

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA
(<http://www.evsc.virginia.edu>)

IMPORTANT INFORMATION FOR PROSPECTIVE GRADUATE APPLICANTS

Thank you for expressing an interest in graduate study in Environmental Sciences at UVa. The Graduate Admissions Committee has prepared the following Frequently Asked Questions document to help explain the process to you. Please spend a few moments to review this critical information.

What graduate degrees are offered? Ph. D. (Doctor of Philosophy), M.S. (Master of Science) and M.A. (Master of Arts), all in Environmental Sciences. The majority of our graduate students are enrolled in the M.S. and Ph.D. programs and are engaged in fundamental research.

What is the nature of the research conducted in the Environmental Sciences graduate program? We are primarily a science department that emphasizes the earth sciences (physical sciences and chemistry) and ecology, and the interactions between these various disciplines. Our faculty do research at a wide variety of temporal and spatial scales. The core disciplines are atmospheric sciences, ecology, geosciences, and hydrology.

How does the M.A. program differ from the M.S.? The M.A. program is a one-year degree that emphasizes course work over basic science research. It is intended for students who do not anticipate a career in science but who wish to gain a background in the Environmental Sciences primarily through course work. M.A. students are enrolled in the same classes as M.S. and Ph.D. students.

Does the Environmental Sciences Department provide training in environmental policy, environmental planning, or sustainability? Although we have faculty with interests in these areas, the focus of our program is the science that informs these applications.

What application materials are needed? An application form, GRE scores, an unofficial transcript of your entire collegiate record (official transcript only required after admission), and at least two letters of recommendation. Foreign applicants must also submit results of a recent TOEFL examination.

Application: Your statement of interest is critical. We wish to know, as specifically as possible, what your research interests are and those faculty with whom you would like to work. It's OK to not have a specific research plan, but your interests are very important in helping us properly route your application to the appropriate faculty members.

GRE Scores: We only use the verbal and quantitative portions of the exam.

Letters of Recommendation: Letters from faculty members who know you well are more useful than letters from employers. Statements from letter writers about your aptitude to do graduate

level course work and research are particularly helpful.

TOEFL: If you are a foreign applicant whose first language is not English or do not have a degree from an institution in which English was the primary language of instruction, you must submit results of a recent TOEFL examination. The minimum internet-based (iBT) TOEFL score requirement is 90 (including sectional minimums of 22 in speaking, 22 in writing, 23 in reading and 23 in listening). The minimum paper-based TOEFL score requirement is 600 or an IELTS score of at least 7.0 in each section. The date of your reported test must fall within 2 years of the application deadline.

What GRE scores are required for admission? There is no minimum GRE required for admission. The mean GRE scores of Environmental Sciences students accepted last year was 317 (157 Math, 160 Verbal). As these are mean values, there can be quite a lot of variation among students.

What grades are required? The Graduate School requires a “B” average grade over the last two years of your degree program. The mean score of our graduate students is between A- and B+.

Do I need a Bachelor’s Degree in Environmental Sciences or a related field to be considered for admission? The short answer is no. Students with a wide variety of undergraduate training have been successful in our program. However, it may be necessary to do some background course work in math or sciences. Each case is evaluated on an individual basis.

What is the single most important strategy for having my application carefully evaluated? It is critical that you directly contact those faculty members whose research is of interest to you. Our admissions process is largely driven by the student/adviser interaction. It is usually easiest to contact the faculty members by email to ask them about their work, to outline your interests, and to find out if they are accepting any new students. The departmental web page is a very good resource for information about the research conducted by our faculty.

When are applications due? To be considered for all possible forms of financial aid, applications are due on January 15. We will accept and review later applications, but it is in your best interests to apply by January 15.

Do all students begin in the fall semester or do you allow spring admission? The very large majority of our students begin in the fall semester. While we do allow some students to start in the spring, they typically are admitted without financial aid for that semester.

When are admissions decisions made? We begin making acceptance and rejection decisions in late January/early February, but this is a rolling process that can extend through March depending on the circumstances. Formal acceptance is sent by the Graduate School along with information about financial aid.

What is the deadline to notify UVa of my decision? Most universities have reached an

agreement that no one can force a student to make a decision before April 15, and we are party to that agreement. As soon as you have made a decision, however, we encourage you to let us know as soon as possible.

Does admission come with a financial aid guarantee? Admission to our M.S and Ph.D. programs comes with financial aid. See <http://gsas.virginia.edu/funding>. Incoming graduate student funding is typically a combination of Graduate Teaching Assistantships (GTAs) and Graduate Research Assistantships (GRAs) – see below. The GRA support comes from individual faculty members' research grants and almost always is provided by the faculty member who will be your advisor. Because of the limited amount of GRA funding available and the graduate funding commitment that accompanies accepting a new graduate student, faculty generally accept only students who have contacted them, have compatible research interests and have an academic and/or employment record that shows strong promise for success as a graduate student researcher.

Admission to our M.A. program does not include financial aid. M.A. students are responsible for covering their own tuition, health insurance and living expenses.

What is the typical package for financial aid? The Department has a variety of means for supporting graduate students, including fellowships (see below). Many first-year students are supported 50% by a teaching assistantship (GTA) and 50% by a research assistantship (GRA). The teaching assistantship comes from the Department and typically involves teaching one lab section a week. The research assistantship typically comes from the advisor's research grant with duties determined by the advisor. Support includes stipend, tuition, and health insurance.

How can I be considered for fellowships? All students who apply by January 15 are considered for fellowship support provided by the University.

What is the current stipend? Current graduate stipends (excepting some special fellowships) average about \$18,000 for the 9-month academic year. Most advisors provide additional funds to support summer research.

Whom do I contact with any questions that are not addressed here? The admissions chair is Patricia Wiberg (pw3c@virginia.edu). She will be able to either answer your question or direct you to the right person. Most everything you need to know can also be found on the departmental website: <http://www.evsc.virginia.edu>.