

DOCUMENTS AND PROCEEDINGS OF THE GRADUATE ASSEMBLY
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN
February 24, 2021
Agenda

The third meeting of the Graduate Assembly for the 2020-2021 academic year will be held on Wednesday, February 17 at 1:30 PM over Zoom

Order of Business

- I. Approval of the minutes of the November 18, 2020 meeting
- II. Report of the Dean of the Graduate School, Mark J T Smith (Maria Juenger)
 - A. Introduction of *interim* Executive Vice President and Provost Daniel Jaffe
- III. Report of Chair (Elizabeth Gershoff)
 - A. Introduction of Gina Magharious, Survey Coordinator, IRRIS. Discussion of the results of the Doctoral Exit Survey data.
- IV. Admissions and Enrollment Committee (Allan Cole)
 - A. Proposal to waive the GRE requirement for the Chemical Engineering program.
 - B. Proposal to waive the GRE requirement for the Astronomy program.
 - C. Proposal to waive the GRE requirement for the Biomedical Engineering program
 - D. Report on revisions to the Guidelines for Standardized Test Waivers.
- V. Academic Committee (Christopher Jolly)
 - A. Report on adding a remote (online) delivery to the MA (Option III) degree in Economics.
- VI. Administrative Committee (Tanya Clement)
 - A. Report on continued discussion of multi-authored works.
- VII. Graduate Student Assembly (Gregorio Ponti)
 - A. Graduate Student current wellbeing update
 - B. Invest in Texas

- i. JR 20-07: In Support of An Independent Redistricting Commission and Redistricting Reform for Texas for the 87th Texas Legislative Session
- ii. JR 20-08: Invest in Texas Platform

VIII. Adjournment

**Proposal to waive the GRE requirement
for the Chemical Engineering program**

SUMMARY

The McKetta Department of Chemical Engineering is requesting a permanent waiver of the GRE for admission to their PhD program.

After extensively evaluating the role that the GRE has played in their admission process, they found that GRE scores are not predictive of success or graduation within their program. They also note GRE scores are not required for many external fellowships and many of their peer programs have already moved to waive the GRE permanently for admission. Additionally, the department has not formally utilized the GRE as part of their admissions process since 2013. They believe this to have contributed to an increase in diversity in their program.

Their petition address why they have chosen to carefully examine the use of the GRE in the review process. They also provide supporting data for how they determined that for their particular program, GRE scores are not predictive of applicant quality or success. Furthermore, they explain how continuing to require the GRE could hinder their department's goals of enrolling top students while creating a diverse student body. The proposal then describes the department's holistic strategy, developed beginning in 2013. Along with additional and proactive recruitment strategies, as well as mentoring programs initiated within the department, they believe waiving the GRE permanently will better allow the program to achieve their admissions goals.

On Friday, December 11, 2020, the program GSC voted unanimously (28-0) in favor of the petition.

A complete copy of the proposal is available in the Office of Graduate Studies. Please contact Shannon Neuse, Director, at Shannon.neuse@austin.utexas.edu for more information.

Proposal to waive the GRE requirement for the Astronomy program

SUMMARY

The Astronomy program is requesting a permanent waiver of the GRE for admission to their PhD program.

Their proposal notes that the primary, dominant goal of their graduate admissions process is to identify scientists with the greatest potential for long-term success in astronomy and astrophysics careers. Referencing several studies and articles, they note that recent evidence has demonstrated that there is a significant lack of correspondence between students' performance on the GRE and their success in graduate school and beyond. Additionally, they note that there is no evidence that comparable PhD programs that do not require the GRE are comprised of less skilled cohorts, and a separate study using self-reported data from past years of astronomy postdoctoral prize fellows in the United States indicate no correlation between number of first-author papers published and GRE performance.

Due to its negative disparate impact on marginalized groups, and combined with the evidence that standardized tests in general, and the GRE tests specifically, are poor indicators of success in academic research, the program feels that a permanent waiver of the requirement will benefit the program in many ways. They believe waiving the GRE will aid in maintaining and building an equitable learning environment. Moreover, in addition to reducing the financial burden on applicants, they hope to reach a broader applicant pool both within and outside the US. They also aim to send a clear message that UT is a continuing leader amongst R1 astronomy programs in the U.S.

In addressing the program's holistic review, they note the normal metrics used to assess long-term success of their PhD, mainly the number of first authored publications in refereed journals, the number of talks given at other institutions and conferences, and the number of postdoctoral fellowship and research assistantship offers a student receives after graduation. They have attempted to design a graduate admissions process well suited to select students who will be successful in the long-term as measured by these metrics, and have established five criteria by which each applicant is measured.

A complete copy of the proposal is available in the Office of Graduate Studies. Please contact Shannon Neuse, Director, at Shannon.neuse@austin.utexas.edu for more information.

**Proposal to waive the GRE requirement
for the Biomedical Engineering program**

SUMMARY

The Biomedical Engineering Graduate Studies Committee is requesting to permanently waive the GRE requirement for admission to their graduate program.

Their proposal addresses their concern that the General GRE exam is limited to quantitative subjects typically covered much earlier on in their applicant's academic careers (middle school and high school). As such, their admissions process has traditionally relied heavily on grades in undergraduate coursework in lieu of GRE quantitative scores. They also reference peer-reviewed reports which have concluded that GRE scores fail to predict metrics of success typically used by graduate programs to determine satisfactory academic progress.

The proposal also notes that among the top 25 Biomedical Engineering programs, nearly half have permanently eliminated the GRE requirement. Another 44% have waived the requirement for 2020-21 and are considering permanent waivers. They believe that a continuation of the GRE requirement would put their programs at a disadvantage for attracting top applicants. Additionally, they feel the GRE requirement impedes their goal of attracting applicants from underrepresented groups, applicants with fewer financial resources, and applicants from other countries and rural areas of the U.S. They outline the holistic admissions review conducted by program faculty, along with the four main criteria they determined define "highest quality applicants."

If approved, the program intends to study the impacts the proposed change on the BME graduate program. They will review both short-term and long-term impacts on the program as a whole. They will also check for disparate impact on students who do not identify as cisgender men, socioeconomically disadvantaged students, and students from racial and ethnic groups traditionally underrepresented in their field.

This proposal has unanimous support of the core BME faculty (24 for and 0 against) and overwhelming support of the entire graduate studies committee (44 for, 3 against, 9 abstain).

A complete copy of the proposal is available in the Office of Graduate Studies. Please contact Shannon Neuse, Director, at Shannon.neuse@austin.utexas.edu for more information.

Proposal to revise the Guidelines for Standardized Test Waivers

SUMMARY

In 2016, the Admissions & Enrollment Committee of the Graduate Assembly established a set of guidelines for requesting waivers of the standardized test score requirement. The guidelines were intended to inform future committee discussion as well as assist programs considering a proposal to waive the GRE/GMAT requirement. The guidelines underwent a minor revision in 2018, removing a statement that discouraged using competition as a reason for seeking a waiver, but otherwise have remained unchanged.

In recent years, we have seen an increase in the number of programs considering a waiver of the standardized test score requirement. We have also seen a shift in the type of program making the request. Historically, waivers were primarily sought by performing arts programs or option III programs; however, we are now seeing requests from programs of all types. As such, the committee felt it prudent to update the guidelines to better reflect the content that they believe make for a strong proposal.

In addition to changes intended to clarify that the stated guidelines apply to programs of all types and not just option III or integrated (5-year) programs, minor changes were made to clarify terminology (i.e. dual degree versus joint program). Updates were also made to address the type of supporting data that proposals should include. Additionally, the guidelines now include a request for programs to outline their holistic admissions review process and include an assessment plan for ensuring that a waiver does not negatively impact program quality over time.

If approved, the revised guidelines will be circulated to program faculty and staff. In doing so, we aim to decrease the burden on programs by ensuring they are well informed of the process and expectations from the beginning. The committee has also selected several proposals that will be provided as examples.

A complete copy of the proposal is available in the Office of Graduate Studies. Please contact Shannon Neuse, Director, at Shannon.neuse@austin.utexas.edu for more information.