

GRADUATE CURRICULUM CHANGE MEMO

Date: 09/22/2022

From: Deepanwita Dasgupta, DGS, Department of Philosophy

Through: Noell Birondo, Chair, Department of Philosophy

Through: Anadeli Bencomo, Dean, College of Liberal Arts

To: Selfa A. Chew-Melendez, Chair, Graduate Council

Proposal Title: Removal of GRE requirement from the Philosophy MA Program

The Department of Philosophy requests the approval to remove the GRE requirement from its MA program. Based on the data collected over last five years (2015-2020), it is shown that GRE scores are no longer good predictors of student success in the program. Indeed, in the post-COVID scenario, they now constitute an extra impediment in their path. The data then is turned into a regression curve for easy visualization.

Institution: The University of Texas at El Paso

Program Name: Master of Arts in Philosophy

Degree Level (Master's, Doctoral): Master's

Institutional Contact:

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The University of Texas at El Paso requests approval to change the admission criteria for their Master of Arts in Philosophy within the College of Liberal Arts, Department of Philosophy as follows:

Description of Change:

- Remove GRE requirement
- Require virtual interview of applicants

Rationale for Change:

The Department of Philosophy requests the approval to drop the GRE requirement from its MA program. This proposal has already been discussed among our faculty and the Department unanimously agrees to remove the GRE as an admission requirement.

The GRE was instituted back in 1936 as a measure of the analytic and reasoning skills possessed by the applicants who enroll for graduate school. It has long been a part of the US graduate school system and has served numerous cohorts of students. The test has also been substantially revamped in 2011. Despite of this long tradition however, there is now a growing consensus that the GRE does not predict well the performance of the students over the years. This performance is instead better predicted by looking at the time taken towards the completion of the degree, GPA scores maintained over the years, scholarly performances such as admission in PhD programs, publications etc. We cite some instances of this growing literature of dissent about GRE below. One should remember that all evaluation instruments are products of their times, and therefore, they become less useful as those times pass. Analytic reasoning and intellectual abilities are no longer viewed as fixed quantities that can be captured in some fixed scores but are viewed more as time-extended dynamic processes that unfold over time. Any initial score given to a candidate cannot thus predict his or her future successes well. Moreover, the social structure and the demographics of the universities have changed immensely over the decades. It is therefore reasonable that there should be corresponding changes in those evaluation metrics as well.

The works cited below are just a small sample of the growing body of literature that highlights the low predictive value of GRE.

1. Dunlap, Katherine M., et al. "RESEARCH NOTES: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ADMISSIONS CRITERIA AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE IN AN MSW PROGRAM." *Journal of Social Work Education*, vol. 34, no. 3, [Taylor & Francis, Ltd., Council on Social Work Education], 1998, pp. 455–62, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23043396>.
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. Oldfield, Kenneth. "A Proposal for Warning People about the Risks Associated with Taking the Graduate Record Examination." *Journal of Thought*, vol. 32, no. 4, Caddo Gap Press, 1997, pp. 37–42, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42589513>.
4. 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>.

The students who join our MA program generally come with undergraduate degrees in philosophy, but we also have students from various STEM or social science backgrounds, such as environmental science or psychology. Those students already bring with them a diverse skill set, such as verbal reasoning or analytic writing. The skills tested in GRE therefore add little or nothing to this toolbox – it just adds another level of difficulty in their path in terms of time and financial hardship. The future careers of those students after the MA degree are also quite varied. In addition to joining various PhD programs in Philosophy, a good number of our students go for careers in law; indeed, a background in philosophy has long been accepted as a staple for success in law schools.

Across the College of Liberal Arts and even other colleges at UTEP, many programs have been gradually removing their GRE requirements or have never used them in the first place. This is the case for the MS program in Criminology and Criminal Justice, MA in English and American Literature as well as MA in English-Rhetoric and Writing Studies. GRE has also been dropped by the MA programs in History, Latin American and Border Studies as well as Sociology.

The Department of Philosophy currently has a multi-level selection process for its potential MA applicants. This includes a substantial writing sample as well as a detailed personal statement describing the intellectual biography of the student. Together, they constitute nearly 14-15 pages of analytic writing. In addition to this, the applicants will be interviewed by the faculty over zoom. This extended engagement is a better predictor of their future performances rather than a standardized test score.

Keeping in mind all those points, we decided to collect data on our MA applicants for the last five years (2015-2020), which is inserted below. The data consists of the GRE scores of the students when they enter the MA program as well as their GPA scores over the first and the second years, the idea being to look for correlation between their GRE scores and the time taken towards the completion of degree. We also have a cohort that came in during the COVID year of Fall 2020. GRE requirements were then waived because of COVID recovery measures. This provides us with a nice contrast class.

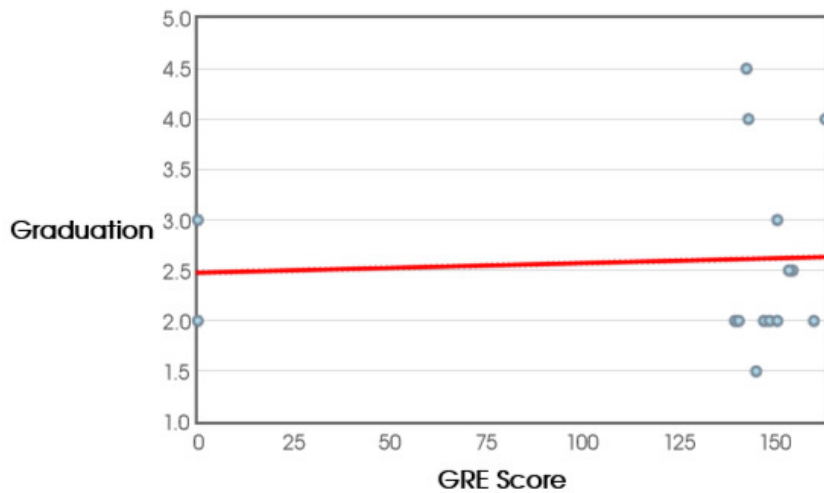
As expected, the data (a set of 23 students – it is small but representative) show that there is no appreciable correlation between the GRE scores and their completion of degree or

the overall performance in the program. In general, the students got better GPA scores in their 2nd year than in the 1st year (or maintained the same GPA over years, e.g., 4.00). Their completion to degree roughly took 2.5-3 years. The highest time taken towards the degree has been 4 years except in one case (Student 8) but that overlapped the two pandemic years when nearly everything was closed. But the more typical pattern for completion is 2.5-3 years. Because our numbers are very modest, the pattern can be strongly influenced by even one student. One student (student 18) who had his GRE requirement waived, graduated on dot after two years, while the best GRE scoreholder (student 3) actually took four years to graduate. Overall then, the student performance show a complex interplay of multiple factors – the complexity of the dissertation topic, depth of coursework needed to handle the topic, student relationship with their supervisors and outside mentors etc. None of these are ideal candidates for a static score such as GRE. The table is given below.

Fall 2015							
Names	GRE Verbal	GRE Quantitative	GRE Writing	1 st Year GPA	2 nd Year GPA	Graduation Date	Time Taken
Student 1	150	144	3	3.60	3.78	5/13/2017	2 years
Student 2	155	142	3.5	3.83	3.90	5/13/2017	2 years
Student 3	164	158	5	3.83	3.92	5/18/2019	4 years
Student 4	Waived	waived	waived	3.67	3.89	5/12/2018	3 years
Student 5	142	144	2.5	3.00	3.00	5/18/2019	4 years
Fall 2016							
Student 6	150	151	4.5	4.00	4.00	5/12/2018	2 years
Fall 2017							
Student 7	Waived	Waived	Waived	3.75	3.75	Dropped out	
Student 8	147	138	3.5	4.00	4.00	1/10/ 2022	4.5 years
Student 9	140	139	5	3.40	3.25	Dropped out	
Student 10	157	152	4	3.60	3.63	12/14/2019	2.5 years
Fall 2018							
Student 11	145	134	2	3.50	3.67	12/12/2020 2 years	2 years
Student 12	143	138	3	3.33	3.60	12/12/2020 2 years	2 years
Student 13	159	148	4	4.00	4.00	5/15/2021 2.5 years	2.5 years
Student 14	157	144				8/15/2021	3 years

Spring 2019							
Student 15	152	138	3.5	4.00	4.00	5/16/2020 1.5 years	1.5 years
Names	GRE Verbal	GRE Quantitative	GRE Writing	1 st Year GPA	2 nd Year GPA	Graduation Date	Time Taken
Spring 2020							
Student 16	Waived	Waived	Waived	4.00	4.00	Spring 2023	
Student 17	151	147	4	4.00	3.56	Spring 2023	
Fall 2020							
Student 18	Waived	Waived	Waived	4.00	4.00	5/5/2022	2 years
Student 19	Waived	Waived	Waived	4.00	4.00	Spring 2023	
Student 20	162	158	3.5	4.00	4.00	5/5/2022	2 years
Student 21	Waived	Waived	Waived	3.67	3.75	Summer 2022	
Spring 2022							
Student 22	No data					Yet to graduate	
Student 23	No data					Yet to graduate	

Assuming that the independent variable is the GRE score (x) and the dependent variable (y) is graduation time in years, and the x coordinate is composed of the averages of GRE V + GRE Q, a simple regression analysis turns out to be as follows.



Regression Line: Graduation = 0.001 · GRE Score + 2.4764
 Correlation: $r = 0.0556$
 R-squared: $r^2 = 0.0031$

Finally, one should take note of some practical matters. From a purely pragmatic point of view, it should be noted that dropping the GRE requirement would immensely benefit our program in terms of its potential growth. First, it would save our students time and money during a very difficult time. Based on our experience, most of our students come from various low-income backgrounds who often need to keep working during the time when they are in school. They are therefore already hard pressed both in terms of time and money. Since taking the GRE test needs both time and money -- especially very large chunks of time because of the need to practice with test materials -- it is not rational for us to subject our students to this additional ordeal, given the low predictive power of GRE. Finally, in the post-pandemic world, our primary job as educators is to uphold and repair the structures of higher education so that things can return to normal during the shortest time possible. The long-term effects of the pandemic on higher education are gradually becoming visible as we approach what is often called a demographic cliff, i.e., a sharp decline in enrollment numbers over the years. Putting our students to this extra expense and hardship in the face of all this makes things unduly difficult for them in their quest for higher education and social mobility, and it does not even give us any good predictive data for their future performance. We therefore ask for this criterion to be removed.

A comparison table between the existing and [the](#) proposed admission criteria is given in Appendix 1.

Appendix 1

The template below shows a side-by-side comparison of the current graduate admission criteria with the proposed graduate admission criteria. The table shows the itemized break-up between our old and the new proposed system of selection. Except for the removal of the GRE score, everything remains as it is. Since the department does not have any conditional admission criteria, that part has been left blank.

CURRENT ADMISSION CRITERIA	PROPOSED ADMISSION CRITERIA
Application for admission in the MA program through UTEP's online system.	Application for admission in the MA program through UTEP's online system.
Official transcript from an accredited institution demonstrating the completion of a four-year Bachelor's degree (or equivalent in the case of an international student) and official transcripts from all colleges or universities attended.	Official transcript from an accredited institution demonstrating the completion of a four-year Bachelor's degree (or equivalent in the case of an international student) and official transcripts from all colleges or universities attended.
A writing sample demonstrating one's skill in writing philosophical prose (usually 12-13 pages)	A writing sample demonstrating one's skill in writing philosophical prose (usually 12-13 pages)
A 1-2-page statement of purpose	A 1-2-page statement of purpose
Two letters of reference from relevant academic or professional sources.	Two letters of reference from relevant academic or professional sources.
Official GRE score required.	Official GRE scores required. <u>Instead, the applicants are interviewed by faculty over zoom.</u>
Official TOEFL scores for international students, demonstrating English proficiency for non-native English speakers.	Official TOEFL scores for international students, demonstrating English proficiency for non-native English speakers.

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M.A. in Philosophy

The program focuses on the core strengths of the Department of Philosophy in philosophy of science and ethics while providing students the opportunity to become competent as generalists in the history of philosophy as well as being teachers of introductory logic. In doing so, the program primarily prepares students for entry into Ph.D. programs in philosophy and other related disciplines. It also meets the ongoing demand for qualified philosophy teachers from area community colleges as well as training students to teach in Mexican universities and secondary schools. With the flexibility of the Non-Thesis Philosophy Project option, students are able to meet a variety of local and regional needs as well, serving the needs of local secondary school systems, pre-law preparation, and community administration and activism.

Current vs. Proposed Admission Criteria

- A bachelor's degree from an accredited U.S. institution or proof of equivalent education at a foreign institution.
 - Submission of official Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores.
 - A writing sample.
 - A statement of purpose.
 - Two letters of recommendation.
 - Optional: a resume or other supporting materials to give a full picture of the applicant's potential.
- A bachelor's degree from an accredited U.S. institution or proof of equivalent education at a foreign institution.
 - GRE is removed. **Applicants** are interviewed by the faculty over zoom.
 - A writing sample.
 - A statement of purpose.
 - Two letters of recommendation.
 - Optional: a resume or other supporting materials to give a full picture of the applicant's potential.

The materials submitted for admission to the MA Program will be judged holistically to assess the potential of the applicant. The successful applicant would typically have an undergraduate GPA of 3.0 or higher that demonstrates focus on philosophy or philosophy related fields, a verbal reasoning score that corresponds to a competitive percent rank, a writing sample that reflects a student's ability to address issues and raise questions philosophically, analyze and construct sound arguments, and/or evaluate complex ethical issues. The personal statement should include discussion of the student's preparation in philosophy, indicate a high level of maturity and commitment to study philosophy, elucidate the student's interest in UTEP's M.A. program in particular, and specify the student's goals in philosophy. The letters of recommendation should be from supporting faculty who can serve as judges of the applicant's competence, philosophical talent, and suitability for the program.

CURRICULUM PROPOSAL

APPROVAL PAGE

Proposal Title: Removal of GRE requirement from the Philosophy MA Program

College: Liberal Arts Department: Philosophy

DEPARTMENT CHAIR- Noell Birondo

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

Signature

Date

COLLEGE CURRICULUM COMMITTEE CHAIR - Selfa 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