New research shows weight a factor in graduate school admissions

July 22 2013

Want to go to graduate school? Your weight could determine whether or not you receive an offer of admission.

The study by Bowling Green State University Ph.D. candidates Jacob Burmeister and Allison Kiefner; Dr. Dara Musher-Eizenman, a professor of developmental psychology; and Dr. Robert Carels, an associate professor of clinical psychology, appeared in the May edition of the journal Obesity.

"Weight Bias in Graduate School Admissions" found that applicants with a high body mass index (BMI) were less likely to be offered admission after an in-person interview.

The researchers followed 97 applicants who had applied to psychology graduate programs at more than 950 universities in the United States. Letters of recommendation were coded for positive and negative statements as well as overall quality.

"One of the things we suspected was the quality of their letters of recommendation written by their undergrad mentors would be associated with the applicants' body weight, but it really wasn't," said Burmeister. "It may be that letter writers come to know students well and body weight no longer played a factor."

The students told researchers about their application experiences, including whether they had an interview in person or on the phone, and
whether or not they received an offer of admission.

"When we looked at that we could see a clear relation between their weight and offers of admission for those applicants who had had an in-person interview," Burmeister said. "The success rate for people who had had no interview or a phone interview was pretty much equal, but when in-person interviews were involved, there was quite a bit of difference, even when applicants started out on equal footing with their grades, test scores and letters of recommendation."

The results also suggested the weight bias was stronger for female applicants.

Burmeister said the research team was not surprised. "We know that these kinds of biases are pretty common and even somewhat acceptable compared to other biases, and there's not much legally forbidding it."

He said additional research is necessary into other fields besides psychology, and those results could show an even stronger bias against applicants with a high BMI.

"We might expect psychology faculty to be more aware of these types of biases. Thus, the level of bias found in this study could be a conservative estimate of the level of bias in the graduate admissions process in other fields."

Provided by Bowling Green State University

Citation: New research shows weight a factor in graduate school admissions (2013, July 22) retrieved 1 November 2023 from https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-07-weight-factor-school-admissions.html