

November 2016

data Views

A Balanced Approach to GRE[®] Score Use

The graduate admissions process is frequently characterized by tight schedules and insufficient staffing. In order to expedite the process, some graduate schools and departments set an arbitrary cut point for GRE[®] General Test scores. Applicants whose scores fall below this cut point are given little or no consideration in the admissions process. The results presented in this report illustrate why it is inadvisable to combine GRE Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning scores or use cut scores to routinely disregard applicants whose combined Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning scores fall below a certain value. For this report, a combined cut score of 300 was used as an example since this represents the approximate sum of the average scores for the Verbal Reasoning and the Quantitative Reasoning measures of the GRE[®] General Test.

The Role of GRE Scores in the Admissions Process

The data presented here serve to underscore the importance of appropriately using GRE scores in the admissions process. GRE scores are a valuable component of the graduate application package. *Combined with other information*, they can provide admissions officers with important information about the skills and abilities of their applicants. As admissions and fellowship

decisions are being made, it is important to keep in mind that there are many factors, in addition to GRE scores, that can provide information about an applicant's potential for success in graduate school or business school.

GRE scores should never be used as the sole criterion by which applicants to graduate programs are denied admission. The GRE Board has developed guidelines for the appropriate use of GRE test scores. The guidelines are intended to facilitate the admissions process and to protect students from unfair decisions that may result from inappropriate uses of GRE scores. The *Guidelines for the Use of GRE Scores* is available at www.ets.org/gre/institutions/scores/guidelines.

The GRE General Test

The GRE General Test measures the verbal reasoning, quantitative reasoning, critical thinking and analytical writing skills required for success in graduate and business school. GRE test scores can be used by admissions and fellowship panels to supplement undergraduate records and other qualifications for graduate-level study. The scores provide common measures for comparing the qualifications of applicants from around the world and aid in the evaluation of grades and recommendations.

The test is composed of three measures: Verbal Reasoning, Quantitative Reasoning and Analytical Writing. Scores for the Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning measures are reported on a scale from 130–170, in 1-point increments,

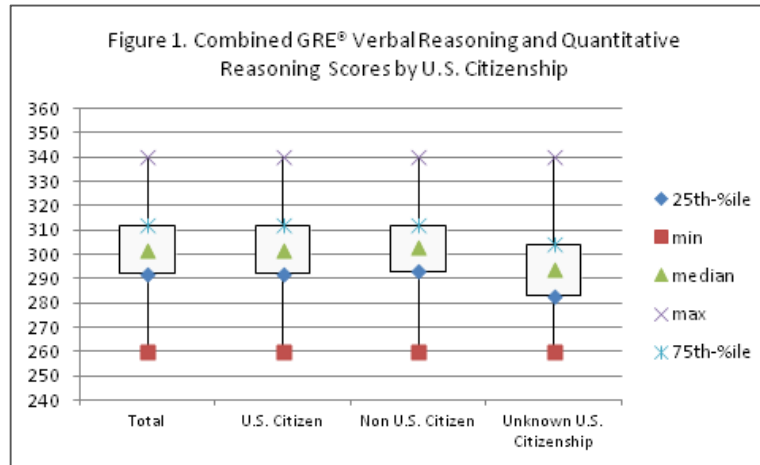
while the Analytical Writing measure is reported on a scale from 0–6, in half-point increments.

A Look at the Data

These analyses are based on test takers who took the GRE General Test between August 1, 2011, and June 30, 2012. Only those test takers that had valid scores on all three measures of the GRE General Test were included in these analyses

(N = 466,674). The results of these analyses show that the effect of adhering to a particular cut-score policy can lead to systematically discounting large numbers of students in various subgroups.

Figures 1 and 2 illustrate combined Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning performance for the total group by U.S. citizenship and by gender groups.



Forty-two percent of the total GRE test taker population fell below 300 during the aforementioned time period. Data on U.S. citizenship indicate that about equal percentages of

U.S. citizens (43%) and non-U.S. citizens (41%) fell below 300. Where gender is concerned, 49 percent of females had a combined score of less than 300, while only 34 percent of males did.

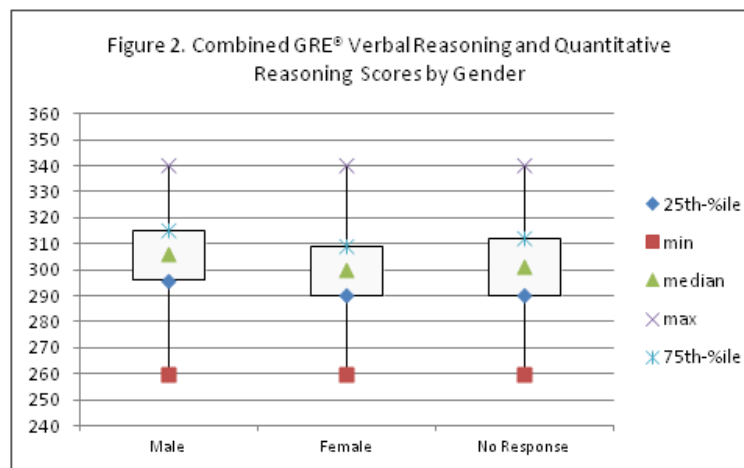
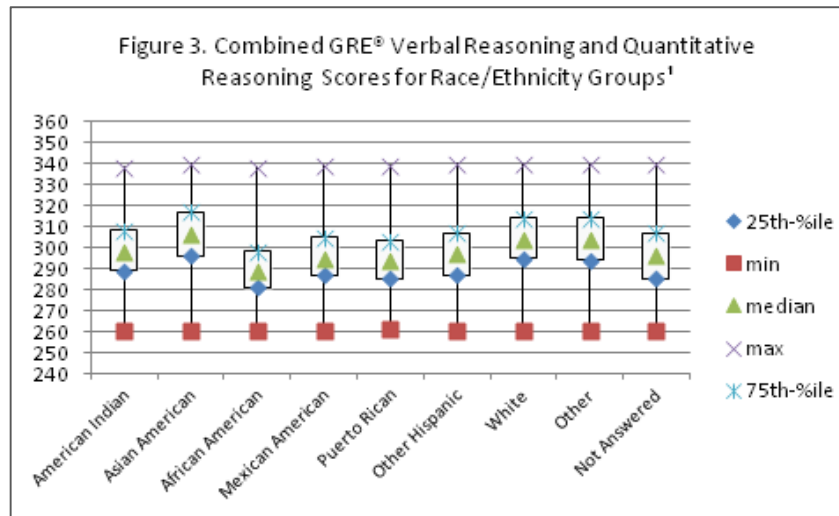


Figure 3 presents the percent of subgroup members, in particular racial/ethnic groups, who are not considered when a combined Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning cut point of 300 is used.

Fully, 78 percent of African American test takers had combined scores that fell below 300, as did 66

percent of Puerto Rican test takers. In the Mexican American subgroup, 61 percent of test takers scored below the 300 cut point, as did 54 percent of American Indian, and 58 percent of those test takers who classified themselves in the Other Hispanic group.



In only three test taker subgroups – those that describe themselves as White, Asian American, or Other – did a cut-point policy of 300 discount less than half of the population. Approximately 36 percent of White test takers, 38 percent of those test takers who classified themselves within the Other group, and 34 percent of Asian American test takers fell below the combined Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning score of 300.

These data are striking in that they clearly illustrate the fact that large numbers of prospective graduate students in a variety of subgroups are adversely affected by a cut-score policy, such as that depicted here. Many of these

test takers may have acceptable, even commendable, scores in an area considered important for success in a particular graduate program (such as verbal reasoning), but their scores in the other area (such as quantitative reasoning), which may be less related to success in that program, may be keeping them out of consideration.

The GRE Program recommends the use of a balanced approach to admissions and fellowship decisions, using GRE scores as one factor among various factors that have been shown to be indicative of an applicant’s potential for success in graduate and business school.

¹ Note: Race/Ethnicity groups are defined as follows: American Indian: American Indian or Alaskan Native; Asian American: Asian or Asian American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; African American: Black or African American; Mexican American: Mexican, Mexican American or Chicano; Puerto Rican: same; Other Hispanic: Other Hispanic, Latino or Latin American; White: White (non-Hispanic); Other: same.