The University of Texas at El Paso

Curriculum Change Proposal

Approval Page

Proposal Title: **GRE Requirement Removal Political Science MA Program**

Department Chair: Charles Boehmer, Ph.D.

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

Dr. Charles Boehmer

Signature   Date 8/26/19

College Curriculum Committee Chairperson

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

_____   _____
Signature   Date

College Dean

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

Graduate Council/Undergraduate Curriculum Committee

Council Action: ⌐ Approved   ⌐ Returned to the College

Date of Action Report: _____

_____   _____
Signature, Chairman   Date

Graduate Curriculum Change Memo

Date: August 26, 2019

From: Charles Boehmer, Chair, Department of Political Science

Through: Denis O' Hearn, Dean, College of Liberal Arts

To: Amy Wagler, Chair, Graduate Council

Subject: Proposal for GRE Requirements Removal Political Science MA
            Program

The Department of Political Science is requesting approval to remove the Graduate Record Exam (GRE) requirement for admission to the Masters in Political Science program. We are proposing no other substantive changes to this program. We have systematically investigated other graduate programs at UTEP and several no longer require the GRE exam for admission. We have also investigated admission requirements at other universities and found that our proposal is following a trend. Studies are finding that standardized tests such as the GRE may be unfair to students of various demographics, such as minority students, and thus not serve as useful predictors of completion or future success. We seek to make our admission process easier so prospective students will avoid the cost of taking an exam that data show is biased in favor of students of more affluence and family education, which correlates with other factors such as race and ethnicity. Moreover, the GRE exam is a financial burden that deters students from applying to programs or delays the admissions process. This proposal includes no new courses and no additional resources will be required. We include some evidence for our proposal on the next page. We are also submitting a host of cosmetic changes to the catalog to improve language and accuracy. The only substantive change in the catalog requires striking the language on the GRE requirement; the rest of the changes are catalog clean up.

There has been a growing number of programs at UTEP (such as the MA in Sociology about six years ago, and also in English, among others) that decided to waive the GRE for all applicants while some programs still keep the GRE requirement but waive it for UTEP students. As for the nationwide trend, an increasing number of universities (including those with R1 designation, and particularly minority-serving institutions) are no longer requiring the GRE or leave it to departmental discretion. For instance, the faculty senate of Stanford University recently decided to replace the university-wide requirement with school-by-school discretion: https://news.stanford.edu/2018/04/13/faculty-senate-graduate-education/

As for the Hispanic-serving institutions, several have already decided to drop the GRE requirement. One example is the University of Texas at Arlington, MA in Political Science where GRE is not listed as part of the application materials: https://www.uta.edu/pols/graduate-program/admissions-and-advising.php

Another example to minority-serving institutions is the University of Hawaii, Manoa, MA in Political Science. According to their website: (http://www.politicalscience.hawaii.edu/graduate/admissions.html)

Mānoa Political Science and the GRE:

> Our department DOES NOT require the GRE for admission. We removed the requirement because we found the GRE to be a poor predictor of graduate student aptitude for our program. Some students who had very low scores on the GRE went on to stellar success in our program and the academic world after that, while others who came in with very high scores found themselves unable to cope with the rigors of graduate school. There is ample evidence of racial, gender and other biases in aptitude tests, and the GRE is no exception. In our view, the GRE seemed to correlate best with the socioeconomic status of the applicants and did little to inform us of the aptitude of the candidate for graduate work in our program.
>
> Removing the GRE from the evaluation process has meant that our assessment of candidates has focused primarily on (a) the quality of their research sample, (b) their statement of intent, (c) the quality and depth of their reference letters, (d) their prior academic record, and (e) the strength of the case they make in their cover letter, especially with regard to the fit between their needs and the department's resources. We feel these are far better instruments through which to assess the potential of a particular student than a multiple-choice test ostensibly measuring aptitude for graduate work in some generic sense. Successful applications provide the admissions committee with a qualitative account of a candidate's academic past and their goals once admitted to our program.

There has indeed been a growing number of empirical studies that find no significant relationship between GRE scores and graduate student success. Even in the context of

STEM graduate school admissions, research consistently finds that GRE scores do not predict successful doctoral degree completion: https://news.rutgers.edu/gre-scores-don%E2%80%99t-predict-stem-doctoral-degree-completion-new-study-says/20181029#.XIqMByJKh9M

Dr. Todd Curry, Associate Professor of Political Science at UTEP, has brought to the Political Science Graduate Committee's attention a very informative article on the use of GRE in Masters of Public Administration (MPA) admissions, recently published in the academic journal *PS: Political Science & Politics* (see attached). The authors find "less than one third of programs require standardized tests for all applicants. Moreover, program prestige, program diversity, and program size do not affect the likelihood that a program requires the Graduate Record Examination."

Dr. Cigdem Sirin, our Associate Professor and Director of Graduate Studies for Political Science (UTEP) talked to several UTEP faculty from graduate programs that waived the GRE requirement. For instance, Dr. Josiah Heyman (Department of Sociology and Anthropology, and Director of the Center for Inter-American and Border Studies) mentioned that his department decided to waive the GRE exam for all applicants in the Sociology MA program. It is also not required for admission to the Latin American and Border Studies (LABS) MA program, directed by Dr. Heyman. These programs found "no predictive value" regarding student success (which is demonstrated empirically in multiple studies nationwide), while confirming race/ethnicity-based and socio-economic biases with the GRE. Dr. Heyman further mentioned that the number of applications to their graduate program increased considerably after dropping the GRE. We strongly believe our program will experience a similar increase in the number of applicants as well, and this removes a barrier to quicker admission to our MA program and for our Fast-Track program, especially from our high-GPA undergraduate students. This should improve both the quantity and the quality of students in our MA program, and make our fast-track program more attractive and viable.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

M.A. in Political Science

UTEP's location at the intersection of political systems, nationalities, and cultures provides many fascinating and unique opportunities to study American Politics, Border Politics, Comparative Politics, and International Relations. Our master's degree is useful for many different career paths. UTEP graduates have gone on to jobs in government service, teaching, business, and non-profit organizations. Some of our MA graduates have subsequently completed doctoral programs. We offer two degree plans in the MA program:

1. Degree Plan I consists of 30 credit hours, including six (6) thesis credit hours, and is designed for students planning to pursue a doctoral degree or otherwise would like to develop an area of research expertise; and

2. Degree Plan II requires 36 credit hours, including a final paper project.

Students in our MA program can apply for teaching and research assistantships. The early deadline to apply for ~~funding~~assistantship consideration is March 31 for Fall admission and November 15 for Spring admission.

Requirements for Admission to the MA Program

Admission is based on the entire record of the applicant and not a single criterion.

1. Completed application (available online) for the Graduate School.

2. Bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university in the U.S. or proof of equivalent education at a foreign institution in Political Science, or a related area. Transcripts are required from the bachelor's degree and any other graduate or professional degree programs, including law school.

3. Two letters of recommendation, preferably from former professors in either the bachelor's degree program or previous graduate programs.

4. A statement of purpose outlining one's interest in the program and career objectives. If the applicant's undergraduate GPA is below 3.0, any extenuating circumstances must be explained.

5. ~~The results of the Graduate Record Examination (GRE).~~ For graduates of institutions outside of the United States where English is not the first language, the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is also required. Official test scores from ~~both GRE and~~ TOEFL should be sent directly from the testing agency to the Graduate School.

6. Other evidence of background and experience that might be available.

Additional Policies

1. Independent studies are limited to three (3) hours of graduate coursework, taken with the permission of the instructor and the Director of Graduate Studies and justified with a proposal from the student outlining the objectives of the project by the end of the drop/add period.

2. No more than six (6) credit hours of upper-division undergraduate classes can count toward the graduate degree. To use an undergraduate course for graduate credit, the following additional work is required: reading of original scholarly books and articles above and beyond textbooks; and additional written work, such as research on specific theories, literature reviews, or identification of issues in specific areas. Undergraduate courses can count for graduate credit only with the permission of the instructor and the Director of Graduate Studies.

3. No student can register for a graduate course in the Department of Political Science without the advice and ~~signed~~ approval of the Director of Graduate studies. This applies to the initial registration, and also to all subsequent enrollments.

4. Satisfactory performance in the MA program is defined as maintaining a 3.0 GPA. A grade of B or better must be earned in all the mandatory courses required in both degree plans, including:

Code	Title	Hours
POLS 5300	Sem In Quant Rsrch Methods I	3
POLS 5301	Sem in Qual Resrch Methods	3

Code	Title	Hours
POLS 5302	Sem Quant Research Methods II	3

Course List

Degree Plan I

Required Credits: 30

Code	Title	Hours
MA in Political Science (All courses require a grade of C or better)		
Seminar:		
POLS 5301	Sem in Qual Resrch Methods [B]	3
or POLS 5302	Sem Quant Research Methods II	
Required Courses:		
POLS 5300	Sem In Quant Rsrch Methods I [B]	3
Political Science Subfields:		
Select one course from three of the four subfields below:		9
American Institutions and Processes:		
POLS 5310	Seminar in Am. Pol. Behavior	
POLS 5315	Sem. In Am. Inst. & Proc.	
POLS 5320	Seminar In Public Law	
POLS 5364	Seminar-Public Policy Analysis	
Border Politics:		
POLS 5336	Sem-Southwestern Border Politics	
POLS 5343	Seminar in Border Politics	
POLS 5344	Seminar in Border Theory	
POLS 6303		
Comparative Politics:		
POLS 5334	Sem.Comparative Pol. Dev.	
POLS 5339	Sem. Comp. Pol. Institutions	
POLS 5342	Sem. Comp. Electoral Systems	
POLS 5346	Sem in Pol Econ of Developmt	
POLS 5348	Sem in Politics of Latin Amer	
POLS 5370	Field Analysis Seminar	
International Politics:		
POLS 5330	Seminar-International Politics	
POLS 5331	Semina-Intn'l Organ/Intn'l Law	

Code	Title	Hours
POLS 5332	Sem-Foreign Policy Dec Making	
POLS 5338	Sem. In Int. Pol. Econ.	
POLS 5347	Sem in International Security	
POLS 5368	Seminar in Conflict Analysis	
Political Science Electives:		
Select nine hours from the following:		9
POLS 5301	Sem in Qual Resrch Methods	
POLS 5302	Sem Quant Research Methods II	
POLS 5310	Seminar in Am. Pol. Behavior	
POLS 5315	Sem. In Am. Inst. & Proc.	
POLS 5320	Seminar In Public Law	
POLS 5330	Seminar-International Politics	
POLS 5331	Semina-Intn'l Organ/Intn'l Law	
POLS 5332	Sem-Foreign Policy Dec Making	
POLS 5334	Seminar-Comparative Pol. Dev.	
POLS 5336	Sem-Southwestern Border Politi	
POLS 5338	Sem. In Int. Pol. Econ.	
POLS 5339	Sem. Comp. Pol. Institutions	
POLS 5345	Sem. Comp. Electoral Systems	
POLS 5343	Seminar in Border Politics	
POLS 5344	Seminar in Border Theory	
POLS 5346	Sem in Pol Econ of Developmt	
POLS 5347	Sem in International Security	
POLS 5348	Sem in Politics of Latin Amer	
POLS 5349	Seminar in Political Thought	
POLS 5370	Field Analysis Seminar	
POLS 5364	Seminar-Public Policy Analysis	
POLS 5368	Seminar in Conflict Analysis	
POLS 5380	Selected Problems-Government	
POLS 5393	Final Paper Project	
~~POLS 6303~~		
Thesis POLS 5398 & POLS 5399 ~~Project Option:~~		6 credits
~~Select one of the options~~		6-12

Code	Title	Hours
Total Hours		**30 ~~36~~**
Course List		

B   Course requires a grade of B or better.

Thesis Option

Code	Title	Hours
POLS 5398 & POLS 5399	Thesis and Thesis	6
Total Hours		**6**
Course List		

~~Project Option~~ Degree Plan II

Code	Title	Hours
POLS 5393	Final Paper Project	3
	Select ~~nine~~ 12 hours, ~~with at least three~~ with one course each in the categories of American Institutions and Processes, Border Politics, Comparative Politics, or International Politics~~, Comparative Politics~~ from the following:	9
POLS 5301	Sem in Qual Resrch Methods	
POLS 5302	Sem Quant Research Methods II	
POLS 5310	Seminar in Am. Pol. Behavior	
POLS 5315	Sem. In Am. Inst. & Proc.	
POLS 5320	Seminar In Public Law	
POLS 5330	Seminar-International Politics	
POLS 5331	Seminar-Intn'l Organ/Intn'l Law	
POLS 5332	Sem-Foreign Policy Dec Making	
POLS 5334	Seminar-Comparative Pol. Dev.	
POLS 5336	Sem-Southwestern Border Politi	
POLS 5338	Sem. In Int. Pol. Econ.	
POLS 5339	Sem. Comp. Pol. Institutions	
POLS 5345	Sem. Comp. Electoral Systems	
POLS 5343	Seminar in Border Politics	
POLS 5344	Seminar in Border Theory	
POLS 5346	Sem in Pol Econ of Developmt	
POLS 5347	Sem in International Security	
POLS 5348	Sem in Politics of Latin Amer	
POLS 5349	Seminar in Political Thought	
POLS 5370	Field Analysis Seminar	

Code	Title	Hours
POLS 5364	Seminar-Public Policy Analysis	
POLS 5368	Seminar in Conflict Analysis	
POLS 5380	Selected Problems-Government	
~~POLS 5393~~	~~Final Paper Project~~	
~~POLS 5398~~	~~Thesis~~	
~~POLS 5399~~	~~Thesis~~	
~~POLS 6303~~		
Total Hours		~~12~~36
	~~Course List~~	

Do I Have to Take the GRE? Standardized Testing in MPA Admissions

Christopher A. Cooper, *Western Carolina University*
H. Gibbs Knotts, *The College of Charleston*

ABSTRACT   Graduate-program decision makers face a similar challenge: how to design an admissions process that screens out applicants who are unlikely to succeed but does not provide too high an entry barrier for students who can be successful. This study catalogs the use of standardized testing in Master of Public Administration admissions and finds that less than one third of programs require standardized tests for all applicants. Moreover, program prestige, program diversity, and program size do not affect the likelihood that a program requires the Graduate Record Examination. This study also reviews the various standards that universities use to provide test waivers and also discusses other common application materials. The results should be of interest to undergraduate academic advisers and graduate-program directors as well as scholars and practitioners of higher-education administration more generally.

In summer 2018, the University of Chicago made national headlines by removing the requirement that applicants must submit the SAT or ACT when applying for undergraduate admission. Princeton University and Brown University soon joined this august group of "test-optional" universities, citing concerns about equity and diversity (Truong 2018). Although these three universities are perhaps the most prominent schools to make this decision, more than 1,000 other colleges and universities have abandoned the standardized-test requirement for undergraduate admissions (Posselt and Miller 2018).

Whereas undergraduate admissions have been the subject of most of the national attention regarding standardized testing, it also is important to consider the role of standardized testing in graduate admissions. Studies questioned whether standardized tests—most notably the Graduate Record Examination (GRE)—discriminate against female and minority candidates (Miller and Stassun 2014). In addition, a host of studies queried the practices that Master of Public Administration (MPA) programs use when admitting students—that is, whether standardized tests are "an admissions obstacle" (Darolia, Potochnick, and Menifield 2014, 3) and whether those practices predict future student success (e.g., Bowman 1988; Leavitt, Lombard, and Morris 2011;

Menifield et al. 2007; Thompson and Kobrak 1983). Despite these debates, most signs indicate that MPA programs have not moved away from standardized testing for admissions. According to the accrediting body for MPA programs—the Network of Schools of Public Policy, Affairs, and Administration (NASPAA)— "most schools require standardized test scores, such as the GRE or GMAT" for admission (NASPAA 2018).

This article catalogs the prevalence of standardized testing in MPA admissions.[1] The results should be of interest to graduate-school faculty and decision makers who face a fundamental challenge: how to design an admissions process that screens out applicants who are unlikely to succeed but does not provide too high an entry barrier for students who can be successful. This analysis should be of interest also to scholars of higher-education administration, more generally—particularly those who are concerned with issues of access, diversity, and barriers to admission.

STANDARDIZED TESTING IN GRADUATE PROGRAMS

According to previous work (Bowman 1988), the GRE is the most common standardized test used in MPA program admissions. Created in 1949 by Educational Testing Service (ETS), the test was designed to measure four areas: verbal reasoning, quantitative reasoning, analytical writing, and critical-thinking skills (Buchy 2017). Although these broad goals remain, many details about administration of the test have shifted over time. The GRE underwent a major revision in 2011, shifting from a 120–180 to a 130–170 scoring range. The 2011 revision also shifted the GRE from a "continuously-adaptive-test" examination to an "adaptive-by-section" examination. In the current version,

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students complete one verbal-reasoning and one quantitative-reasoning section; the computer then adapts the difficulty of the questions for the second quantitative and second verbal sections (Manhattan Review 2018). There also is an analytical-writing section that is scored on a 0–6 scale.

Research on the role of standardized testing in MPA admissions illustrates that the GRE has long been used in admissions decisions, although it always has been the subject of considerable controversy. Indeed, questions about its predictive accuracy and effect on program diversity have been pondered since at least the early 1980s (Thompson and Kobrak 1983). Bowman (1988, 871) summarized the state of the test in MPA admissions decisions as both "frequently used and contentious"; he reported that in 1985 80% of graduate programs and 66% of MPA programs used the GRE in admissions decisions.

counterparts who were required to stake a standardized test before admission.

Others scholars provide a cautionary note for those who want to eliminate the GRE from MPA admissions. There is evidence that the GRE can provide value in predicting student success (Darolia, Potochnick, and Menifield 2014). Furthermore, mid-career students who receive a GRE waiver may have a lower academic profile and experience less success in graduate school than those admitted under traditional requirements (however, the effects on graduate-student success disappear when controlling for undergraduate academic indicators) (Darolia, Potochnick, and Menifield 2014). Clearly, there is a healthy debate within public administration and public affairs programs about whether and how to adapt to changing norms of standardized testing.

This article catalogs the prevalence of standardized testing in MPA admissions. The results should be of interest to graduate-school faculty and decision makers who face a fundamental challenge: how to design an admissions process that screens out applicants who are unlikely to succeed but does not provide too high an entry barrier for students who can be successful.

Bowman's (1988, 871) analysis not only reinforces the ubiquity of the GRE; it also supports its use in some circumstances, noting that "GRE scores, especially when consistent with other evidence…can lead to more informed judgments." In a related study, Bowman and Mangelsdorf (1989) asked NASPAA principal representatives to participate in an experiment in which they made admissions decisions on a series of fictitious candidates who varied by grade point average (GPA), GRE, quality of letters of recommendation, race, and sex. GRE scores were a common and important predictor of the representatives' ultimate decisions on whether to admit a candidate—falling second only to undergraduate GPA. Clearly, at the end of the 1980s, MPA stakeholders had received the message that the use of the GRE was common in admissions decisions and consistent with best practices in the discipline. Similarly, research in political science PhD admissions found that—at least in one elite program—the quantitative section of the GRE was an excellent predictor of graduate-school success (King, Bruce, and Gilligan 1993).

In the early 2000s, MPA programs began experimenting with GRE waivers. Although the specific criteria for waivers varied by school, undergraduate GPA, professional experience, and interview outcome seemed to be among the most common criteria for acquiring a waiver (Bowman 1988; Menifield et al. 2007). Some research found that the academic success of mid-career students who received GRE waivers is statistically indistinguishable from students who were required to take the GRE. This finding suggests that GRE waivers might be appropriate for programs that are attempting to recruit more mid-career professionals (Menifield et al. 2007).

Similar studies likewise concluded that the GRE waiver may be a good option for programs that want to increase their share of part-time students without sacrificing quality (Gibson et al. 2007; Leavitt, Lombard, and Morris 2011). Indeed, they found that the professionally experienced students who obtained a GRE waiver outperformed their less-experienced

DATA AND THE HYPOTHESES

To better understand the role of standardized testing in admissions decisions, we coded the admissions criteria for 185 NASPAA-accredited programs. Following Reinagel and Gerlach (2015), this represents the universe of programs accredited as of September 1, 2017, with the exception of nine foreign universities, the University of Puerto Rico, and two programs at the Naval Postgraduate School. These 12 programs were eliminated from our analysis because of language differences (i.e., in 10 programs) and differences in program objectives (i.e., the Naval Postgraduate School). The unit of analysis in this study was the accredited program. Whereas most universities have one accredited program, some have multiple accreditations; in those cases, the university appears multiple times in our dataset but each program appears only once.

Most programs clearly delineated admissions requirements on their website, but some were housed on the graduate-admissions page, in the graduate catalog, or in other locations on the university website. After we identified the location of the information, we coded several factors for each program: (1) Do they require a standardized test for admission?; (2) If yes, which exam(s) do they accept?; (3) Do they make exceptions or grant waivers?; (4) If they make exceptions or grant waivers, what are the reasons that applicants may give for obtaining a waiver?; and (5) Which other materials are required for admission? We then combined these original data with two existing datasets. In an attempt to determine whether admissions standards differ by program prestige, we merged our original data with the *US News & World Report Public Affairs* (2018) rankings. To determine whether admissions standards differ by other program-level metrics (e.g., student diversity and program size), we also merged publicly available data about these factors from NASPAA. Although these program-level metrics are the best and most systematic data available, they rely on self-reporting and a significant number of cases are missing.

The logic behind the prestige variable is simple: We expect that more prestigious programs are concerned that they might be sending negative signals about program quality if they were to eliminate the GRE. We termed this the "prestige hypothesis." We also included a variable that measures the percentage of a program's student body that is from diverse backgrounds. Here, we expect programs that traditionally draw on more-diverse pools of applicants may have opted against the GRE, given the growing diversity, nor market forces, nor prestige explains why programs adopt or eschew standardized testing. Focusing on prestige, less than half of the NASPAA-accredited MPA programs ranked in *US News & World Report*'s top 20 require a standardized test for all students; slightly more than a quarter offer GRE waivers; and slightly more than a quarter entirely eliminated the test. Clearly, requiring the GRE is not a prerequisite for cultivating a respected MPA program.

This initial analysis suggests that program directors and MPA faculty can rest assured that if they eschew standardized testing, they will not be alone.

literature citing concerns about racial bias inherent in standardized testing. Finally, we included a measure for the program size, with the expectation that larger programs might not experience the market pressure and therefore be more likely to keep the standardized-testing requirement. We labeled this the "market hypotheses."

RESULTS

Figure 1 shows the prevalence of standardized testing across MPA programs. The figure displays three bars representing the percentage of programs that: (1) require a standardized test for all applicants; (2) provide standardized-test waivers for some students; and (3) do not require a standardized test. As figure 1 suggests, far from being the ubiquitous choice of most programs, standardized tests are required universally for admission in less than one third of NASPAA-accredited programs. More than one third of MPA programs provide waivers for some students and more than one third do not require standardized tests for any applicant.

This initial analysis suggests that program directors and MPA faculty can rest assured that if they eschew standardized testing, they will not be alone. The question remains, however, about which programs are most likely to keep the standardized-testing requirement and which are most likely to either adopt waivers or entirely eliminate standardized testing. The left-hand column in table 1 presents results of an ordinal logistic regression model testing the prestige, market, and diversity hypotheses discussed previously. The dependent variable is coded on a 0–2 scale in which "0" represents a program that has a standardized-test requirement for all applicants. A "1" indicates that the program has a standardized-test waiver; a "2" indicates that the program entirely eliminated standardized testing.

None of these variables achieves traditional levels of statistical significance, which suggests that neither

Of the programs that require a standardized test, there is no doubt that the GRE is the most popular. In fact, we identified only one program that requires a standardized test but does not accept the GRE. Despite the prevalence of the GRE, NASPAA-accredited MPA programs seem to be relatively open to accepting other standardized tests: 58% of the programs that require a standardized test for at least some students will accept another test. Figure 2 lists tests that are accepted in addition to the GRE.

Figure 1

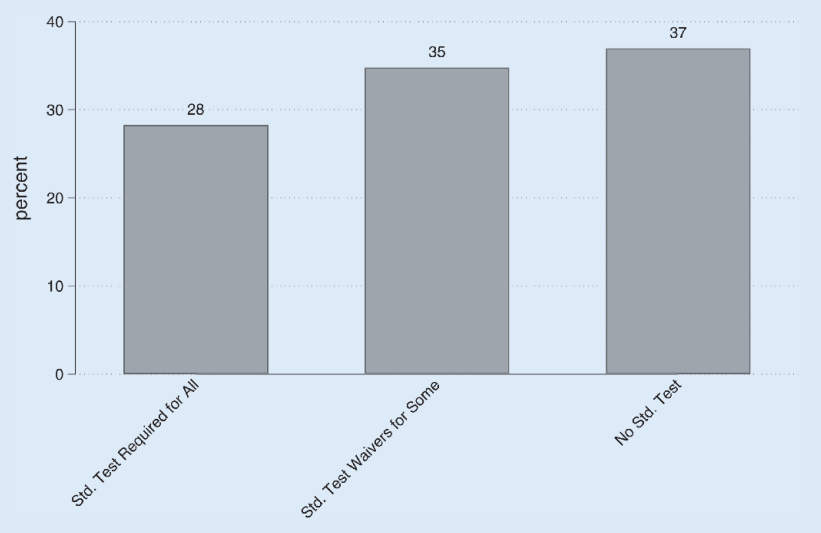### Prevalence of Standardized Testing in NASPAA Accredited MPA Programs

Table 1

Modeling Program-Level Admissions Requirements

	Standardized Testing	GPA (Among Those with GRE Waivers)
US News & World Report Ranking	0.0062 (0.0038)	-0.0021* (0.0009)
Percentage of Diversity in Student Body	0.0012 (0.0013)	-0.0003 (0.0021)
Number of Students	0.0013 (0.0016)	-0.0007 (0.0003)
N	131	35
Pseudo R^2 /Adjusted R^2	0.02	0.09

Note: The first model is an ordinal logistic regression model and the second is an ordinary least squares regression model.
*p<.05, two-tailed test.

More than half of the programs that accept another score will accept the Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT). The Miller Analogies Test (MAT) is accepted by another third of the programs that accept other scores, and a similar proportion

Finally, if MPA programs are increasingly moving away from standardized testing in admissions decisions, what are they using to make decisions? There is surprising unanimity on this question. As figure 5 suggests, about 90% of programs require some form of

Finally, if MPA programs are increasingly moving away from standardized testing in admissions decisions, what are they using to make decisions? There is surprising unanimity on this question. As figure 5 suggests, about 90% of programs require some form of personal statement.

accepts the LSAT. Although the GRE is the most common standardized test, students who took other standardized tests certainly can find MPA programs that will accept those tests in lieu of the GRE.

Recall that more than one third of MPA programs (i.e., 35%) allow standardized tests to be waived under some circumstances. Figure 3 presents the frequency with which programs accept various considerations for waivers. As shown in the figure, GPA requirements (paired with other considerations) are the most common line of demarcation between applicants who do and do not receive waivers,[2] followed by professional experience, graduate degrees, and various types of internal preferences.[3] Although GPA cutoffs are common, there is no consensus among MPA programs about which set of materials should be used to establish that a student is eligible for a waiver. Figure 3 demonstrates considerable differences across programs about the conditions that constitute a waiver; however, it understates those differences because there is no clear standard for the line of demarcation in what constitutes a "high-enough" GPA or "enough" years of experience to qualify for a waiver.

Figure 4 presents the distribution of GPA cutoffs and years of experience that each program specifies. A 3.0 GPA and five years of experience are the most common, although there are programs that set the GPA threshold as low as 2.5 and as high as 3.5. Similarly, two years of work experience is sufficient to qualify a candidate for a standardized-test waiver in some programs, whereas others require as many as 10 years.

The right-hand column in table 1 presents results of a multivariate model to determine whether diversity, prestige, or market forces explain the rigor of the GPA cutoff to qualify for a waiver. Although student diversity and program size are not correlated to the GPA cutoff, there is evidence to suggest that the more prestigious a program, the higher the GPA cutoff. The unstandardized regression coefficient indicates that 10 places higher in the *US News & World Report* ranking translates to an increase in the GPA cutoff of approximately 0.02.

personal statement. More than 85% in the sample require letters of recommendation (i.e., 50% of those require three letters and 33% require two letters). Résumés also are required by about 66% of all

Figure 2
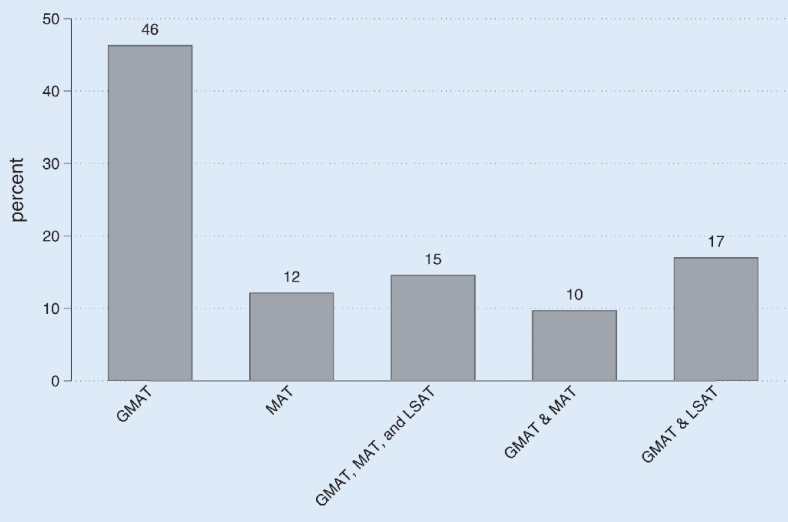## Standardized Tests Accepted, Other than the GRE

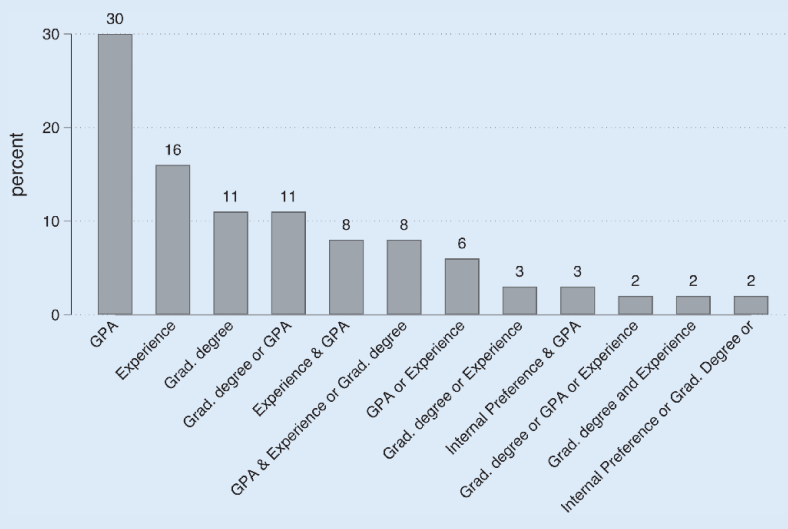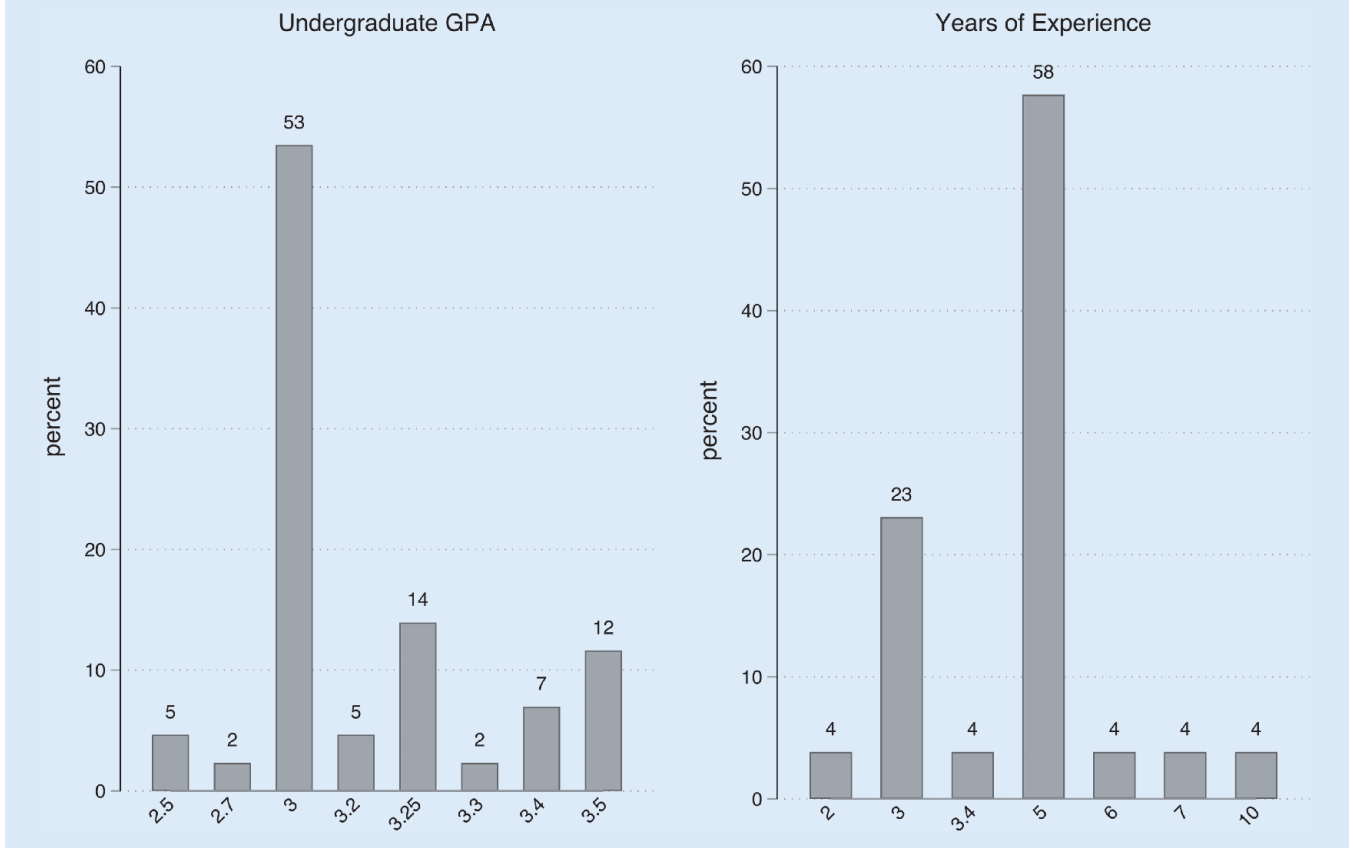*Figure 3*
Qualifications for Standardized Test Waivers

Figure 4
GPA and Professional Experience Cut-Offs for Standardized Test Waivers

Undergraduate GPA | Years of Experience

programs. Writing samples are relatively rare (i.e., only 8% require them for all students) as are other requirements (e.g., in-person interviews, ecclesiastical endorsements, and evidence of specific course-prerequisite completion). This list is strikingly similar to the admissions factors cataloged by Bowman (1988). Despite a precipitous decline in the use of standardized testing in admissions decisions in MPA programs (i.e., from about two thirds of all programs in 1988 to one third in 2018[4]), it does not appear that standardized tests have been replaced with new application materials.

CONCLUSION

Many graduate faculty and program directors have struggled with the efficacy of standardized testing. As a result, decision makers have been left with the dilemma of whether abandoning standardized testing would help the program attract a larger and more diverse student body or provide a signal of lower quality—perhaps dissuading the best and brightest students from enrolling in a program.

This study examined admissions requirements in MPA programs and found that they seem to be moving away from standardized testing. Bowman (1988) reported that about two thirds of all MPA programs required a standardized test; in 2018, that number had decreased to less than one third. Whereas graduate faculty and program directors in the late 1980s could be legitimately concerned that eliminating the GRE would put them at odds with professional norms, that fear is no longer relevant. We also found evidence that the move away from standardized testing is not related to the prestige, size, or diversity of a program. Programs of all types are moving away from standardized testing.

Figure 5
Admission Requirement Other than Standardized Tests
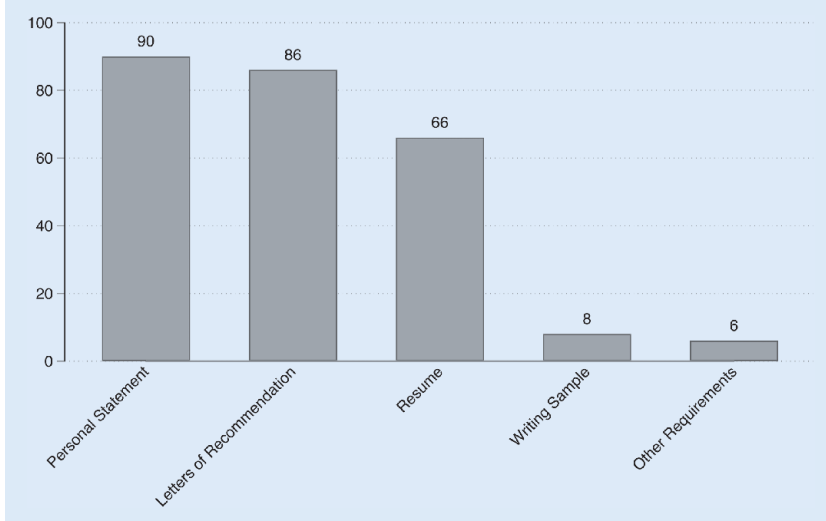
Whereas the plurality of MPA programs do not require any student to submit a standardized test, the second-largest category opts for a waiver system in which students who meet certain criteria may waive the standardized-test requirement. We found that programs offer a variety of different criteria for waivers, although some combination of GPA and experience are the two most common. Apparently Gibson et al.'s (2007) advice to consider waivers as a viable alternative for programs that want to increase their share of in-service students has been adopted by numerous programs.

The implications of this investigation are clear: the standardized-test requirement is fading from the MPA landscape and programs that entirely eliminate the test (or provide a waiver option) do not risk losing accreditation or signal a lack of quality. In fact, maintaining a steadfast hold on the standardized test may make programs less competitive for many students—particularly in an environment in which online and hybrid programs have expanded the size of the graduate marketplace in many communities. ∎

NOTES

1. "MPA" programs in this article refer to all programs accredited by NASPAA, the "global standard in public-service education." The majority of NASPAA-accredited programs are Master of Public Administration programs, but many are called "Master of Public Affairs" and still others are known by other names, such as "Master of Public Policy."

2. These GPA requirements typically refer to overall GPA, although a few programs are more concerned with applicants' GPAs in their major.

3. Sometimes these internal preferences are for students enrolled in a 4+1 program; sometimes they are for graduates from their university or undergraduate program; and—in one case—they include graduates from partner universities.

4. Of course, there are many more accredited MPA programs today than when Bowman (1988) conducted his analysis.

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