

MEMO: Comprehensive Evaluation of Applicants for Graduate Admission

*Updated: January 10th, 2012*

*Office of the Dean  
Graduate Division  
University of California, Berkeley*

To: Deans, Department and Group Chairs, Graduate Advisers, Chairs of Graduate Admission Committees, Equity Advisers, Graduate Student Affairs Officers

From: Carlos Fernandez-Pello, Associate Dean of the Graduate Division;  
Gibor Basri, Vice Chancellor of Equity & Inclusion

Re: Comprehensive Evaluation of Applicants for Graduate Admission

As a new admissions cycle begins, we commend those departments and admissions committees that have updated their graduate admissions procedures in the direction of a comprehensive review approach. Such an approach avoids over-reliance on GRE scores, especially in the preliminary stages of assessment, in determining a candidates worthiness for admission. Instead, comprehensive approaches infer an applicants potential for success from more reliable indicators such as the applicants general academic record and record of special achievement, letters of recommendation, statement of purpose and writing samples, research experience and drive to succeed, and his or her personal circumstances and goals.

The Graduate Council has discontinued requiring the use of GRE scores in assessing applications for graduate admission, allowing individual departments to determine the weight appropriate in using GRE scores. This accords with a number of studies that note the limitations of using GRE scores as predictors either positive or negative of success in graduate degree programs. Indeed, the GRE board itself endorses comprehensive review: “Test scores should always be used along with other sources of information such as course grades, letters of recommendation, personal statements, samples of academic work or professional experience.”

[http://www.ets.org/gre/institutions/scores/guidelines/board\\_guidelines/index.html](http://www.ets.org/gre/institutions/scores/guidelines/board_guidelines/index.html).

We encourage those programs in which GRE scores still figure prominently as a criterion in graduate admissions especially in the preliminary selection and de-selection of applicants to move toward comprehensive approaches to evaluation. We invite those departments presently unable to implement comprehensive evaluation to consider de-emphasizing GRE scores in favor of a relatively comprehensive review in those cases in which the applicants scores clearly contrast with other aspects of the academic profile considered for preliminary review.

Our experience strongly suggests that more comprehensive approaches to reviewing graduate applications bolster sound admissions standards and help Berkeley to recruit and retain a more diverse and predictably successful graduate student body, in turn sustaining our national and international reputation for academic excellence and diversity.

Please let us know if we can assist you in any way as you discuss and implement admissions criteria for the coming cycle.

Sincerely yours,

Carlos Fernandez-Pello, Associate Dean of the Graduate Division; Professor of Mechanical Engineering

Gibor Basri, Vice Chancellor of Equity and Inclusion; Professor of Astronomy