



# Holistic Admissions: From ‘cut-offs’ to ‘screen in’

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University of Georgia, November 1, 2017



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Centralized graduate admissions but decentralized review

150 academic programs including Doctoral, Masters, Certificate programs

6,900 graduate students

7 campuses





Building Graduate Community:  
diverse, inclusive & global

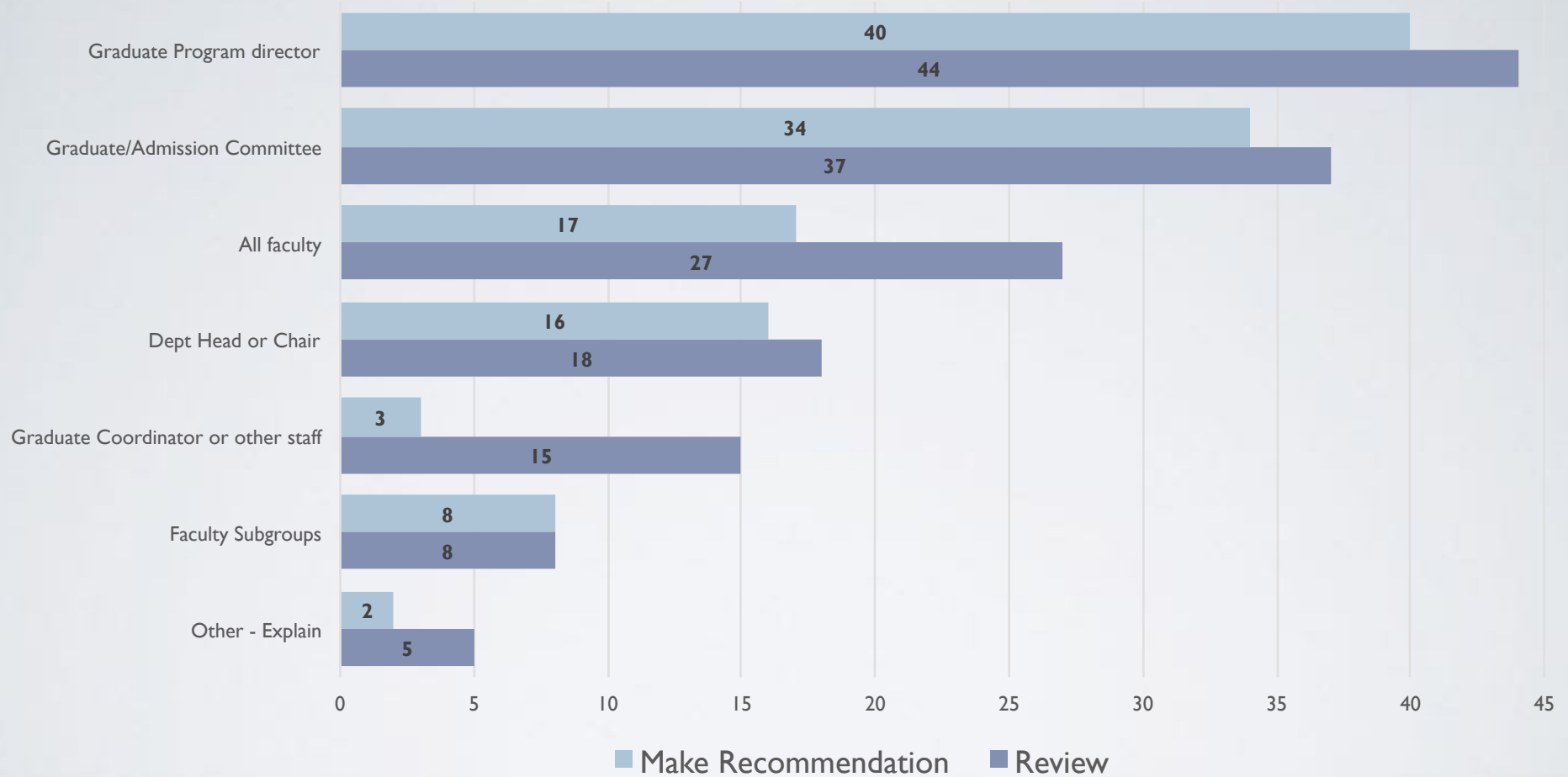
# Graduate Program Directors Survey

(20 Questions - Multiple Choice, Text Entry,  
Matrix - N=59)

## Areas Assessed

- Academic Performance
- Research Contribution
- Persistence and Commitment

# Graduate Application Review Process



# Admissions criteria from survey

- Overall GPA
- In major GPA
- GPA for last 60 credits
- Class rank
- Test scores (GRE, GMAT, etc.)
- English language proficiency scores for international applicants (TOEFL, IELTS)
- Written communication skills, writing sample
- Oral communication skills

# Criteria continued

- Curriculum in prior degree programs or subject matter preparation
- Progression of academic performance over time
- Statement of purpose for graduate study
- Portfolio review
- Letters of recommendation
- Resume or curriculum vitae
- Publications, presentations
- Awards, scholarships

# Academic Performance

## Important criteria

- English language proficiency
- Statement of purpose
- Letters of recommendation

## Overall use of criteria

- 86% use at least half of criteria

## Willingness to consider additional criteria

- Portfolio
- Class Rank
- Oral Communication



# Research contributions

## Important criteria

- Research experience
- Scholarly engagement

## Use of criteria

- About 50% indicate they use all listed criteria

## Willingness to consider additional criteria

- Aptitude for planning & organization
- Creativity in problem solving
- Collaboration and team skills

# Persistence and commitment

## Important criteria

- Personal and Professional Ethics
- Contribution to diverse applicant pool
- Personal referral from colleague

## Use of criteria

- 20% use all fifteen criteria

## Willingness to use additional criteria

- Military Service
- Significant responsibility in family or job
- First Generation College Student

# VT Graduate School approach

Unbalanced admissions favoring majority populations

Acceptance rate was at 28% - becoming too exclusive

# VT Graduate School approach

- Discontinue practice GPA and / or GRE cut scores as primary criteria
- Use of additional criteria in support of holistic admission

# ETS Personal Potential Inventory (PPI)

In creating the PPI, ETS studied and identified six attributes considered vital to success in graduate study: knowledge and creativity, communication skills, team work, resilience, planning and organization and ethics and integrity. These were used as the basis of the development of the additional questions for the application and recommendation letters.

# Additional questions on application

## Additional Educational Experiences

Which of the following have you had experiences in? (select all that apply):

- ☒ Community involvement and/or service

Explain:

- ☒ Leadership

Explain:

- ☒ Overcoming social, economic, or physical barriers

Explain:

- ☒ Personal and/or professional ethics

Explain:

- ☒ Recognition of achievements over time

Explain:

- ☒ Research/scholarship

Explain: |

- ☒ Additional Experience

Explain:

# Additional questions for letters of recommendation

If available, provide the applicant's relative standing in your department:

How would you rate this applicant in:

Communication skills: ☐ Very strong ☐ Strong ☐ Average ☐ Needs improvement ☐ Unable to evaluate

Ethics & Integrity: ☐ Very strong ☐ Strong ☐ Average ☐ Needs improvement ☐ Unable to evaluate

Initiative: ☐ Very strong ☐ Strong ☐ Average ☐ Needs improvement ☐ Unable to evaluate

Innovation & Creativity: ☐ Very strong ☐ Strong ☐ Average ☐ Needs improvement ☐ Unable to evaluate

Planning & Organization: ☐ Very strong ☐ Strong ☐ Average ☐ Needs improvement ☐ Unable to evaluate

Teamwork: ☐ Very strong ☐ Strong ☐ Average ☐ Needs improvement ☐ Unable to evaluate

Curiosity: ☐ Very strong ☐ Strong ☐ Average ☐ Needs improvement ☐ Unable to evaluate

Which two of the above attributes best characterize this applicant?

1.  2.

Please provide the most compelling reason for Virginia Tech to admit this applicant and explain your reasoning.

Department/ program admissions should:

- Determine some or all of the criteria identified in additional questions for applicants as important for admission
- Determine some of all of the criteria specified in the additional questions for writers of letters of recommendation



VT Graduate School application system  
allows to “sort” applicants by:

- GPA
- GRE scores
- additional questions criteria on application
- additional questions for letters of recommendation
- and more

# Three tier screen-in process

- First - sort entire pool of applicants by GPA and GRE (e.g., test scores)
- Second - sort entire pool of applicants by selected criteria in additional applicant questions; add these to the pool above
- Third - sort entire pool of applicants by selected criteria from additional recommenders questions

# Qualified pool of applicants:

- Applicants identified through the three “sorts” - the pool should be larger after each sort
- Final pool of applicants including those with lower GPAs and GREs considered as qualified for admissions
- Select those to be admitted without ranking by GPA or GRE scores but overall match with department



Initial results and preliminary data

# Example of data collected

Fall 2017													
	Applied	8,290											
	Admitted	2,897	34.8% Acceptance										
	Enrolled	1,767	61.0% Yield	62.2% of all applicants are international									
Citizenship	Applied	Count	Proportion	Admitted	Count	Proportion	Enrolled	Count	Proportion	Count	Proportion	Count	Proportion
	International	5,154	62.2%	International	1,093	20.0%	International	435	42.1%	International	42.1%	24.5%	
	US Citizen	3,136	37.8%	US Citizen	1,804	59.4%	US Citizen	1,332	71.5%	US Citizen	71.5%	75.4%	
		8,290			2,897			1,767					
Gender	Applied			Admitted			Enrolled						
	Female	2,950	35.6%	Female	1,213	41.8%	Female	762	63.4%	Female	63.4%	44.3%	
	Male	5,339	63.8%	Male	1,684	57.1%	Male	983	59.4%	Male	59.4%	55.6%	
	Not Reported	51	0.6%	Not Reported	10	0.3%	Not Reported	2	0.0%	Not Reported	0.0%	0.1%	
		8,290			2,897			1,767					
Race*	Applied			Admitted			Enrolled						
	American Indian or Alaska Native	4	0.1%	American Indian or Alaska Native	3	0.1%	American Indian or Alaska Native	2	0.1%	American Indian or Alaska Native	0.1%	0.2%	
	Asian	283	3.4%	Asian	159	5.5%	Asian	109	6.2%	Asian	6.2%	8.2%	
	Black or African American	246	2.9%	Black or African American	143	4.9%	Black or African American	105	6.0%	Black or African American	6.0%	7.9%	
	Hispanic/Latino	216	2.6%	Hispanic/Latino	114	3.9%	Hispanic/Latino	77	4.3%	Hispanic/Latino	4.3%	5.8%	
	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	3	0.0%	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	3	0.1%	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	2	0.1%	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0.1%	0.2%	
	Not Reported	140	1.7%	Not Reported	91	3.1%	Not Reported	65	3.7%	Not Reported	3.7%	4.9%	
	Two or More Races	119	1.4%	Two or More Races	76	2.6%	Two or More Races	57	3.2%	Two or More Races	3.2%	4.3%	
	White	2,125	25.7%	White	1,273	43.9%	White	915	51.8%	White	51.8%	68.7%	
	*Race only for U.S. Citizens	3,136			1,804			1,332					
Minority*	Applied			Admitted			Enrolled						
	Underrepresented Minority	534	6.4%	Underrepresented Minority	304	10.5%	Underrepresented Minority	216	12.2%	Underrepresented Minority	12.2%	16.2%	
	Not Underrepresented Minority	2,602	31.6%	Not Underrepresented Minority	1,560	53.5%	Not Underrepresented Minority	1,116	62.8%	Not Underrepresented Minority	62.8%	83.8%	
	*Race only for U.S. Citizens	3,136			1,804			1,332					
Sources: Institutional Research & Effectiveness													

# Example of data collected - Applicants

Applicants	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	1-year Change	2-year Change	5-year Change
American Indian or Alaska Native	5	4	6	6	4	-2	-2	-1
Asian	281	241	255	280	283	3	28	2
Black or African American	261	251	224	206	246	40	22	-15
Hispanics of any race	194	210	213	199	216	17	3	22
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	5	4	1	3	3	0	2	-2
International	5975	6042	5615	5589	5154	-435	-461	-821
Not Reported	173	167	143	138	140	2	-3	-33
Two or more races	92	126	105	104	119	15	14	27
White	2636	2429	2354	2110	2125	15	229	-511
Total	9622	9474	8916	8635	8290	-345	-626	-1332

# Example of data collected - offered admission

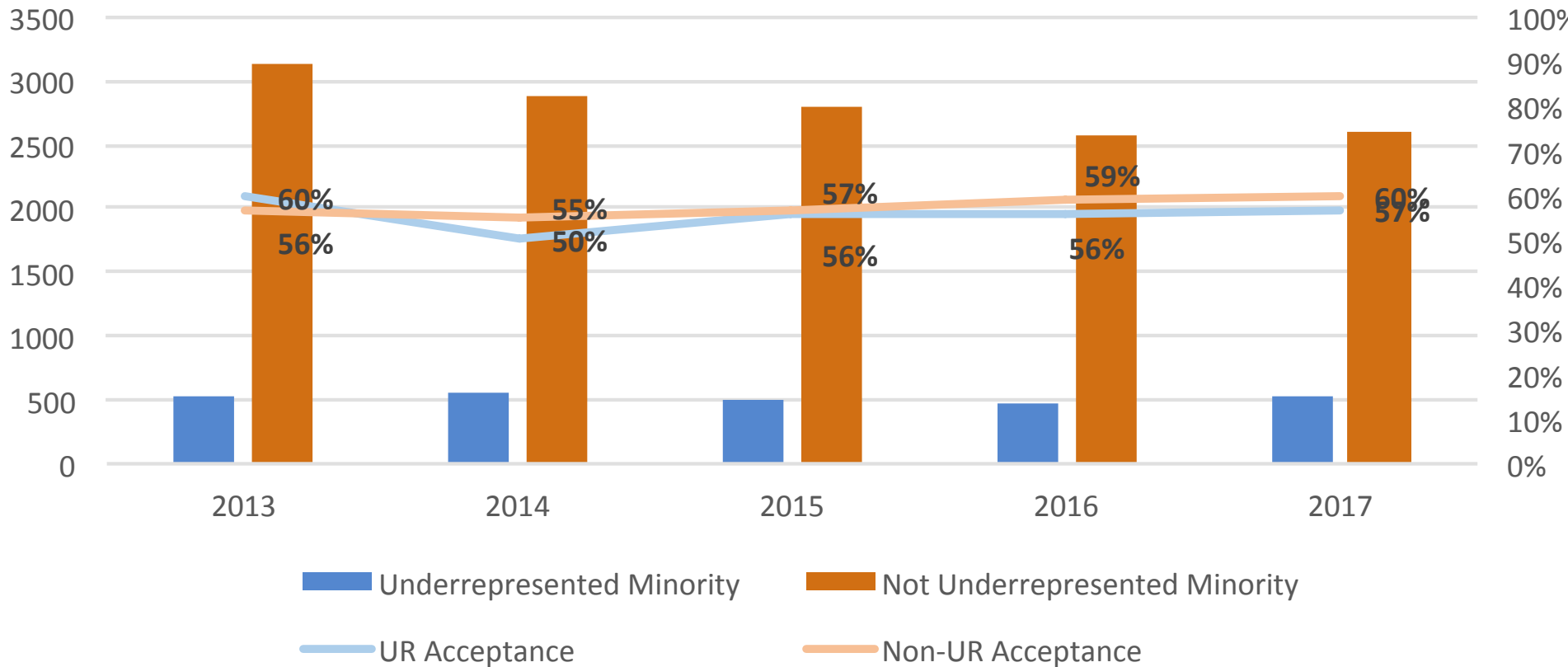
Offered	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	1-year Change	2-year Change	5-year Change
American Indian or Alaska Native	1	2	3	2	3	1	0	2
Asian	131	111	117	138	159	21	42	28
Black or African American	157	126	130	122	143	21	13	-14
Hispanics of any race	115	103	114	106	114	8	0	-1
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1	3	1	1	3	2	2	2
International	915	933	1082	958	1033	75	-49	118
Not Reported	90	88	84	93	91	-2	7	1
Two or more races	59	65	56	62	78	15	22	19
White	1520	1355	1362	1265	1273	8	-89	-247
Total	2989	2785	2949	2747	2897	150	-52	-92

# Example of data collected - enrolled

Enrolled	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	1-year Change	2-year Change	5-year Change
American Indian or Alaska Native	1	1	1	2	2	0	1	1
Asian	78	66	75	99	109	10	34	31
Black or African American	99	85	95	94	105	11	10	6
Hispanics of any race	63	61	84	79	77	-2	-7	14
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	0	2	1	0	2	2	1	2
International	452	438	565	511	435	-76	-130	-17
Not Reported	67	56	69	72	65	-7	-4	-2
Two or more races	40	45	41	45	57	12	16	17
White	1021	926	1055	992	915	-77	-140	-106
Total	1821	1680	1986	1894	1767	-129	-219	-56



## Applicants and Acceptance Rate: UR Minority



# VT Graduate School strategy

- Email from the Dean
- Video on YouTube
- “Road Show” - meetings throughout university
  - Graduate School Dean meetings with graduate program directors, department heads and deans
  - Graduate School staff follow-up meetings with coordinators for implementation

# Context for holistic admission

- Graduate School mission for building inclusive and affirming graduate community
- Graduate School Transformative Graduate Education (TGE) initiative
- InclusiveVT initiatives
- Holistic admissions on website
- Dean's blog

# Holistic Admissions

You are more than a number to us.



*“The changes the Grad School made to applications facilitated our existing process, making it easier for reviewers to find relevant information.”*

*“We have been using holistic admissions for a few years now, not only because Dean DePauw wants us to , but because we believe we are getting better-qualified and more diverse graduate students by looking at their application as a whole for evidence of their skills and their fit with our program.”*

*“We were getting far too focused on standardized test scores, which resulted in an increasingly narrow profile of students.”*

# Reflections & best practices

- identify data to evaluate effectiveness
- share data with stakeholders
- redefine “provisional admissions” status
- continue communication strategies
- conduct post admissions survey for additional services desired by students
- more



a space and place for graduate education

Questions?