

Holistic Graduate Application File Review Best Practice Recommendations

The University of Texas at Austin
Graduate School

What are we doing?

- Collecting and sharing practices across campus
- Educating and providing guidance
 - Roadshow style workshops
 - At program request
 - 1 to 1.5 hours
 - Presentation / discussion / question and answer
- Providing data for benchmarking

Practices for reviewing applications (what we've heard)

We accept most students, but do selectively reject those with low GPA and GRE scores.

We ask each faculty to review one or two applications and decide who should be admitted/denied.

We have a committee that looks at all applications and makes admissions decisions.

Holistic Review Items

GPA – overall

GPA – discipline

GRE

Research experience

Awards

Letters of recommendation

Study abroad experience

Transcripts

Leadership experience

Team project experience

Industry/internship experience

English proficiency (TOEFL)

Career interest essay

Diversity essay

Other parameters

Be aware of unconscious bias

Research shows that we have biases, many of which we are unaware of.

Here are a few examples:

A study by Biernat and Manis

Evaluators were asked to rate the verbal skills of candidates who were given words and asked to provide the definition for each. The evaluators rated the verbal skills lower when they thought the candidate was African American.

A study by Bertrand and Sendhil

Evaluators were given applicant CVs and asked for their recommendation – should this candidate be interviewed or not. The same CVs were used, but the CVs with white sounding names were more likely to be recommended for interview than the ones with African American sounding names.

A study by Steinpreis et al

National study of 238 academic psychologists (118 male, 120 female). They evaluated faculty CVs that were randomly assigned male and female names. Both male and female evaluators gave male applicants better evaluations for teaching, research, and service.

Best practices for reviewing graduate school applications

- Discuss unconscious bias as a committee. Awareness helps.
- Look at all metrics and parameters *you consider to be important*
 - Reassess each cycle
 - Discuss as a committee in advance
- Avoid relying too heavily on one or two metrics
- Avoid giving candidates numerical scores
- Spend time reviewing and discussing each applicant

Best practices for reviewing graduate school applications

Large applicant pools:

- Distribute application files to subsets of committee members. This can enable each applicant to receive a thorough review.
- Avoid rank ordering candidates. Rather, separate candidates into A, B, C groups. Allow candidates to move from one group to another after discussion

Best practices for reviewing graduate school applications

VERY large applicant pools:

Use simple filters such as GPA and GRE as combinations to prescreen. Allow for candidates who might be disadvantaged by some metrics (such as the GRE) to be retained in the pool for further consideration.

“Hidden gems”

- Flip the review process
 - Start with review of qualitative measures
 - Look for deficiencies in quantitative measures
 - Set students up for success
- Diversify committee with outside “readers”
 - Alumni
 - Industry experts

Achieve racial, ethnic, geographic,
gender... diversity through
recruiting efforts.

Achieving excellence in admissions is a process.

We need to continually assess how well students we admit progress toward completion and their success after graduation.