



Holistic Admissions: Priorities for CSUSB Graduate Programs

The following principles and practices are recommended by the [Council of Graduate Schools](#).



First Principles:

- 1. Diversity is essential to the overall success of graduate programs.** All students in a program, regardless of background, benefit from taking part in a learning environment that reflects various kinds of diversity.
- 2. It is critical to think beyond the admissions process when developing strategies for diversity and inclusion.** Ideally, recruitment processes, admissions processes, and strategies for supporting student success should be mutually reinforcing.
- 3. Holistic review processes are most likely to be successful when well-aligned with a graduate institution's mission and with the goals of particular master's, doctoral, and professional graduate programs.**



Promising Practices:

We encourage graduate programs to:

- 1. Demonstrate a clear commitment to excellence through diversity.** Engage in discussions with campus leaders about making this a priority, and consider how policies and requirements might be leveraged to enact change.
- 2. Gather and analyze department-specific data on graduate admissions. Programs can use these data to:**
 - identify gender- and race-based patterns in admitted and rejected student characteristics.
 - test whether evidence of student outcomes supports prevailing assumptions about who is likely to succeed (those with a certain GPA or standardized test score, for example).
- 3. Provide faculty members who make admissions decisions with the context needed to evaluate students appropriately. In particular,**
 - provide additional information to the reviewers of applicant files to help them contextualize key criteria.
- 4. Provide faculty with information on the appropriate use of the Graduate Record Exam (GRE).** The Educational Testing Service offers materials designed to help reviewers avoid “mistakes” in using the GRE (www.ets.org/gre/bestpractices), such as adding scores together and using cut-off scores.
- 5. Support communication and alliances between faculty and the graduate recruitment specialist to ensure that admissions and recruitment efforts are well-aligned.** Faculty in graduate programs and the graduate recruitment specialist may have opportunities to observe aspects of an applicant that the other group has not; communication can yield a more complete picture of an individual.
- 7. Provide faculty with rubrics for evaluating applicants so that admissions criteria are more transparent and consistently applied.** Rubrics have the added benefits of making evaluation processes more efficient and allowing faculty to more easily compare their assessments.

Holistic review has been associated with a number of challenges for graduate institutions that might be summarized as falling into the categories of traditions and time constraints.



Traditions: Holistic review processes may challenge the culture of programs by questioning long-held customs, habits, and notions of merit.



Time Constraints: Holistic admissions processes are often perceived to add time and complexity to the work of admissions committees. Establishing cut scores for GPA's and standardized tests is among the methods used by some programs to winnow down applicant pools and make admissions processes more “efficient.” Yet such practices may work against efficiency in the long run if a department or program does not admit the candidates most likely to remain in and succeed in a program, and cut scores on standardized tests are statistically inappropriate. These practices also violate the recommended uses of test scores (ETS, 2015a).