

AS SEEN IN GRADUATE MANAGEMENT NEWS

Demystifying the GMAT: Four Faces of Fairness

By Lawrence M. Rudner

To articulate a guiding principle at GMAC, CEO Dave Wilson often quotes Harry Bosch, the protagonist of several Michael Connelly novels, who said, "Everybody matters, or no one matters." With management education now a global field, and with 52 percent of the GMAT exams taken by non-US citizens, GMAC makes special efforts to assure that every GMAT exam is fair and appropriate for every single test taker. But what is fairness, and what steps does GMAC take to assure fairness for each test taker?

Fairness as lack of bias

The GMAT exam is designed so that those who are high in ability will score well, and those who are less able will score less well, regardless of gender, nationality, or native language. These efforts start with formal guidelines on writing culturally appropriate questions, which the authors of GMAT test questions must follow. Questions considered for the exam are subjected to formal fairness review panels. Pre-test data are analyzed to evaluate whether the probability of a correct response is the same for examinees of the same ability, regardless of cultural background. We also conduct and publish validity studies that examine the predictive power of the GMAT by gender, native language, and program type. In addition to identifying and eliminating questions that, based on statistics, function differently across culture groups, GMAC seeks to identify and eliminate language, words, phrases, and content that are either offensive to members of a culture group or makes members of one culture group, but not another, think about things that are not relevant to the test.

Fairness as equitable treatment

Fairness requires that all examinees be provided a comparable opportunity to perform on the test. Every step of the GMAT examination process, from the time a test taker arrives at the test center, has been standardized. Test takers complete the same check-in process and are given the same instructions. Their tests are administered at comparable testing stations, with everyone taking the test on 17 inch (430 mm) monitors. In addition, everyone takes the Quantitative and Verbal sections of the GMAT as a computer adaptive test. Going several steps further than most testing companies, GMAC also assures that the computer adaptive testing algorithm gives everyone the same number of each question type, not counting pre-test questions.

Fairness as equitable outcomes

GMAC occasionally discovers individuals trying to cheat on the GMAT exam, which we view as grossly unfair to all honest test takers. Even the hint of cheating tarnishes our brand and potentially the value of GMAT scores. To combat cheating, GMAC has one of the most active security programs in the testing industry. Our palm vein technology can now identify imposter test takers in real time; we have

a carefully reviewed incident monitoring system; we rigorously monitor websites for inappropriate postings of our material; and we have developed state-of-the-art security tools, which we license to some of the largest testing companies.

Fairness as equitable opportunities

Access is a major concern for the GMAT exam. We believe that to be best able to demonstrate their ability, all test takers need to take a high-stakes test such as the GMAT exam when they are ready, regardless of location or accommodation needs. GMAC carefully analyzes demand for the GMAT exam globally and opens new test centers as needed. In the past five years, we have increased the number of non-US test centers by 33 percent. Every one of our 566 centers (as of this writing) is open at least five days a week, and test takers are guaranteed to be able to find a seat in any center within a 30-day window.

GMAC receives approximately 1,700 requests for testing accommodations each year, most of which involve a request for extra time. Every one of these requests is carefully reviewed. We recognize that denying a request to someone who needs accommodations is not fair to that individual and that granting an inappropriate request is not fair to everyone else. When accommodations are warranted, we determine what accommodations will level the playing field. Too little extra time is not sufficient, and too much extra time can provide an unfair advantage. I can gladly report that we conducted a research study matching accommodated and non-accommodated test takers in 2008 and found no significant difference in the GMAT scores.

Only by investing the resources to assure that their test is valid, reliable, and fair for every test taker, can a test publisher deliver a product that is fair to each individual. GMAC has always chosen this position in the marketplace and has always invested the necessary resources to back it up.

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