October 30, 2020

After an analysis of current research, institutional data, and our own shared values, we the faculty of the PhD program at USC Rossier School of Education unanimously voted to enact a two-year trial eliminating GRE score requirements for application and admission. We take this step as part of a systematic redesign of our admissions policy toward ensuring future PhD applicants are evaluated holistically, rigorously, and equitably. The policy has now been approved at the School and University levels, and goes into effect for admissions this fall.

We made this decision in February 2020 before the Coronavirus pandemic disrupted U.S. education. The pandemic has brought social inequalities into sharp relief, including unequal access to records that are typically privileged in admissions. We believe this decision represents one way we are being thoughtful, intentional, and systematic in our attempt to responsibly encourage equity of opportunities and outcomes.

We’ve known for years that the next generations of education scholars and professionals must reflect the full range of perspectives in the communities served. To that end, Rossier’s PhD program has been a leader in producing critically minded scholars who are racially and ethnically diverse. Even with our track record in this area, we felt we should do more to encourage a diverse applicant pool. Improving admissions policy is one step in this direction.

Our own experience tells us that in many cases the GRE adds little if anything to the admissions process. Rossier faculty have been down-weighting or ignoring GRE scores in admissions for years, and we continue to produce capable scholars who are conducting cutting edge research. Our experience thus comports with what the literature finds: GRE scores often offer little benefit in admissions and may cause disparate impact on the very groups we seek to include amongst our ranks.

We also recognize that it takes more than eliminating test scores for admissions not to reproduce inequities. Almost any element of a typical application can be interpreted to preserve advantages from groups who are already privileged. This is why we convened a working group of faculty and students over several months to create a new, comprehensive admissions policy that includes an equity-minded approach to holistic review. It triangulates information systematically across components of the application, uses a comprehensive set of criteria used to judge applicants in the context of their opportunities, and allows faculty to collectively operationalize those criteria in ways that are meaningful for them.
If students choose to submit GRE scores as part of their application materials, the PhD program office will not include any submitted scores in the application materials that faculty see.

After a two-year trial period of this policy, the PhD faculty will assess its success in furthering Rossier’s mission. At that point, the faculty will determine the best path forward with its admission policies.

Sincerely,
The PhD faculty of USC Rossier School of Education