



Policy Announcement from the Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies (OGPS) at the University of Michigan Medical School

New PIBS Admissions Policy: GRE Scores Will Not Be Required in Applications to PIBS, effective for the 2018-19 Admissions Season (i.e. those applying for the Fall 2019 PIBS Class).

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The role of the Graduate Record Exam (GRE), a standardized test, in STEM graduate admissions has been questioned in several research papers, editorials, and journalistic pieces, many of which can be found in this shared [folder](#). It has also been a regular topic of discussion at PIBS admissions meetings for years. Some of our faculty find that these papers present a compelling case for eliminating our requirement that all PIBS applicants take the GRE General Test and submit their scores. Others consider the GRE to be valuable enough, as a predictor of success in graduate school, to justify our current requirement. Similar conversations are taking place within STEM training programs across the country.

Over the past few years, the institutional rules that necessitated the GRE requirement in PIBS admissions have changed. The Rackham Graduate School [no longer requires](#) graduate programs at the University of Michigan to collect GRE scores, and GRE scores are no longer required in applications for NIH T32 training grants, NIH individual fellowships, or NSF GRFP fellowships. Both [Rackham](#) and [NIH](#) have publicly expressed reservations about the use of the GRE in graduate admissions.

In the light of these changes, now is a good time to examine our current policy and determine whether it is well aligned with the evidence from science-education studies, with our admissions philosophy, and with our institutional values. This year, the PIBS community engaged in a public discussion to bring ourselves up to speed with the relevant literature and the full range of informed opinions on the GRE. Volunteers from among our faculty researched the issue and wrote [white papers](#) distilling the best arguments for and against the requirement that all PIBS applicants submit GRE scores. Those white papers were shared with the entire PIBS community of faculty, staff and trainees. Earlier this month, we held an open town-hall meeting, in which we heard comments from mentors and trainees with a wide range of experiences and opinions. Video recordings of that meeting can be seen [here](#). In addition, many faculty, staff and trainees individually contacted or met with PIBS Director Scott Barolo to share opinions, experiences, ideas, and favorite papers on the topic.

We sincerely thank everyone who engaged with this process and helped to educate our training community about the evidence relevant to the GRE and PhD admissions.

Key factors in the OGPS decision are the following:

1. **Evidence from STEM graduate education studies.** Different published studies reach different conclusions about the value of the GRE as a predictor of success in graduate school. There is evidence to be found that indicates a weak-to-moderate correlation between GRE scores and some metrics of graduate student success, most notably grades in first-year graduate courses. Other studies fail to corroborate this conclusion, finding little to no predictive value in GRE scores. The white papers summarize the evidence on both sides. Overall, while we

cannot rule out the possibility that GRE scores contain some valuable information, the predictive power of that information appears to be weak at best, and the signal-to-noise ratio is very low.

The American Physical Society and the American Astronomical Society, which represent highly quantitative fields, have [questioned](#) or recommended the [elimination](#) of the GRE requirement in graduate admissions. This, together with the recent decision by Harvard University's Department of Astronomy to [neither require nor accept](#) GRE General Test scores, and the policy of the University of Michigan's Department of Chemistry to [not require](#) GRE scores, suggests that the GRE is not indispensable for STEM PhD admissions, even in highly quantitative disciplines.

2. **Evidence of inherent bias in GRE scores.** GRE scores are significantly [skewed to the disadvantage](#) of women, students from underrepresented minority groups in STEM, and students of lower socioeconomic status.
3. **Significant expenditures of applicants' money, time and effort required to take and prepare for the exam.** These costs, summarized in the [white papers](#), are a disproportionate burden for less privileged students, making test scores less standardized than they may appear and raising questions of equity of access. Furthermore, requiring students to invest money and effort in a test whose usefulness our faculty cannot agree on is a questionable policy.

Based on the evidence and arguments outlined above, our decision is the following:

PIBS applicants will no longer be required to submit GRE scores, effective in the 2018-19 admission season.

This change applies only to PIBS. PhD programs within the PIBS umbrella that also hold separate, direct PhD admissions may create or maintain separate policies for their direct-admissions process. Please refer to each PhD program's website for their individual admissions policies.

OGPS and PIBS would like to sincerely thank every member of our community who stepped forward to get involved in this process. We hope to keep this discussion going: please feel free to continue to share your opinions, new evidence, and ideas for improving this imperfect but vitally important process.

Sincerely,

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