

## ADMISSIONS - Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

### *Should I send my admissions materials directly to the Geography Graduate Program or to the Graduate Admissions office?*

You should apply directly to the [Office of Graduate and Professional Admissions](#) via their [online application portal](#). In this case all of your materials will be submitted electronically and will be available to the admissions committee of the Geography Graduate Program. If some materials are only available in hard copy form (e.g. some letter writers will only write hard copy reference letters), these should be mailed directly to the [Office of Graduate and Professional Admissions](#).

Office of Graduate and Professional Admissions  
Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey  
56 College Ave  
New Brunswick, New Jersey 08901-8541 U.S.A.  
848-932-7711

### *How can I determine whether my materials have been received?*

The best way to track the admissions process is online. Once you have initiated an application and paid your fees you can use the online [Check Status](#) link to determine whether your file is complete and has been transferred to our program office. The application fee is \$70.00.

### *What is the deadline for submitting an application?*

**Prospective students are strongly encouraged to submit all admissions materials by January 15th.** Applicants who miss this deadline may not be considered for funding opportunities. If you submit your application by this date, you can be sure that your application materials will be fully reviewed by the entire admissions committee and that prospective faculty advisor/mentors will be informed of your interest in joining the program. You are also much more likely to receive important program information for new students in a timely fashion. Applications submitted after January 15 will be accepted and reviewed on an intermittent basis throughout the spring. If applications are delayed until the summer months, however, they may not be reviewed until the following academic year.

### *May I apply for mid-year admissions?*

No. Our program only reviews applications once a year. If you wish to begin classes in the Spring term rather than Fall, you must be admitted for the preceding Fall term and request that your entrance into the program be deferred until spring.

### *How are applications reviewed, and when can I expect to hear about the program's admissions and funding decisions?*

The program's admissions committee is typically comprised of the Graduate Director and three members of the graduate faculty representing different parts of our program (physical Geography, human Geography and geographic information science/remote sensing/spatial data management techniques). Review of completed applications begins

in late January and is completed by late February. The admissions committee meets around the third week in February to evaluate individual applications and rank candidates for fellowship consideration. The committee then presents a set of formal recommendations to the full graduate faculty, which finalizes admissions and funding decisions in the first or second week of March. Letters containing the results of this process are typically mailed out shortly thereafter.

***Can I apply to your graduate program even though I do not have a BA in Geography? What if I never even had a course in Geography?***

Yes. While it obviously helps your case if you have a background in Geography or a related field, there is plenty of precedent for admitting students who have never taken a Geography course. You will need to explain in your personal statement, however, why you are interested in pursuing a graduate degree in Geography, and perhaps how other aspects of your education, training, and work experience have led you to this decision. The lack of geographic background may affect your ability to transfer credits from a prior Master's degree program, however (see below).

***If I have a Master's degree in hand, can I transfer credits from my prior degree and have them count toward a PhD at Rutgers?***

Yes. A PhD at Rutgers requires a minimum of 24 research credits and 48 course credits. You may be eligible to transfer up to 24 course credits from a prior Master's degree program. Normally these credits are in Geography or a related field (e.g. Urban Planning, Environmental Studies, Anthropology, Ecology, Biology - this is not a comprehensive list). Research credits, credits for work on a thesis, and credits for independent study are not accepted for transfer.

***If I only have a bachelor's degree, should I apply for a Master's degree rather than a PhD?***

We accept students in two categories: Terminal Master's and PhD. The Terminal Master's degree is designed for students who do not expect to continue immediately on for a PhD following Master's-level study. This degree is typically sought by applicants who are interested in professional training and advancement relevant to non-academic career goals. The PhD signals a commitment to obtain a PhD degree in Geography at Rutgers, and may lead to either an academic or advanced professional career. For those students entering the PhD program without a Master's degree in Geography, a Master's degree may be awarded after the successful completion of PhD qualifying exams (exams are typically taken after all course work is completed).

***I currently hold a full-time job in the area, and would like to work on my degree part-time. Is this allowable?***

Yes. We have had quite a number of students pursue degrees part-time in recent years.

***Are there special admissions procedures I need to follow as an international student?***

Yes. Please follow appropriate links for [international students](#) on the Office of Graduate and Professional Admissions website and explore the information on student visas and

other procedures administered through [Rutgers' Center for International Faculty and Student Services](#).

***Is there a minimum GRE score that is necessary to be considered for admission?***

No. While strong GRE scores are an important indicator of analytical abilities, we consider your entire admissions package – your academic and professional background, personal statement, standardized GRE and TOEFL (for international students) test scores, transcripts, and letters of recommendation - when making admissions and funding decisions. If your test scores are low, and you think that they do not reflect your abilities, you might discuss this point in your personal statement and make sure that the people writing your letters of recommendation are aware of the issue.

***What are the average GPA and GRE scores of students who were granted admissions to the program in the past?***

The average GPA of students admitted in 2013 was 3.62 and their average GRE scores were 162 verbal and 153 quantitative. For those who took the analytical writing test, the average score was 44. Recipients of fellowship packages awarded by the department in 2012 had an average GPA of 3.74. Their GRE scores averaged 163 verbal and 153 quantitative, and they received an average of 44 in the analytical writing exercise.

***What are the appropriate Institutional and Program/Departmental codes for GRE mailing?***

The Rutgers Institutional code is 2790. The Rutgers Geography Program code is 2203.

***My GRE scores are more than five years old. Can I use them as part of my application package, or do I need to retake the exam?***

This depends on what you have been doing in the interim. If you have remained in academia in some capacity, or been involved in a professional career that has kept you current with developments in the field, you may be able to use your old test results. If not, you may be required to take the exam again to update your scores. You should consult with the Graduate Director early on in the application process to determine which option applies in your case.

***Is there a minimal TOEFL score that I must achieve in order to be granted admission?***

Yes. International applicants with TOEFL scores below 80 on the new computer test and 575 on the paper test are not normally granted admission to the program. Students who meet the basic minimum TOEFL requirement for admission, but nonetheless have obvious difficulty with English upon arrival at Rutgers may be required to take an English language competency examination and enroll for remedial instruction at the discretion of the Graduate Director.

***Do you have suggestions for what I should cover in my personal statement?***

The personal statement is a very important part of your application. At a minimum, you need to clearly answer the questions: "Why Geography?" and "Why Rutgers?" You should explain what it is you want to study, and how your previous education, training or experiences have qualified or compelled you to choose that topic. You should mention

strengths or skills relevant to your research interests that might not be evident elsewhere in your application, and you should explain any discrepancies in your academic record (such as, for example, a high GPA and low GRE scores, a slow start in your undergraduate program, or a long absence from academics). Finally, if you have been in contact with certain faculty members or have ideas about whom you would like to work with, you should identify those individuals by name and explain how your interests match theirs.

***Do I need to supply a writing sample with my application?***

No, not normally. On occasion applicants submit writing samples in order to demonstrate their critical writing and analytical skills, but there is no formal requirement that you do so.

***May I come visit the program? How do I set up appointments with faculty members?***

We encourage all prospective applicants to visit our program and meet with relevant faculty and graduate students. You should contact directly those faculty members with whom you would be interested in working to set up appointments. At the same time, you should ask them to help you meet with graduate students working on similar topics. You should also try to set up an appointment with the Graduate Director, currently Professor Kevin St. Martin. You can learn more about faculty interests and how to contact them by email or phone from our [Graduate Faculty listing](#).

***What kinds of financial packages are available from the department to support graduate students?***

Every year, the department has a certain number of financial packages to offer the most competitive applicants. For now, these are four-year packages that consist of two years of fellowship support and two years of guaranteed support as a teaching assistant. These packages cover tuition, a living stipend, and health insurance each year. **In order to qualify for these multi-year funding packages, you must apply as a PhD student. Terminal Master's degree students are not eligible for such funding.** All prospective students are strongly encouraged to apply for national funding from sources such as the [Jacob K. Javits program](#) or the [National Science Foundation](#). Once in the program, students without financial packages can compete for a limited number of teaching assistant positions in the department. For more details on these opportunities, see the program's [official handbook](#).

***How are advisors assigned?***

Provisional advisors are assigned to all incoming students based on a combination of factors including your request to work with a particular faculty member, a faculty member's request to work with you, the match between your research interests and those of our faculty, and a faculty member's previous student load and commitments. You have the right to request a change of advisors once you are in the program, and sometimes advisors or the Graduate Director may suggest a change themselves, especially if your research interests change. We strongly suggest that you learn about and contact [faculty members](#) whom you think you might wish to work with before you apply, so that you can explore mutual interests and lay the groundwork for future working relationships.

***Is there an orientation for new students?***

Yes. The Graduate School offers a series of orientation meetings for new domestic and international students during the week before classes begin in the fall. In addition, our Graduate Program also offers a mandatory half-day orientation during the same week, followed by a luncheon with the [graduate faculty](#), [program staff](#) and [current graduate students](#). During the orientation, we cover the policies and procedures of the program, introduce you to the staff and key faculty members, discuss logistics such as keys and photocopying, and tour the department facilities. If accepted into our program, you will receive notification about all of the orientation meetings over the summer.

***What sorts of topics have Rutgers students selected for Master's thesis and dissertation research?***

The Geography Department website maintains a listing of recent [thesis and dissertation abstracts](#). Electronic versions of all Rutgers theses and dissertations (since 2007) are available via the [Rutgers University Community Repository](#) (search Subject = Geography).

***What kinds of jobs have recent graduates received?***

Graduates of the program consistently secure top tier faculty appointments at major universities and colleges in Europe and North America. Some of the institutions where our PhD students have taken tenure track positions include the University of Maryland, University of Arizona, University of California-Berkeley, University of Brighton (UK), University of Florida, University of Georgia, University of Illinois, Kings College (UK), Miami University, Rutgers University, New Jersey Institute of Technology, Ohio State University, University of Toronto, University of Rhode Island, Syracuse University, Temple University, the City University of New York, University of Texas at Austin, and the University of Tennessee. Rutgers Master's and PhD students also hold positions in federal, state, and county-level governmental agencies, international research institutes, non-governmental organizations, and private firms.

***Whom should I contact if I have additional questions?***

Please contact the Graduate Program Administrative Assistant, Cleo Bartos, [cleo.bartos@rutgers.edu](mailto:cleo.bartos@rutgers.edu) or 732-445-4103 with questions related to the application process. More general questions about the graduate program may be addressed directly to the Graduate Director, Laura Schneider [laschnei@rci.rutgers.edu](mailto:laschnei@rci.rutgers.edu) or 732-445-0071.