**GRE waiver request – Biomedical Sciences (PhD program)**

**Proposal:**

The Biomedical Sciences PhD program is requesting permission to waive the GRE admission requirement for specific outstanding students who apply to this program. Applicants who meet the following academic AND research background criteria will have the option to request a waiver of the FSU requirement to provide GRE scores:

***Academic Credentials:***

* Upper-division undergraduate GPA of 3.2 (on a 4.0 scale) or higher from an accredited national or international college or university, OR
* Graduate GPA of 3.5 (on a 4.0 scale) or higher from an accredited national or international college or university.

***Research Experience:***

* Undergraduate research-based thesis in a relevant field, OR
* Post-graduate research experience in a relevant field. This would include both graduate school and formal post-baccalaureate programs, OR
* Extensive (at least 1 year) relevant research experience. This includes both paid and unpaid work, but must reflect significant engagement, commitment, and an understanding of the research process.

Examples of relevant fields include (but are not limited to): biology, biochemistry, biomedical sciences, chemistry, genetics, engineering, medicine, neuroscience, and pharmacology/pharmaceutical sciences.

Prospective students must present supportive evidence within their application that they meet the selected waiver criteria (e.g., authorship on a peer reviewed scientific publication, statement from a former advisor or mentor, etc). All applicants will have the option to report their GRE test scores. Applicants should explain within the waiver request how they meet the criteria. Of course, approval of a GRE Waiver Request does not guarantee admission to the program or university. Prospective students must still submit and complete a Graduate Application and meet all university and department admissions requirements to be considered for admission.

**Role/Justification of Criteria to be Utilized:**

*Lack of predictive value of the GRE in predicting STEM-related graduate student success:*

Our program considers multiple factors in a holistic review process when considering admission of applicants. These include previous research experience, letters of recommendation, statement of purpose, relevant course work, previous GPA, and sometimes the GRE. Research experience is typically the highest weighted factor in these evaluations by our faculty, and published studies affirm a fairly robust relationship between previous laboratory experience and success as a graduate student (Hall et al, 2017; Langin, 2019; Moneta-Koehler et al, 2017; Sealy et al., 2019). Qualitative information provided by a previous mentor (that is, letters of recommendation) may actually be most predictive (Hall et al., 2017). In contrast, performance on the GRE is not correlated with any metrics of success in a biology/biomedical-related research career (Hall et al., 2017; Moneta-Koehler et al., 2017; Sealy et al., 2019; Sternberg & Williams, 1997). Metrics studies to date include likelihood of finishing the degree, passing qualifying exams, time to defense, number of conference presentations, and number of first author papers. Even the Educational Testing Service (ETS) itself, which administers the GRE, discourages the use of GRE cut off scores for admissions, and acknowledges that the GRE does not predict other skills needed to succeed in professional programs (GRE Guide to the Use of Scores 2015-2016; Enright & Gitomer, 1989).

*Explicit Bias:*

In addition to not providing predictive value in success of biomedical doctoral students (see above), the GRE also puts highly capable women and underrepresented groups at a competitive disadvantage for admission to graduate training programs (Benderly, 2017; Miller & Stassun, 2014; Moneta-Koehler et al, 2017; Shames, 2018). This is because scores on the GRE, similar to most standardized tests, reflect certain demographic characteristics, such as socioeconomic status, that are unrelated to academic preparation, intellectual capacity, and potential for academic success. This has led to test disparity, with women scoring an average of 80 points lower than men, and African Americans scoring an average of 200 points lower than Caucasian Americans (Miller & Stassun, 2014). Thus, the traditional focus on GRE scores and the misguided approach of using GRE minimum scores for admission may be a driving force for the continuing under-representation of women and minorities in graduate programs in general, and STEM fields in particular. This represents a salient and ongoing concern for our doctoral program, and we believe that waiving the GRE and including other criteria that are more predictive of future success and aptitude for research and academic performance will help us meet our goal of increasing diversity within our program.

*We are lagging behind both direct competitor schools and aspirational programs:*

STEM fields have led the movement to drop the GRE admission requirement. In a 2018 survey of application requirements at 50 top-ranked U.S. research universities, 44% of molecular biology-related Ph.D. programs dropped the GRE requirement between 2016 and 2018 and more reported planning to do so for 2019 and 2020 admissions (Langin, 2019). Importantly, many peer and aspirational Biomedical Science programs have either dropped the GRE admission requirement entirely or allowed applicants to waive the GRE if other criteria, deemed more indicative of success in graduate school, are met. For example, the following link displays the 223 programs in the biomedical sciences that have already implemented these procedures: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1MYcxZMhf97H5Uxr2Y7XndHn6eEC5oO8XWQi2PU5jLxQ/htmlview>. These programs include those at the University of Michigan, Harvard University, Vanderbilt, the University of North Carolina, Duke, the University of Georgia, and the University of Alabama Birmingham. With FSU now ranked 18 amongst public universities, we note that biomedical programs at 2/3rds of the schools still above us in those rankings include GRE waivers and/or exclusions. We therefore see no threat to the perceived rigor or acclaim of FSU. Additionally, the cost of the GRE places a financial burden on many applicants, both domestic and international, that represents a barrier to application, particularly in this climate where so many institutions have eliminated the requirement.

Taken together, we believe that waiving the GRE admission requirement will allow us to make better decisions around admission and increase our pool of applicants. In turn, this will help us achieve our goals of (i) admitting students who are highly likely to be successful in our doctoral program, (ii) increasing our ability to compete for the most highly qualified applicants among other Biomedical PhD programs that have already waived or do not require the GRE, and (iii) increasing the number of underrepresented students in our doctoral program. Thank you for considering this.

**References**

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