

Impact of Removing GRE Requirement on PA Program Applicant Pool

Jeremy L Nelson, DMSc, MPAS, PA-C, DFAAPA;
Theresa E Hegmann, MPAS, PA-C

University of Iowa Carver College of Medicine Department of PA Studies and Services

Introduction

Background: Prior research has suggested that eliminating standardized test requirements can increase the diversity in applicant pools. In 2023, a public Midwest PA program (University of Iowa) removed the GRE requirement for admission, based on internal analyses showing no correlation between GRE scores and student success.

Purpose: Evaluate the changes in a PA program’s applicant pool after removing the GRE requirement.

This project investigates whether this decision led to significant changes in the diversity and qualifications of the applicant pool.

Aim: Ultimate implications for the diversity of the PA workforce.

Methods

Data Source: De-identified CASPA data from application cycles 2020-21 through 2022-23 (GRE required) compared with 2023-24 and 2024-25 cycles (GRE removed).

Variables Analyzed: Demographics (race, ethnicity, gender), HRSA indicators (first generation, public assistance, economic disadvantage, non-native English speakers), geographic location (rural vs. urban), age, GRE scores, and GPAs.

Analysis: Descriptive statistics, Chi-S Square and Fisher’s exact tests for categorical variables, Mann-Whitney U tests for continuous variables.

References

Honda TJ, et al. Predictors of applicant pool racial and ethnic diversity among physician assistant education programs. BMC Med Educ. 2023;23(1):514. doi:10.1186/s12909-023-04500-0.

Luck M. Association of Preadmission Factors With Physician Assistant Student Diversity. J Physician Assist Educ. 2022;33(2):101-106. doi:10.1097/JPA.0000000000000422.

Young PA, et al. Diversity of PA cohorts during the evolution to an entry-level master’s degree. JAAPA. 2024;37(2):1-6. doi:10.1097/01.JAA.0000997688.51073.c2.

Yuen CX, Honda TJ. Predicting Physician Assistant Program Matriculation Among Diverse Applicants. Acad Med. 2019;94(8):1237-1243. doi:10.1097/ACM.0000000000002717.

U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: United States. Accessed February 13, 2025. <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045222>.

CASPA Resources for Programs | PAEA. Accessed February 23, 2025. <https://paeonline.org/resources/member-resources/caspa/caspa-resources-for-programs>.

CASPA-Matriculation-Data-18-24-Final-Copy.xlsx. Accessed February 23, 2025. <https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fpaeonline.org%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2024%2F03%2FCASPA-Matriculation-Data-18-23-Final-Copy.xlsx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>.

Schermele Z. Fewer Students Are Disclosing Race When Applying to Top Colleges. USA Today. October 21, 2024. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/education/2024/10/21/affirmative-action-ban-admissions-effect/2024/75699203007/>. Accessed January 18, 2025.

Results

	Local PA Program Applicant Pool			National PA Applicant Pool		US Population	
	2020-22 Ave. (Before GRE Required)	2023-24 Ave. (After GRE Dropped)	P-value (Chi-Square)	CASPA Applicant Trend Report: 2020-22 Averages	CASPA Applicant Trend Report: 2023 Averages (2024 not avail)	US Census Bureau “Quick Facts” 2022 Estimates	US Census Bureau “Quick Facts” 2023-24 Estimates
Total N	706	1283	---	30592	33201	---	---
Female	73.1%	78.1%	.007	76.0%	78.5%	50.4%	50.5%
Ave Age	24.1 yrs	23.9 yrs	.055 (NS, t-test)	25.38 yrs	24.96 yrs	---	---
Non-White	17.4%	23%	<.001	42.6%	46.7%	41.1%	41.6%
Black	3.31%	4.21%	.124 (NS)	7.59%	8.06%	13.6%	13.7%
Hispanic	7.46%	7.56%	.911 (NS)	14.37%	16.14%	19.1%	19.5%
Asian	14.31%	17.5%	.003	13.72%	15.01%	6.3%	6.4%
First Generation	16.24%	21.05%	<.001	26.34%	28.52%	---	---
Family Public Assistance	8.83%	12.94%	<.001	14.75%	18.21%	---	---
Non-native English	3.64%	6.59%	<.001	8.1%	9.07%	21.7%	22.0%
Economic Disadvantage	13.27%	15.52%	.03	21.32%	23.07%	---	---
Rural Upbringing**	26.91%	24.29%	.043	---	---	---	---

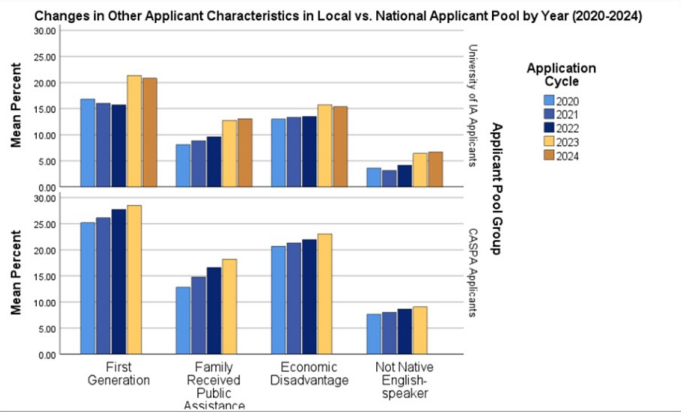
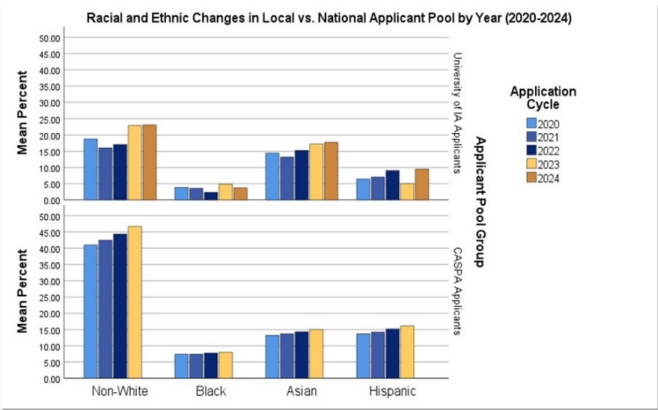
Applicant Pool Increase: Average increase of 82% after removing GRE requirement.

Diversity Increases: Statistically significant increases in non-White, non-native English speakers, first-generation college students, applicants from families receiving public assistance, and economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

Female Representation: Increased from 73% to 78%.

Academic Qualifications: Modest improvements in average science and total GPAs.

Workload Impact: Larger pool size increased admissions workload, highlighting the need for additional resources.



Discussion

Diversity Increase: Findings align with research suggesting that eliminating standardized test requirements can enhance diversity within applicant pools.

Increasing diversity at the entry point to the profession can have profound effects on the PA workforce.

Developing clinicians that represent the population of our nation is crucial.

National trends in higher education and race/ethnicity reporting changes may account for part of this change.

Academic Qualifications Maintained: Having no changes in other academic qualifications suggests GRE may not be helpful in admissions process.

Effect on Applicant Numbers: Larger pool size significantly increased the workload for the admissions process, highlighting the need for additional resources to manage the increased volume of applications vs alternative admissions strategies.

Impact: Programs must meet the unique needs of all students, accounting for diverse backgrounds. We look for additional ways to create equity in accessing PA education.

