

# Graduate Council Panel Discussion

February 16, 2017

## Graduate Admission Processes

The discussion generated good feedback on the holistic vs. non-holistic approaches to the admission process. The majority of programs seem to be using a more holistic approach and plan to continue with this method, noting that it is more time consuming but the pool of applicants is better. Most programs noted that the research aspect was weighted highest.

### **Dr. Colleen Gabauer, Managing Director, Office of Interdisciplinary Graduate Programs**

Dr. Gabauer provided a video on *An Ongoing Analysis of the Holistic Review Process*. The video outlined the findings of two studies that were completed by Dr. Colleen Gabauer, Dr. Janet Beagle, and Dr. Kathy Dixon. At the completion of two studies, their findings were that 60% of programs define themselves as taking a holistic approach to reviewing applications and that their definition of holistic was “all aspects of the application are considered and cutoff scores and rank scores are not used.” Some considerations included were: moving away from a focus on certain schools, avoiding cut off scores, and gaining awareness of hidden biases in letters of recommendation.

### **Three panel members discussed their process for applicant review and selection:**

#### **Professor Barb Almanza, Professor of Hospitality and Tourism Management**

Professor Almanza noted that they try to keep the applicant pool large enough so that their faculty will have a good representation to look at for admissions. The faculty may have a particular research agenda and it is helpful to have a larger pool of applications to review. If they are only lacking one standard for admissions then they would not be immediately eliminated.

She noted that they have a three member committee that looks at the applicants and chooses to either move forward, unsure (discussion follows), or don't move forward. From there all faculty in the department may rank by giving their top three candidates by research focus and whether they would be willing to chair their committee. If a student does not have a faculty member willing to chair their committee, they are not selected to move forward. From there they move to Skype or face-to-face interviews. They have a huge pool of international applicants and they want to be sure that their English skills are acceptable and that the reviewers are not just going by the GRE scores provided. Applicants may be eliminated at this stage.

The department will then look at additional criteria in addition to the minimum requirements, such as work experience, verbal skills, ability for spontaneous conversation, etc... Some examples of questions at this stage might be, “Do you like to cook?”, “What is the nicest hotel you have ever stayed at?”. They feel that the Skype interviews are important and they require that they put a photo ID next to their face during the interview to ensure that they are truly who they say they are.

#### **Cindy Nakatsu, Professor of Agronomy (participates in the PULSe Interdisciplinary program)**

Professor Nakatsu noted that the PULSe program is different in its application review process since they are an interdisciplinary program. There are eleven training groups and one faculty member from each training group is involved in the selection process to cover the diversity of the applicants. This committee is very diverse as well; with underrepresented minorities, good ratio of men to women, and those with international educational experience having been trained somewhere else. They also have a mix of full, assistant, and associate professors.

Since PULSe has a campus visit for their new students, it causes the review team to have to speed this process up in order to have their final selection made in time. They are very dedicated and meet twice

per week as a group each December and January. They have two people per committee member to assess each student. Whether they are accepted or denied, they still have them speak because at the meeting someone may see something in someone and say, "Maybe we shouldn't be denying this person at this time." The PULSe program team feels that research experience is more important of a factor in this process than the GRE scores. The statistics show that students coming in with research experience are more likely to complete their degree. The requirement is one year minimum of research experience.

The next step is to review the international pool to see where they could be narrowed down. In this group there is diversity among the countries represented, as well as within each country. These applicants have a requirement of one journal paper publication. In total, PULSe received 160 applicants this year and only twenty five were accepted into the program.

### **Dimitri Peroulis, Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering and Director of Graduate Admissions**

The School of Electrical and Computer Engineering is the largest program on campus with around 3400 applicants per year. Nearly 85% are international students. Around 5% are funded and about 15% are admitted.

The school has a very decentralized process with an admissions committee with representatives from all eight research areas. They do not use cut scores and do not have a minimum GRE requirement. The GRE scores are published, but not factored into the initial decision. By and large, the faculty does not feel that the standardized tests should be used in their review process. Primarily, they are looking at where the students are coming from, their GPA, and research experience. They are asked to come up with a consensus for their final selections.

### **Questions by council members followed:**

How many use Skype? The majority of the attendees indicated that Skype was used for their interviews with international students.

Do any programs use student rankings? A respondent indicated their program does.

Is the entire Graduate Faculty invited to be a part of the review process? This was asked to the panel and Barbara Almanza replied that for the most part, yes, all faculty are able to review and share opinions. Many have funding to consider. The other two panelists agreed.

How do the students choose their major professor? Professor Almanza noted that each student is given the list of faculty who have agreed to be their student's major professor and the student chooses from this list.

Do any of the programs ask for a video presentation where the student answers a set of predetermined questions? No, most prefer not disclosing the questions in advance.

What are you looking for when you talk to students via Skype? The panelists noted they wanted to know the student's areas of interest and his/her overall verbal ability. In addition, Skype interviews allow the student to ask questions.

Are there any downsides to holistic applicant review? One of the panel members noted that when you look at an applicant holistically you are going to find attributes and strengths in certain areas that need further developing. You need to be able to find faculty members who are willing to help the students in developing those skills that may need strengthening. Another point made is that the workload is much higher. Using a holistic approach means you are taking more time to get to know the whole person.

Professor Nakatsu agreed that the holistic approach is more time consuming but you definitely get a better pool of admits.

Are you using Fellowships as a creative way to recruit or to get students to matriculate into your programs? Professor Peroulis noted that they do use fellowships when considering applicants. They sometimes need to take more time with them to be sure they understand the process.

What type of criteria do you use in your review process and what weights do you assign to your criteria? Professor Peroulis, ECE, noted that they look at scores, GPA/rankings, recommendation letters, if they have their own funding, resources needed from the department, have they been actively participating in research, and review of the interview outcomes and comments including Skype interviews. Most programs noted that the research aspect was weighted highest. Other than that, no particular weight is given to any of the areas.

Do you focus on particular schools? Professor Nakatsu, Agronomy, noted that they do not focus on particular schools any longer. They have found that even students coming from smaller schools can have four years of research and be as qualified as the other applicants from the larger schools. They will also deny Berkeley or Harvard students if they have never been in the lab before. It is beneficial to have a large review committee so that they can share experiences and better calibrate GPA equivalencies from school to school.

How many use cut scores? Attendees said their programs use cut scores.

How many have training for search committees? Only one person indicated that their program required training for the admission committee.