

GRADUATE CURRICULUM CHANGE MEMO

Date: 03-31-2022

From: Dr. Ronald Weber

Through: Dr. Ronald Weber, Director Master's of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies

Through: Dr. Denis O'Hearn Dean of the College of Liberal Arts

To: Aaron Velasco, Chair Graduate Council

Proposal Title: Elimination of GRE Requirement for Admission

This request follows a detailed discussion with the MAIS Advisory Board and formal unanimous approval of the change. Experience has shown that our requirement of an individualized Plan of Study, created by applicant and program advisor, provides a much clearer detailed admission requirement that is more in keeping with the individualized nature of the MAIS plan of study than the generalized GRE. Requiring students to take the GRE is inconsistent. It confuses students and extends the application process. It also adds unneeded financial hardship for applicants.

Form for Proposed Changes to Graduate Admission Criteria

Institution: **University of Texas at El Paso**

Program Name: **Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies Program (MAIS)**

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

Institutional Contact:

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- A. Summary: Describe the proposed changes to graduate admission criteria and the rationale for making the changes. As part of the rationale, provide information on how the decision to change the admissions criteria was made, e.g., analysis of predictors of graduate student success, identification of “best” or “promising” practices, etc.

We request approval to drop the requirement of the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) for all MAIS Program applicants. This request follows a detailed discussion with the MAIS Advisory Board and formal unanimous approval of the change. Experience has shown that our requirement of an individualized Plan of Study, created by applicant and program advisor, provides a much clearer detailed admission requirement that is more in keeping with the individualized nature of the MAIS plan of study than the generalized GRE. Requiring students to take the GRE is inconsistent. It confuses students and extends the application process. It also adds unneeded financial hardship for applicants.

The professional focus of the MAIS program attracts a mixed group of applicants with a variety of skills, aptitudes and goals. The GRE does not address these disparities. Most MAIS applicants have extensive life and professional skills. Many are returning to classes after stopping out for a period. Some of them submit old GRE scores, which no longer reflect their aptitudes. Others come from programs in which they were successful, where GRE scores were never required. For them, completing the GRE merely adds unexpected obstacles. It has resulted in a lack of uniformity and fairness for students. Since finances are always impactful upon MA students, with no financial awards available to MAIS applicants, the GRE presents them with an additional financial hardship, which limits many. We are seeking to make admission standards more relevant to incoming students who often have extensive life experiences before returning to MAIS for a Master's degree. Change will also make the application process less expensive and therefore more accessible.

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There is growing national recognition that in more traditional academic programs GRE scores do not predict obvious educational metrics and milestones (e.g., program completion, time to degree, GPA and overall achievement).

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. Taylor & Francis, Ltd., 1995, pp. 3–15, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1183461>.
4. 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>.
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>.

The GRE is even less predictive for MAIS students. The purpose of an MAIS degree is to enable students to develop the ability to integrate professional knowledge, values, and skills in a manner that enables them to advance in their profession by contributing to the reform and practice of their jobs. The process is different for each applicant, so the evaluation of MAIS applicants must assess diverse groups and cultures served by various professions. Little is known about the degree to which the admissions criteria examined by the GRE are predictive of abilities gained through life and professional experience (practice competence). They certainly do not address the variety of skills required for an MAIS graduate.

Furthermore, a growing number of MA programs at UTEP within the College of Liberal Arts do not have either GRE or MAT (Miller Analogies Test) requirements for admission. Because the program depends upon courses organized in other departments and programs, and each student constructs their own program of study, students in the program must rely on the courses offered from other disciplines to complete their academic program. Among the disciplines most frequently included in MAIS degree plans, the following do not require the GRE for admission: the MA in Creative Writing, the MS in Criminology and Criminal Justice, the MA in English and American Literature, the MA in English-Rhetoric and Writing Studies, the MA in History, the MA in Latin American and Border Studies and the MA in Sociology. Therefore, it has already been recognized that there is no need to test competence to achieve in these courses. Moreover, requiring

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MAIS students enrolled in these courses to complete the GRE forces them to meet a requirement that does not apply to the other students in these courses, which is inherently unfair.

One metric of success for MAIS students has been the time to degree. To look at this, we examined GRE data from the 12 MAIS students who graduated from 2017 to 2021. In this period only GRE Verbal Reasoning and Analytical Writing scores were factored into admission decisions. This has been the practice in MAIS for over a decade. The table below shows the range of GRE scores and the time to degree of successful students.

| | GRE Scores | MAT Scores | Scores Waived | Missing | Ave. Time to Degree | |
|------------------|------------|------------|---------------|---------|---------------------|------|
| Total Students | 12 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 4.22 |
| GRE Scores | | | | | | |
| VR: 156-170 | | | | | | |
| AW: 3.6-6.0 | | | | | | |
| VR: 150-155 | 2 | 2 | | | | 3.67 |
| VR: 145-150 | 1 | | | | | 2.67 |
| VR: 140-145 | 2 | | | | | 2.33 |
| AW: 3.0-3.5 | 4 | | | | | 2.75 |
| VR: 130 or below | | | | | | |
| AW: 2.5 or below | 1 | | | | | 6 |
| 3 Scores Waived | | | | | | 7.67 |
| 2 Scores Missing | | | | | | 3 |

VR=Verbal Reasoning

W=Analytical Writing

Clearly, the statistical sample is too small and inconsistent to show any obvious statistical correlation between scores and degree completion. The numbers indicate that the longest average time to degree is among the students who received waivers from the exam. In all cases, the waivers had been granted because the students were transferring from other graduate programs where they had taken classes. This reflects the fact that many MAIS students are already working professionals trying to fit education and family responsibilities into their career advancement. Moreover,

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because the numbers are low, they are profoundly affected by one student, who had returned to graduate school after 12 years. Dropping his time to degree lowers the average time to degree of the remaining 2 to 4.67 years to degree. Among the 5 graduates who presented GRE scores all had scores below the 50th percentile in both Verbal Reasoning and Analytical Writing, which demonstrates that below average scores were not predictive of their ability to complete the degree.

As mentioned, it is our contention that the requirement for each candidate to participate in the creation of an Individualized Plan of Study provides an admission requirement, which is more predictive of success. The first element of the Individualized Plan of Study is an interview with the Program Advisor. The interview is designed to assure that each applicant fully understands the procedures for applying and grasps the methods and purpose of an interdisciplinary degree. This is just the first part in the analysis of the needs and goals of each student. When talking to the Program Advisor, students are often probing to discover the program/discipline that best fits their needs. It is the Program Advisor's job to help each student realize the feasibility of their academic goals and to determine the best program to realize those goals. The personal interview also helps to determine if a student's initial goals are feasible at UTEP. Thus students submitting an Individualized Plan of Study are better informed with better direction from the start of their careers.

Following the MAIS External Review in 2012-13, the rubric for the Individualized Plan of Study was standardized. Subsequently, all applicants have been required to complete an Individualize Plan of Study, and all graduates have been tracked and evaluated. The most recent MAIS SACSCOC assessment data has verified that students who completed an Individual Plan of Study as they entered the program were better able to stay on track and to complete their degree. MAIS students must work in a variety of disciplines where they are not always recognized or encouraged. This requires a great deal of individual focus, motivation, and self-confidence. An Individualized Plan of Study helps determine that students have these qualities to assure success in their academic career. Each student devises his or her own plan of study under the supervision of the Program Advisor. Thus, students applying to the MAIS Program do so with the help and supervision of the Program Advisor.

Each Individual Plan of Study contains a developed statement of goals and objectives, which articulates what the student wants to achieve through an MAIS degree. In addition, the plan of study must include a list of courses, which the student plans to take to fulfill their 36-hour degree requirement. Each course on the list must be accompanied by a short justification of how it will help the student to reach their stated goals and objectives. The Program Advisor assists students to

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choose relevant courses from the UTEP catalog, giving advice on which courses MAIS students are eligible to take. The last part of the Individual Plan of Study is a preliminary proposal for a final project. Since most MAIS applicants are employed, they come to the program with very specific career goals in mind—either to advance in their current job or to move up to a higher-level position. The final project provides the assessment vehicle that will allow the student's faculty committee to determine how well the student, at the end of their academic career, has achieved the goals they initially defined. The Program Advisory Committee together with the Program Advisor assists the student in the creation of the preliminary proposal for a final project. The final project proposal provides a means for the Program Advisor to give guidance to the student and to evaluate the feasibility of each student's plan to achieve their particular career goals.

As noted, the most recent MAIS SACSCOC assessment data indicates that students who complete a satisfactory Individual Plan of Study show greater direction and purpose as they proceed and they have more success in completing their degrees. Tracking data shows that all 12 of the 2017-21 MAIS graduates completed an Individual Plan of Study before entering the program. Therefore, because it has been applied more consistently among our most recent students, the Individualized Plan of Study has proven to be a clearer predictor of success for MAIS students than the GRE. While no one component ever determines acceptance, in our current application process, the personal interview, the three parts of the Individualized Plan of Study and past academic performance give clear indications of academic potential.

As shown by the latest round of graduates, most had lower range GRE scores or delayed or nonexistent scores. We have drawn the conclusion that while high GRE scores may reflect academic achievement, GRE scores are not predictive of success in the MAIS Program. It should also be noted that dropping the GRE requirement for the MAIS Program would substantially benefit our applicants and our program goals for continued growth. Removing the GRE score requirement would save our applicants time and money. The monetary and time costs of taking the test pose major obstructions for our working applicants. Many applications to our program are not completed, because of the cost of the GRE. Dropping the GRE requirement could immediately increase the number of completed applications and in turn contribute to increased cohort sizes for the MAIS Program.

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- B. Details: Use the template below to create a side-by-side table showing the current graduate admission criteria and the proposed graduate admission criteria.

| Current Admission Criteria | Proposed Admission Criteria |
|---|--|
| <p>Overview The MAIS program is designed for individuals who, having completed a baccalaureate program or professional degree program at an accredited college or university, wish to expand their knowledge in areas outside of their previous training or present profession. To this end, each student will participate in the design of a plan of study consisting of courses offered by a variety of departments.</p> | <p>Overview The MAIS program is designed for individuals who, having completed a baccalaureate program or professional degree program at an accredited college or university, wish to expand their knowledge in areas outside of their previous training or present profession. To this end, each student will participate in the design of a plan of study consisting of courses offered by a variety of departments.</p> |
| <p>A bachelor's degree from an accredited institution in the United States (or proof of equivalent training in a foreign institution).</p> | <p>A bachelor's degree from an accredited institution in the United States (or proof of equivalent training in a foreign institution).</p> |
| <p>A satisfactory grade point average (GPA) in upper-division (junior- and senior-level) work and in any graduate work already completed.</p> | <p>A satisfactory grade point average (GPA) in upper-division (junior- and senior-level) work and in any graduate work already completed.</p> |
| <p>Submission of official Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores.</p> | <p>Submission of official Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores.</p> |
| <p>Submission to the MAIS Advisory Committee of an acceptable Admission Essay and Plan of Study.</p> | <p>Submission to the MAIS Advisory Committee of an acceptable Admission Essay and Individualized Plan of Study.</p> |
| <p>Acceptance by the MAIS Advisory Committee and by the Graduate School.</p> | <p>Acceptance by the MAIS Advisory Committee and by the Graduate School.</p> |
| <p>The MAIS requirements for admission shall be evaluated as a composite. Applicants should present a background of GPA and courses completed that demonstrate the ability to sustain graduate level work with competitive verbal and reasoning scores on the GRE, and a Plan of Study containing a broad set of objectives that will expand their knowledge beyond their previous training or present profession.</p> | <p>The MAIS requirements for admission shall be evaluated as a composite. Applicants should present a background of GPA and courses completed that demonstrate the ability to sustain graduate level work with competitive verbal and reasoning scores on the GRE, and an Individualized Plan of Study containing a broad set of objectives that will expand their knowledge beyond their previous training or present profession.</p> |
| <p>Individuals interested in joining the MAIS program should consult with the Program Director before applying.</p> | <p>Individuals interested in joining the MAIS program should consult with the MAIS Program Director before applying.</p> |
| <p>Degree Plan Required Credits: 36</p> | <p>Degree Plan Required Credits: 36</p> |

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| | |
|---|---|
| <p>MA in Interdisciplinary Study (All courses require a grade of C or better)</p> | <p>MA in Interdisciplinary Study (All courses require a grade of C or better)</p> |
| <p>Required Courses: MAIS 5350 The History of An Idea 3 MAIS 5360 Contemporary Issues 3 Graduate Course Work: Select twenty-seven additional hours of graduate course work Final Oral Examination: Complete final oral examination Final Project: MAIS 5393 Final Project Total Hours 36</p> | <p>Required Courses: MAIS 5350 The History of An Idea 3 MAIS 5360 Contemporary Issues 3 Graduate Course Work: Select twenty-seven additional hours of graduate course work Final Oral Examination: Complete final oral examination Final Project: MAIS 5393 Final Project Total Hours 36</p> |
| <p>No more than nine hours may be in any one subject; no more than nine hours may be outside the College of Liberal Arts.</p> | |