**Proposal for School of Teacher Education GRE Waiver**

*(Last revised 06/14/2019)*

The Curriculum and Instruction (C&I) Master’s Degree is structured to house 10 majors each with its own academic plan codes. The Academic Plan Codes for this degree are offered in a variety of formats, including BS/MS face to face, MS face to face, and MS part time online.

The School of Teacher Education requests permission to waive the GRE admissions requirement for a subset of the various plan codes associated with the Curriculum and Instruction Master’s degree; that subset includes the 5 plan codes for the BS/MS combined degree, and the 9 plan codes housed within the on-line, part-time master’s degree program.

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| Plan Codes in the C&I MS (for the BS/MS Combined Degree) Requesting the Waiver | |
| Plan Code | Major |
| ELEMEDUMS | Elementary Education |
| ENGLSHTCMS | English Education Teaching |
| SOCSCITCMS | Social Science Teaching |
| SPCLEDTCMS | Special Education Teaching |
| VIZDIZMS | Visual Disabilities |

Plan Codes in the On-line MS for the C&I Degree (for practicing teachers) Requesting the Waiver

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| Part-Time (Online) Plan Code | C&I Major |
| ECHILDPTMS | Early Childhood Education |
| ELEMEPTMS | Elementary Education |
| ENGLSHPTMS | English Education |
| FLANGPTMS | Foreign and Second Language Education |
| MATHZPTMS | Mathematics Education |
| SCIENZPTMS | Science Education |
| SOCSCIPTMS | Social Science Education |
| AUTSDPTMS | Autism Spectrum Disorders |
| Plan Code Pending | Visual Disabilities Studies |

The rational for the request to waiver the GRE includes the following:

* In terms of the on-line, part-time, online MS degree program:
  + A number of our strongest competitors do not require the GRE for applications.
  + The inclusion of the GRE as a requirement for admissions results in a less diverse application pool.
* In terms of the graduate portion of the five combined degree programs:
  + As required in State of Florida Rule, entry into initial teacher certification programs (which includes the BS/MS C&I combined degree program) requires students to pass the General Knowledge Portion of the Florida Certification Teacher Examination. The State of Florida Department of Education recognizes the General Knowledge Examination to be equivalent to the GRE.

These changes will help the faculty of the C&I degree program to achieve the following goals:

* Increase the applicant pool applying for the part-time, online MS in Curriculum and Instruction, thereby allowing the FSU play a more active role in the support and professional development of a more diverse pool of educators.
* Help eliminate unnecessary hardships for undergraduate teacher education students as they enter the graduate portion of their combined degree programs, thereby reducing possible program bottlenecks around the costs and timing of the examination and decreasing program attrition.

**Background**

***Part-time On-line MS in Curriculum & Instruction***

The part-time, online MS in curriculum and instruction has been designed to support the continuing professional development of practicing educators. This target audience accounts for the part-time nature of the degree, as full-time professionals find it difficult to pursue a graduate degree on a full time basis. Courses within this degree require educators to use the findings of research to reflect upon and hone aspects of their teaching practice to as a central component for course activities.

Within the state of Florida, of the programs that offer a MS in Curriculum and Instruction on-line (or a closely associated degree), one does not require a GRE as part of the admissions criteria for their online master’s degree programs: Florida International. An additional institution, the University of West Florida, commonly waives the GRE for applications for admission to their program. That said, two remaining institutions that do offer an online Master’s in Curriculum and Instruction, the University of Florida and Florida Atlantic University, continue to require the GRE for admission.

Out of the state of Florida, a number of our close competitors offering programs for practicing teachers and ones that teachers in Florida often select to pursue their online Master’s in Curriculum & Instruction do not require a GRE as part of their admissions. Those institutions include: Penn State University, Ohio University, and the University of Colorado/Denver. *Given the reputation and rankings of these elite institutions that already waive the GRE, we see no threat to the prestige or perceived rigor of FSU should we be permitted to do the same.*

***Combined Degree Programs***

The Florida Legislature has determined that the quality of a teacher's general knowledge is an important part of the overall level of teaching excellence in the State of Florida and has passed legislation for ensuring educator quality. This legislation has to the requirement that the successful completion of an initial teacher preparation program includes passing scores on a series of three Florida Teacher Certification Examinations (FTCE):

* General Knowledge-- assesses the skills and knowledge all candidates need to begin effective careers as professional educators.
* Subject Area knowledge – the focus of which varies with the discipline in which certification is sought, and
* Professional Knowledge and Skills-assesses teacher candidates' competencies and skills related to teaching (i.e., lesson design, classroom management).

The first of these three FTCE examinations, General Knowledge, must be passed before applicants can be admitted to an initial teacher certification program at the undergraduate upper-division level. The general knowledge examination consists of four subtests: Essay, English Language Skills, Reading and Mathematics. In recent years, this examination has become much more difficult, resulting in an 30% failure rate for some subsections and resulting in a decline of the numbers of individuals entering the teaching profession. In reaction to this, on the ninth of June, 2018, the Florida Department of Education adopted a rule that states (FLDOE, 2018):

*Effective for tests administered on or after July 1, 2015, achievement of passing scores, as identified in*[*Rule 6A-4.0021(12), F.A.C.*](https://www.flrules.org/gateway/RuleNo.asp?title=CERTIFICATION&ID=6A-4.0021)*, on test sections of the GRE® revised General Test*

* *GRE Analytical Writing combined score of 4 out of 6 acceptable for GK Essay*
* *GRE Quantitative Reasoning scaled score of 147 acceptable for GK Mathematics*
* *GRE Verbal Reasoning scaled score of 151 acceptable for both GK English Language Skills and GK Reading*

The cost of taking the FCTE exams varies, with the General Knowledge examination costing $120 for the first attempt, and $150 for subsequent attempts, the Professional knowledge costing $150 for the first attempt and $170 for subsequent attempts, and the Subject Areas examinations costing $200 for the first attempt and $220 for subsequent attempts. In total, the Florida DOE requirements involve $480 in testing if teacher candidates can successfully pass their examinations on the first attempt. Taking the GRE currently costs $160.

Within FSU, a closely related program, the 5-year combined Master’s Degree in Art Education does not require a GRE for admissions to the master’s portion of the program. State and nationwide, there are few programs that feature the combined degree program structure for teacher preparation. Two of the national programs, University of Massachusetts Lowell and the University of Connecticut, automatically waive the GRE requirements for students applying to the master’s portion of the combined degree program.

**Analysis**

***Part-time On-line MS in Curriculum & Instruction***

The requirement of the GRE may be a factor in the relatively homogenous demographics of the students in this degree program. As an example, only 4 of the current 32 students in this program are students of color (only 6% of our current student population). When one considers the diverse demographics of Florida’s schools, and the difference that having an effective teacher who shares her/his students’ cultural background can have on the academic success of K-12 students(Gershenson, Holt, & Papageorge, 2016), our failure to attract more teachers of color is particularly egregious.

***Combined Degree Programs***

Four of the five combined degree programs requesting permission to waive the GRE as a requirement for admissions are new programs, and their first cohorts of students have not yet attempted the GRE. Given that, no data are available that can shed light on our request. However, one of these programs, the combined degree in Special Education, has been existence for years, so the examination of data related to their program may be helpful.

As shown below, there has been a precipitous decline of the % of students in this program who failed to meet the C&I target scores for the GRE:

Year Total % of total student cohort

2015 9 45%

2016 9 45%

2017 5 25%

2018 1 14%

Not surprisingly, this decline corresponds with the timing of the increase of rigor for the General Knowledge FCTE examination, a decline that suggests that this examination does effectively serve as a proxy for the GRE. We suggest that we can anticipate the same effect for the other combined degree programs. Given the costs already associated with the three FCTE examinations (total of $480 if students are successful the first time they sit for the exam), we urge the committee to allow us to avoid the costs and effort associated with sitting for the GRE, particularly at a time when students are already engaged in the more cognitive demanding period in their programs of study.

**Proposed Criteria**

The GRE requirement may be waived for applicants to one of the 5 plan codes for the BS/MS combined degree, or one of the 9 plan codes housed within the on-line, part-time master’s degree program if the applicant meets at least ONE of the following criteria:

* Three years of professional experience as a practicing educator or equivalent field provided that the candidate can provide evidence of Effective or Highly Effective teacher evaluations, OR
* Successful completion of 6 graduate credit hours from the C&I program with a graduate GPA of 3.50 or higher, OR
* Passing score on the General Knowledge Test of the Florida Certification Teacher Exam or an equivalent state certification examination.

Applicants must provide evidence to satisfy the criteria being applied. Approval of a GRE waiver does not guarantee admission. Prospective students must still apply and meet all other admissions requirements.

**Criteria Rationale**

* Three years of professional experience as a practicing educator or equivalent field provided that the candidate can provide evidence of Effective or Highly Effective teacher evaluation. *In waiving the GRE in lieu of additional years of experience with evidence that speaks to the quality of applicants’ work in the teaching role, we can admit applicants are likely to be successful in a graduate program designed to support them in further developing their teaching skills and knowledge.*
* Successful completion of 6 graduate credit hours from the C&I program with a graduate GPA of 3.50 or higher. *By requiring a higher GPA than is required by FSU for graduate coursework, we can admit applicants who have already demonstrated a high level of success in graduate school and are likely to continue their success in a full graduate program.*
* Passing score on the General Knowledge Test of the Florida Certification Teacher Exam or an equivalent state certification examination. *By requiring passing score on the General Knowledge Test of the Florida Certification Teacher Exam higher, we can admit applicants who have already demonstrated a success in passing an examination that the State of Florida recognizes to serve as a proxy for the GRE.*

## References

## FLDOE. (2018). Rule 6A-4.0021, Florid Teacher Certification Examinations. Last downloaded, 8/21/18, from: <https://www.flrules.org/gateway/ruleno.asp?id=6A-4.002>

## Gershenson, S. Holt, S., & Papageorge, N. (2016). Who believes in me? The effect of Student-teacher demographic match on teacher expectations. *Economics of Education Review*, *52*, 209-224.

## LaGrone, K. (2018). Florida teachers failing and frustrated: Lawmaker files bill have historic failures on competency examination. Last downloaded, 8/21/18, from <https://www.wptv.com/news/local-news/investigations/fl-teachers-failing-frustrated-lawmaker-files-bill-after-historic-failures-on-competency-exam>