

Integrated Reasoning and Admissions

New Data Illuminate Integrated Reasoning

Preliminary data from the Integrated Reasoning section of the GMAT exam show that the skills it measures are distinct from the Verbal and Quantitative skills measured in other parts of the exam and that the section is not biased toward undergraduate business majors. While further studies are being conducted, business schools can use IR scores as an additional selection point in the admissions process and to help differentiate candidates with similar GMAT scores.

Recent analysis “tells us that the IR section is testing something even more than Verbal and Quant skills—such as the ability to synthesize information from multiple sources and formats, evaluate output and identify possible solutions, consider alternative decisions, and predict outcomes,” Michelle Sparacino, associate director of the GMAT Program, said in a recent GMAC webinar.

Sparacino reported results of recent GMAC surveys to learn how students and employers view Integrated Reasoning skills. Among graduate management education students, 85 percent said that IR skills are relevant or very relevant. A similar percentage of alumni said that they use IR skills most or all of the time in the workplace.

“Drilling down further on what employers said, we know that they value the skill sets that IR can bring,” Sparacino said. Nearly all (97%) of the employers surveyed said the skills—such as the ability to integrate, organize, combine, and synthesize information—were important. GMAC also interviewed alumni of business schools about those skills, and overwhelmingly they said they spent all or most of their work time using such skills.

Addressing a common question, Sparacino said the IR is not biased toward business majors. In fact, engineering and science students tend to have slightly higher-than-average IR scores compared with all majors, including business.

The GMAC IR webinar included a panel of admissions experts from business schools. Dawna Clarke, director of admissions at the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth College, said that “the biggest value is that IR is an additional data point. It assesses information that we don't currently capture in the admissions process. I think it is going to make our process more complete. We're going to be able to make better decisions because we have that additional set of data that is so relevant to what students are going to do in the MBA curriculum, but also in their careers.”

“Integrated Reasoning gives business schools another avenue to look at candidates and a greater sense of what the candidate's abilities are going to be like in the classroom,” said Oliver Ashby, senior manager of recruitment and admissions at London Business School. “The other key thing is that Integrated Reasoning very closely matches the skill sets that we require for people to succeed in a modern business school classroom. It is a very good benchmark to test the kind of less tangible skills that have been quite difficult to test for the past, so it is a quite useful tool. The more you can do to get a rounder picture of an individual's abilities beyond the quantitative and verbal, you are going to be much more confident about making a decision about that candidate.”

Use of data from IR testing will evolve in the coming years. For now, Clarke suggested, it is “a time to gather information and continually look at the new data that is coming out. My guess is that GMAC will do a great job of educating all of us on the outcome of the validity studies and what that means for how we go about interpreting IR scores in the future.” In the meantime, GMAC urges all business schools to counsel candidates to take the IR section of the GMAT seriously, in part because IR scores are good for five years, and many students testing now may be applying to schools later. Although schools may not be considering IR scores this year, they may choose to weight it more heavily in the future.

“We're all aware that this is new. Each school is going to have to determine how it is most relevant in their admissions process,” said Bill Sandefer, senior director of admissions in the Graduate School of Management at the University of California-Davis. “But it is a score on which we can build data points.”

To date, more than 100,000 test takers have taken the Integrated Reasoning section, which launched last June. Sparacino said the average score has inched up since the launch to 4.33 on a scale of 1 to 8 and has stabilized at about the 45th percentile, slightly below the median, or 50th percentile. GMAC posts percentile tables ^[1] for the section online.

1. <http://www.gmac.com/gmat/next-generation-gmat-information-center/scoring.aspx>