


Increasing the Diversity of Psychology Trainees: A National Review of Graduate Program Admissions Processes

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We acknowledge and respect the lək̓ʷəŋən peoples on whose traditional territory the University of Victoria stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.



Equity Considerations in Graduate School Admissions Processes

- Desire to diversify who is in our training programs
- Examine admissions process to
 - Remove barriers
 - Promote access
- Includes all phases of the process
 - Efforts to influence who applies
 - What materials are required
 - How materials are reviewed & decisions reached

An invitation to participate was sent to DCTs at the 42 accredited programs

Materials were professionally translated into French

Link to a short online anonymous survey

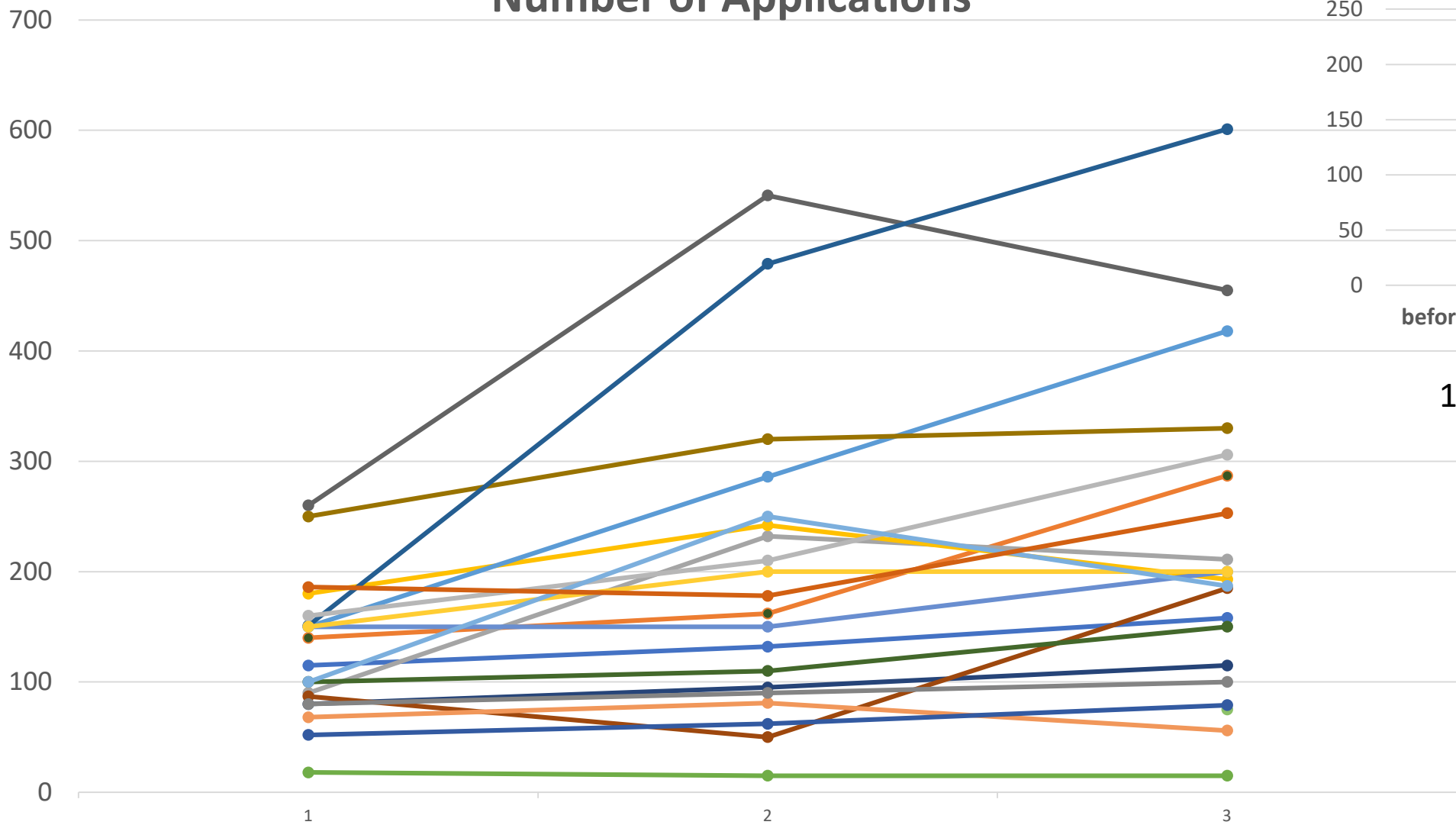
- Number of applicants
- GRE requirements
- Open-ended reflections on equity in process

Responses from 21 programs = 50%

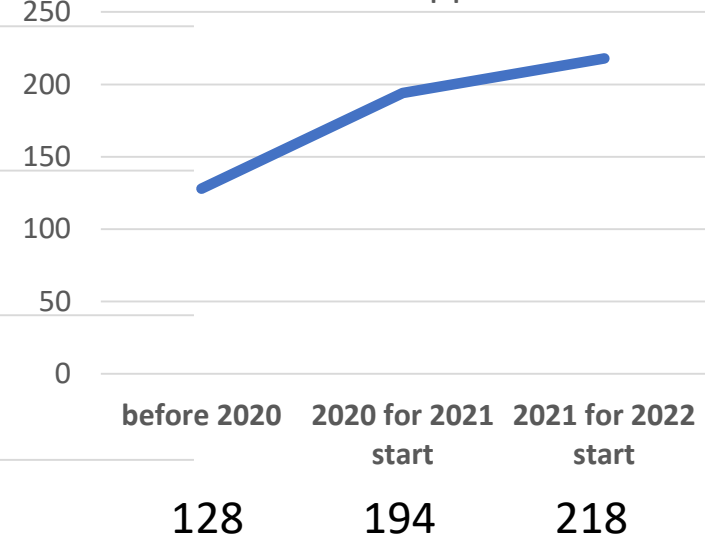
- 20 of 36 English language programs
- 1 of 6 French language programs



Number of Applications



Mean number of applications

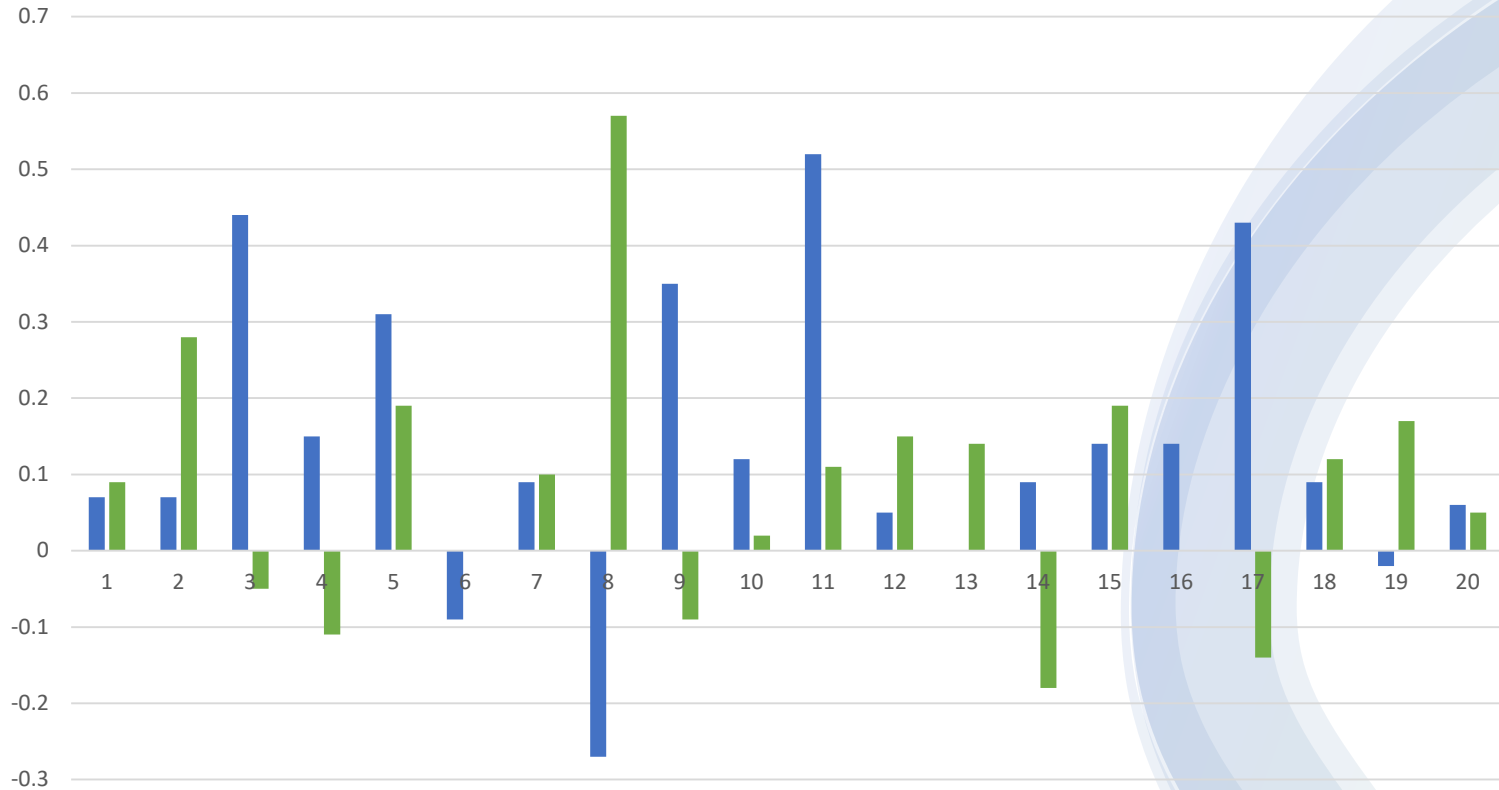


Before 2020
Range 18 – 260

2020 for Sept 2021
Range 15 – 541

2021 for Sept 2022
Range 15 – 601

Percent change in number of applications



■ Change from "received before 2020" to "received in 2020 for Sept 2021 start"

■ Change from "received in 2020 for Sept 2021 start" to "received in 2021 for Sept 2022 start"

Average % change

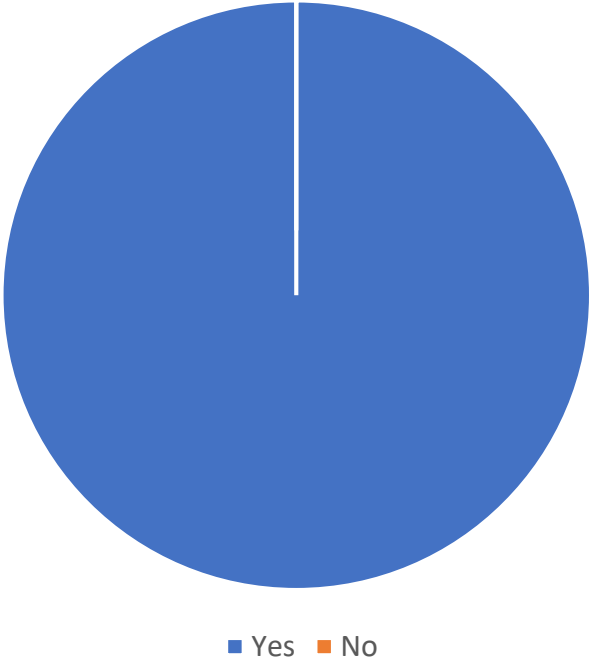
2020 start – 2021 start:

- **14%** (SD = 19%)
- Range: -27% to +52%

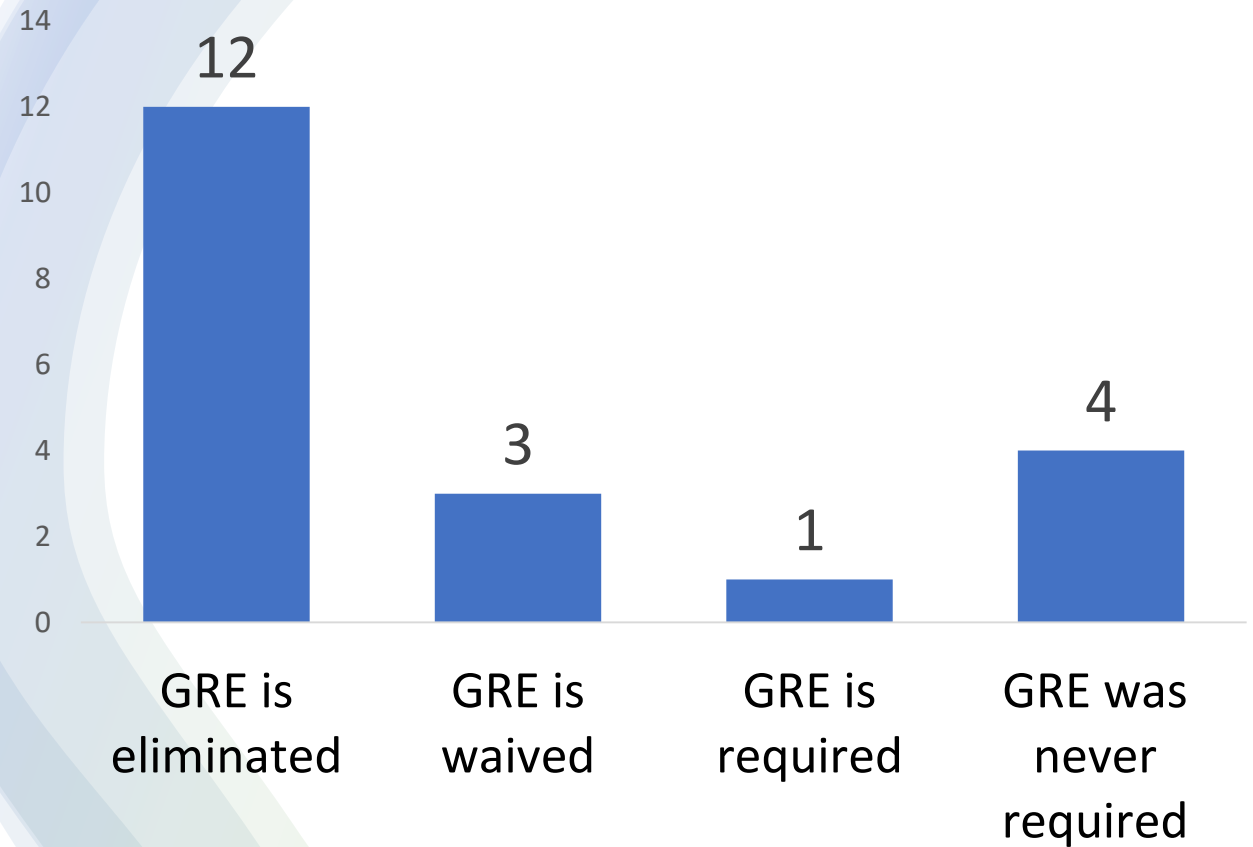
2021 start – 2022 start:

- **8%** (SD = 17%)
- Range: -18% to +57%

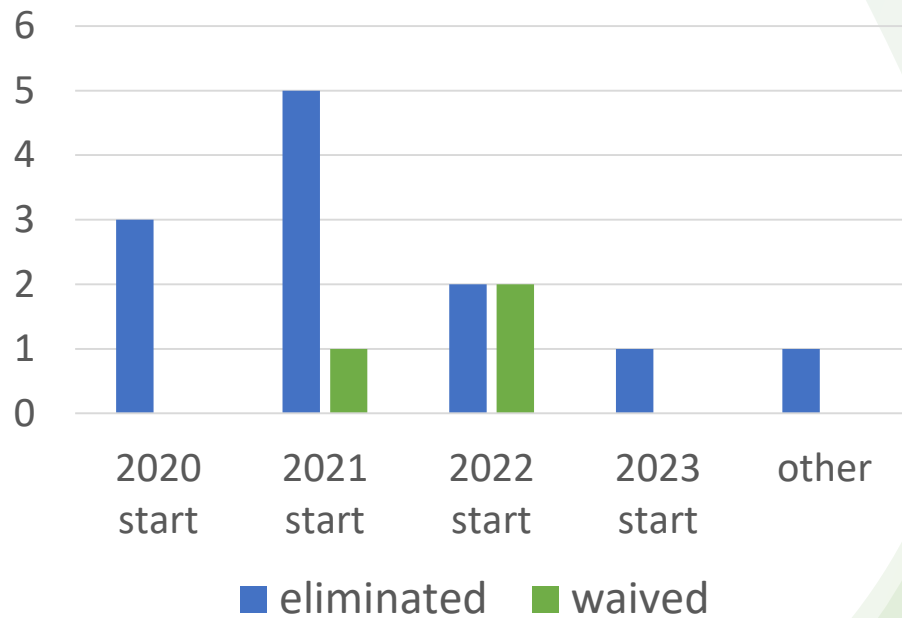
All programs reported that increasing the diversity of trainees was something their program had discussed in recent years



Status of GRE as an application requirement



When was the GRE eliminated or waived?



Status of GRE as an application requirement

Change in number of applications in the year following GRE change:

- Mean = **+126 applications** (SD = 108)
Range = 0 – 328

Compared to

- +5 applications for programs that had not made a GRE change
- +8 applications for programs that never required the GRE

Comments in favor of GRE elimination

“We decided to remove it due to evidence of **test bias (i.e., based on race and socioeconomic status)**. It is very expensive and unfairly disadvantages students who may have to work multiple jobs, have less time to study, and less funds to re-take the test to improve their score. We were also not convinced that it predicted success in a clinical psychology graduate program. This is true of the general and subject GRE.”

“Both components of the GRE were eliminated as an admissions requirement because of the costs involved, and research indicating that GRE scores tended to be **lower as a group for racialized minorities.**”

“Initial removal of GRE was based on ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and difficulty accessing testing centres. Final decision to remove GRE was based on **growing inclusivity concerns.**”

“Like many other programs, we initially removed the GRE during the pandemic. As a program, we extensively discussed whether to remove or retain it permanently. We decided to remove it permanently as we believed it served as a potential **barrier for many students given its cost and the potential burden of travel** to complete the test.”

“Our **student-led diversity committee**, in consultation with our faculty, voted to remove the GRE.”

+ 7 more similar comments

Comment reflecting ambivalence about the GRE

“The *pandemic made access to the general GRE difficult* so we made it optional. Additionally, *some feel that the GRE is biased* and thus should be omitted for EDI purposes, *though others feel the GRE is actually less biased than other more subjective metrics* (e.g., rec letters, prestige of institution, even GPA) and think the GRE is being unfairly targeted because it is the only metric for which systematic research on bias exists. In general our program is moving toward a ***more holistic admissions evaluation process*** -- whether the GRE is ultimately included is of minor importance from the DCT's perspective compared to the overall approach taken to admissions and what steps are taken to ensure the most equitable and inclusive admissions process.”

Comment in favor of keeping the GRE

“The research base is actually quite strong with respect to ***predictive validity*** in grad school on variables such as drop out, acquisition of counselling knowledge etc., despite all the rhetoric and cherry-picking of studies that did not predict well. This is why we have ***reviews and meta-analyses*** so as not to be able to rely on study that fits our pre-existing beliefs.”

Initiatives for increased equity in the admissions process

We asked for open-ended examples of ways in which programs have attempted to address equity issues

- Programs are at different stages of implementing initiatives, ranging from just starting to consider these issues, to those who have several years of experience

“We are meeting for the first time as a dedicated meeting to this [topic] later this year.”

“We have been developing a comprehensive, systematic Admissions process over the past 5 years, and in the past two all aspects of the process have been heavily scrutinized for bias and changes implemented to overcome bias.”

6 THEMES

Reducing Application Barriers

Outreach and Recruitment

Support for BIPOC students

Modified process for applicants from diversity groups

Holistic Evaluation and Emphasizing Lived Experience

Ongoing Discussion and Reflection

1. Reducing Application Barriers

Eliminating barriers to application such as

- waiving application fees
- waiving the GRE requirement
- holding interviews remotely

Increasing transparency about the application process such as

- increased clarity on requirements (e.g., content of personal statement, expected length)
- providing a video tutorial on how to apply

“In 2022, the Inclusivity Committee in the clinical program created a set of videos to describe our program and how to prepare a competitive application, with the goal of increasing access to information to applicants, especially persons from underrepresented groups”

2. Outreach & Recruitment

Programs reported active efforts to seek out and attract applications from diverse applicants such as

- outreach activities for BIPOC undergraduates
- hosting a recruitment event for potential applicants from underrepresented groups

“We started a recruitment program for BIPOC undergraduates to come visit us for a 3-day period and get a feel for the program and meet faculty and students.”

We have been holding a Diversifying Psychology recruitment event every September for the past 3 years. It includes a keynote address, information about our program, and an info session on applying to graduate school. Students are partnered up with graduate student mentors from our program.

3. Support for BIPOC students

Support was provided for current BIPOC students in the form of

- Scholarships
- Supportive networks
- Mentorship

Support removes barriers. Visible support for current diverse students may also attract more diverse applicants.

“Based on consultations with higher level administration, an Inclusive Excellence Scholarship was created in 2022, which provides support for Black and Indigenous students in our program.”

4. Modified Process for Applicants from Diversity Groups

Initiatives range from making a general effort to pay close attention to applications from applicants from underrepresented groups, to setting concrete goals and processes, such as

- specific admissions targets
- adjusted evaluation criteria (e.g., lower GPA requirement)
- being granted an automatic interview or put on the short-list if self-identify as part of a targeted group

Indigenous applicants mentioned most

“We have a special admissions category for applicants to self-identify with a marginalized group. In particular, we emphasize our desire for Indigenous applicants given the large Indigenous population in our province”

5. Holistic Evaluation and Emphasizing Lived Experiences

Evaluate applicants beyond traditional metrics, including lived experiences, community engagement, and applied experiences. Two specific examples:

- Encourage non-academic reference letters
- Request a diversity statement as part of the application process to learn about applicants holistically and communicate program's interest in diverse lived experiences

“The optional Diversity Statement provides us more information about the applicant that helps us to understand who they are holistically as we review applications.”

6. Ongoing Discussion and Reflection

Program efforts to review the process through EDI lens (e.g., interview questions for bias); consult with EDI committees and current grad students

- Use standardized interview questions
- Track identities of those who apply versus those who are admitted (collected by programs, by universities)

Recognition that the context of the program (e.g., size of program, number of applicants, higher-level university policies, financial resources) affects implementation of ideas

“This is an ongoing discussion. We are considering ways of having students identify how those from diverse backgrounds can highlight their experiences in the application, but this must be discussed with the university and grad school as they are the final authority on application materials.”

Cautions and Recommendations: Bias

- Holistic evaluation is good, but also continue think about bias that might exist *within each element* of your admissions requirements (grades, references, work history, etc.; see also Sarr et al., 2022, *Canadian Psychology*)
- Provide training for faculty in increasing awareness of biases that may creep in as applications are evaluated; Discuss privilege and differential access to opportunities
- Include multiple reviewers of applications to reduce bias

Cautions and Recommendations: Transparency

- If you are considering applicants differently, be clear about that
- Aim to help applicants trust that self-identification is desirable – that programs are increasingly valuing diverse life experiences – so that applicants feel comfortable sharing those aspects of themselves
- EDI statement: ensure this request signals the program's interest in the whole person of the applicant, rather than how the applicant will help your program diversify

Cautions and Recommendations:

Promote access

- Remove admissions barriers and biases, but also need to make the *field* as a whole more attractive to people who come from a wide range of backgrounds
- Think about equity holistically in your program (who are your faculty, what is your curriculum, community support, clients); recruiting diverse students in isolation of addressing other aspects of the training experience will not be successful

Thank you!

It is encouraging that programs are thinking about equity issues

Join our CCPPP Anti-racism group and continue to exchange ideas

Continue on your pathway – wherever you are – a step forward is a step forward!

Contact us at costigan@uvic.ca