

In Search of the Next Class of Computer Science Graduates

How GRE® Search Service is helping North Carolina State meet recruiting goals



When you're responsible for recruiting North Carolina State University's (NCSU) next class of computer science graduate students, it can be difficult to get the exact pool of candidates you need if you're relying on traditional recruiting methods. That was the situation Andrew Sleeth, the program's Graduate Admissions Manager, faced back in 2012. While NCSU has always had an ample supply of applicants, Sleeth sought to gather more from specific sectors, so he began searching for a better solution.

The computer science program is NCSU's single largest graduate program.



2,300
Annual application intake



200
Doctoral positions
450
Masters positions



45-50
Computer Networking positions, the departments only specialty master's program.

Recruiting for a program such as this can be incredibly challenging, especially when you're relying on the results of recruitment fairs, display advertisements and direct mail to attract the attention of the right applicants. "Graduate admissions is a wholly different beast from undergraduate because it's almost entirely program specific, so these methods can produce very random and scattered results," he said.

- University:** North Carolina State University
- Program:** Computer Science
- Challenge:** Targeting the right applicants for NCSU's computer science graduate program
- Solution:** The GRE® Search Service gives the ability to target the students that will be interested in the program with the right messages at each stage of the enrollment process
- Results:** The GRE Search Service provided NCSU the ability to target students much more efficiently, reducing recruitment costs to negligible amounts per student enrolled

Sleeth understood that for graduate programs, it's the individual program's faculty and research that draws interest, more so than the broad, institutional reputation. Therefore, it can be unpredictable to know if you're accessing the appropriate candidates when your primary search methods are covering too broad an audience.

For Sleeth, finding the right candidates from a particular set of sectors was critical because the department's faculty are deeply involved in research and are interested in attracting students to join in the quest for knowledge. These students receive financial support from the university – a considerable investment by the department – so attracting the right candidate is essential.

Finding a new search method – the right graduate students

Sleeth needed to find a way to reach the students his program needed – and the ones that would be most interested in his program. It was essential to him that the new solution help him achieve this in a much more targeted and effective way. That’s when he discovered the GRE Search Service.

NCSU’s Graduate Admissions Director brought the service to his attention after hearing about it at an annual conference. It immediately piqued his interest, so he gave it a try and placed his first order.

The GRE Search Service allowed Sleeth to do early outreach, by engaging prospects as soon as they registered for the GRE test. In doing so, he was among the first to engage with rising college seniors majoring in computer science, discovering them when students were still planning their next move on their journey to an advanced degree. He was able to keenly target the right types of students with the GRE Search Service’s advanced search options, so he could identify the prospective students that would be the best fit for his program. This was, by far, more effective than recruiting fairs, which often felt like a random – stochastic, as computer scientists would say – recruiting method.

The GRE Search Service quickly became the backbone of Sleeth’s recruiting outreach. He has been particularly impressed by the incredibly granular search parameters that allow him to focus with great precision on what his program is seeking in terms of education, professional background and many other factors.

“By allowing the computer science department to target specific individuals, it circumvents the pitfalls common to display ads or recruiting fairs, which, frankly, are little better than scattergun approaches to reaching people of interest.”

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Using the GRE Search Service to its fullest potential

The GRE Search Service gave Sleeth a deep level of insight into what viable prospects around the globe were planning for in the near future. This allowed him to engage the right students, with the right messages, at the right times during the enrollment process.

Since 2012, Sleeth has come to rely on many more of the GRE Search Service’s features to help him find the right graduate students. One of his favorite features is de-duping. The GRE Search Service makes it convenient to repeatedly search the database throughout the admission season and check for newly added GRE registrants. And, by selecting the de-duping feature with each order, users only pay for the prospects that have been added since their last order.

“You wouldn’t believe how much time and money that saves us now. You can bet my program director appreciates that!”

Experiment your way to search success

Currently, Sleeth uses six distinct searches to place his order and always adjusts the criteria to fulfill the goals of his program. Experimentation is key because the user interface lets you test unlimited search configurations without forcing you to commit to an order. Once you are satisfied with the number and quality of contacts your search generates, you can place an order and continue to tweak and control your approach to refine or expand your results as necessary. “The cost per order is always so modest, I never regret what I’ve spent trying new approaches,” said Sleeth.

After 8 years using the GRE Search Service, Sleeth can’t imagine ever going back. “At the risk of sounding smug, I’d probably ask [colleagues not using the GRE Search Service] what they could possibly be doing that’s more effective for locating actual, viable, self-identified prospective applicants for their graduate program.”

Sleeth is already planning for the future with the GRE Search Service. This involves looking back and optimizing past searches, and also looking ahead to the next recruiting season. He plans to leverage the GRE Search Service heavily as part of his strategy because, as he says, “It’s hard to argue against success.”