

GRIT Application Guide

2019



This guide is aimed at advising Admissions Committees on equitable practices when reviewing student applications, particularly students from marginalized backgrounds. Generally, the BSD and Graduate Recruitment Initiative Team ([GRIT](#)) recommend a holistic review process, in which quantitative and qualitative (non-cognitive) traits of a particular applicant are all considered in the application process. In this case, a holistic review encourages a whole-file examination of the student to place each student into the context of their environment, experiences and access to opportunities in order to determine how each student will react to the stresses of graduate school. Non-cognitive variables, such as perseverance and grit, have been shown to be better predictors of success for students than the GRE alone (Sedlacek, 2010; Sedlacek, 2004).

While the reading and reviewing of applications is a very personal, case-by-case process, GRIT wishes to provide a resource to orient faculty for reading applications from students marginalized, underrepresented, or nontraditional communities. We recognize that this guide will not be applicable in all scenarios due to the diverse personal experiences reflected in each application. However, we hope this guide will provide insight on reading applications holistically.

Application Criteria

Research

Research experience is a critical component of any graduate school application. However, disparities in research opportunities may disadvantage some students. While it certainly can be striking on an application if a student has had an extensive research experience at a top name university, this does not mean that a student who hasn't had that opportunity would be any less suited for graduate education.

GRIT suggests looking for Logic, Clarity, and Enthusiasm:

- Does this applicant clearly and concisely explain their research experiences?
- Do they present their work in a logical flow?
- Do they detail how their experiences have led them to apply to graduate school?
- Do they seem motivated to discuss their research and/or others' research?
- Do they seem enthusiastic about research in general? (e.g. awed or inspired by their interactions with science)

Academic Rigor

GRE	GRIT commends dropping the general GRE as a requirement for graduate applications. This is a huge step forward in equitable admissions practices. The GRE has been shown to be biased against URM students and women (ETS, 2014; Louderback, 2008; Hood, 1992); and studies have shown that the GRE holds no predictive power for time until graduation or numbers of publications (Micceri, 2002; Sternberg and Williams, 1997; Willingham, 1976). GRIT urges admissions committees to view optional submitted GRE scores as a helpful addition to an application, but not as a metric of comparing students
GPA	While grade point averages may be useful to committees in determining the academic strength of an applicant, they can be biased in their representation of the academic success of the applicant. These things can vary based on: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- The type of undergraduate institution- Financial or economic security (i.e., needing to work another job)- Mental health or medical situations- Physical or learning disabilities- First generation college or First-generation American status While we understand it is important to select applicants that will succeed in the

	<p>demanding academic structure of UChicago, we hope that every application will be examined in the context of the student’s background. It is also important to look at grade trajectories and trends across semesters/quarters, as aberrations in transcripts can also be informative of external pressures or unavoidable circumstances.</p>
<p>Perseverance</p>	<p>Studies have shown that perseverance and grit are better predictors of success than GPA, GRE scores, or explicit scientific knowledge (Moneta-Koehler, 2017; Miller and Stassun, 2014). These factors, while hard to define, are critical to success in graduate school where students are faced with many hurdles and stressors. GRIT suggests looking for the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job experience: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Non-scientific jobs can highlight important qualities about a candidate that have a large impact on their potential success in graduate education. These qualities include, but are not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Time management skills (such as in the service industries) – Interpersonal skills – Leadership skills and professionalism – Collaborative and Team Building skills <p>Note: students from low socioeconomic backgrounds often help their families by working jobs in addition to their classes/research. This often impacts GPA and quality of research experience.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The “rising” quality: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Look for ways that the applicant has risen to challenges; personal, academic, or professional – A way one can contextualize this is by asking “look how far they have come” and detailing the accumulation of disadvantage marginalized students experience. – Is this student on a rising trajectory? Are they committed to success no matter the odds? <p>Note: Many URM and other marginalized students (e.g., LGBTQ+, students with disabilities) face challenges throughout their life, including stereotype threat (see below), inequality in educational/economic resources, challenges related to identity, etc., that impact academic success.</p> <p>Persistence in and commitment to academic success, even in the face of insurmountable odds is a strong indicator of a motivated and dedicated student. For instance, if a student feels underqualified or undeserving of higher education or science, or are the first in their family to seek such a career (e.g., First Generation), the fact that they are even submitting an application can show a desire to succeed that rises above the odds against them.</p>
<p>Special Circumstances and Disclosures</p>	<p>Overcoming obstacles can often be a central theme in marginalized applications. It can showcase the grit and determination that will allow them to succeed in graduate school, as well as contain an explanation of a perceived problem due to lack of funding or a family death. The application may also include a disclosure of personal information, such as self-identifying as LGBTQ+ or discuss navigating a disability. It is important to remember that information disclosed in the application is meant to be private, and even in good faith, should not be shared beyond those absolutely necessary, particularly in regard to the details of disability or sexuality.</p>

Community

Understanding an applicant’s relationship with their community may bring insight on the type of community builder they will be here at UChicago. Community based and non-academic endeavors also highlight many non-cognitive traits that can demonstrate trajectories in a student’s success.

Leadership Opportunities and Community Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Does this student actively engage in their community? – Has this student shown leadership in academic, non-academic, or personal situations? – How well does this student interact as a team?
Teaching and Mentorship	<p>Has this applicant shown an interest in teaching and/or mentoring others? How have they demonstrated this?</p>
Programs/Group affiliations	<p>Involvement in non-academic groups and programs may indicate a desire to serve one’s community, which is exactly the type of student we wish to have at UChicago and in science, as we strive to create a collaborative and supportive working environment. This may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Involvement in service or volunteer type organizations – Spearheading new clubs or groups – Specifically working in groups that aim to lift up others, such as diversity focused groups, mentorship programs, or volunteer-type organizations.
Awareness and Conscientiousness	<p>In order to create a diverse, inclusive, and supportive campus community, we need to recruit students who are self-aware, thoughtful, reliable, and responsible. We want students who take their obligations to others seriously, as is evident in NSF and NIH fellowships.</p> <p>Did this student “make an impact” at their undergraduate university, in their professional community, or in their personal life? Examples of this could include Spearheading community building programs, Diversity & Inclusion initiatives, Volunteer work, and/or Mentorship programs</p>
Awards and Scholarships	<p>Non-science related awards and scholarships highlight the service a student has made to their communities at large.</p>

Important Considerations

- **Stereotype threat**
 - Stereotype threat is a situational predicament in which people are or feel themselves to be at risk of conforming to stereotypes about their social group. For example, students of color might feel pressured to succeed in the light of higher dropout rates of minority students. This pressure and/or risk can cause high levels of anxiety and lead to underperformance.
- **Implicit Bias**
 - Implicit Bias is the subconscious attribution of particular qualities to a member of a certain social group due to social conditioning. For example, despite believing that women are equally as capable as men, one could behave in a manner that is biased: from distrusting feedback from female co-workers or preferentially hiring equally qualified men.

Final Thoughts

We hope that this guide proves useful when reading and reviewing applications, particularly applications from students of marginalized and diverse backgrounds. We hope that all applications will be considered within the context of the applicants' background, in order to admit student who will thrive in Grad School.

Other Resources:

- Graduate Recruitment Initiative Team (GRIT):
<https://voices.uchicago.edu/grit/>
- A guide on holistic review:
https://cgsnet.org/ckfinder/userfiles/files/CGS_HolisticReview_final_web.pdf
<https://rackham.umich.edu/faculty-and-staff/resources-for-directors/holistic-review-of-applications/>
- Stereotype threat resource guide (contains many definitions, examples, and citations):
https://diversity.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/stereotype_threat_overview.pdf
- A collection of resources about implicit bias:
<https://equity.ucla.edu/know/implicit-bias/>
<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/implicit-bias/>