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Battle for supremacy

ASSESSMENT TEST • The rivalry between GRE and GMAT has intensified with the testing organisations going for a massive overhaul. **Prasun Chaudhuri** and **Avijit Chatterjee** report



Saheli Roy, a botany graduate from Calcutta University, wants to do her postgraduation in the US. But she can't decide on the programme: a masters in botany or an MBA from an elite B-school? Roy, however, never had any doubts selecting the assessment test required to study in the US. "The Graduation Record Exam (GRE) was my obvious choice

because the scores now are accepted by almost all colleges, including most B-schools," she says.

Indeed, in recent years, a number of top US business schools have started accepting GRE scores alongside the Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT). The latter allows a student to apply to B-schools only. "GRE offers a wider option. I can apply to virtually any college irrespective of my subject — science, engineering, law or MBA. Moreover, the fee for GRE is less (\$190) than that of GMAT (\$250)," adds Roy.

Ankur Datta, a commerce graduate from Burdwan University, however, believes one should go for GMAT if he or she is aiming for a top B-school in the US or elsewhere. "After all, GMAT is specifically designed to measure the skills needed in the management arena," he says.

Roy and Datta are among the few who know which route to take. The majority, particularly MBA applicants, is in a dilemma. Until recently, GMAT virtually enjoyed a monopoly in graduate business school admissions. In 2005, a few top B-schools such as the Stanford Graduate School of Business began to accept GRE scores. Gradually, hundreds of MBA programmes — in precisely 350 B-schools — followed suit. This change in policy spawned an intense rivalry between the Educational Testing Services (ETS) — which administers GRE — and the Graduation Management Admission Council (GMAC), the administrators of GMAT. Things got more complicated when a few months ago the two decided to revamp (**see box**) their exams.

"We are introducing the GRE revised General Test in August 2011 which will have more questions featuring real-life scenarios to better reflect the kind of thinking required in today's demanding graduate and business school programmes," says David G. Payne, president, College and Graduate

Programmes at ETS. Shevanti Narayan, regional officer and educational advisor, United States-India Educational Foundation (USIEF), adds, "There is a new section, called the personal potential index, which reveals information about a student's personality traits. This may help a university take a decision on his or her admission."

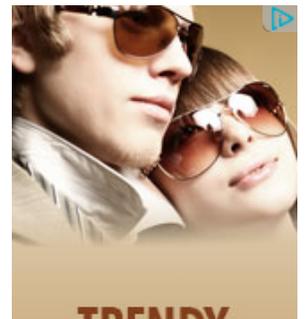
There will also be new types of questions in the verbal and quantitative reasoning sections. Apparently, the changes are being introduced to counter the notion that GRE is easier than GMAT. Payne, however, maintains that both the GRE General Test and GMAT measure similar skills. "The former has excellent predictive validity for social science programmes, including business, as demonstrated by independent research," he says.

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GMAC, however, claims a record number of applicants took the GMAT in the last two years and more and more programmes are accepting it around the world, especially in China and India. "It's designed by B-schools for B-schools. In 2009, nearly 5,000 programmes in 2,900 business schools worldwide used it," says Ashok Sarathy, vice-president, GMAT Programme, GMAC. "A recent article in *Businessweek* said that only 4 per cent of MBA applicants are actually submitting their GRE scores at eight prominent business schools that accept the test."

Even then, GMAC decided to make changes after faculties pressed for new sections. The "enhancements" will appear in June 2012. "The new integrated reasoning section will be a microcosm of today's B-school classroom. The questions will provide critical intelligence on the ability of prospective students to take sound decisions by evaluating, assimilating and extrapolating data," says Dave Wilson, president and CEO of GMAC.

What do top B-schools say? "Neither test is a perfect predictor of an individual's potential. Besides, the test scores are just a small aspect of the admission process," says Derrick Bolton, director of MBA admissions, Stanford Graduate School of Business. "We began accepting GRE to simplify the process for joint-degree applicants, that is, those who pursue an MBA along with bio-engineering, education, law, medicine or public policy."

Deirdre C. Leopold, managing director, MBA Admissions, Harvard Business School, agrees. "We accept both to make the application process accessible to candidates from a broad array of academic backgrounds," he says. Bala Balachandran, professor emeritus of Kellogg School of Management, too, believes that B-schools have begun to accept GRE scores to broaden their applicant pool. "However, I personally believe students who go through GMAT are better prepared to face the chaos and uncertainties of modern business," he adds.

So what should aspirants do? Arindam Roy, executive director, EdXCare International, says, "As most MBA programmes now accept GRE scores, it would be wise to go for it. You can not only do an MBA, but also graduate studies (MS / PhD) in your core subject." Roy believes the revised GRE is designed to match the GMAT.

But some experts differ. Says Anuradha Mukundan, senior admissions consultant, IMS Learning, "GRE is recommended for freshers from the sciences and humanities. But for those with over two years' experience, GMAT is a better option. Commerce graduates should choose based on their specific requirements."

The verdict is clear: do your research and seek the advice of experts. See what your specific needs are before writing any exam. Illustration: Uday Deb

NEW AND IMPROVED

GRE

- ★ More questions featuring real-life scenarios
- ★ Less reliance on vocabulary out of context, more emphasis on reading, no antonyms and analogies
- ★ New navigation features, including the ability to skip questions within a section and go back to them later
- ★ New answer types, such as filling in a number or providing more than one response
- ★ On-screen calculator for quantitative reasoning
- ★ More emphasis on mathematical reasoning and fewer questions on knowledge of specific formulae.

GMAT

- ★ A section designed to measure one's ability to evaluate information from multiple sources
- ★ This 30-minute integrated reasoning section comes instead of one of two essays that are part of analytical writing
- ★ Examinees must analyse information, draw conclusions and discern relationships between data points

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