Graduate Application Evaluation Recommendations

This document serves as a tool to assist graduate programs in evaluating and potentially revising applicant evaluation practices to ensure alignment with university and program mission, vision, and values. The following recommendations align with research regarding holistic admissions practices. The University of Washington Graduate School states, "Holistic admissions review refers to practices that promote an inclusive and rigorous graduate application review process that evaluates applicants through a variety of methods, rather than prioritizing GPA, standardized test scores such as GRE scores, or former school of attendance" (np). For a comprehensive overview of holistic review, see the following [report from the Council of Graduate Schools](#).

Recommended Guidelines for Evaluation Processes

- The primary goal of graduate admissions should be inclusion.
    - Committees should first identify reasons to admit students as opposed to reasons to deny students access to graduate education.
- Applications should be evaluated in a manner that recognizes both cognitive and non-cognitive skills. Doing so can reduce educational, social, and cultural bias.
    - Cognitive skills include factors such as reasoning, thinking, and remembering as reflected through grade point average and standardized testing.
    - Non-cognitive skills include factors such as motivation, integrity, resilience, and communication as reflected in personal or diversity statements.
- Committees should establish a common evaluation procedure before review of applications begins (i.e., evaluation rubric or structural guide to completing review).
    - This procedure should recognize that non-cognitive skills should bear equal weight to cognitive skills in the evaluation process.
        - GPA should always be evaluated in relation to a personal statement or diversity statement to account for mitigating factors.
        - Per the recommendation of ETS, the non-profit company that created and manages the GRE, standardized test scores should never include a "minimum" or "cut off" score.
- Evaluation practices should align with the mission, vision, and values of a public affairs university.
    - In addition to department requirements, applicants should be evaluated based on their attitudes regarding community engagement, cultural competence, and ethical leadership.
- Evaluation practices should aim for *non-quantified* diversity in cohort creation.
    - This includes the presence of variety in all of its forms and requires purposeful selection designed to expose students to individuals who present different factors from themselves.
- Programs should seek evaluation bias education for any individual or committee involved in admissions decisions.

- o Such professional development should be centered on inclusive consciousness for naturally diverse admissions practices.
- Programs should articulate how applicants are evaluated in admissions materials in order to help external individuals understand how they will be evaluated as an applicant.

Post-evaluation Practices

- Evaluation practices should be adapted and updated annually.
  - Assess cohort diversity to inform future recruitment strategies.
    - o If cohort lacks diversity, consider developing natural partnerships with HSIs and HBCUs.
  - Assess evaluation practices annually to identify implicit biases that might occur in previous evaluation model.
  - Continue to diversify evaluation methods to provide students who possess different strengths an equal chance.

* These recommendations are presented as a guiding resource. Departments should take these recommendations and structure their evaluation process according to the practices that are best fit for their program.

Resources for Admissions Committees

Allen, B. C. M. & Esters, L. T. (2018). "PWIs and HBCUs Need to Create Partnerships, Not Competition." Diverse Issues in Higher Education. https://diverseeducation.com/article/118297/

Boske, C., Elue, C., Osanloo, A. F., & Newcomb, W. S. (2018). "Promoting Inclusive Holistic Admissions in Educational Leadership Preparation Programs." *Frontiers in Education*. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2018.00017

DePaw, K. P. (2020). "What Works: Creating Diverse and Inclusive Graduate Campuses." Higher Education Today. https://www.higheredtoday.org/2020/05/20/works-creating-diverse-inclusive-graduate-campuses/

ETS Holistic Admissions Webpage: https://www.holisticadmissions.org

Kent, J.D. and McCarthy, M.T. (2016). Holistic Review in Graduate Admissions: A Report from the Council of Graduate Schools. Washington, DC: Council of Graduate Schools

Posselt, J. R. (2016). *Inside Graduate Admissions: Merit, Diversity, and Faculty Gatekeeping*. Harvard: Cambridge.

Sedlacek, W. E. (2017). *Measuring Noncognitive Variables: Improving Admissions, Success, and Retention of Underrepresented Students*. Stylus: Sertling.

The University of Washington Holistic Admissions Webpage: https://grad.uw.edu/equity-inclusion-and-diversity/programs-resources/for-faculty-and-staff/holistic-admissions-2/

Inclusive Excellence Model
https://www.aacu.org/sites/default/files/files/mei/williams_et_al.pdf