Graduate Diversity and Inclusion Committee 3/16/17

Meeting Notes

**Agenda**

1. Transition Plan
2. GRE Scores
3. Expanding VU-Edge
4. Child Care

**Transition Plan**

* This committee is an Ad Hoc committee of the Graduate Student Council. The Student Life Liaison (Erica) serves as a liaison and does not direct the committee. The GDI committee has autonomy which allows them flexibility and enables productivity.
* Last year, our plan was very loose
  + The people who weren’t graduating carried on the committee goals
* Stacey and Ali aren’t graduating and they have agreed to help transition the committee to next year. Yay! Thanks! Stacey and Ail aren’t committed to chairing the committee, but they recruit volunteers and help appoint a chair next year.
* We will not have a formal election since this is an Ad Hoc Committee.
* Anyone is welcome to become involved in the committee!

**Alternative to GRE scores**  
**Goal**: Provide best practice training on the appropriate use of GRE scores to reduce reliance on these measures, which can lead to a severe constriction on the pool of women and minority graduate students. Adopt best practice approaches in holistic admissions as recommended by the Council of Graduate Schools, including holistic admissions toolkits developed at Vanderbilt, enabling greater graduate diversity and greater measures of excellence in graduate education such as PhD completion rates.

I copied and pasted some notes from our emails to supplement my notes.   
Please add as necessary because I may have not captured everything.

**Columbia (Sociology), Berkeley (French)** One of the above didn’t respond and the other uses GRE scores.

**Columbia University Teacher’s College**

PhD Programs in Teaching of Social Studies and Teaching of English & English Education do not require the GRE.

I received the following information in an email exchange with the Chair of the Department of Arts and Humanities (my questions in italics):

*1. How do you evaluate your candidates in lieu of the GRE score?*

"Though many students still do submit [GRE] scores, they are not required.  We rely much more on the written aspects of the application (personal statement/intention of professional plans/writing sample) to evaluate students.”

*2.   When did your department make the decision to forgo GRE scores as a requirement for admission, or have they always been optional?  If your department required them in the past, when did you switch to making them optional?  Was it a controversial decision within the department, within Teachers College, or at the University?*

“They have always been optional as far as I can recall, it is an was always viewed as 'another data point' that might be informative but was not essential to make a judgment about someone's capacity for graduate work in our program."

*3.  From your point of view as chair of the department, what are the most difficult and time consuming aspects of the admissions process?  Is it weeding out candidates who are not a good fit for your program, or is it choosing between well-qualified candidates who have made it past the first cut?  Or some other part of the process?   Do you think not having GRE scores for your applicants makes admissions more difficult or time consuming for your department’s faculty and staff at any point in the process?*

"Great question, and in the throes of it now! I would say that the GRE plays a very small role in the decision, such that someone might say 'but they have a really low score on verbal section' that adds to a wider discussion of the quality of their written work).  For us I think the hard part in the comparisons is the apple-orange problem such that you have dissimilar profiles that are difficult to fairly compare leading the committee then to talk about what/why they value more.”

*4. Do you feel there is any pressure on the department’s external reputation because you do not have admitted students’ average GRE scores to report?*

"That's a good question and I think you're correct that it does contribute to the college profile for those types of benchmarks. We have never heard, though, pressure to include them probably since most other programs require the scores.  The thing to know about TC is that it's a federated institution in that admissions decisions go directly down to the program level with little oversight/input from other levels, so you likely have 70+ different systems operating within.  How that gets aggregated for the college as a whole is unknown to me though I know the person who handles that and she could give more texture to it.”

**Northwestern University**

PhD Program in French does not require GRE scores.

Here is my summary of the information I received in a phone conversation with the DGS:

As far as the DGS can remember, the department has never required them.  Two reasons:  they did not feel GRE scores were very reliable in indicating the kind of thinking they look for in applicants; and historically the department had a large number of applicants from France and it didn’t make sense to require them to take the GRE in English.

The department relies mainly on the candidate’s written materials.  They are the best indicator of the kind of skills and core sensibility that the department looks for in its candidates (for example, close reading), which they feel they cannot be taught the way that critical theory can be, for example.

In terms of making the first cut of applicants, all underrepresented minorities make it through the first cut so that their applications will get a careful and close look.  Because they are a small department, they don’t feel external pressure to report GRE scores as part of their external reputation or rating.  Much more important to them is the schools students come from, which is its own form of bias.  Also because they are a small department, they don’t really need a way to weed out applicants because they can divide them up and read them all.  They have recently adopted the practice of having Skype interviews with all applicants, which is time consuming but has allowed them to take closer looks at candidates who came from less-prestigious schools, especially schools outside of France and the U.S.

**UPenn's Nursing program. Notes:**

1. They've had a GRE waiver for a while.
2. They've gotten more applications since getting rid of the requirement.
3. They believe holistic review is better.
4. They do often look at the overall GPA, and especially the GPA in sciences.
5. This did not increase the time spent on admissions that much.
6. They spent a long time considering what they're looking for and who they want.
7. They do keep some eye on the schools from which applicants are coming from and their rigor.
8. They tried a two-year pilot before rolling it out.
9. For people who have not been in school for a while, they look at their experiences to make sure that they are "progressing clinically."
10. I got a suggestion for someone to talk to at UWash.
11. Even for people who don't make some of the academic markers, they ask, "What could they add to our community?"
12. They found that the academic markers weren't predicting that much, and rather when people were struggling, it was often personal issues.
13. Interviews often made or broke candidates.

**We had some conversations about the stuff above and drew the following conclusions:**

* You need buy-in from the top. Once you decide to implement this, it really is doable. Most people didn’t have problems once they decided to implement alternatives to GRE scores. But you need to commit.
* You have to be careful because if you get rid of GRE scores you might fall back on other markers that discriminate (like school someone came from). So if you decide to not use GRE scores you need to have a solid alternative in place.
* Maybe this could first be initiated on the department level. Departments know what they want in an applicant and will be able to assess applicants using alternative tools. For example, writing samples for people in an English department and a research paper for someone in a biology department.
  + Maybe one department could try it first as a proof of principle.
* Could we crowd source solutions to this question? To devise an implementation plan.
  + Have a competition similar to the Global Health Case Competition
  + Invite the Advanced Degree Consulting Club take this case
  + Appoint a grad student and mentor to work on this as part of their research
* We would like Dean Wallace to ask the DGSs how their department would react to such a change, where would the resistance be and how can we overcome it?

**VU-EDGE**

**Goal**: Sustain and expand the Diversity Recruitment Office for Graduate Education (VU-EDGE), and increase collaboration with programs such as AccessStem (pairs students with disabilities with faculty mentors) and The KC Potter Center.

* Don says funding is an issue but having people to implement goals might also be an issue
* Could we write an Endowment-Style proposal to advocate for funds?
  + See template Erica will send out, is only like two pages
  + One goal of the proposal is to show what students are interested in
  + A proposal will need to be supplemented unless it is very thorough and has a lot of data. However, we could still just write a quick proposal and follow with data later if time is limiting.
  + Ali may be able to whip something up and Erica and Stacey can edit.
* But what are we going to focus on? We had some discussion, our conclusions are below. We don’t necessarily need to find solutions/details for this just yet. It is just the first step.
  + Large Goal: Advocate for more funds
  + Smaller Goals:
    - Advocate for more help for Don
      * Maybe another post-doc fellowship
      * Talk to Don, see what he needs
    - We need analysis on retention
      * Build a plan for collecting data in the future
      * What kind of data do we have right now?
    - Identify resources that underrepresented populations have on campus? Are these good enough? Do we need more?
      * We should get a Campus Ombuds!! This will help tremendously, see Ombuds Proposal.

**Mental Health Orientation session**

**Goal**: Create an introductory or orientation session through PCC that is geared towards issues specific to graduate students, particularly self-care and stress management. Informing incoming graduate students that these are common issues can help to reduce stigma around the PCC and help students to recognize the resources available there. (*Addition: The PCC resources should also be more representative.*)

* Previously we said we wanted more than 3 minutes
* We don’t have time to think about this right now and we don’t have a game plan for filling up more than three minutes yet so we aren’t going to ask for more than 3 minutes.
* We’ll think about this later, maybe over the summer.
* See notes from last time.

**Child Care**

* There are a lot of great opportunities for Vanderbilt to improve child care opportunities on campus.
* There was an endowment proposal about child care. Will be on the website soon.

**Meeting with Dean Wallace @ 12:30pm on the 30th. Woot!**

Provost is going to send a report on the strategic plan follow up. This will be cool.

Erica can send the committee a blurb about recruiting volunteers and maybe about finding the next Student Life Liaison.