Master's  
1 Ph.D.

Business

27 Master's  
8 Doctoral

Education & Human Development

33 Master's  
3 Specialist  
12 Doctoral

Law

2 Master's  
JD

Arts & Sciences

22 Master's 13 Ph.D.

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Are GRE scores used in determining program rankings?

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Do peer and aspirational programs continue to rely on the requirement for admissions decisions? If so, how will moving away from disciplinary norms impact the graduate program?

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Will removal of the GRE impact placement success rates for those programs populated by students intending to pursue a more advanced graduate degree (e.g., Ph.D.)?

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What impact is removal of the requirement anticipated to have on application quality and quantity?



# Committee Consideration for GRE Removal

# Building an Algorithm for Application Review

- School of Public Health interested in streamlining the MPH admissions process, while retaining a holistic approach
- 2018-19 Academic Year
  - 450 applications
  - 258 admissions
  - 106 Enrolled



# Building an Algorithm for Application Review

- **Concerns of MPH Faculty**

- Inefficiency
- Missed opportunity to bring in the strongest students with greatest likelihood of attending GSU

- **Commitment of MPH Faculty**

- All applicants will still be reviewed by at least two faculty
- Decrease time to review for most desirable applicants
- Increase yield





# Building an Algorithm for Application Review

## • Considerations

- Risk of bias
- Program leadership
- Direct/Influence the process

## • Variables to include in initial model

- GPA
- Experience
- Engagement with CRM
- Program outcomes
- GRE?



# Building an Algorithm for Application Review

- **Strategy**

- Lead by me and Institutional Research Assoc. in the Graduate School
- Partnering with Data Science Program
- Reiterate risks
- Iterate process with ongoing examination of data

# Helping Your Programs Adopt Holistic Admissions Practices

- Admission Practices Workshop conducted at James Madison University
  - With Graduate Program Directors across all the graduate programs
- Co-Presenters
  - Molly McCracken, Kira Talent
  - Cathlin Sullivan, Kira Talent
- Activity to help connect sought after incoming student characteristics to admissions practices
  - Including, a review of biases and strategies for minimizing them.

# What does your current process look like?

- A detailed picture of what process and evidence is being used in app review
  - reveal how sought after characteristics are currently being assessed or NOT assessed (what is missing in the process)

**Map Your Process**  
*Map the journey that an applicant takes from the beginning to the end of the admissions process.*

PROGRAM  
\_\_\_\_\_

ADMISSIONS REQUIREMENTS  
(E. RESUME, STATEMENT OF PURPOSE, ETC.)

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_

Recruitment

Enrollment

Kira Talent + with Holistic Review Workshop




# What are core competencies for incoming students?

- From ideal cohort to core competencies
  - What competencies should your review process be assessing?

## Define Your Core Competencies

*Think about your top students. Do they have any characteristics, life experiences, or competencies in common?*

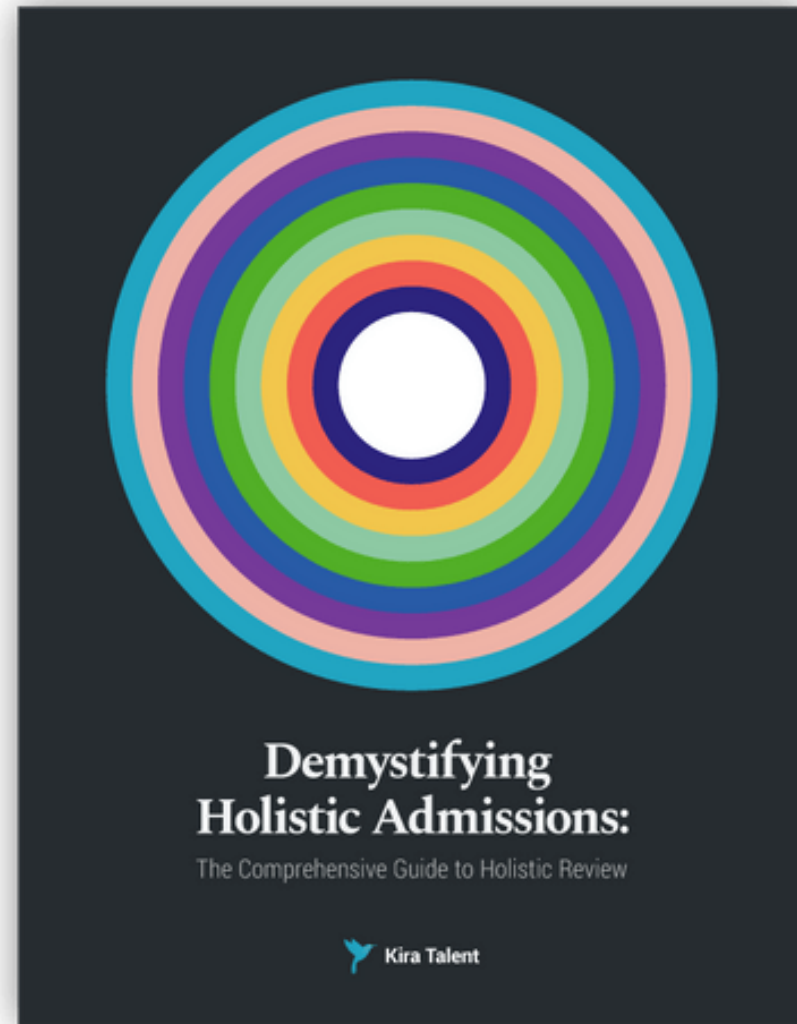
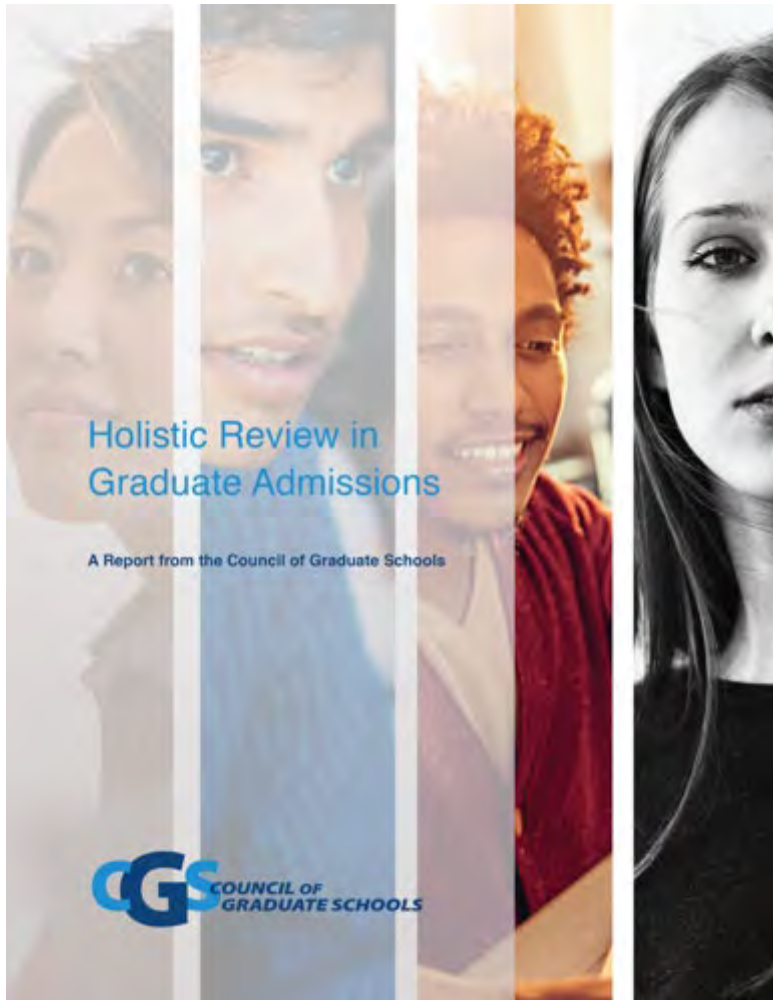
WHEN CREATING A COHORT VISION, CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING?	LIST COMMON CHARACTERISTICS, LIFE EXPERIENCES, AND COMPETENCIES.	LIST THE 3-6 COMPETENCIES OR CHARACTERISTICS THAT YOU SEE AS BEING IMPORTANT TO YOUR STUDENTS' SUCCESS.
1. What does success look like for this cohort?	1. _____	1. _____
2. What's your program mission and why?	2. _____	2. _____
3. What do you want your students to accomplish – both while studying and after graduating?	3. _____	3. _____
4. What makes your students stand out?	4. _____	4. _____
5. What do you admire most about them?	5. _____	5. _____
	6. _____	6. _____
	7. _____	
	8. _____	
	9. _____	
	10. _____	

Kira Talent +  ACCREDITED

Holistic Review Workshop



# References





Questions?

