

GRE Scores and Public Health Admissions

Over the past ten years, higher education has seen a rapid decrease in the number of degree-granting institutions requiring the Graduate Record Examination (GRE). Universities and programs that no longer require applications to submit GRE scores cite their concern that the GRE may unfairly disadvantage minority applicants who may be less prepared to take the exam due to unequal secondary school investments and opportunities. Applicants from higher-income families are better able to afford tutors and prep courses before taking the GRE, giving them a measurable advantage. In addition, the cost of the exam itself may be a barrier for students from low-income families.

However, one of the most compelling reasons for abandoning the standardized test is because it appears the GRE may underpredict the success of minority students. Several studies have examined the correlation between GRE scores and the successful completion of a degree program and found no association.

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In 2012, ASPPH examined the correlation between GRE scores and final GPAs upon completion of the public health program at several member schools and found no association. It was evident that neither study displayed any strong correlation between the final GPAs and the GRE scores. The Educational Testing Service (ETS), which owns the examination, has funded a considerable amount of research into the validity of the GRE. ETS asserts only that "GRE General Test scores tend to show moderate correlations with first-year [GPA] averages" (ETS 1990).

Given the lack of evidence of the effectiveness of GRE scores in predicting the academic success of graduate students, it is not surprising that schools and programs of public health are

moving away from requiring GRE scores and are instead focusing more on a holistic process for evaluating applicants.

For the current admissions cycle for 2021, 59% (63 out of 108) of schools and programs participating in SOPHAS do not require applicants for admission into MPH programs to provide GRE scores. This is a significant increase from one year ago when 16% did not require GRE scores for the MPH degree. Some of this increase is driven by COVID-19 and it remains to be seen if GRE requirements will be restored after the pandemic abates. Given the lack of evidence that GRE scores correlate with academic success, coupled with the commitment of schools and programs of public health to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in their student bodies, it is more than likely this trend will continue. Additionally, some schools and programs of public health may find that eliminating the GRE requirement will be necessary to stay competitive with their peers.