

Holistic Review in Graduate Admissions: A Perspective from U.S. Graduate Schools

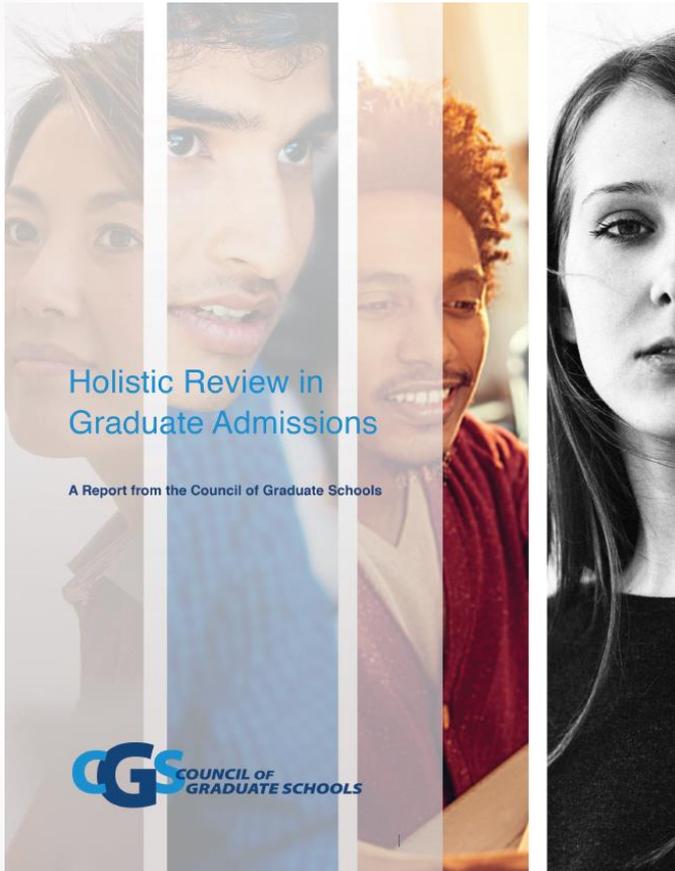
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Council of Graduate Schools (CGS)

Overview of CGS Project



- Sponsored by HOBSONS 
- Activities: research, survey of CGS members, workshop with deans & other experts
- Final Report (CGS 2016) now online

CGS Student Life Cycle Survey: Topics Covered

- Practices associated with holistic review
- Who holds authority for making admissions decisions
- Relative importance of different types of admissions materials
- Applicant qualities deserving greater attention
- Availability and use of rubrics
- Barriers to holistic review and needed information

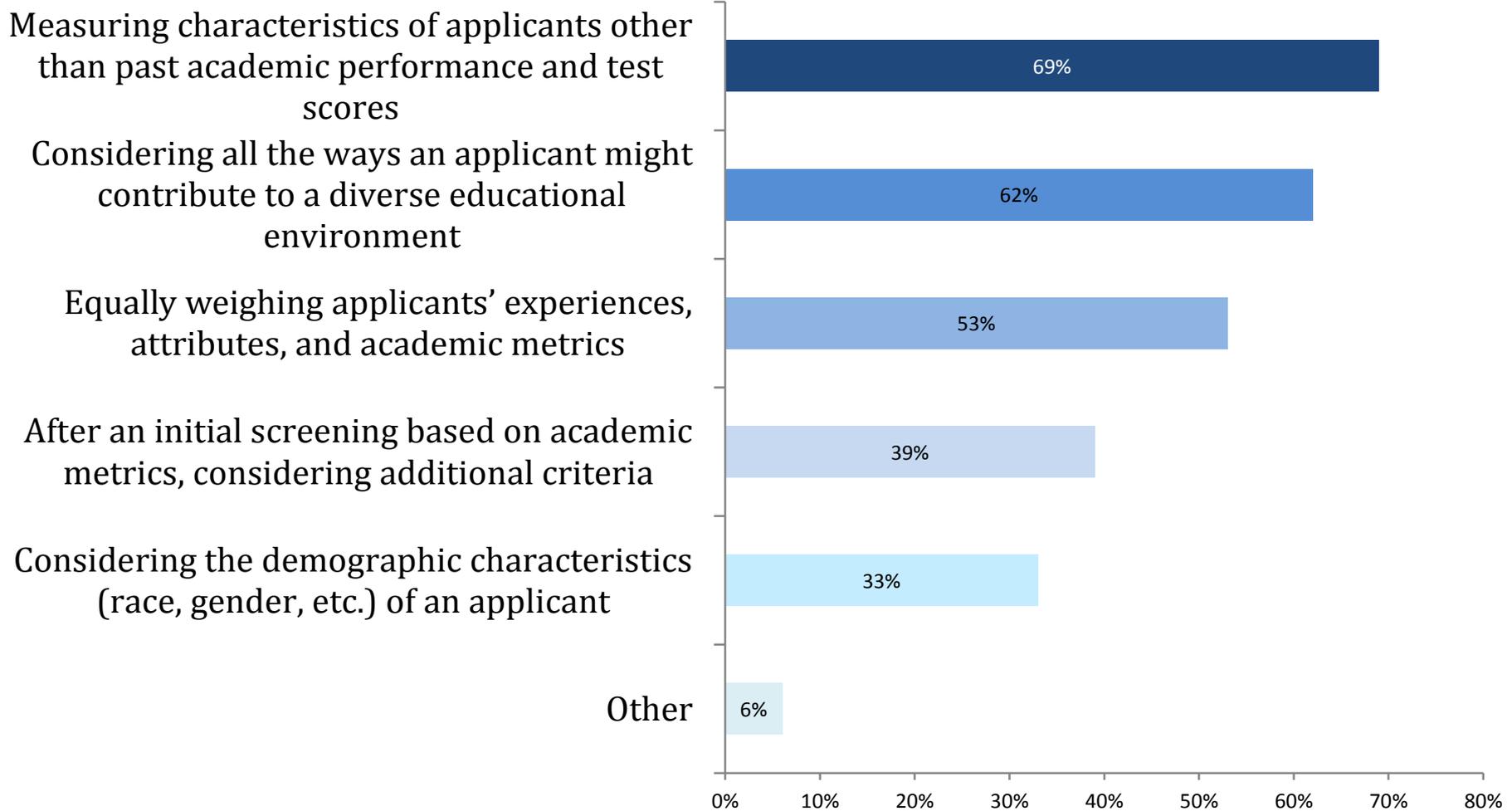
Questions for Today

- What **practices** are currently associated with the term “holistic review?”
- What does the **current landscape** of graduate admissions look like?
- What do U.S. graduate schools consider “**promising practices**” for improving diversity in graduate programs?

CGS Working Definition

“A process by which programs consider a **broad range of characteristics**, including noncognitive and personal attributes, when reviewing applications for admission.” (CGS, 2016)

Digging Deeper: Practices associated with “holistic review”



Reflecting on Definitions

The graduate education community would benefit from a clearer understanding of what constitutes a “holistic” review process for master’s and doctoral programs (CGS 2016).

We should be careful to define what we mean when we say a program is using “holistic review.”

We need **better data** linking specific admissions practices associated with holistic review to student and program outcomes (e.g. diversity, student retention and completion).

Toward a Stronger Definition: Urban Universities for Health (UUH) Model

MODEL PRACTICES ASSESSED

Does the institution evaluate applicant criteria related to specific mission or goals of the school (e.g. primary care, research mission, global health, urban or rural focus)

Does the institution have a mission statement for admissions that includes diversity

Does the institution consider non-academic criteria as well as academic metrics such as GPA and test scores in the initial screening process

By what means and to what extent does the institution evaluate non-academic criteria related to student background or experience in the initial screening (e.g. first-generation status, socioeconomic status, gender, race, foreign language ability, community of origin)

Does the institution select students from the waitlist by characteristics related to school's mission or goals

Does the institution provide training for the admissions committee related to school mission and/or diversity

Urban Universities for HEALTH. (2014, September). *Holistic Admissions in the Health Professions: Findings from a National Survey*. Washington, DC: Author.

What does the current landscape of graduate admissions look like?

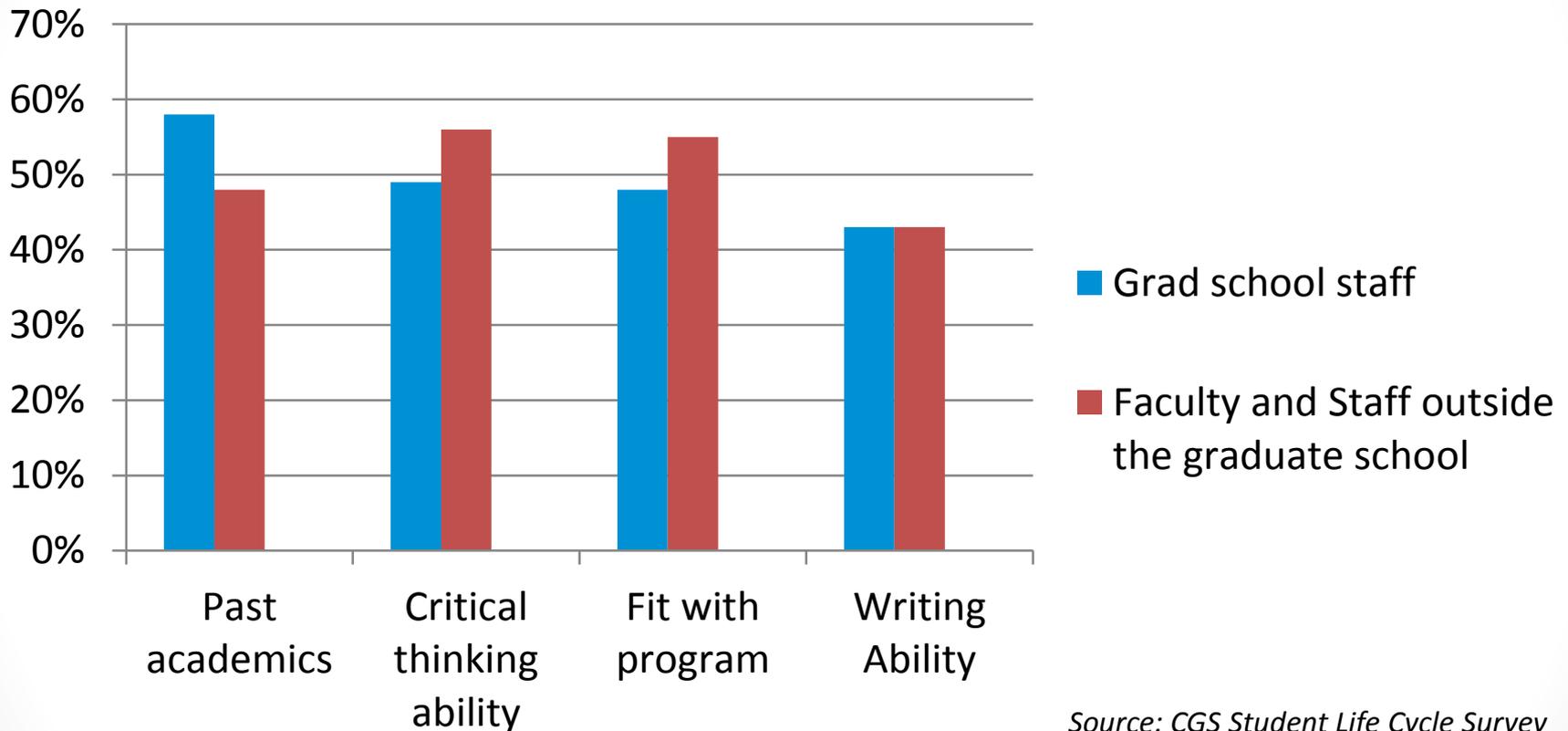
Academic Credentials are Considered First

Most graduate programs value quantifiable metrics (such as GPA and standardized test scores) in early stages of the admissions process.

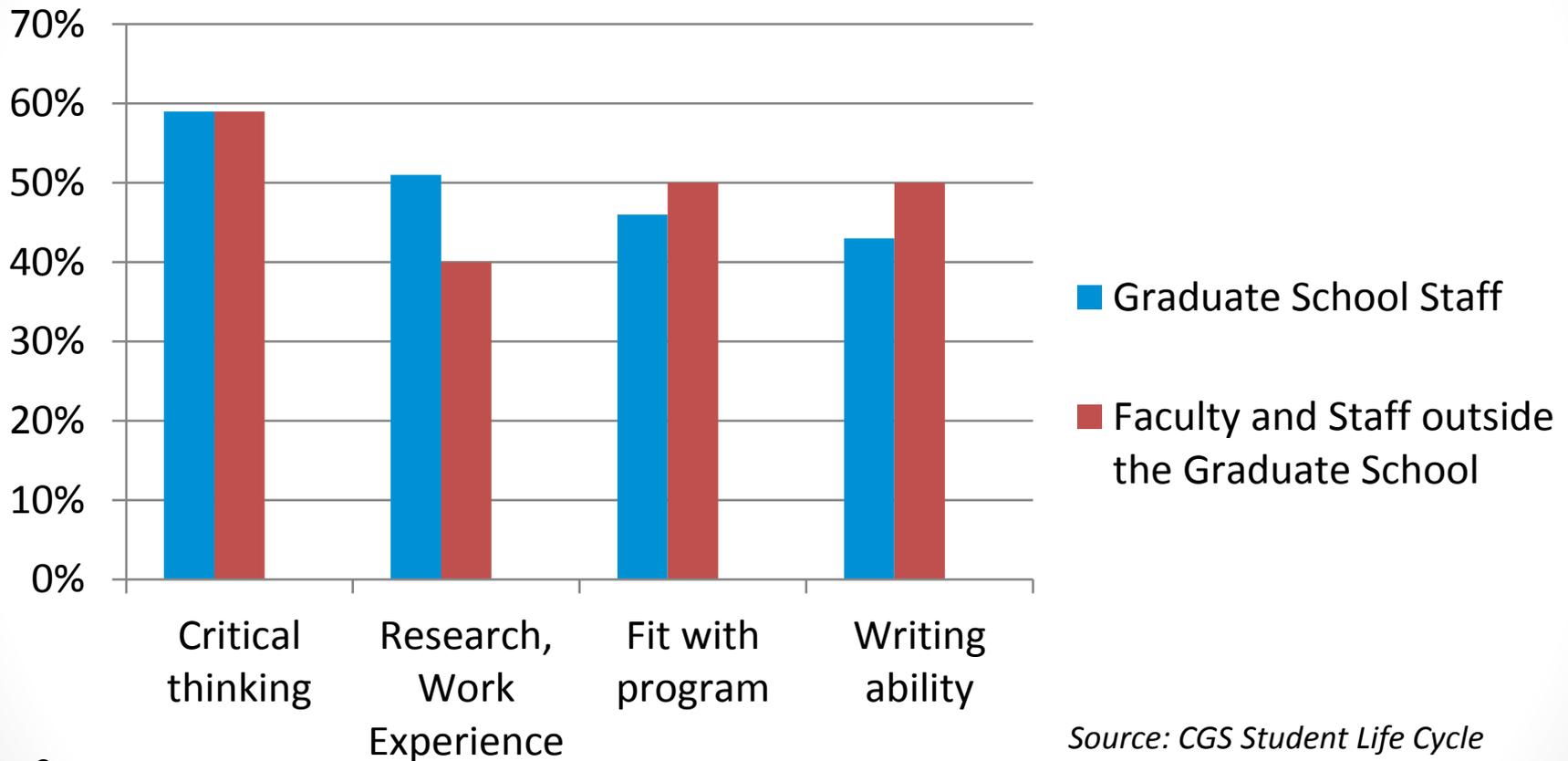
They shift to considering more qualitative materials (such as letters of recommendations and personal or research statements) in later stages.

Source: CGS Student Life Cycle Survey

Qualities Deserving More Attention – Master’s Admissions



Qualities Deserving More Attention – Doctoral Admissions



Survey

Promising Practices for Improving Diversity

1. Demonstrate a clear commitment to **excellence through diversity** throughout the graduate education system.
2. Gather and analyze **department-specific data** on graduate admissions.
3. Provide faculty members who make admissions decisions with the **context** needed to evaluate students appropriately.
4. Provide faculty with information on the appropriate use of the **Graduate Record Exam (GRE)**.

Promising Practices (continued)

5. Offer guidance on the optimal **sequence** for reviewing application materials.
6. Support communication and **alliances between faculty and recruitment officers** to ensure that admissions and recruitment efforts are well-aligned.
7. Provide faculty with **rubrics** for evaluating applicants so that admissions criteria are more transparent and consistently applied.
8. Consider **alternative funding models** (especially in doctoral programs) that might enable new thinking about admissions.

Improving URM Completion Rates in STEM Doctoral Programs

Doctoral Initiative
on Minority
Attrition and
Completion



Insights from “DIMAC”

- **Prior experience with research and scholarship**, such as McNair, LSAMP, Bridge to the Doctorate, etc., are essential in helping incoming URM STEM doctoral students acclimate to the graduate school environment.
- URM students who had **opportunities to conduct class-based undergraduate research** prior to enrolling in STEM doctoral programs were more likely to feel integrated into the program environment in meaningful ways (70% v. 56%), than their counterparts who did not have prior research opportunity.

Further Information

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