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 PhD 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?
- 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 students to begin in Winter or Spring quarter?
- 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 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?
- How much do teaching assistantships, research assistantships, and fellowships pay?
- How much is graduate tuition?
- Do teaching assistantships come with tuition waivers?
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. PhD applicants must have solid coursework in both of these subjects. It is helpful to have some additional advanced math courses such as Algebraic Geometry, Combinatorics, Complex Analysis, Differential Geometry, Number theory, Probability, or Topology when you apply so you know more about what research area you are most interested in. 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. Your degree does NOT have to be in mathematics. People have successfully made the transition to a Math PhD from Computer Science, Physics, Statistics, Electrical Engineering, Art, and English. It does take a strong commitment. To have a realistic chance of admission to our program leading to a successful degree, you need to have completed coursework equivalent to an undergraduate math degree with good grades 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?

Yes, especially as a fourth letter of recommendation. If for some reason you 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. 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 rather well.

Does the UW Math Department admit students for terminal Master's degrees?
This year we will be admitting Masters Students only under specific circumstances while we revise our program. See the Graduate Admissions Overview page for more information.

What degrees are offered by the UW Math Department?

See the PhD 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 pure 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 15-20 new PhD students each year.

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

We welcome students who have already taken graduate courses or who already have Master's degrees. 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. Don't worry about the exact number of course requirements for the degree--everyone who stays here long enough to write a PhD dissertation manages 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?

Not any more. All of our information is available on the Math Department Graduate Program Website. We try to be environmentally friendly and minimize our paper use. In fact, UW is a very environmentally aware green campus.

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

If your ultimate goal is to receive a PhD, then go ahead and apply to the PhD program. Our Master's Program is under revision this year.

Does the UW Math Department have an industrial mathematics graduate program?
No, our focus is on pure mathematics, but some of our faculty members and graduate students work closely with government and industry. Note, at the University of Washington, we have a very well respected Department of Applied Mathematics and Department of Statistics, in addition to what we call the Math Department. Check out their websites to discover which one fits you best.

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 outreach. Graduate students often participate in these programs and discussions. We do not offer a math education degree. The College of Education does offer such a degree.

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, housed in two different buildings. Note, 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, plus we have ongoing collaborations with faculty in Computer Science, Electrical Engineering, The Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME), and the Fred Hutch Cancer Research Center. 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 pure 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 PhD program, registering as a regular (not graduate) non-matriculated (NM) student is almost certainly the right choice. 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 students to begin in Winter or Spring quarter?

No. All of our entry-level graduate courses are full-year sequences beginning in the 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 test requirements 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 International Applicants.

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 International Applicants.

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 who can guide you through the initial immersion into graduate school. After a student has passed preliminary exams, (usually within one or two years in the program, the student begins doing reading courses with one or more faculty members as a next step toward getting to know them and their research area. Once a student and faculty member have a good working relationship, that faculty member can become the student’s thesis advisor. The preliminary advisor should help students identify faculty in their area of interest who are best suited to advise them on the PhD and mentor them in the process.

What tests are required for admission?

See How to Apply.

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 December 10. If not, we will accept applications until June 1.

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 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. See International Applicants for more details.

I'm an international applicant. How should I fill out the Statement of Financial Ability?

All students requesting a visa must fill out the financial ability form as part of their visa request. If you are awarded financial support from the Math Department, your TA salary (or fellowship) plus tuition waiver should be enough to cover the financial resources required to get a visa. If you are not receiving financial support, you will have to provide documentation that you will have sufficient funds from personal or family resources or from a government agency or sponsor. Please visit the Graduate School's Financial Ability Requirement web page 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 PhD or Master's students.

**GRE General Test**: There is no absolute minimum requirement for the GRE score. Furthermore, this year GRE's are not required due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. We want to be sure students around the world have a chance to be admitted even if tests are not given in their area.

**GRE Math Subject Test**: 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 International Applicants), the minimum score is 92 on the TOEFL iBT, but we prefer to see scores of 100 or higher. For financial support, we want to see scores of at least 26 on the TOEFLS component, although we occasionally make exceptions.

I can't afford the application fee. Can it be waived?
The Mathematics Department cannot waive the fee, but US applicants who qualify on the basis of need can request a fee waiver from the Graduate School as part of their online application. Note, the application must be completed at least seven days before the Math Department's December 10 deadline; see the Graduate School's application page for more details. International applicants are not eligible for fee waivers.

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

Almost all PhD students in our program are supported by TA's, fellowships, or RA's. Our current Master's students are funded in different ways depending on their circumstances.

If I choose to enroll without support, might I be offered support later?

Yes. 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, many of the students who complete the PhD program receive one or more quarters of support from fellowships or research assistantships (RA) without teaching duties. The RA funds often come from the thesis advisor's grants so they are subject to change.

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

Here is the current salary scale. Entering students with bachelor's degrees are paid at the rate listed under Teaching Assistant, Schedule #1; those with master's or doctoral degrees are paid at the rate of Predoctoral Teaching Associate I (PDTA I), Schedule #1. In later years, most students get promoted to the level of PDTA I, and students who teach their own sections of courses are usually paid at the level of PDTA II or higher. We typically don't know the exact pay scale for the coming year until after the admissions process is completed, because the pay scale is determined in the spring of each year based on the Academic Student Employees union contract. The graduate students at UW are members of a union that has been successful in negotiating salary increasing and benefits.

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 student must pay several hundred dollars per quarter in fees, even if you are supported on a TA, fellowship, or RA position.

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 about 25% less than that of New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and many other major cities. Seattle summers are dry, sunny, and mild. Typical winter days are mostly cloudy, with drizzle off and on, and with occasional sunbreaks. We are located at the latitude of 47.655548, so we are further north than any other major city in the US and almost all cities in Canada. That makes the winters rather dark, hence our tendency to drink a lot of coffee. It also makes the summer days very long, so we can take long walks and bike rides.

How expensive is Seattle to live in?

In recent years, Seattle has become one of the more expensive US cities to live in, although the cost of living here is still far below those of New York and San Francisco. Even so, our graduate students have been able to find tolerably affordable housing within a reasonable commuting distance of campus. Students, staff and faculty often come to campus by foot, bike, bus, or light-rail. The light rail serves many communities to the south of the university. It is due to open a new line going north next year.

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 graduate students when you're here, and give you information about transportation and lodging. There is some travel support available for admitted PhD applicants living in the United States to visit the campus at the time they are admitted.

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 provided you submit the request before the April 15 reply deadline; 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 PhD students?

During the past fifteen years or so, it has ranged between 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

Administrative Office
C-138 Padelford
Box 354350
Seattle, WA 98195-4350
Phone: (206) 543-1150
Fax: (206) 543-0397

For all academic inquiries, please contact:

Math Student Services
C-36 Padelford
Phone: (206) 543-6830
Fax: (206) 616-6974
advising@math.washington.edu

Source URL: https://math.washington.edu/admissions-faqs