



**Inside  
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# **Considering the Whole Student: A Look at Holistic Admissions**

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# Webcast| Considering the Whole Student: A Look at Holistic Admissions

## Hosts:

Doug Lederman, *Inside Higher Ed*

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Susan Greenberg, *Inside Higher Ed*

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## Panelists:

Michele Sandlin, American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers

Julia Michaels, Association for Undergraduate Education at Research Universities

Angel B. Pérez, National Association for College Admission Counseling

Juan Espinoza, Virginia Tech

# What Is Holistic Review?

- Supplements traditional admissions standards
- Considers noncognitive variables
- Race-neutral
- Legally sound
- Mission-, data- process-driven (AACRAO Consulting)

*“Holistic review is a university admissions strategy that assesses an applicant’s unique experiences alongside traditional measures of academic achievement such as grades and test scores. It is designed to help universities consider a broad range of factors reflecting the applicant’s academic readiness, contribution to the incoming class, and potential for success both in school and later as a professional. Holistic review, when used in combination with a variety of other mission-based practices, constitutes a ‘holistic admission’ process.”*

—American Association of Colleges of Nursing

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**Noncognitives** (Sedlacek, W. E. )

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Positive Self-Concept

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Realistic Self-Appraisal

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Understands and Knows How to Navigate the System and Racism

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Long-Range Goals

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Leadership

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Strong Support Person

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Community

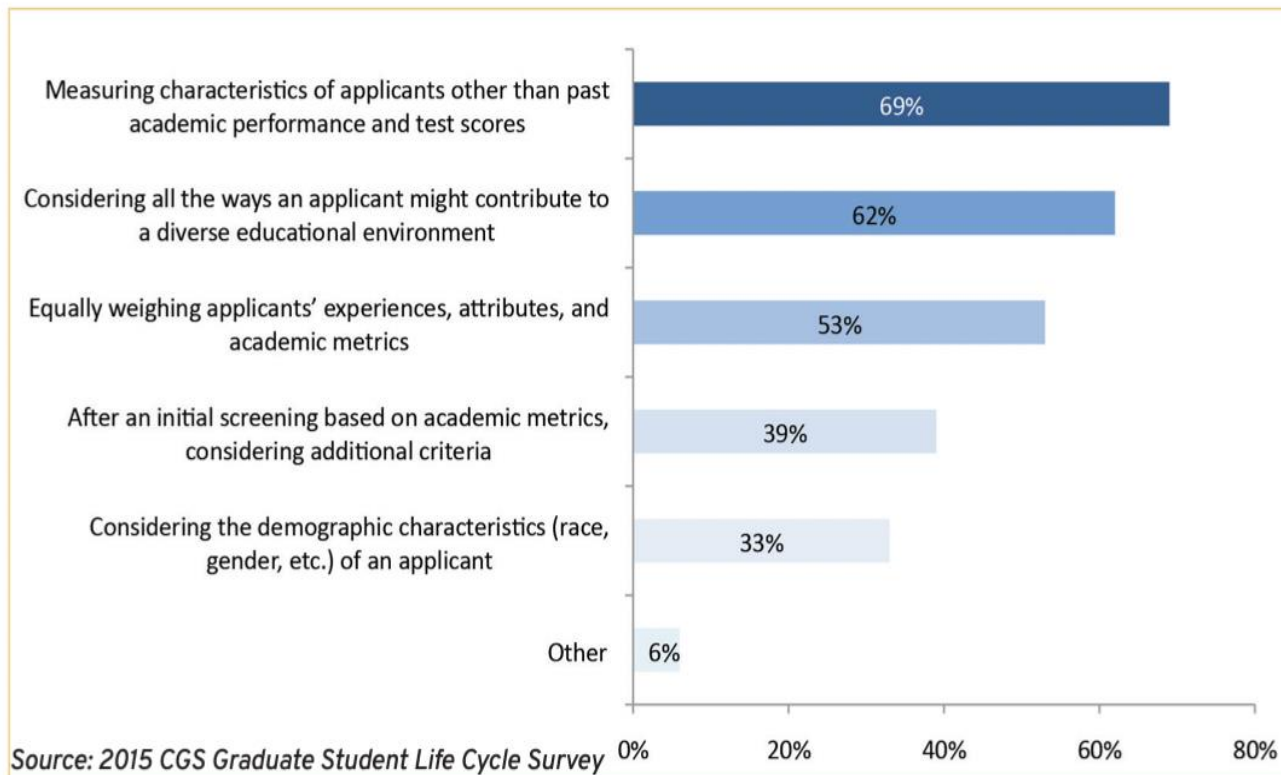
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Nontraditional Learning

# What Is Holistic Review? (Cont.)

1. Council of Graduate Schools survey (2015) found no strong consensus around key features of holistic review:

**FIGURE 2: Practices associated with the terms “holistic review” or “broad-based admissions”**



2. Recent *AERA Open* study on contextualized review (Bastedo et al, 2023) found test scores and especially high school GPA contextualized based on available resources strongly predict success in college.

***“These findings extend our knowledge of the relationship between students’ contextualized high school performance and college success, which has so far mostly been limited to studies of class rank. This is particularly important as more institutions read applications in context as part of their holistic admissions practices.”***

—Michael Bastedo

# Effects of Holistic Review

“Holistic Admissions in the Health Professions” by Urban Universities for Health (2014) found 67% of health professions schools adopted holistic admissions w/in last 10 years

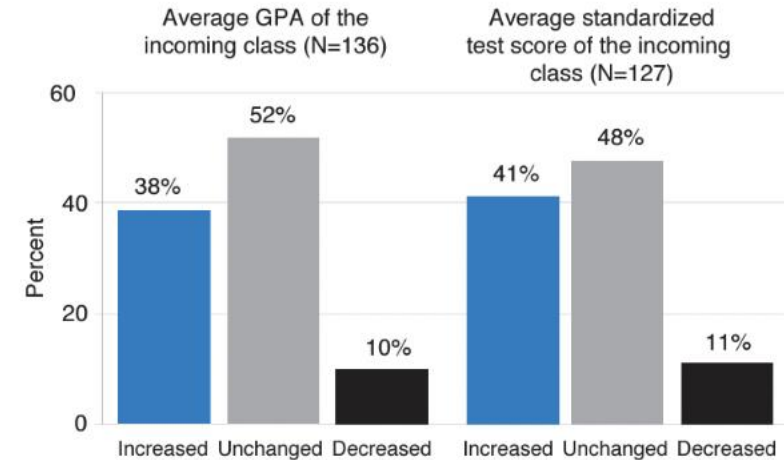
Of schools using holistic review:

- Majority reported increase in diversity (race, gender, socioeconomic status, etc.)
- 90% reported average GPA of incoming classes remained unchanged or increased
- 89% reported average standardized test scores for incoming classes remained unchanged or increased
- 96% reported graduation rates were unchanged or increased
- 91% percent said it has a positive overall impact

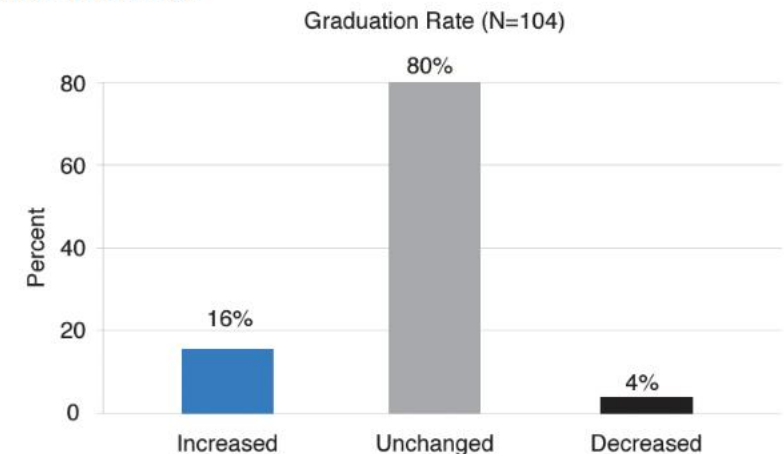
***“Colleges using holistic review were more likely to track student engagement with the community, student cooperation and teamwork, and student openness to ideas and perspectives different from their own. These measures are important contributors to individual student success as well as the teaching and learning environment at the school.” —Dr. Greer Glazer***

**FIGURE 3. HOLISTIC REVIEW: Student Success Measures**

## Incoming Class Academic Measures



## Student Retention



# The Complex Admissions Landscape

*“The admissions office really is the crucible for a lot of these changes, since it is where the rubber meets the road.*

*There’s always a set of conflicting demands, criticisms that higher education needs to become accessible for more people or that it’s too accessible for the wrong type of people. On the other hand, you have these mounting restrictions that suggest colleges have to do more with less.”*

—David Hawkins, chief education and policy officer at the National Association for College Admission Counseling

Current challenges:

- End of race-conscious admissions
- Test-optional/testing requirement uncertainty
- FAFSA redesign delays
- AI and personal statements
- Enrollment concerns
- High turnover

# Case Study: Admissions at Virginia Tech

## Admissions changes since 2018:

- Adopted a more holistic review process
- Switched to Common App
- Collected self-reported academic information
- Went test-optional
- Streamlined fee waiver application process.

## This admissions cycle:

- Discontinued early decision
- Formally eliminated legacy status
- Ended race-conscious admissions

## Results in 2023:

- Record applications
- Record incoming GPA (4.09)
- 91.9% first-timer retention (up 1 pp)
- 90.2% URM retention (up 2 pp)
- 88.3% first-gen retention (up 1 pp)

\*Reached record diversity, 40% URM/USP in 2022

*“As a land-grant institution, Virginia Tech is dedicated to serving the Commonwealth of Virginia by offering an educational environment where all students learn to collaborate with others from diverse backgrounds and are prepared to enter a global workforce and serve their communities after graduation.”*

—Provost Cyril Clarke

# Panel Discussion



**Michele Sandlin**, American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers



**Julia Michaels**, Association for Undergraduate Education at Research Universities



**Angel B. Pérez**, National Association for College Admission Counseling



**Juan Espinoza**, Virginia Tech



## Sponsor Chat



Kelly Dore, Co-  
Founder and VP,  
Science &  
Innovation at  
Acuity Insights



Doug Lederman,  
Editor and Co-  
Founder at  
Inside Higher Ed

# Audience Q & A

**Susan Greenberg**, Inside Higher Ed

**Michele Sandlin**, American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers

**Julia Michaels**, Association for Undergraduate Education at Research Universities

**Angel B. Pérez**, National Association for College Admission Counseling

**Juan Espinoza**, Virginia Tech

# Thank you!



# Helpful Links

<https://www.aacrao.org/consulting/our-services/holistic-admissions>

<https://www.insidehighered.com/admissions/article/2017/05/22/admissions-reformer-takes-stock-use-noncognitive-variables>

[https://cgsnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/CGS\\_HolisticReview\\_final\\_web.pdf](https://cgsnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/CGS_HolisticReview_final_web.pdf)

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/admissions/traditional-age/2023/09/18/link-between-contextual-admissions-and-college-success>

<https://www.insidehighered.com/news/admissions/traditional-age/2023/12/18/how-will-years-big-admissions-changes-shape-2024>

<https://www.cupahr.org/surveys/research-briefs/the-higher-ed-admissions-workforce-april-2023/>

<https://news.vt.edu/articles/2023/10/CM-fall-census-2023.html>

<https://ueru.org/boyer2030>

<https://dl.acm.org/doi/abs/10.1145/3375627.3375871>

<https://www.insidehighered.com/newsletters>

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<https://acuityinsights.com/admissions-trends-report/>

<https://acuityinsights.com/product-overview/admissions-assessments/casper/>

<https://info.acuityinsights.com/holistic-admissions-guide>