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The Landscape of Graduate Admissions: Surveying Physics Programs about Doctoral Admissions

Practices

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Sustaining or improving the best graduate programs as well as increasing the diversity of the physics community requires us to better understand the critical gatekeeping role played by graduate admissions. Admissions processes determine not only who is allowed to begin graduate study but can also influence who chooses to even consider applying. Recently, in concert with some of the activities of the APS Bridge Program, a survey was conducted of directors of graduate admissions and associated faculty in doctoral-granting departments about their admissions practices. Receiving responses from over 75% of departments that award PhDs in physics, respondents were probed about their admissions decisions with special attention on the criteria used in admissions and their relative importance, and how student representation considerations are dealt with in the admissions process (if at all). Results indicate a number of important issues for future students, faculty, and administrators to consider including the importance placed on GRE scores. Results also indicate a sizable number of departments express a latent demand for greater numbers of students from traditionally-underrepresented backgrounds (including women) but simultaneously report a dearth of such students who even apply to their doctoral programs. Implications of these and other findings will be discussed.