



# Four Facts about the GRE<sup>®</sup> General Test

Are you considering changes to your admissions processes? This document pulls together useful information — including findings from the largest, most relevant studies — that shows the GRE<sup>®</sup> General Test's unique value in helping programs ensure that prospective students have the critical-thinking skills needed to meet program requirements.

## 1. The GRE General Test successfully measures an applicant's readiness for graduate-level academic work.

As a standardized measure of an applicant's readiness for graduate-level academic work, graduate programs can use scores to fairly compare students from different backgrounds. The test assesses verbal and quantitative reasoning, critical thinking and analytical writing skills — skills vital to many disciplines and critical in helping graduate students navigate the rigors of the academy.

The test's ability to assess these skills fairly have been documented through an extensive body of research:

[Can the GRE Predict Valued Outcomes? Dropout and Writing Skill.](#) (Bridgeman et al., 2022)

**Key finding:** Studies are explored citing evidence there is a significant correlation between GRE Analytical Writing scores and the quality of subsequent graduate student writing samples. The GRE was also effective in predicting program dropout in two highly selective schools.

[New Perspectives on the Validity of the GRE<sup>®</sup> General Test for Predicting Graduate School Grades.](#) (Klieger et al., 2014)

**Key finding:** A study that examined the GRE scores of 25,356 students enrolled in master's and doctoral programs at 10 institutions found that the test correlated with academic performance across programs ranging from STEM to the humanities. The test is especially helpful in identifying students likely to struggle so resources can be directed accordingly.

[A Comprehensive Meta-analysis of the Predictive Validity of the GRE: Implications for Graduate Student Selection and Performance.](#) (Kuncel et al., 2001)

**Key finding:** A meta-analysis using data from 82,659 graduate students across multiple disciplines at the master's and doctoral levels concluded that GRE scores are valid predictors of first-year and cumulative GPA, comprehensive examination scores, publication citation counts and faculty ratings.

The study also found consistently positive correlations with degree attainment and research productivity. These are outcomes that extend beyond what the GRE test was designed to measure.

## 2. Holistic admissions processes that consider multiple components of a candidate's application package, including GRE scores, are more fair to the applicant.

GRE General Test scores are an essential part of holistic admissions because of their unique role as the only research-based, fair and objective measure of cognitive skills in the application packet. In holistic admissions, GRE scores are considered alongside evidence gathered from transcripts, undergraduate GPA, personal statements, letters of recommendation and other sources that are relevant to a program's goals. These latter materials can provide information about desirable attributes such as motivation and conscientiousness, which may be useful predictors of program completion, research productivity and other outcomes.

Using GRE scores in combination with undergraduate GPA and qualitative measures is a proven method for identifying students with the skills, experiences and appetite needed for graduate school success. Learn more at [www.holisticadmissions.org](http://www.holisticadmissions.org) and especially this [side-by-side comparison](#) of holistic admissions with — versus without — GRE scores.

## 3. The GRE General Test can be used to help programs achieve their diversity goals.

The GRE test can open doors for students who otherwise may not be considered for admission. Many graduate students and professionals, including those from underrepresented groups, credit their graduate admission to how well they performed on the GRE General Test. In fact, GRE scores can elevate the visibility of applicants who:

- have undergraduate degrees from less familiar or foreign undergraduate institutions
- don't have a letter of recommendation from an author with whom the faculty committee is familiar
- have forgone an unpaid internship to put food on the table

And the GRE Program's 50 percent fee reduction offering — now with free test prep valued at \$100 — reduces barriers for those applicants as well.

Increasing diversity at the graduate level is challenging because programs are trying to adjust for social inequities that began long before the applicant ever considered attending graduate school. Just as graduate programs alone can't fix entrenched, systemic societal inequities, neither can the GRE General Test. However, it serves a role in helping institutions understand performance differences among various groups, which they can then determine how to take into consideration. And the GRE Program provides GRE score use guidelines and promising practices for ensuring that GRE scores are used appropriately in admissions processes without overinflating their role so that all applicants are considered fairly. The promising practices have been curated from 71 interviews with faculty, deans and staff at programs across various disciplines at the master's and doctoral levels.

It is unlikely that dropping the GRE test requirement for admissions — a test that has served students and the graduate community for more than 70 years — will result in a more diverse class. And it may have several unintended consequences, such as overreliance on reputation of the undergraduate institution, letters of recommendation and personal statements — all of which can be influenced by socioeconomic status and are susceptible to implicit bias.



A number of studies support use of the test within a holistic admissions process, including:

[\*Bias, Fairness, and Validity in Graduate-School Admissions: A Psychometric Perspective.\*](#) (Woo et al., 2022)

**Key finding:** The GRE General Test does not appear to be tainted by measurement bias, nor does it appear to suffer from predictive bias that would disadvantage students from underrepresented groups. Conversely, qualitative sources of applicant information (i.e., resumes/CVs, personal statements and letters of recommendation) often lend themselves to socio-cognitive and rater biases.

[\*A Model for Holistic Review in Graduate Admissions that Decouples the GRE from Race, Ethnicity, and Gender.\*](#) (Wilson et al., 2019)

**Key finding:** Elimination of GRE-based cut scores (but not the test itself), along with implementation of holistic review practices that better take into account nonacademic parts of application packages, increases the number of underrepresented applicants reviewed by admission committee members. The model can be implemented without significantly increasing faculty burden.

#### **4. The GRE General Test was created to provide equal opportunity to everyone.**

Originally used to fairly evaluate World War II veterans on the GI Bill — many of whom attended rural undergraduate institutions — the predecessor to the GRE test ensured graduate education wasn't only for the privileged. While

the diversity goals of institutions have evolved with society, the GRE test's original purpose remains. At its core, the test is meant to highlight students with the skills to succeed academically, and may serve as a supportive detail in an application packet for qualified individuals who didn't have the same advantages as their peers.

Today, as institutions look to enroll more students from underrepresented groups and other nations, the need for a common, objective measure has never been more pressing. That's why ETS goes to great lengths to make its assessments as fair and unbiased as possible. This includes:

- training staff on the ETS Standards for Quality and Fairness
- forming diverse teams to review test questions
- using statistical analysis and expert judgment to remove questions that seem to disadvantage any one group in accordance with standards set by the American Educational Research Association (AERA), the National Council on Measurement in Education (NCME) and the American Psychological Association® (APA)

As a result, the GRE General Test yields objective data that enables decision makers to directly compare applicants, all of whom come from different backgrounds and academic experiences. Learn more about [our commitment to fairness and equity](#). We welcome questions and comments at [GREtests@ets.org](mailto:GREtests@ets.org).

