

## GRADUATE CURRICULUM CHANGE MEMO

Date: 10.23.2023

From: Paul Ashby, Department of Criminal Justice and Security Studies

Through: Dr. Egbert Zavala, Department of Criminal Justice and Security Studies

Through: Dr. Anadeli Bencomo, College of Liberal Arts

To: Dr. Selfa A. Chew-Meléndez, Chair, College of Liberal Arts Curriculum Committee

To: Dr. Martine Ceberio, Chair, Graduate Council

Proposal Title: Removal of GRE/MAT requirement for applications to the MDSS

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In the last several years, we have found a lack of utility in the requirement for applicants to complete the GRE or MAT to enter our program. It is not proving useful as an academic indicator. We have provided data to support this in a separate document.

In addition to academic data, we also find that the GRE/MAT requirement does not fit The University of Texas at El Paso's (UTEP) mission to provide inclusive access to quality higher education. Our program fulfills UTEP's core goal to serve historically underrepresented students such as students of color, low-income students, women, and first-generation graduate students. Studies have found the GRE runs counter to these aims (see additional document). Further, with our particular student population, which features a high percentage of professional and/or military servicepeople with busy schedules, the GRE/MAT requirement is an added burden. It is often preventing applications from being completed at all.

In light of the above and the data provided in a separate document, we propose to remove the GRE/MAT requirement from the list of materials applicants to the program are required to provide.

The University of Texas at El Paso requests approval to change the admission criteria for their Master of Defense and Strategic Studies Program within the Department of Criminal Justice as follows:

Description of Change *(List only the changes being proposed.)*

- Submission of GMAT (or GRE) scores to be optional

Rationale for Change

In the last several years, we have found a lack of utility in the requirement for applicants to complete the GRE or MAT to enter our program. It is not proving useful as an academic indicator. There is a key data area from our program that strongly emphasizes this.

We have a long-standing Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the U.S. Army Sergeants Major Academy/Non-Commissioned Officer Leadership Center of Excellence (USASMA/NCOLCoE). THE GRE/MAT requirement has been waived for these students. Their academic results have been stronger than the population taking the GRE/MAT.

Data for the above is detailed below. However, we also note there is extensive research that shows that the GRE, for example, is not a useful predictor for graduate success, including at the doctoral level (e.g., Miller & Staussen, 2014; Petersen et al, 2018; Sternbergh and Williams, 1997). We also note that during the COVID-19 pandemic, waivers were put in place for GRE/MAT requirements without impact on academic results. All of this corresponds with our experiences reviewing applications with the GRE/MAT, where we find limited use in results from these aptitude tests.

In addition to academic data, we also find that the GRE/MAT requirement does not fit The University of Texas at El Paso's (UTEP) mission to provide inclusive access to quality higher education. Our program fulfills UTEP's core goal to serve historically underrepresented students such as students of color, low-income students, women, and first-generation graduate students. Studies have found the GRE runs counter to these aims (e.g., Miller & Staussen, 2014; Perez, 2011; Hirshfield et al, 2001). Further, with our particular student population, which features a high percentage of professional and/or military servicepeople with busy schedules, the GRE/MAT requirement is an additional burden. It is often preventing applications from being completed at all.

Removal of the GRE/MAT would also be consistent with recent removals in several graduate programs across UTEP and around the country, which have found a lack of utility in the requirements and a mismatch between graduate aptitude testing and accessibility to a diverse pool of historically underserved students (Cheng, 2022).

## **Data | USASMA/NCOLCoE student performance amongst the wider MDSS student population**

### **Some Basics**

The MDSS is a professional program, comprising of 12 classes (16 as of Fall 2023). The program is currently fully online, delivered in an asynchronous learning format. Students are expected to complete 12 classes to graduate.

However, prior to the academic year 2020/21, students from USASMA/NCOLCoE were taught primarily in a face-to-face learning format. They were able to transfer in credits from the Sergeants Major Course (SMC) run at that facility, so they completed 8 MDSS classes with UTEP. Since that academic year, these students have been mixed with our online, asynchronous population, and expected to complete all 12 classes.

We have waived the GRE/MAT for all these students across this time period, as per the MOAs we have had with USASMA/NCOLCoE.

### **USASMA/NCOLCoE Student Performance**

USASMA/NCOLCoE students are amongst the highest achievers in the U.S. military. They are also a diverse group, comprising many students of color, women,<sup>1</sup> and overwhelmingly first-generation higher education students. They have risen through the ranks to leadership roles and been selected by the military for further career advancement. Their educational experiences can vary,<sup>2</sup> and they have a wide range of undergraduate GPA levels, often under or well under 3.0. It is the achievement within their professional careers and their subject experience that most lends them to our program, rather than a traditional “high GPA/‘prestigious’ institution” model.

These students consistently perform extremely highly within the MDSS. Please see table 1 below for key indicators of student numbers, withdrawals (academic and personal)/non-starters/other (e.g., moved to other programs), graduates, grade point average (GPA) averages across the student group, and semester credit hours completed in this population between 2016/17 and 2022/23. Please note once more that between academic years 2016/17 and 2019/20 these students were primarily taught in face-to-face cohorts, whilst from 2020/21 onwards they joined their fully online peers.

See following page for data.

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<sup>1</sup> Overall numbers are relatively low, but growing in a still male dominated profession.

<sup>2</sup> Some students who come to our program earned their very first undergraduate degree *through* USASMA/NCOLCoE.

**Table 1. Key Academic Indicators USASMA/NCOLCoE students 2016/17-2022/23**

| Academic Year | Students First Active | Withdrew/Did not begin/other | Graduated | Program GPA Average* | Hours Completed |
|---------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|-----------|----------------------|-----------------|
| 2016/17       | 12                    | 3*                           | 9         | 3.55                 | 3-24            |
| 2017/18       | 11                    | 1                            | 10        | 3.76                 | 24              |
| 2018/19       | 20                    | 0                            | 20        | 3.96                 | 24-36           |
| 2019/20       | 21                    | 0                            | 20        | 3.73                 | 24              |
| 2020/21       | 3                     | 0                            | -         | 3.633                | 3-33            |
| 2021/22       | 4                     | 1                            | -         | 3.89                 | 18-33           |
| 2022/23       | 4                     | 2                            | -         | 4.0                  | 3-15            |

\*Some students completed additional degrees, took DSS classes as electives. GPA average is for classes with our program

### **Wider MDSS Student Performance**

The results are superior to those coming from our wider MDSS population who are, under normal circumstances, taking the GRE/MAT.<sup>3</sup>

Table 2 below provides data for the same key indicators as Table 1 above, this time for the wider MDSS student population in academic years 2017/18 to 2022/2023 (2016/17 was unavailable at the time of writing).

| Academic Year | Students First Active | Withdrew/Did not begin/other | Graduated | Program GPA Average* | Hours Completed |
|---------------|-----------------------|------------------------------|-----------|----------------------|-----------------|
| 2016/17       | -                     | -                            | -         | -                    | -               |
| 2017/18       | 47*                   | 11                           | 23        | 3.15                 | 3-36            |
| 2018/19       | 42                    | 10                           | 24        | 3.36                 | 3-36            |
| 2019/20       | 48                    | 19                           | 25        | 3.28                 | 3-36            |
| 2020/21       | 36                    | 10                           | 17        | 3.52                 | 3-36            |
| 2021/22       | 35                    | 11                           | 5         | 3.52                 | 3-36            |
| 2022/23       | 19                    | 2                            | -         | 3.24                 | 3-18            |

\*Note – there are discrepancies in the “students active/graduated/withdrawn” numbers. Many students, especially more recently, are still active. There are also several not formally withdrawn or inactive students.

### **Explanations for Performance, and GRE/MAT Utility**

There are several interlocking and complex factors within these GPA figures. For example, in academic years 2016/17 through 2019/20, the USASMA/NCOLCoE students were primarily being taught face-to-face as part of cohesive cohorts. This potentially has affects in overcoming some of the challenges of a distance learning, fully

<sup>3</sup> Waivers have been applied in certain cases, and more broadly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

asynchronous model (around, for example student/institutional contact, positive peer group dynamics, personal feedback through instructor/student meetings). Students in this timeframe also completed eight classes and received transfer credit for the remaining four, allowing for deeper focus. However, conversely, USASMA/NCOLCoE students were also taking the maximum load of four classes per semester simultaneous to the rigorous demands of the SMC course. That class load is rare for our wider online MDSS population.

Whatever the complexities for differing graduation rates and GPA results, we can be confident that the lack of GRE/MAT requirements for USASMA/NCOLCoE is not affecting the quality of student entering our program through this route. They are achieving stronger overall results than their peers. This holds even as USASMA/NCOLCoE students have been blended with the wider MDSS population since 2021. Whilst there have been lower overall numbers entering the program, the GPA average for USASMA/NCOLCoE students does remain higher than the wider program averages.

This data complements further observations from our application review committees on the MDSS. We do not require a minimum score on the GRE/MAT. We have noted that very few students perform strongly above the mean in these tests. This is the case even in students with high undergraduate GPAs. In students with solid to strong GPAs, solid to strong letters of recommendation, and solid to strong statements of purpose, the GRE/MAT is not of utility, often hovering around the mean. We most often use the GRE/MAT scores where we have “borderline” cases (e.g. where they might be a strong GPA but a poor statement), but there is limited utility here, too, with mean or close to mean results. The GRE/MAT is not providing useful guidance in these cases.

A final important data point related to the above comes from student performance during the COVID-19 pandemic. In parts of the academic years 2019/20 and 2020/21, there were waivers in place for the GRE/MAT that many applicants took advantage of. In the academic year 2020/21 there is an improvement in student performance as measured by program GPA average.

In conjunction with the wider research on the utility of GRE cited above, the requirement is not helping us in making more informed decisions about student applications and is not predicative of student success.

### **Program Mission | Inclusivity and Military Access**

Research has indicated that the GRE can act as a barrier for students of color and non-traditional academic backgrounds. The GRE/MAT is not in line with UTEP's mission of accessibility and excellent education to our underserved student communities. We have seen potential applicants be dissuaded from applying to our program by the GRE/MAT requirement. They are concerned they will not be able to perform well in the examinations. Students who have been reassured to apply have gone on to be very successful in our program. There is also a specific discrepancy here as these tests

measure quantitative reasoning, which is not directly applicable to the learning outcomes of the MDSS program.

We have a particular issue with the GRE/MAT and military servicepeople. As they are often deployed (including overseas) and in extremely demanding professional positions, they struggle to find the locations and/or times to complete the tests. We have always experienced attrition in applications from this requirement. Colleagues at Extended University inform us that this is the most common feedback from military students (and others), and initial informational and application discussions often end as soon as this requirement is explained.

In an academic market environment where many other schools, colleges, and universities are removing GRE/MAT testing as a mandatory requirement, applicants are increasingly informing us that our requirement of graduate aptitude testing represents 'a dealbreaker', and they are not following through on applying.

With this conjunction of lack of utility and apparent dampening of application rates, including from underserved populations, we consider the removal of GRE/MAT requirements to be in the best interests of our future students and our program.

### **Replacing the GRE/MAT**

In order to retain rigor in our application process should the GRE/MAT requirement be removed we propose to require a higher standard of statement of purpose from our applicants. Statements of purpose will become more formalized, where we will expect to see a clear outline of educational and career achievements, an individual's explanation of their suitability for the program, and how the program fits with educational and career goals. The writing should be of a high standard. It should be structured around these three aims. Applicants will be informed of these standards prior to application. This will formalize and require something we see in the best statements of purpose to be more of a standard to meet.

### **References**

Cheng, M. (2022, December 7) The GRE is no longer useful in evaluating students for graduate school *Quartz* <https://qz.com/gre-test-scores-graduate-schools-changing-requirements-1849843761>

Hirschfeld, M. Moore, R.L. & Brown, E. (1995) "Exploring the Gender Gap on the GRE Subject Test in Economics." *The Journal of Economic Education*, 26 (1), 3–15, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1183461>.

Miller, C. & Stassun, K. (2014) A Test that Fails *Nature* 510, 303-304 <https://doi.org/10.1038/nj7504-303a>

Perez, K. (2011). GRE as a Predictor of Graduate Student Success at a Hispanic

Serving Institution of Higher Education Higher Education Administration, Florida International University. <https://doi.org/10.25148/etd.FI11042602>

Petersen, S.L., Erenrich, E.S., Levine, D.L., Vigoreaux, J., & Gile, K. (2018). Multi-institutional study of GRE scores as predictors of STEM PhD degree completion: GRE gets a low mark. *PLoS One*, 13(10), e0206570  
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0206570>

Sternberg, R. J., & Williams, W. M. (1997). Does the Graduate Record Examination predict meaningful success in the graduate training of psychologists? A case study. *American Psychologist*, 52(6), 630–641. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.52.6.630>

# Master of Defense and Strategic Studies Online

The Master of Defense and Strategic Studies is designed to provide an in-depth, critical examination of the major defense and security challenges facing the United States now and in the future. Particular attention will be placed on the development of strategy, both in theory and practice, to address defense-related problems. Offered in a distance-learning/online format, this will be a distinctive degree tailored to improving the competence of military and civilian personnel engaged in strategic planning, the inter-agency process, military operations, diplomacy, budgeting, legislative affairs, defense program management, research and development, and a myriad of other staff activities and specialties.

The program is offered online through [UTEP Connect](#).

## Admissions Requirements

1. Completion and submission of a graduate admissions application.
2. Submission of official transcripts in accordance with the requirements of the Graduate School.
3. A Bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university.
4. A brief statement of purpose (1-2 pages) that addresses educational and career goals and reasons for pursuing the degree.
5. Three letters of recommendation from individuals that can evaluate the ability to succeed in a rigorous graduate program, such as former instructors. Letters of recommendation from employers or work supervisors are also acceptable. Please contact the DSS Director for any questions regarding letters of recommendation.
6. Note: Admission packages are evaluated utilizing all of the requirements listed above, there are no "minimum scores" required for the test.
7. Applicants from countries where English is not the first language are required to demonstrate English proficiency. Please consult the [graduate school](#) website for required scores.

**Commented [PA1]:** Note numbers change following deletion of GRE/MAT requirement

Deleted: <#>Demonstration of academic achievement and potential as indicated by the results of the Miller Analogies Test (MAT) or the Graduate Record Examination (GRE). This requirement is waived if you already possess an accredited graduate degree.<sup>1]</sup>



# CURRICULUM PROPOSAL

## APPROVAL PAGE

Proposal Title: Removal of GRE/MAT from MDSS Program Application Requirements

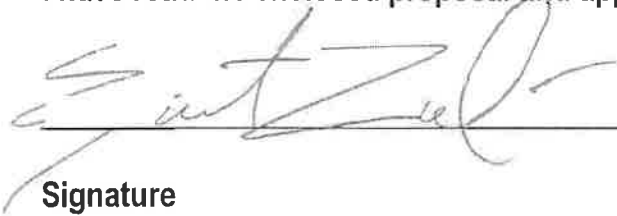
College: Liberal Arts

Department: Criminal Justice and Security Studies

DEPARTMENT CHAIR- Dr. Egbert Zavala

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I have read the enclosed proposal and approve this proposal on behalf of the department.

  
Signature

9-15-23  
Date

COLLEGE CURRICULUM COMMITTEE CHAIR – Dr. Selfa A. Chew-Melendez

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I have read the enclosed documents and approve the proposal on behalf of the college curriculum committee.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

COLLEGE DEAN – Dean Anadeli Bencomo

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I have read the enclosed documents and approve the proposal on behalf of the college. I certify that the necessary funds will be allocated by the college in support of this proposal.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date