

The GRE in Public Health Admissions: Barriers, Waivers, and Moving Forward

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between GRE scores and graduate

success as defined by their programs⁸

ASPPH finds no association btwn. GRE

completion (not mentioned until 2020)¹⁶

August

resulting in its removal for Fall 2019¹⁹

June

BostonU SPH first top 10 SPH program to

remove GRE for all degrees (Masters and

October

created (only CEPH accredited programs)

February

admissions decisions or predict success²²

April

Rutgers SPH adopts 1-year temp. GRE

May

Emory SPH first to extend temp. GRE

waivers through Fall 2021 applications²⁴

waiver in response to COVID-19²⁴

UMN SPH publish thesis finding GRE

score didn't substantially influence

First public health GRE waiver list

scores and final GPAs upon degree

ABSTRACT

Objective: In the wake of COVID-19, there is an urgent need for a diverse public health work force to address problems presented or exacerbated by the global pandemic. Educational programs that create our work force both train and shape the makeup of access through graduate applications. The Graduate Record Exam has a number of standing issues, with additional barriers created by the pandemic. We trace the GRE waiver movement over several years, focusing on the gradual adoption in CEPH accredited programs and the rapid expansion of temporary waivers as a response to testing access.

Methods: We documented the GRE waiver status for all CEPH accredited program concentrations / degrees on several dates between October 28th, 2019 to September 20th, 2020, including whether a GRE waiver was temporary or permanent.

Results: We found that while GRE waiver use has expanded over 825% in 11 months, the coverage within and between programs is inconsistent. Doctoral degrees and concentrations such as biostatistics lag in the adoption of waivers, temporary or permanent.

Conclusions: Going forward, we need to consider gaps in waivers during the pandemic and how this data can be used to shape our future use of the GRE.

ISSUES WITH THE GRE

Biased against women and people of color





- Large gaps in GRE scores between men, women, and URMs^{1,2,3}
- Reducing focus of GRE scores in admissions greatly increases diversity of applicants^{1,4,5}

Cost barrier



- Financial burden: test costs costs \$205 (USA) -\$231.30 (China) and \$27 per school submission
- Additional \$150 for ETS to report only their highest cumulative score

Poor predictor of academic success





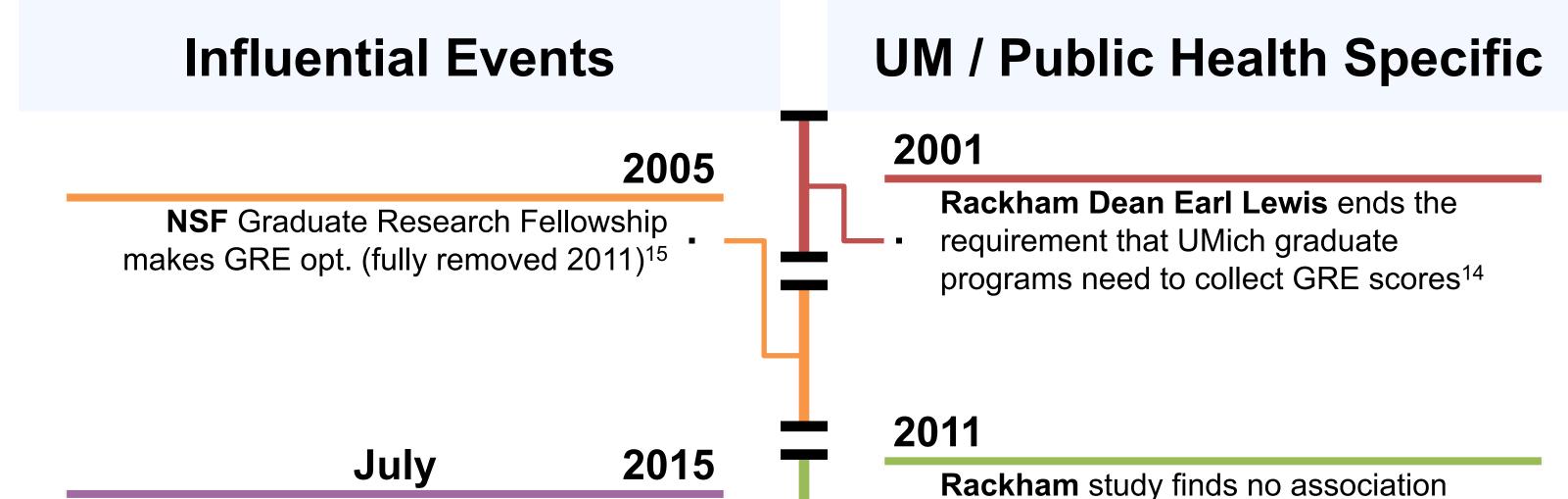
- Not a good predictor of academic success, correlating mostly with first semester grades^{6,7,8}
- Several studies observed highest-ranked students had lowest GRE scores and students withdrawing from school had higher quantitative GRE scores^{9,10}

At home GRE exacerbates digital divide



- Additional requirements to take the test, including access to a desktop or laptop and stable internet connection¹¹
- 25% American adults lack access to high-speed internet, 20% of students at a large Midwestern had difficulty accessing education technology^{12,13}

GRE WAIVER HISTORY



2012

2019

2019

2020

2020

2020

2020

waiver²⁵

Doctoral)²

2016

American Astronomical Soc. one of the first professional societies to recommend • GRE removal¹⁸

NIH F30 & F31 fellowships fully remove

January

2017 2017 **February** UM PIBS hold public town-hall on GRE,

First GRE waiver list, for physics subj. test (expand to incl. general test in 2020)

2017 November Bio/biomedical GRE waiver list created -

Fall

Article on half of molecular biol. programs dropping GRE req. (top 50)²⁰

2019+ Many subject specific GRE waiver lists created, often influencing dept. decisions. These include: Chemistry

> **Computer Science** Engineering **English** Geology / Geography Higher Education Mathematics

Neuroscience Philosophy Plant / Horticulture Psychology

2020 March GRE at Home version released in resp. to COVID-19 closing testing centers²³

Universities nationwide opt to waive the

GRE req. in response to COVID-19²⁶

Summer / Fall

Ulowa & OSU SPH programs convert temp. GRE waivers to permanent (starting a trend)²⁴

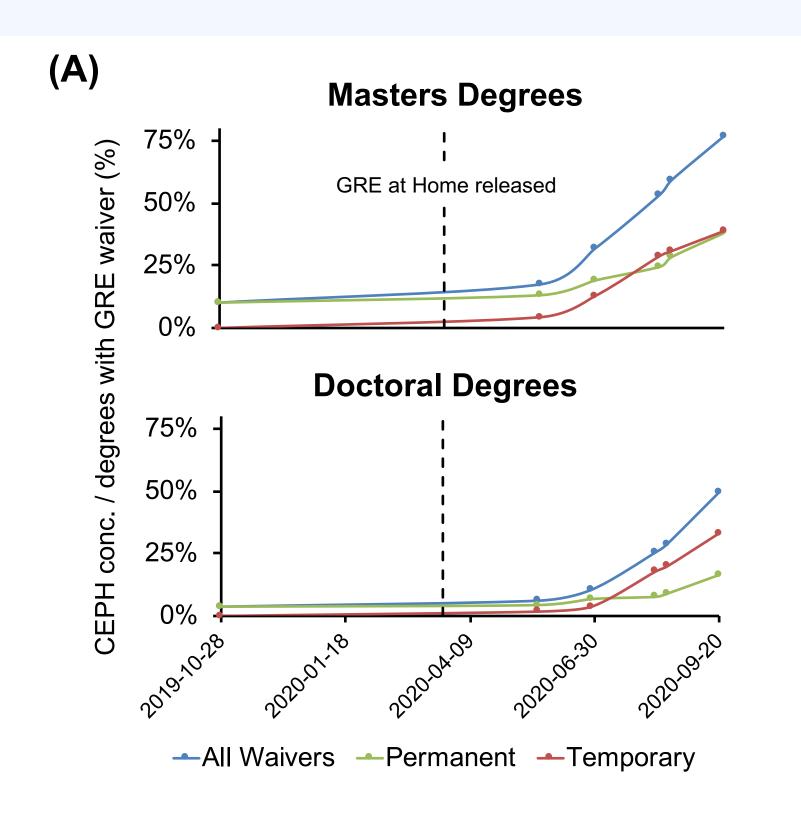
June

2020 **UMich SPH** adopts 1-year temp. GRE

PUBLIC HEALTH GRE WAIVER SNAPSHOTS

1. GRE waiver coverage expanded rapidly due to COVID-19

- 825% increase in public health degrees/concentrations with GRE waivers since last year
- 76% of CEPH accredited programs currently offer at least one GRE waiver



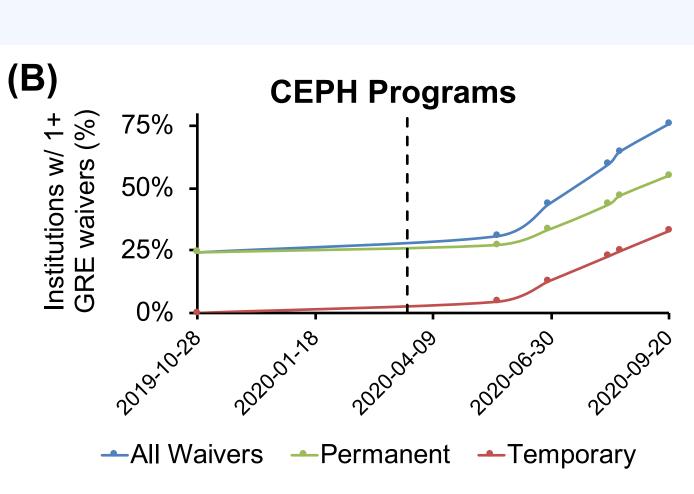


Figure 1: Snapshots from Oct. 28th, 2019 to Sept. 20th, 2020 of (A) the percentage of CEPH conc./ degrees with GRE waivers and (B) percentage of institutions with CEPH programs that have one of more GRE waivers for public health conc./degrees. Data was collected by visiting each individual CEPH accr. program website and documenting which conc./degrees had waivers.

2. GRE waiver coverage not evenly spread among degrees and concentrations

- 59% of biostatistics degree programs offer a GRE waiver, but only 23% are permanent
- 50% of doctoral degrees offer a GRE waiver and only 16% offer a permanent waiver

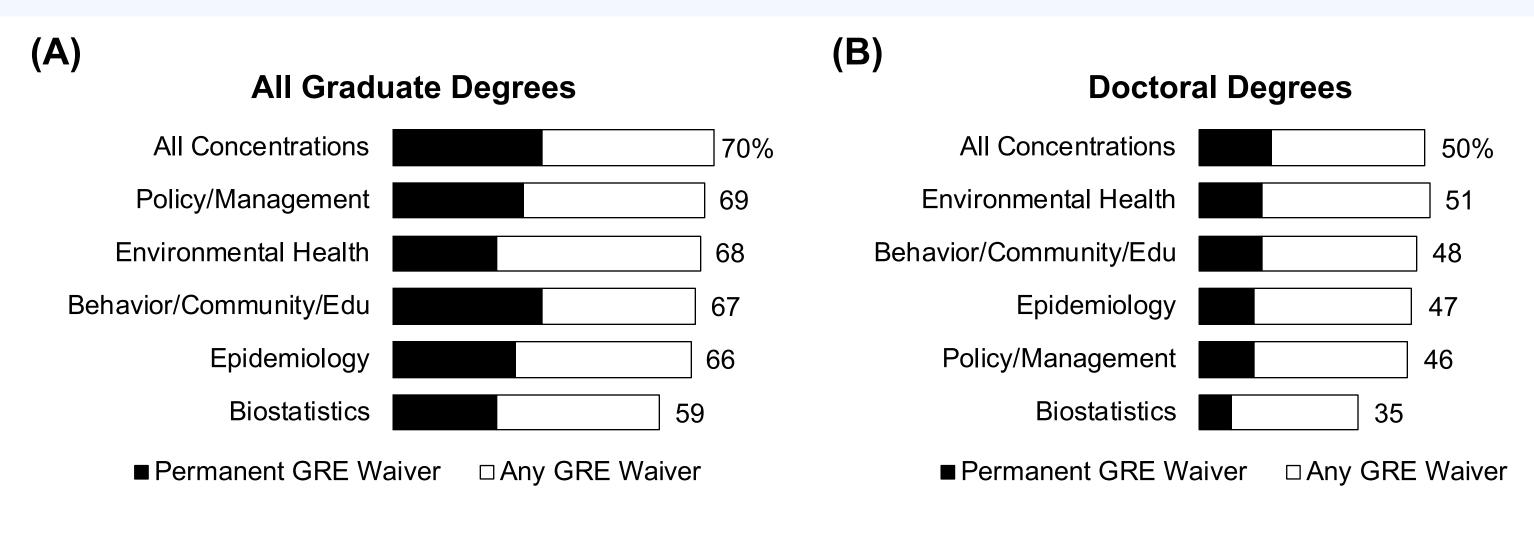


Figure 2: Percent degrees at CEPH accr. public health programs at U.S. universities that have GRE waivers as of Sept. 20th, 2020. Permanent GRE waivers are shown super imposed (black) over all GRE waivers (white). Percentage of degrees with any GRE waiver explicitly stated at the right of each bar. Not all degrees and concentrations were offered at each program.

DISCUSSION / MOVING FORWARD

- Several SPH programs are now converting their temp. waivers to permanent
- Important to implement, at the very least, temporary GRE waivers currently
- Temp. waivers are a low stakes opportunity that can be used to test relevance
- We have the opportunity to test how removing a barrier to public health education will affect the professionals we create

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