Holistic Admissions in the Health Professions is the first large-scale study to examine the impact of holistic review across multiple health disciplines (nursing, medicine, dentistry, public health, and pharmacy) at universities nationwide. The study finds the majority of schools report an increase in the diversity of their incoming classes and no change to measures of academic quality, student academic performance, or student retention.

While many colleges and universities use a holistic admission process to select students, the extent to which this practice was being used across schools of health professions nationwide and the impact it’s had on academic success, diversity, and other outcomes—such as students’ engagement with the community—were largely unknown until now. This study provides new evidence to help inform university leaders in their discussions and decisions to design their admissions practices.

More than 100 universities from 45 different states participated in the study. A total of 228 individual health profession schools submitted responses to the survey.

The national survey was coordinated by Urban Universities for HEALTH – a partnership between the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU)/ Coalition of Urban Serving Universities (USU) and the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), with funding from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA).

What is Holistic Review?
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.

Key Findings

Nearly 75% of schools – across all health professions – report that they are currently using holistic review

Respondents reported that holistic review has had an overall positive impact at the school

72% of schools saw an increase in diversity in their incoming classes

Half of schools reported no change to the average GPA of their incoming classes, while 40% reported an increase.

Addressing the Need

- Growing health workforce shortages, a rapidly diversifying patient population, and changing health care system have created new challenges for preparing enough professionals with the right combination of skills, qualities and experiences to address the health needs of diverse communities.

- The admissions process is one area where university leaders may intervene to shape the future health workforce that meets the needs of communities and health care employers.

- Holistic review opens the door to higher education for diverse students who traditionally may have had limited access, but have the right qualities for success in school and in the workforce.
Diversity in the health professions improves access to health care, as well as patient satisfaction and trust.

Diversity in the classroom exposes all students to a variety of cultures and experiences in that they will have as future professionals.

Results

The findings indicate that most health profession schools surveyed have transitioned to a holistic admission process within the past 10 years. Nearly all medical and dental schools reported using the practice, however less than half of nursing schools reported the same. The majority of schools tracking student success outcomes reported that holistic admission increased the diversity of the incoming class, while standard success metrics (e.g. incoming GPA, incoming test scores, graduation rates) remained unchanged. Schools using holistic review also reported an improved teaching and learning environment, with students more engaged with the community, more cooperative, and more open to perspectives different from their own. An overwhelming number of schools reported that the impact of holistic review on their school was "positive," with the remainder rating impact as "neutral/no discernable impact."

"Our study shows that holistic review is a very promising admissions practice that not only increased access for diverse students, but also admitted students who excelled academically and have the right qualities to be successful in the workforce."

Dr. Greer Glazer, co-principal investigator and Dean, College of Nursing, University of Cincinnati

Other Measures of Student Success

Schools using holistic review report that other measures of student success improved over the past decade

Download the full report at:

http://www.urbanuniversitiesforhealth.org

Urban Universities for HEALTH (Health Equity through Alignment, Leadership, and Transformation of the Health Workforce) is a partnership effort of the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities (USU)/Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) with the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) and the National Institutes of Health’s (NIH) National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NIMHD). The project aims to improve evidence and the use of data that will help universities enhance and expand a culturally sensitive, diverse and prepared health workforce that will improve health and health equity in underserved urban communities.