Admissions FAQs

- What math courses should I take to prepare for admission to the UW Math Graduate Program?
- If I don't have an undergraduate degree in mathematics, can I be admitted to the UW Math Graduate Program?
- Is it OK to submit a recommendation from someone who is not a math instructor?
- Does the UW Math Department admit students for terminal Master's degrees?
- What degrees are offered by the UW Math Department?
- What mathematical fields can I study at the UW Math Department?
- How big is a typical entering class?
- I've done graduate work at another university. Can I get transfer credits or be exempted from some courses or exams?
- Does the UW Math Graduate Program have a printed handbook or brochure?
- If I apply to the Ph.D. program but don't get in, can I be considered for the Master's program instead?
- Does the UW Math Department have an industrial mathematics graduate program?
- Does the UW Math Department have a mathematics education graduate program?
- Does the UW Math Department have an applied mathematics graduate program?
- What are the differences between the Math and Applied Math Departments?
- Does the UW Math Department accept visiting grad students?
- Does the UW Math Department accept Graduate Non-Matriculated (GNM) students?
- Does the UW Math Department accept part-time graduate students?
- Does the UW Math Department accept international applicants?
- Can international applicants be offered teaching assistantships?
- I'm an American living abroad, or an immigrant living permanently in the US. Do I count as an international applicant?
- I'd like to work with Professor X. Can I be admitted as that professor's student?
- What tests are required for admission?
- When is the deadline for applying?
- When will I hear if I'm admitted and/or offered financial support?
- I was told I'm on the waiting list for admission and/or financial support. What are my chances and when will I hear more?
- What if I want to apply for admission with no support?
- I'm an international applicant. Must I take the TOEFL?
- I'm an international applicant. How should I fill out the Statement of Financial Ability?
- What are the minimum GPA and test scores required for admission?
- I can't take the GREs in time for the deadline. Do I still have a chance of being admitted?
- I can't afford the application fee. Can it be waived?
- What percentage of entering graduate students are financially supported by the Math Department?
- If I choose to enroll without support, might I be offered support later?
- Are there fellowships or other forms of support for new students besides teaching assistantships?
What math courses should I take to prepare for admission to the UW Math Graduate Program?

The absolute minimum requirement is at least 5 full-year courses (30 semester hours or 45 quarter hours) in mathematics beyond precalculus, including familiarity with one-variable and multivariable advanced calculus, differential equations, and linear algebra. In addition, in order to be realistically prepared for graduate school, you should have had at least a full year of rigorous advanced coursework in real analysis, abstract algebra, or both. Ph.D. applicants must have solid coursework in both of these subjects. Topology and complex analysis courses are highly recommended for Ph.D. applicants, but not required. For more information, see Admission Requirements.

If I don't have an undergraduate degree in mathematics, can I be admitted to the UW Math Graduate Program?

The University of Washington requires a bachelor's degree from an accredited US institution (or an equivalent degree from a foreign institution) for admission to any graduate program. In principle, your degree does not have to be in mathematics. But, in order to have any possibility of success in this graduate program, you need to have completed coursework equivalent to an undergraduate math degree. To have a realistic chance of admission to our program, you should have excellent GRE scores, and at least one very strong recommendation from an instructor in a rigorous advanced math course. For more information, see Admission Requirements.

Is it OK to submit a recommendation from someone who is not a math instructor?

If for some reason you absolutely cannot get three recommendations from people who have been the instructors of mathematics courses you have taken, then go ahead and have someone else (such as a professor in another course or a job supervisor) send us a recommendation. But you should be aware that such recommendations carry far less weight in the admissions process, because people who have not taught you in mathematics courses are not in a position to evaluate how well you might do in a math graduate program. The most useful recommendations are those from faculty who have been your instructors in advanced undergraduate or beginning graduate math courses, and who know you personally rather well.

Does the UW Math Department admit students for terminal Master's degrees?
Yes, but only rarely. See the Master’s degree section of the Graduate Study Web site. Note that we admit very few Master’s students: almost all of our graduate students are in the Ph.D. program.

What degrees are offered by the UW Math Department?

See the Ph.D. and the Master’s pages of the graduate program web site.

What mathematical fields can I study at the UW Math Department?

One of the great strengths of the UW Math Department is that we offer graduate study in nearly every major subfield of abstract mathematics, and many applied fields as well. See Faculty Research Interests for details.

How big is a typical entering class?

Class sizes fluctuate from year to year, but on the average we have approximately 15 new Ph.D. students and 1 or 2 new Master’s students each year.

I’ve done graduate work at another university. Can I get transfer credits or be exempted from some courses or exams?

For the Ph.D. degree, the simple answer is no. But we welcome students who have already taken graduate courses or who already have Master’s degrees; and if your preparation is sufficiently strong, you can usually work out a program here that will get you to your degree in less time than typical entering students without any graduate experience. The first thing to do is to take one or more preliminary exams in September of your first year (see also What is the best way to prepare for prelims?). If you pass them, you will be exempted from the corresponding core course requirements. The next thing to do is to choose a thesis advisor and get started on your research as soon as you have passed prelims, rather than waiting until the second or third year. Don’t worry about the overall course requirements for the degree—everyone who stays here long enough to write a Ph.D. dissertation manages easily to take more than enough courses to fulfill the degree requirements.

For Master’s degrees, you may petition the Graduate School to recognize up to 6 transfer credits for 500-level courses if the Graduate Program Coordinator approves. Transfer credits are not granted for 400-level courses.

Does the UW Math Graduate Program have a printed handbook or brochure?

No. The official source of information about the UW Math Graduate Program is the graduate program section of the website.

If I apply to the Ph.D. program but don't get in, can I be considered for the Master's program instead?

Yes, students who apply to the Ph.D. program are automatically considered for the Master’s program if they appear to be talented but not sufficiently prepared to begin the Ph.D. program right away. So if your ultimate goal is to receive a Ph.D., then go ahead and apply to the Ph.D. program. If you think you might fall in this category, it wouldn’t be a bad idea to include a remark in your personal statement explaining that you’d be happy to be considered for Master’s admission as well.
Does the UW Math Department have an industrial mathematics graduate program?

No, but many of our faculty members and graduate students work closely with industry.

Does the UW Math Department have a mathematics education graduate program?

No. Many members of the Math Department are involved in studying mathematics education issues, and graduate students can get involved in these studies; but we do not offer a math education degree. The College of Education does offer such a degree.

Does the UW Math Department have an applied mathematics graduate program?

No, but many faculty members and grad students in the Math Department are actively involved in applied and interdisciplinary research. In addition, there is a separate Applied Mathematics Department at the University of Washington, which has its own graduate admissions process.

What are the differences between the Math and Applied Math Departments?

**Math** and **Applied Math** are two separate departments, with their own faculties, graduate programs, and admissions processes. However, the Applied Math department is not the only place in the university where applied mathematics is done. In fact, there are as many faculty members doing applied and interdisciplinary research in the Math Department as there are in the Applied Math Department. The most important difference, perhaps, is that faculty members in the two departments are interested in a somewhat different range of subjects. A second important difference is one of motivation: Research in the Applied Math Department is a bit more oriented toward using mathematical ideas to solve problems that arise outside of mathematics, while research in the Math Department is directed more at understanding the underlying mathematical ideas, whether motivated by applications or by more theoretical considerations. If you’re interested in applicable mathematics, the best way to decide which department is right for you is to talk to both abstract and applied mathematicians about what they do, to get a sense of which of their attitudes most closely matches your own; and then see the Math Department’s Research Overview and the Applied Math Department’s Research Overview, to decide which department’s interests most closely match your own.

Does the UW Math Department accept visiting grad students?

Yes. Here is information for visiting graduate applicants.

Does the UW Math Department accept Graduate Non-Matriculated (GNM) students?

Only in very unusual circumstances. If you are interested in eventually entering the Ph.D. program, registering as a regular (not graduate) non-matriculated (NM) student is almost certainly the right choice. If you are interested in only receiving a Master’s degree here, then GNM status might be appropriate, but note that most Master’s students in our program hope to transfer to
the Ph.D. program. If you are interested in applying for GNM status, contact the graduate program coordinator at mathgpc@math.washington.edu. Include a plan for what courses you hope to take and an explanation of why GNM status, rather than NM status, is appropriate in your case.

Does the UW Math Department accept part-time graduate students?

Yes, but ... : While it is possible in principle to pursue a graduate degree part-time, you should be aware that one of the main benefits of being in a full-time graduate program is the immersion in mathematics combined with the opportunity to work together with other students on a regular basis. Attending part-time would mostly cut you off from those benefits, and could therefore put you at a significant disadvantage. Our grad courses almost all meet MWF at various times between 9:30 and 3:30, so you’d need to have a schedule that’s sufficiently flexible to allow you to be available at those times. Depending on your preparation and how many courses you can take each quarter, it would probably take you three or four years to finish a Master’s degree working part-time. It would be almost impossible to complete a Ph.D. degree if you work part-time throughout the program; but it might be feasible to spend a couple years working part-time at the beginning or near the middle of your program. To apply for part-time study, just follow the usual application procedure and check the appropriate boxes to indicate that you plan to attend part-time and that you’re applying for admission without financial support (support is available only to full-time students).

Does the UW Math Department accept students to begin in Winter or Spring quarter?

No. All of our entry-level graduate courses are full-year sequences beginning in autumn quarter, so there would be no point in beginning any other quarter. In addition, all students who are supported as teaching assistants must participate in the departmental TA training, which is held only in September.

Does the UW Math Department accept international applicants?

Yes, we welcome applications from international applicants, and every year a significant number of international students are admitted to the program, most with full financial support. However, you should be aware that there are special deadlines, special test requirements, and special application procedures for international applicants. See the page on International Applicants for more information.

Can international applicants be offered teaching assistantships?

Yes. But unless you are a native English speaker or have received a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution in the US, you must submit a satisfactory TOEFL score with your application. See "Must I take the TOEFL?"

I'm an American living abroad, or an immigrant living permanently in the US. Do I count as an international applicant?

An international applicant is anyone who is not a US citizen or a holder of a permanent resident or immigrant visa. However, if you are a native English speaker or have received a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution in the US, you may not be subject to all the same test requirements as other international students. See the Web pages on International Applicants and Required Tests.

I'd like to work with Professor X. Can I be admitted as that professor's student?
The UW Math Department does not assign students to thesis advisors when they are admitted. Instead, we assign preliminary advisors, and then after a student has passed preliminary exams (usually after one or two years in the program, but in rare cases some students pass when they first arrive), the student chooses a faculty member to be the student's thesis advisor (with the advisor's consent, of course).

What tests are required for admission?

See Required Tests.

When is the deadline for applying?

It depends on whether you apply for financial support (an assistantship or fellowship) or not. If you are applying for financial support, your application must be received by January 4. If not, in principle, we will accept applications until July 1, but we may have filled all available spots before then, so even if you don't want support, it is a good idea to submit your application by January 4.

When will I hear if I'm admitted and/or offered financial support?

We usually start making offers of admission and financial support around the beginning of March. By around the middle of March, you should have heard some response to your application: offer of admission with or without financial support, waiting list, or denied. If you haven't heard anything by March 20, send e-mail to grads@math.washington.edu or telephone (206) 543-6830 to check on your status.

I was told I'm on the waiting list for admission and/or financial support. What are my chances and when will I hear more?

Don't give up hope. Every year in recent memory, we have made offers of admission and financial support to some applicants who were initially placed on the waiting list. You might hear a final decision any time up until the final reply deadline of April 15. If at any time you have questions about your status, please feel free to send e-mail to grads@math.washington.edu or telephone (206) 543-6830.

What if I want to apply for admission with no support?

Provide evidence that you will be able to support yourself as a graduate student. This is especially important for international students because of visa issues: we need to know how you will support yourself for five years without a stipend and tuition waiver.

I'm an international applicant. Must I take the TOEFL?

If you are a native English speaker, no. If you have a bachelor's degree from a US institution, no. Otherwise, you probably need to take the TOEFL. If you want financial support via a TA appointment, you must take the TOEFL: see the UW Graduate School's Memorandum #15. See also Required Tests. If you don't want financial support (see this question), then it is good enough to have a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree from an institution in Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, or the US. Otherwise, you need to take the TOEFL: see the UW Graduate School's Memorandum #8.
I'm an international applicant. How should I fill out the Statement of Financial Ability?

If you are awarded financial support from the Math Department, your TA salary (or fellowship) plus tuition waiver should be enough, or nearly enough, to cover the financial resources required to get a visa. All students requesting a visa must fill out the financial ability form as part of the visa request. Please visit the Graduate School's website about Financial Ability to determine the funds required to attend the University of Washington.

What are the minimum GPA and test scores required for admission?

GPA: The UW Graduate School requires a minimum GPA of 3.0 (on a scale of 0.0–4.0) for your last two full years' worth of courses. This can be waived, but only if the rest of your record is exceptionally strong. The Mathematics Department prefers to see grades of 3.5 or higher, especially in advanced mathematics courses. Applicants with GPAs below 3.5 are seldom admitted, as either Ph.D. or Master's students.

GRE General Test: There is no absolute minimum for the GRE. Most of the students we admit have excellent GRE scores (75th percentile or higher).

GRE Math Subject Test: The majority of applicants admitted to our Ph.D. program score higher than the 70th percentile on the Math Subject GRE, and almost all score higher than the 55th percentile. We sometimes admit applicants with scores below the 55th percentile, but only if their records are otherwise exceptionally strong. For Master’s applicants, the subject GRE is not required; if you take the test and obtain a relatively high score (50th percentile or above, say), it will help your application; but not taking it will not hurt.

TOEFL: If you are required to take the TOEFL (see Required Tests), the minimum score is 92 on the TOEFL iBT. For financial support, we want to see scores of at least 26 on the TOEFLS component, although we occasionally make exceptions.

I can't take the GREs in time for the deadline. Do I still have a chance of being admitted?

If you do not take the required GREs (General Test for Master's admission, both General and Math Subject Tests for Ph.D. admission), there is a small chance that you might be admitted if the rest of your record is exceptionally strong. In general, your chances will be much greater if you submit the required test scores.

I can't afford the application fee. Can it be waived?

The Mathematics Department cannot waive the fee. You can request a fee waiver from the Graduate School by sending e-mail to uwgrad@u.washington.edu, but be warned that waivers are rarely granted.

What percentage of entering graduate students are financially supported by the Math Department?

Almost all. Occasionally, a Master's student or two (but almost never Ph.D. students) will be offered admission without financial support, and there are sometimes other students who have their own resources and do not request financial support. Other than that, all of our students are fully supported.
If I choose to enroll without support, might I be offered support later?

Yes. Students who enroll without support may be able to obtain support on a quarter-by-quarter basis, at least for some quarters. In addition, in the spring of each year, unsupported students are given the opportunity to apply to become fully supported.

Are there fellowships or other forms of support for new students besides teaching assistantships?

Yes. There are a few fellowships for first-year students, given as recruitment awards. In addition, most students who complete the Ph.D. program receive at least a few quarters of support from fellowships or research assistantships without teaching duties.

How much do teaching assistantships, research assistantships, and fellowships pay?

Here is the current salary scale: entering students are paid at the rate listed under "Regular (Non-Variable Rate) TA/RA/SA Salary Schedule", Teaching Assistant, Schedule #1. In later years, most students get promoted to the level of Predoctoral Teaching Associate I, and students who teach their own sections of courses are usually paid at the level of Predoctoral Teaching Associate II or higher. Students supported by research assistantships or fellowships are paid at a higher rate.

We usually don't know the exact pay scale for the coming year until after the admissions process is completed, because the pay scale is set each year by the UW Board of Regents after the state legislature decides on its salary appropriation.

How much is graduate tuition?

It depends on whether you are a Washington State resident or not. Here is the current tuition table. Mathematics graduate students are considered "Graduate Tier I".

Do teaching assistantships come with tuition waivers?

Yes. During any quarter when you are supported as a TA, RA, or on a fellowship, you will not have to pay tuition, except for several hundred dollars per quarter in fees.

Are there fees that all grad students must pay?

Yes. Each supported student must pay several hundred dollars per quarter in fees.

Do graduate students receive medical insurance?

All supported grad students receive comprehensive medical, dental, and vision coverage at no cost. Self-supporting students are responsible for their own coverage.
Does it rain all the time in Seattle?

No. In fact, Seattle’s average annual precipitation is less than those of New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and many other major cities, and Seattle summers are dry, sunny, and mild. Typical winter days are mostly cloudy, with drizzle off and on, and with occasional sunbreaks.

How expensive is Seattle to live in?

Although Seattle has become more expensive in recent years, the overall average cost of living is only a little higher than the national average, and is much lower than in many other large cities such as New York, Boston, San Diego, or Los Angeles. Here is information on housing costs.

I'd like to visit Seattle. Is there financial support or other assistance available?

We would be more than happy to have you visit us. If you contact grads@math.washington.edu well in advance of your visit, we will attempt to help you arrange meetings with faculty members and/or graduate students when you’re here, and give you information about transportation and lodging. A few admitted Ph.D. applicants will be offered reimbursement for transportation expenses to Seattle at the time they are admitted; we regret that we are unable to provide financial travel support to any other applicants.

I was admitted for this year but I'd like to postpone my entrance into the program. Can I defer my admission to a later year?

You may request a deferral of your admission by one year, but approval is not automatic. An offer of financial support cannot be deferred; however, in most cases, a student who defers admission will be offered the same financial support as the first time around.

I applied previously to the UW Math Department and I'd like to apply again. What materials do I need to resubmit?

You will need to submit a completely new application.

What is the average time to degree for UW Math Ph.D. students?

During the past fifteen years or so, it has ranged between 5.5 and 6 years.

I have a question not answered here. Whom should I contact?

Send e-mail to grads@math.washington.edu or telephone (206) 543-6830.

Department of Mathematics
University of Washington