

Breaking Down Barriers: The Impact of Removing the GRE on Admissions

Purpose:

Solutions to alleviate healthcare disparities and increase workforce diversity in medicine are at the forefront of initiatives in medical training programs.¹⁻⁴ Limited information exists on the impact of admission requirements on application submittal by underrepresented minority (URM) and socioeconomically disadvantaged (SED) students to Physician Assistant (PA) Programs. Admission practices that focus on standardized tests scores may create a barrier for URM and SED students applying to health professional programs.^{1,2} After a thorough review of admission practices that improve workforce diversity and predict student success, the University of Colorado Physician Assistant Program removed the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) requirement for admission. The purpose of this study was to determine whether a significant difference in the proportion of URM and SED applicants occurred following removal of the GRE for admissions.

Methods:

This quantitative study included two cohorts of PA applicants from 2016-2021: 3 application years (2016-2018) with GRE requirement (n = 4798), and 3 application years (2019-2021) without GRE requirement (n = 5555). Applicants that chose SED and/or a URM population on their application to graduate-level PA Programs through the Centralized Application Service for Physician Assistants (CASPA) were identified. Chi-square tests were conducted to compare the two independent proportions (URM and SED applicants) with the aggregated 3 years data before and after removing the GRE score for admissions. Statistical significance was determined at 95% CI. Statistical analysis was performed using SAS version 9.4 (SAS, SAS Institute, Cary NC).

Results:

Following aggregation of the three years' numbers before and after removing the GRE for admissions, the proportion of URM applicants increased from 11.6% (2016-2018) to 13.9% (2019-2021). This difference is statistically significant (difference = 2.4%, 95% CI: 1.1% to 3.6%, p=0.0004). Following aggregation of the three years' numbers before and after removing the GRE for admission, the proportion of SED applicants increased from 9.9% (2016-2018) to 14.6% (2019-2021). This difference is statistically significant (different =4.7%, 95% CI:3.4% to 5.9%, p<0.0001).

Discussion and Conclusion:

It is important for PA Programs to critically review their admission practices and predictors of student success to alleviate barriers.⁵ This study proposes that removing the GRE requirement can significantly improve the proportion of URM and SED applicants applying to PA Programs. By aggregating the numbers across three years of applicants before and after the GRE requirement was removed for admission, this quantitative study provides evidence of the statistical significance found in the proportion of URM and SED applicants applying to the PA program. Future research will need to assess

other predictors of success and barriers to admission for URM and SED applicants beyond standardized test requirements.