

Graduate Admissions

FAQ rutgers geography

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 composed of the graduate program director and three members of the graduate faculty, representing different parts of our program (physical geography, human geography, and GIS/remote sensing/spatial analysis). The admissions committee meets around the third week of February to evaluate applications and rank candidates for funding consideration (fellowships and teaching assistantships). 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. Decision letters are typically mailed out shortly thereafter.

Can I apply to the program even if I do not have a bachelor's degree in geography?

Yes, absolutely! While it can help to have a background in geography or a related field, there is plenty of precedent for admitting students who have never taken a geography course. If you do not have an academic background in geography, we ask that you explain in your personal statement why you are interested in pursuing a graduate degree in geography. You might also highlight other aspects of your education, training, and work experience that have led you to this decision—and that you believe make you a strong candidate. If you do not have an academic background in geography, this may affect your ability to transfer credits from a prior master's degree upon entering the PhD program. Requests to transfer credits are evaluated on a case-by-case basis (see below).

If I have a master's degree, can I transfer credits from this degree and have them count toward a PhD at Rutgers?

Yes, in most cases. A PhD at Rutgers requires a minimum of 48 course credits and 24 research credits. You may be eligible to transfer up to 24

course credits from a prior master's degree. Normally, these credits are in geography or a related field, such as urban planning, environmental studies, anthropology, ecology, or biology (this list is not comprehensive). 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 to the MA/MS program rather than the PhD program?

We accept students in two categories: terminal master's (MA/MS) and PhD. The terminal master's degree is designed for students who do not expect to continue immediately on to a PhD following completion of the master's degree. This degree is typically sought by applicants who are interested in professional training and advancement relevant to non-academic careers. The PhD may lead to either an academic or advanced professional career. For students entering the PhD program without a master's degree in geography or a related field, a master's degree may be awarded after successful completion of the PhD qualifying exams (typically taken after coursework is completed).

I currently hold a full-time job in the area. Is part-time study permitted?

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

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

Yes. Please follow the appropriate links for international students on the [Office of Graduate and Professional Admissions](#) webpage, and consult information available on student visas and other procedures through [Rutgers Global–International Student and Scholar Services](#).

Is there a minimum GRE score required to be considered for admission?

We don't consider GRE scores for admission. We consider the materials part of the admissions package—your academic and professional

background (CV), personal statement, transcripts, letters of recommendation, any writing sample you might voluntarily upload, along with TOEFL scores for international students)—when making admissions and funding decisions.

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

The average GPA for the 2018–19 cohort was 3.61.

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

Yes. International applicants with TOEFL scores below 95 are not normally granted admission to the program. Students who meet the basic minimum TOEFL requirement for admission, but nonetheless have clear difficulty with English upon enrollment at Rutgers may be required to take an English language competency exam and enroll in further instruction at the discretion of the graduate program 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, and experiences have qualified you and or compelled you to pursue graduate study in geography at Rutgers. 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 a slow start in your undergraduate program, or a long absence from academics). For PhD applicants, you should describe specific topics you intend to study and explain a broad approach to independent research you might follow to address those topics. 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 them by name and explain how your interests match theirs.

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

Applicants are encouraged to 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 visit the program? How do I set up appointments with faculty members?

We encourage prospective students to visit our program and meet with relevant professors and graduate students when it is feasible. You should contact directly those faculty members with whom you would be interested in working in order to set up appointments. We generally discourage visits during the admissions review period of February 1–March 1, however. Note that it is not customary for faculty members to give feedback on drafts of personal statements, although discussion of statements and applicants' overlap/fit with the program is common. You are welcome to use the departmental website to make contact with current graduate students working on topics similar to your own. You can learn more about faculty member interests, and find their contact information, on the [Graduate Faculty](#) webpage.

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. These are typically four-year packages that consist of one to three years of fellowship support and balancing one to three years of guaranteed support as a teaching assistant. These packages cover tuition and provide a living stipend and health insurance each year. In order to qualify for these multi-year funding packages, you must apply to the PhD program. Terminal master's degree students are not eligible for these funding packages. The department has a strong record of supporting PhD students for a fifth year of funding, but this is not guaranteed nor offered at the time of admission.

All prospective students are strongly encouraged to apply for external funding from, for example, the National Science Foundation (NSF) Graduate Research Fellowship Program, Jacob K. Javits Fellowship Program, and the Ford Foundation Fellowship Program. For more details on these opportunities, please see the student handbook. Once enrolled, students in the program have access to support with external funding applications from [GradFund](#).

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 current student load and commitments. You have the right to request a change in advisor once you are in the program, and sometimes advisors or the graduate program director may themselves suggest a change, especially if your research interests change. We strongly suggest that you learn about and contact faculty members with whom you might wish to work 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 School of Graduate Studies 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 offers a mandatory halfday 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 department facilities. If accepted into our program, you will receive notification during the summer about all of the orientation meetings.

What sorts of topics have Rutgers students chosen for master's thesis and dissertation research?

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

Is there a way to have the admissions fee waived?

Yes. As a member institution of the Big Ten Academic Alliance, U.S. citizens with an undergraduate or master's GPA of 3.0 or higher can apply for a waiver through the FreeApp Waiver Request form. [FreeApp](#) is

designed to increase access to graduate education for students who possess qualities and experiences that enhance the diversity of the intellectual, cultural, and social environments. The priority deadline is November 15th each year, but requests can be made beyond this deadline as well.

Students ineligible for or denied a fee waiver through FreeApp can make a special request to the Graduate Program Director, who with a satisfactory justification can make an administrative request for a fee waiver or reimbursement.

Whom should I contact if I have additional questions?

Questions about the graduate program may be addressed directly to the graduate program director, Professor Laura Schneider (laura.schneider@rutgers.edu or 848-445-0071), or administrative assistant Cleo Bartos (cleo.bartos@rutgers.edu).

Revised September 2023