

The Graduate Application

The J. Jeffrey and Ann Marie Fox Graduate School limited direct access to add, edit, or remove program-specific prompts within GRADS. Programs were required to submit modifications by emailing GradAppProgramQuestions@psu.edu. The Fox Graduate School then reviewed requests before implementing changes within GRADS.

UPDATE: The Fox Graduate School is currently undergoing a trial phase for the "GRADS Program-Question Approval" system pathway. This system will enable programs to submit program-specific questions promptly upon approval within this framework

Application Review

The Fox Graduate School required all departments/programs to appoint, at minimum, three faculty members to admissions committees responsible for reviewing graduate applications. This step aims to ensure a fair and holistic approach to admissions.

The Fox Graduate School noted that it would continue to collect demographic data on all applicants. However, given the June 29, 2023, decision of the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS) use of race in admissions is unconstitutional. Thus, mandating that an applicant's demographic information, including race and ethnicity, be masked within applications systems (i.e., GRADS) moving forward.

UPDATE: Admissions offers for graduate programs must be made independent of funding considerations. It is strongly recommended that programs employ rubrics to meticulously document the criteria used by admissions committees in arriving at decisions regarding an applicant's acceptance. Programs are mandated to process an applicant's acceptance in GRADS without access to their demographic information, including race, among other factors. Once an applicant has received an offer of admission in GRADS, their demographic information will become accessible.

Members of the Advisory Committee for Graduate Education (ACGE) and College Council of Multicultural Leaders (CCML), who are not involved in the admissions decisions within colleges/programs, will have access to demographic information from the Fox Graduate School's application before extending admission offers. This access enables collaboration among these groups to ensure timely awarding of funding packages, aligning with the necessity to keep admissions decisions separate from funding considerations.

Furthermore, to assist our college partners, the Fox Graduate School will provide demographic information shortly after April 15th, aligning with the Council of Fox Graduate Schools Resolution, which stipulates that "Students are under no obligation to respond to offers of financial support prior to April 15th." Demographic information on all applicants will be accessible no later than 120 days before the semester starts for Fall/Spring applicants and 60 days before the semester starts for Summer applicants.

UPDATE: Below is the updated *automatic message* sent from the Fox Graduate School to applicants in offer status.

Congratulations! We are delighted to officially admit you to the Fox Graduate School at The Pennsylvania State University. Your admission is a testament not only to your past academic accomplishments but also to your potential as a dedicated scholar and professional.

Our commitment to excellence extends across all aspects of graduate education and research. At Penn State, you will encounter a stimulating, collaborative, and supportive environment that fosters personal growth and achievement.

We eagerly anticipate your arrival at Penn State and the Fox Graduate School. Further details about your admission offer will be provided in a subsequent email from your Graduate Program of Study. If you have any immediate questions about your admission, please feel free to reach out to your Graduate Program of Study.

SPECIAL NOTE: Recognizing the intricacies of graduate education, the court's ruling does not mandate making admissions offers to all applicants who meet the admissions threshold. The adoption of rubrics acts as a framework for a race-neutral decision-making process. The complexities inherent in graduate education, such as research matching and pairing, should still factor into the admissions process. In practical terms, if a program utilizing a rubric determines that 20 students meet the admissions criteria, but the program's capacity allows for only 15 admissions due to faculty and staff constraints, the program is not obligated to extend 20 offers. The Fox Graduate School discourages programs from making offers when there are limitations on providing the necessary mentoring and academic support for successful outcomes. However, if a program traditionally extends additional offers to accommodate enrollment changes or melt, it is permissible for those programs to persist with employing that strategy.

Interviews

The Fox Graduate School recognizes that several programs conduct interviews, either in-person or via Zoom, as a prelude to extending offers of admissions. It's important to note that campus interviews are not legally prohibited. However, since these interviews serve as a continued evaluation of an applicant's preparedness or suitability for a graduate program, they are considered an integral part of the admission review process.

Therefore, any program utilizing interviews as a component of an applicant's admission criteria should incorporate a standardized rubric that does not prioritize or consider race or ethnicity. While an applicant's race or ethnicity might be visually apparent during interviews, any notation or evaluation based on such distinctions or the consideration of race or ethnicity in the interview process or rubric is not permissible.

Funding Review

UPDATE: The assessment of funding for graduate programs must adhere to similar guidelines as admissions, while acknowledging that diversity considerations may be factored into funding decisions. This distinction arises from court limitations, which strictly prohibit the use of race in admissions but may allow diversity to be considered in funding reviews.

Funding review teams or committees should comprise at least three faculty members or administrators entrusted with evaluating funding to students in admissions offer status. Like the application review process, these teams should use rubrics to assess applicant's eligibility for specialized funding. It is imperative to maintain records of committee members' rubrics and notes to address any queries regarding the decision-making process for awarding funding to applicants.

SPECIAL NOTE: Programs that extend full funding packages to **ALL** accepted applicants can integrate admissions and funding offers. However, programs permitting self-paying students, thereby not providing funding to all, are required to distinguish between admissions and funding decisions.