

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

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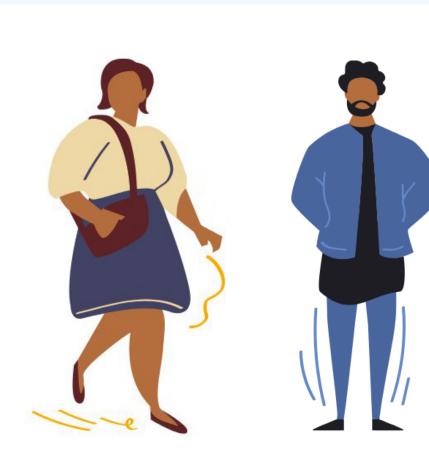
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### **ABSTRACT**

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. 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<sup>1,2,3</sup>
- Reducing focus of GRE scores in admissions greatly increases diversity of applicants<sup>1,4,5</sup>

### **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





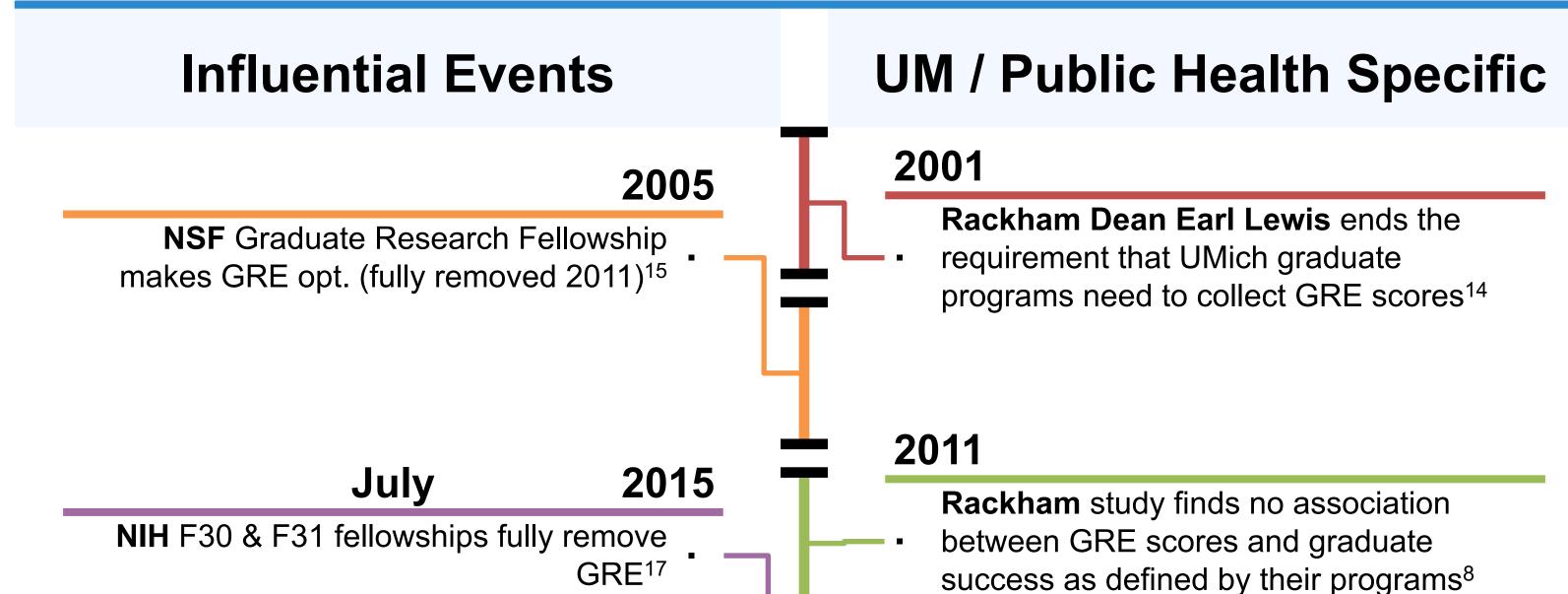
- predictor of success, correlating mostly with first semester grades<sup>6,7,8</sup>
- Several studies observed highest-ranked students had lowest GRE scores and students withdrawing from school had higher quantitative GRE scores<sup>9,10</sup>

#### At home GRE exacerbates digital divide



- Additional requirements to take the test, including access to a desktop or laptop and stable internet connection<sup>11</sup>
- One in four American adults lack access to high-speed internet, 20% of students at a large Midwestern had difficulty accessing education technology<sup>12,13</sup>

# **GRE WAIVER HISTORY**



2012 2016

**ASPPH** finds no association btwn. GRE American Astronomical Soc. one of the scores and final GPAs upon degree first professional societies to recommend • completion (not mentioned until 2020)<sup>16</sup> GRE removal<sup>18</sup>

2017

2019

2019

2020

2020

2020

Doctoral)<sup>2</sup>

August

UM PIBS hold public town-hall on GRE,

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 success<sup>22</sup>

**April** 

Rutgers SPH adopts 1-year temp. GRE

May

**Emory SPH** first to extend temp. GRE

waivers through Fall 2021 applications<sup>24</sup>

waiver in response to COVID-19<sup>24</sup>

**UMN SPH** publish thesis finding GRE

score didn't substantially influence

First public health GRE waiver list

resulting in its removal for Fall 2019<sup>19</sup>

2017 **February** 

2017

2019+

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

January

November

Bio/biomedical GRE waiver list created -

Fall Article on half of molecular biol. programs dropping GRE req. (top 50)<sup>20</sup>

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 centers<sup>23</sup>

Summer / Fall Universities nationwide opt to waive the GRE req. in response to COVID-19<sup>26</sup>

Ulowa & OSU SPH programs convert

temp. GRE waivers to permanent (starting a trend)<sup>24</sup>

June

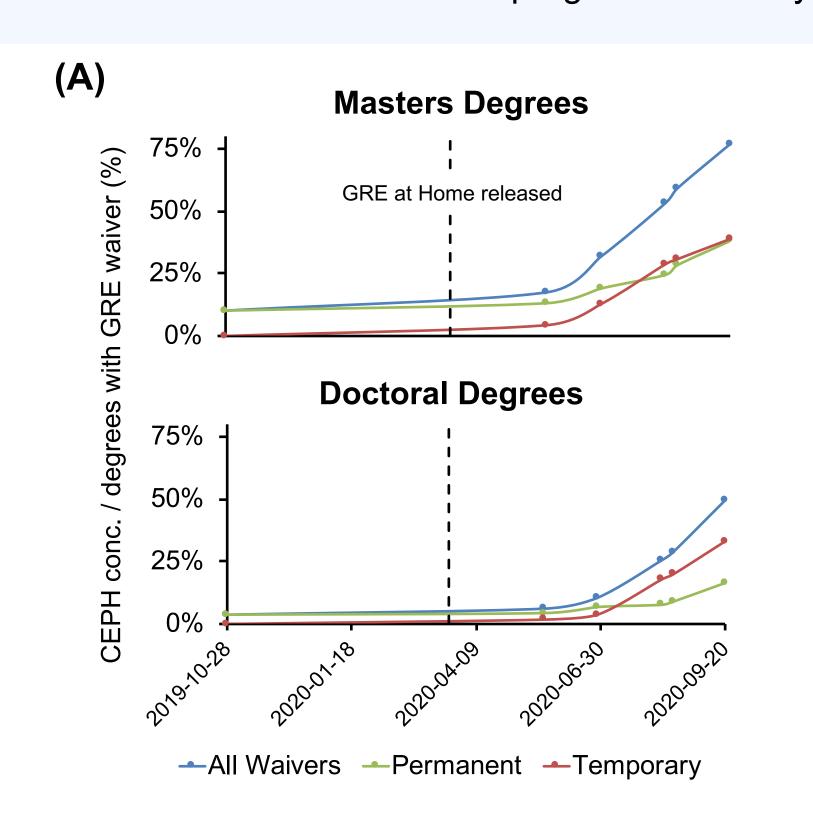
2020 August

**UMich SPH** adopts 1-year temp. GRE waiver<sup>25</sup>

# 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



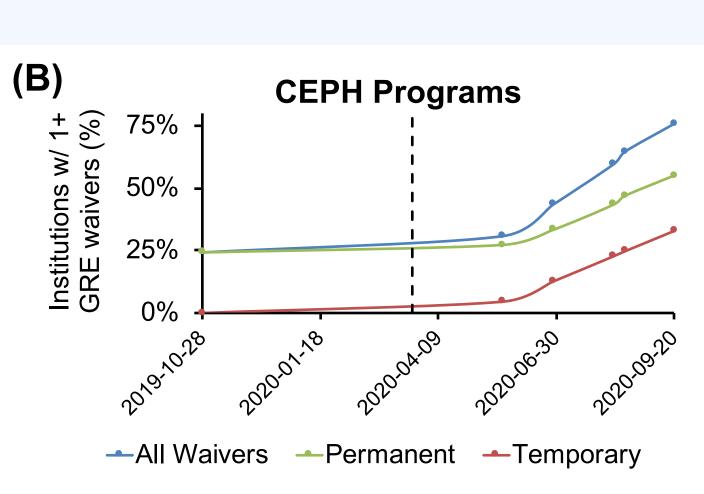


Figure 1: Snapshots from Oct. 28th, 2019 to Sept. 20th, 2020 of (A) the percentage of CEPH conc./ degrees with GRE waivers and (B) percentage of institutions with CEPH programs that have one of more GRE waivers for public health conc./degrees. Data was collected by visiting each individual CEPH accr.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

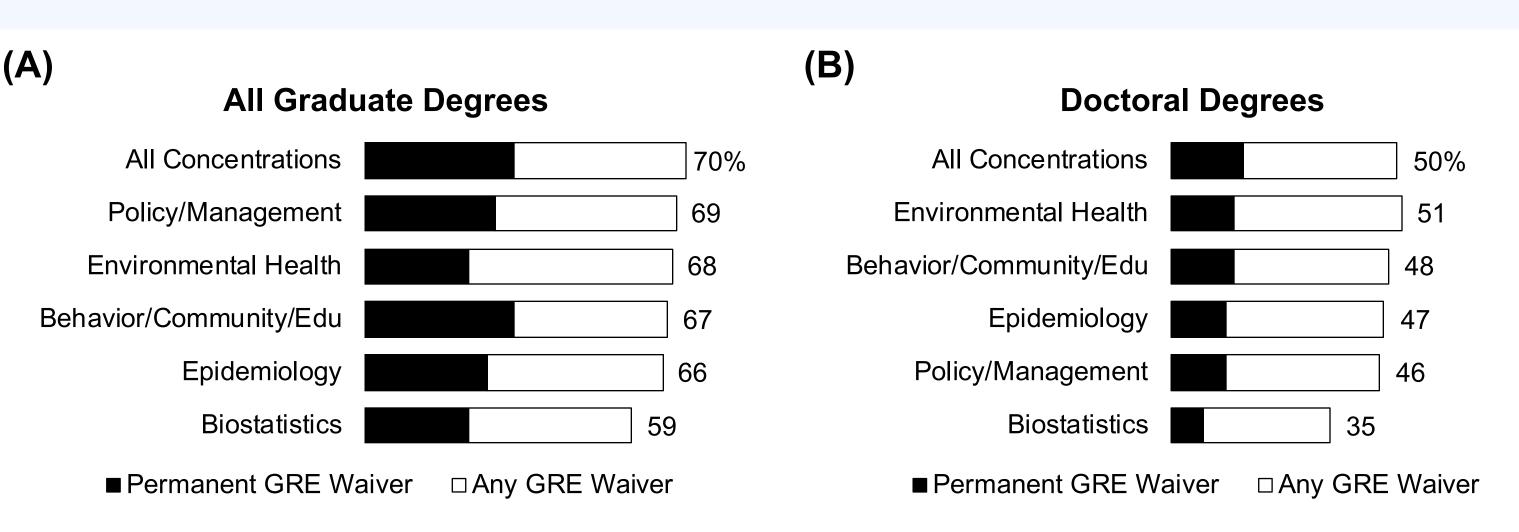


Figure 2: Percent degrees at CEPH accr. public health programs at U.S. universities that have GRE waivers as of Sept. 20th, 2020. Permanent GRE waivers are shown super imposed (black) over all GRE waivers (white). Percentage of degrees with any GRE waiver explicitly stated at the right of each bar. Not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