

Follow-up Report on Entrance Exam Waivers and a Proposal to Continue the GRE Waiver for Master's and Specialist Applicants Beyond 2022



The Graduate School
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Intro and Brief Follow Up Report on Data So Far:

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, following overwhelming support from the Provost and the academic deans, the Graduate School worked with the Graduate Policy Committee and the Faculty Senate in spring 2021 to institute a GRE waiver for Master's and Specialist applicants through 2022. This latter request extended the initial waiver approved in Spring 2020. (Note: The College of Business requested that the GMAT waiver be removed for the second waiver request and this will be continued moving forward.) Florida State University was the first Florida University to implement a GRE waiver during the pandemic and soon after other Florida schools followed our lead. These waivers have proven extremely popular with newly-entering students, and resulted in record enrollment in both 2020 and 2021 (see Figure 1 and Figure 2).

The above policy has been a win-win for everyone but we have obviously been eager to demonstrate this by evaluating the incoming cohorts and their academic performance in comparison to previous groups. The following outlines this analysis, carried out by Brian Barton, mainly through a series of graphical figures using OBI: CSW Enrollment-Student Demographics and data for each fall from 2017 to fall 2020. While there are obviously many questions that may arise from viewing these results and that this analysis could be greatly expanded and examined in multiple dimensions, some of the main observations include:

- The average GPA across Master's and Specialist waiver-receiving students went down in their first term versus previous year cohorts, but it only decreased by 0.08 from Fall 2019 to Fall 2020 and only differed from the Fall 2017 year average by 0.04 (see Figure 3).
- Spring GPA's for students that started the previous fall did decrease from Spring 2018-2020 for Spring 2021, but the Spring 2021 GPA only differed from the previous Spring three year average by .05 grade points (see Figure 4).
- Figures 3-5 show that the cohort that entered in Fall 2020 actually improved their average GPA in Spring 2021.
- Eighty-four program plans saw an increase in Academic Year GPA averages for newly-entering cohorts compared to seventy-four that saw a decrease in the 2020/2021 Academic Year when compared to the previous 3 year Academic Year GPA average, see Figure 6. Figure 7 shows the distribution of program plan GPA Average Decreases/Increases from 2019/2020 compared to 2020/2021.
- The impact of the GRE waiver is positive for the University in other areas than GPA. Every single non-White race/ethnicity has seen positive growth since the last fall term (2019) that did not have a GRE waiver for Master's & Specialist students (Figure 8). The most significant increases are +479 Hispanic/Latino students since Fall 2019 (going from 14% to 16% of the Master's/Specialist population) and +489 Black or African American students since Fall 2019 (going from 11% to 14% of the Master's/Specialist population).
- When you compare the Fall 2020 cohort's GPA (that received the GRE waiver) against all other Master's and Specialist students that were admitted prior to Fall 2020 (without the GRE waiver) the waiver-receiving cohort performed better.
- In the Fall 2020 term students that received the waiver were within .005 GPA of the non-waiver receiving cohorts. However, in Spring 2021 waiver-receiving students had a 3.681 average GPA, and previously-admitted non-waiver receiving students were .243 lower with a 3.438 average GPA (Figure 9).

Summary:

The Fall 2020 Master's and Specialist cohort has performed admirably in their first academic year. Their performance has been very comparable indeed to previous cohorts, although given the unique circumstances of the pandemic that these students have been challenged by, these comparisons will always leave some questions unanswered. Overall though, it is fair to say that the GRE waiver has been a win-win for students and the university. Thus, once again with the support of the Provost and the academic deans, it seems reasonable to extend this policy into the future.

Proposal:

The Graduate School recommends and requests that the current GRE waiver be waived for an additional period of 3 years for Master's and Specialist students beginning in the Spring 2023 application cycle. This will give FSU the ability to track the academic performance over a longer period, including studying completion/graduation rates. **We also recommend that the GRE waiver for Doctoral programs be continued to be managed by the Chairs of the GPC along with the Graduate School's Graduate Policy Coordinator with Academic Deans having the option of opting-out specific doctoral program plans for a period of 1 year at a time (renewable each year).**

Figure 1
Graph Depicting Fall Graduate Applications

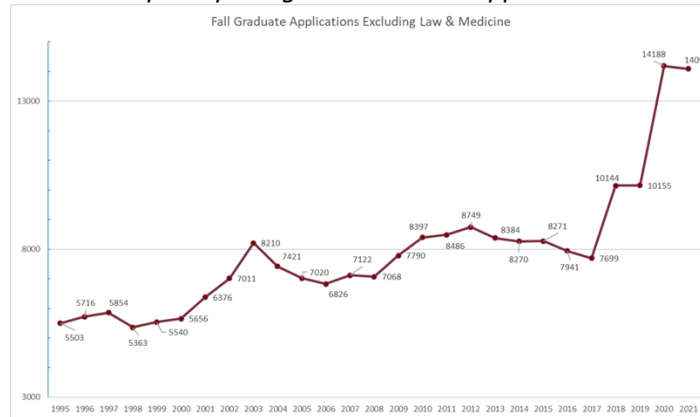


Figure 2
Graph Depicting Fall Graduate Enrollments. Note: almost all the recent growth is in Master's/Specialist

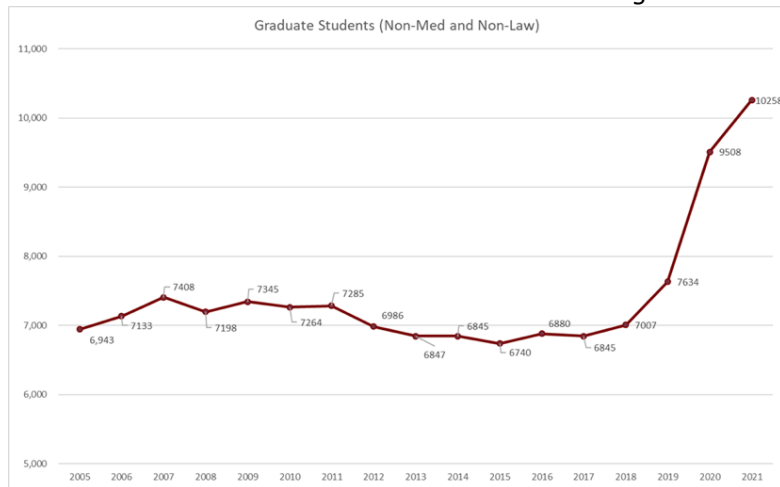


Figure 3
Graph Depicting Total GPA Averages Across all Cohorts/Program Plans for Cohorts that Began in the Fall

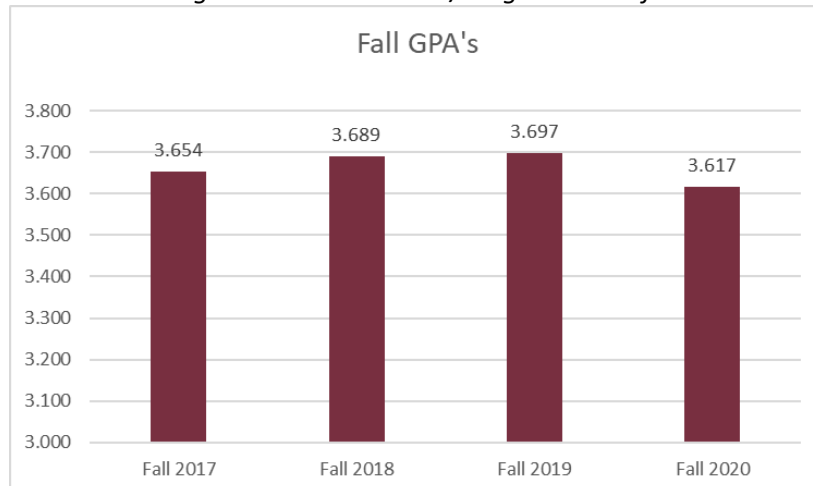


Figure 4

Graph Depicting Total GPA Averages Across all Cohorts/Program Plans for Cohorts that Began in the Previous Fall

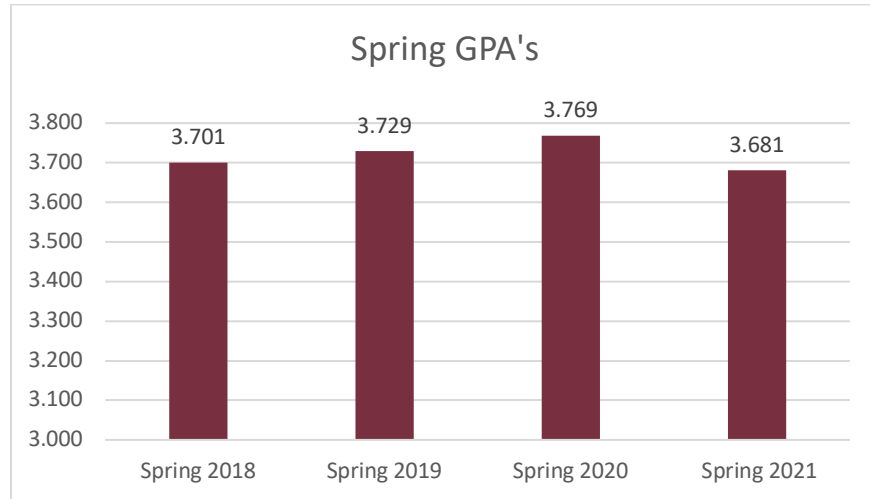


Figure 5

Graph Depicting Total GPA Averages Across all Cohorts/Program Plans for Cohorts that Began in the Previous Fall by Academic Year (Fall/Spring GPA Average)

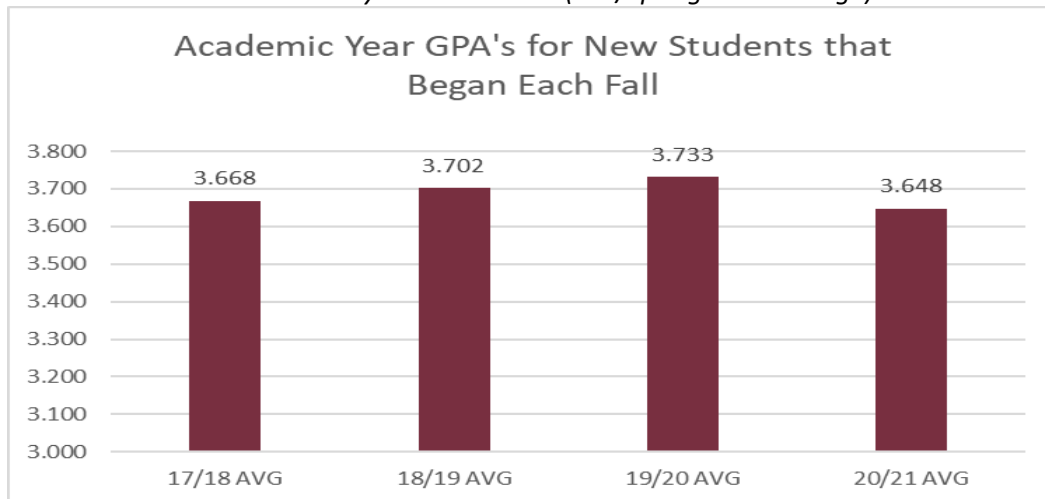


Figure 6

Graph Depicting Academic Year GPA's for all Cohorts versus Previous 3 Year Average

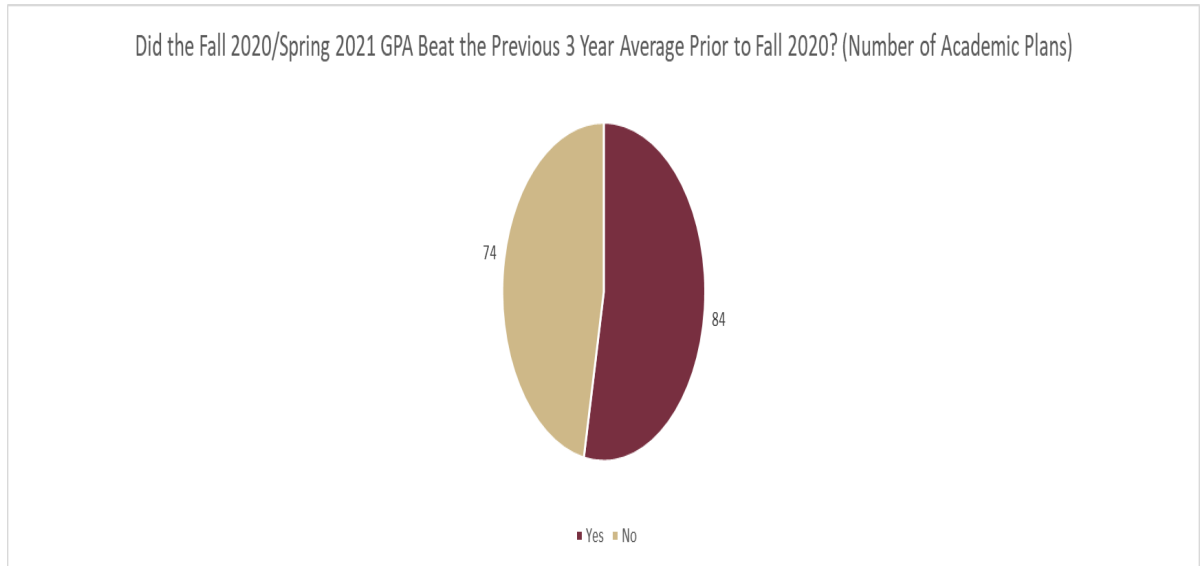


Figure 7

Program Plans: GPA Average Decreases/Increases from 2019/2020 to 2020/2021. Note: the program plans on the far left included a very small number of students and hence are vulnerable to large fluctuations due to the statistics of small numbers.

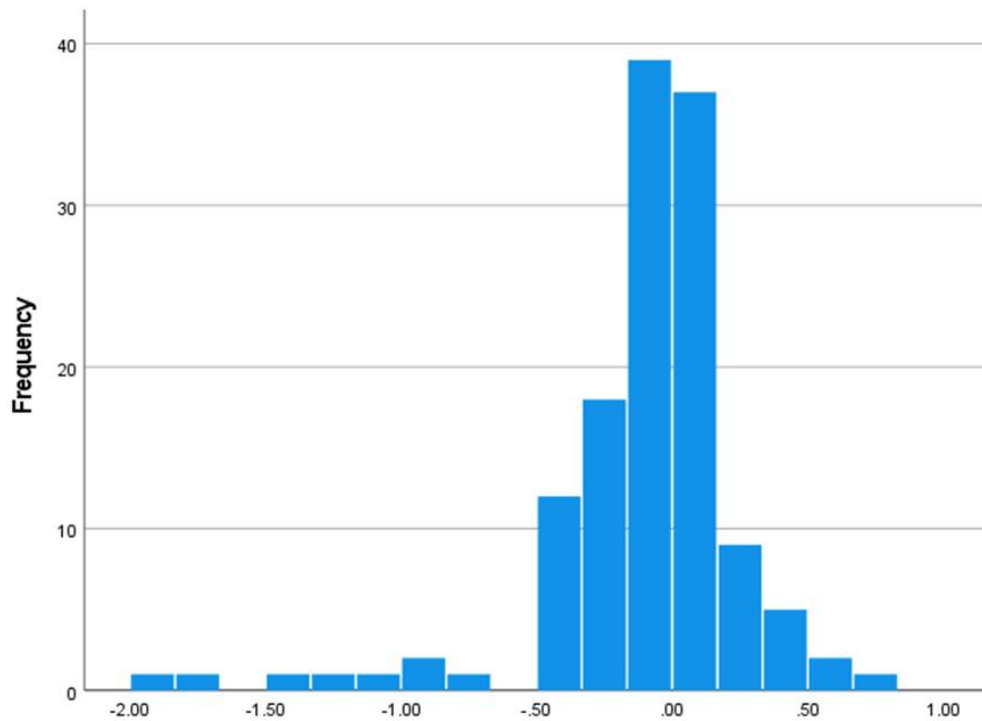


Figure 8
Headcounts of Non-White race/ethnicities from the Fall 2019 – Fall 2021 terms

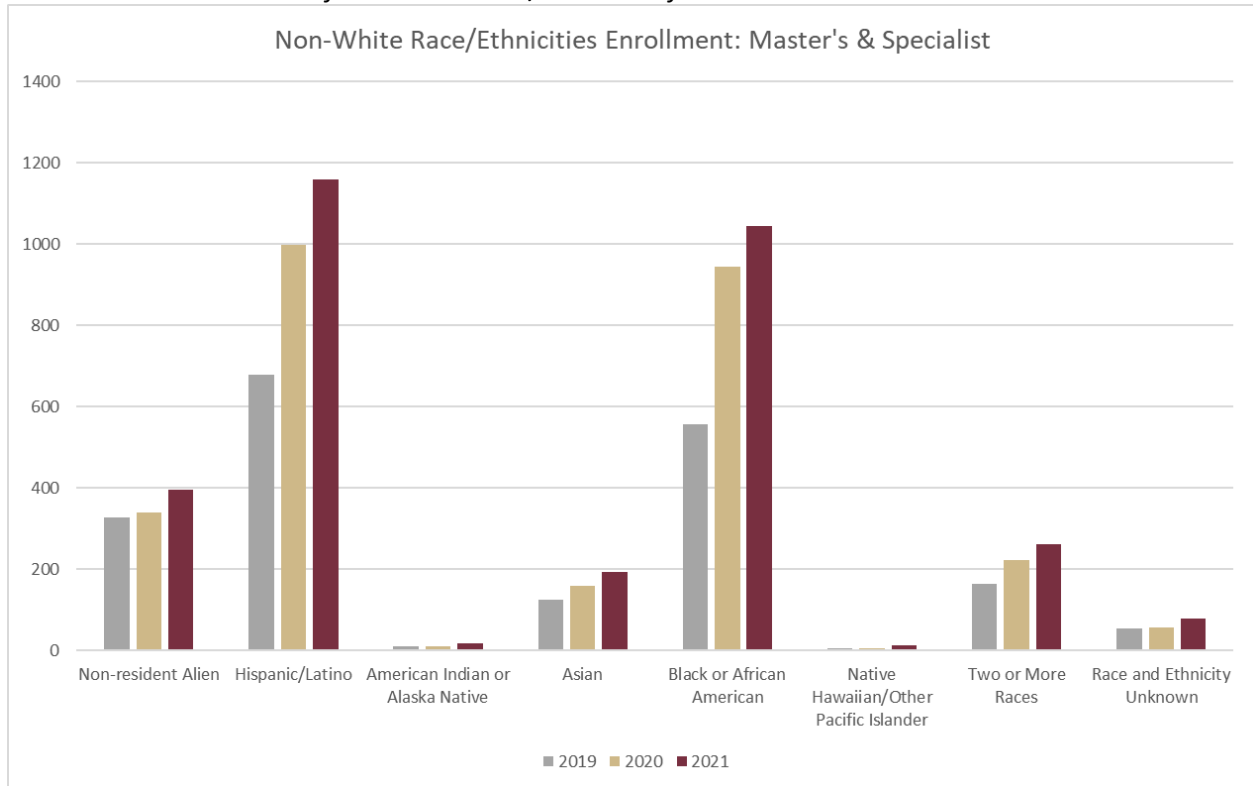


Figure 9
Average GPA Comparison for Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 of the Waiver-Receiving Cohort versus Non-Waiver Receiving Cohorts

