

## GRADUATE CURRICULUM CHANGE MEMO

Date: 3-30-2023

From: Ignacio Martínez, Department of History *Ignacio Martinez*

Through: Jeffery Shepherd, Chair, Department of History

Through: Anadeli Bencomo, Dean, College of Liberal Arts *Anadeli Bencomo*

To: Chair, Graduate Council

Proposal Title: Eliminate GRE from requirements to enter Ph.D. Program in History

---

Explain the nature of the change and the rationale.

See attached proposal.

## Form for Proposed Changes to Graduate Admission Criteria

Institution: University of Texas at El Paso

Program Name: Ph.D. in History

Degree Level: Ph.D.

Institutional Contact:

Name: Ignacio Martínez, Ph.D. Program Director

E-mail: imartinez26@utep.edu

Phone: (915) 747-7054

The University of Texas at El Paso requests approval to change the admission criteria for their degree program within the Department of History as follows:

### **Submission of GRE scores to be optional**

#### Rationale for Change:

We request approval to permanently eliminate the requirement of the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) for all applicants to the Ph.D. program in History. This formal request is the product of numerous discussions with the GPC (Graduate Programs Committee) over the past two years. The GPC, in consultation with the entire Department of History, has unanimously agreed to eliminate the GRE as a requirement for admission into the Ph.D. program in History. We believe that GRE scores submitted to us in previous years have not proven to be accurate measurements of student success.

According to the GRE testing service “for the individual Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning sections, the lowest GRE score is 130 while the max score is 170. Thus, the composite score may range from 260 points to 340 points.”<sup>1</sup> A score, therefore, of 151 on the Verbal section and of 154 on the Quantitative portion of the exam would correlate with the top 50% of test takers. The first chart below identifies the number of GRE test takers from 2011-2020 (32). Of the 32 students who took the exam during these years the time to graduation was roughly 7.9 years (with estimates given for those still in the program). The average time to graduation for students who were in the top 50% of GRE Verbal scores compared to those in the bottom 50% was 7.8 and 7.9 years, respectively. Thus, the GRE Verbal scores were largely negligible, with little difference

---

<sup>1</sup> Educational Testing Service (2023). “GRE Percentiles: What is a Good GRE Score.” (Last updated January 2023). [https://examstrategist.com/gre-percentiles/#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20ETS%20\(makers,approximately%20a%20154%20scaled%20score.](https://examstrategist.com/gre-percentiles/#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20ETS%20(makers,approximately%20a%20154%20scaled%20score.)

## Form for Proposed Changes to Graduate Admission Criteria

in overall time to degree. The same held true for the Quantitative portion of the exam, with only a .3% deviation separating the top 50% from the bottom 50%. In this case, however, the bottom 50% had a slightly shorter time to gradation. The second chart shows that the stop-out rate among the top and bottom 50% of GRE scores were the same. Thus, a lower GRE score did not necessarily reflect a higher incidence of stop-outs among Ph.D. students. In addition, there is ample scholarly evidence to suggest that GRE exams may in fact be highly biased against women and people of color. These same studies also show that standardized tests have been shown to disadvantage students from economically underprivileged communities (Hirschfeld, 1995; Oldfield, 1996; Perez, 2011).

GRE's Reported/Scores	Number of Students	Ave. Time to Degree
GRE Reported for indicated years (2011-2020)	32	7.9 years
Scores Above 50% Percentile (Verbal)	19	7.8 years
Scores Below 50% Percentile (Verbal)	13	7.9 years
Scores Above 50% Percentile (Quantitative)	3	8.1 years
Scores Below 50% Percentile (Quantitative)	29	7.8 years

GRE Scores Above 50% Percentile (Verbal)	Stop-out Rate (in real numbers)
19 students	1 student
GRE Scores Below 50% Percentile (Verbal)	Stop-out Rate (in real numbers)
13 students	1 student

The data in the above charts highlight a growing national recognition that GRE scores do not necessarily predict certain educational metrics and milestones (e.g., program completion, time to degree, stop-out rate, GPA, and overall achievement) (Langin, 2019). For our departmental

## Form for Proposed Changes to Graduate Admission Criteria

purposes, a high GPA and evidence of strong writing ability has been a far better predictor of success in the program, particularly in relation to time to degree.

Over the past decade, our department has experienced a steady decline in applicant numbers, particularly during and after the COVID pandemic. We believe that this decline is partly due to the high cost of the GRE exam which presents students with a financial hardship that effectively disincentivizes applying to our program. Nationally, several History departments at Carnegie R1 research institutions have already eliminated their GRE requirement, leaving us at a distinct disadvantage in recruiting top students. Many programs at UTEP within the College of Liberal Arts have also already dropped or are in the process of dropping the GRE requirement for admission. We believe that by eliminating the GRE in History we can regain our competitive edge at both at the local and national levels.

Currently, we evaluate all our Ph.D. applicants along the following criteria: (1) A competitive GPA from UTEP or other accredited institution; (2) 3 letters of recommendation from professional references; (3) A letter of interest in the program; (4) A 15–30-page essay using historical methodology and analysis and primary sources; and (5) GRE scores. As a profession that is reading and writing intensive, we believe student GPA and writing samples to be the most significant predictor of future success in the program. Aside from the GRE, therefore, we will not be changing any of our established criteria for evaluation.

The central goal of a Ph.D. in History is to enable our students to gain professional skills as critical thinkers, writers, and educators. One of the central goals for our department in particular is to create a pathway for students of color to enter the professoriate in hopes of creating a more just and equitable society. We feel that the GRE gets in the way of that goal. In place of the GRE, we will continue to ensure the success of each of our students in following ways: (1) By pairing each incoming student with both a faculty and graduate-student mentor; (2) By requiring each student create and follow a very detailed plan of study, which they must submit to the Ph.D. Program Director for approval before registering for courses; (3) By requiring that each student create their own Individualized Plan of Study (IDP), which will provide them with a solid roadmap for completing the program in under eight years; (4) By requiring each student attend a two-day mandatory orientation in August (right before the start of the fall semester) to carefully discuss the expectations and requirements of the program. These are all non-negotiable obligations that will provide new entering students with a clear idea of their timeline in the program.

## Form for Proposed Changes to Graduate Admission Criteria

1. Educational Testing Service. (2008). Factors that can Influence Performance on the GRE General Test 2006-2007. [https://www.ets.org/Media/Tests/GRE/pdf/gre\\_o8o9\\_factors\\_2006-07.pdf](https://www.ets.org/Media/Tests/GRE/pdf/gre_o8o9_factors_2006-07.pdf)
2. Hirschfeld, Mary, et al. "Exploring the Gender Gap on the GRE Subject Test in Economics." The Journal of Economic Education, vol. 26, no. 1, Taylor & Francis, Ltd., 1995, pp. 3-15, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1183461>.
3. Kuncel, N. R., Hezlett, S. A., & Ones, D. S. (2001). A comprehensive meta-analysis of the predictive validity of the graduate record examinations: Implications for graduate student selection and performance. Psychological Bulletin, 127(1), 162-181. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.127.1.162>
4. Langin, K. (2019). A wave of graduate programs drops the GRE application requirement. <https://www.science.org/content/article/wave-graduate-programs-drop-gre-applicationrequirement>
5. Oldfield, Kenneth. The Political and Economic Reasons the Graduate Record Examination Persists Despite Its Generally Low Predictive Validity. Journal of Thought, vol. 31, no. 1, Caddo Gap Press, 1996, pp. 55-68, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42589443>.
6. 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>
7. Sudhir, Pillarisett (1999). GRE Test to be Discontinued From 2000. Perspectives on History. May 1, 1999. <https://www.historians.org/research-and-publications/perspectives-on-history/may-1999/gre-history-test-to-be-discontinued-from-2000>

*Ignacio Martinez*

Associate Professor  
Ph.D. Program Director  
Department of History

# CURRICULUM PROPOSAL

## APPROVAL PAGE

Proposal Title: Request to eliminate GRE requirement for admission to Ph.D. Program in History

College: College of Liberal Arts

Department: History


DEPARTMENT CHAIR- Jeffrey Shepherd

---

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



Signature



Date

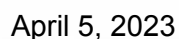
COLLEGE CURRICULUM COMMITTEE CHAIR - Selfa A. Chew-Melendez

---

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



Signature



Date

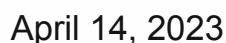
COLLEGE DEAN - Anadeli Bencomo

---

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