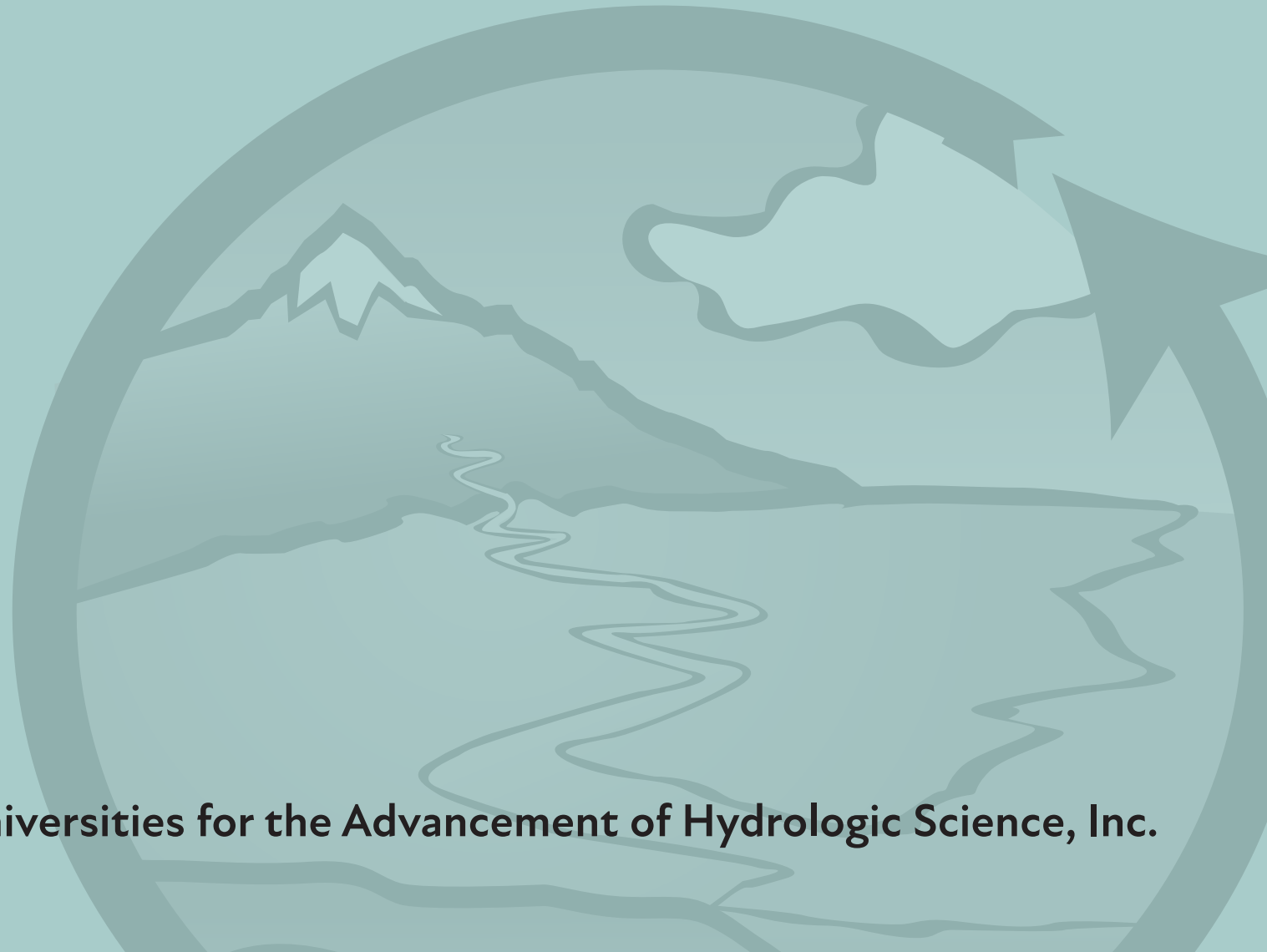




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CUAHSI Quick Guide on Applying to Graduate School



Consortium of Universities for the Advancement of Hydrologic Science, Inc.

A Quick Guide on Applying to Graduate School

Is Graduate School Right For You?

Making the decision to attend graduate school should not be taken lightly. There are many important factors to consider. Here are a few of them:

❖ Time

- Graduate school can be different from undergraduate studies in that it requires a lot of reading and writing. Do not underestimate the time that it will take to accomplish the work.
- The time requirement may also mean that you will have to compromise on taking advantage of other life opportunities that may come up, because of school commitments.

❖ Financial

- Graduate school is a costly endeavor and typically has less access to financial aid resources than undergraduate education. More on financial requirements in later sections.

❖ Outcomes

- Think carefully about what the degree will mean to you. Is it going to get you to where you need to be to succeed in your career?

You've Decided to Apply: Here's What You Should Consider

Now that you have made the decision to apply for graduate school, there are many steps to take. Here's how to get started:

❖ Finding the Right Program

- Do a global search to find programs you like, read the program description, this is where you'll get a feeling for the program and if it matches what you are interested in. Search key words of what you think you are looking for to find the right program. There may be a targeted database of programs for specific areas of interests, such as the Graduate Programs in Water Science on the CUAHSI website, [here](#).
- Ask people you know who are in the field you want to be in, what schools they recommend.
- Unlike for undergraduate college, for graduate school, you need to have an advisor you will work with in order to get admitted to the school and/or the program.
- Once you have chosen several professors you are interested in working with, establish communication with them:
 - Email each professor explaining who you are and that you are interested in going to graduate school in their department. Your email should describe classes you've taken, research you've done and similar things that are related to their research that shows you are a good candidate to have in their department.

- Sometimes the financial aid you will receive comes directly from the professor you'll be working with. In the communication with the professor (but not on the initial email), make sure to ask/talk about financial aid, assistantships, etc.
 - Start the conversation by email, but a phone call may be more appropriate later on and if there is interest from both you and the professor, schedule a video call, and if possible, visit the University.
- ❖ **Programs Have Been Identified**
 - Look closely at the curriculum to see that the courses are pertinent to what you want and that they will get you to your end goal.
 - Location – Can you complete this degree through an on-line format, and would this format work for you? Is the institution local to where you live or will you need to relocate?
 - Is the college regionally accredited?
 - What is the college acceptance rate? Depending on the type of degree and program, this number could be very small, making the competition even greater.
 - Does the program allow for flexibility in scheduling, to go full-time or part-time?
 - How many programs do you apply for? Consider choosing one that is a stretch, more competitive, and a safe school, one you think will be easier to get in to.
 - ❖ **Financial**
 - Cost of Applying: Consider the cost of each application you submit as well as the costs associated with prep materials such as; study books, on-line test prep courses, etc.
 - Look at the required credits to complete the degree compared to your finances.
 - Remember that financial aid applications may have a different submission deadline than the applications deadline.

Planning and Preparation

Once you've considered all the variables and have made the decision to apply for graduate school, your planning and preparation should start early.

- ❖ **Pre-admission Courses**
 - Are there any required courses? If yes, make sure you've taken them, taken them recently enough or, if you haven't taken them, reach out to an admissions counselor and inquire, they may admit you with certain conditions.
- ❖ **Transcripts**
 - Request them as early as possible.
 - Remember they must be officially sent from the institution, you must request them from all prior institutions (including all undergraduate and graduate courses completed), paper copies or electronic versions are acceptable (electronic will be fastest).

- Make sure you do not have any financial holds at prior institutions or transcripts will not be released.
- If you have taken courses in other countries, you will have to do research on what is acceptable as transcripts are not universal.

❖ **Letters of Recommendation**

- Read the directions on the application, it may guide you to who should write the letter. Past professors and professional acquaintances are generally good people to ask. The person must know you or your work well enough to be able to advocate for your ability to succeed in the program.
- When you request letters from past professors, make sure you refresh their memory about the coursework you did and what you liked about the course. Let them know how your plan to complete the desired program fits in with your overall goals.
- You should waive your right to review the letters. This assures that the recommender can be accurate and honest and indicates to the college that you are confident in what will be written about you.
- Make sure you follow up with the persons you've requested the letters from, before the deadline.
- If you get accepted, follow up with the people who wrote letters and let them know.

Required Exams

Be sure to determine if specific entry exams are required.

- Read the directions on the application carefully.
- Is there a minimum score you need to attain?
- If given a choice of exams to take, select the test you would perform better at.
- Factor in time to do prep courses, if needed.

Writing a Personal Statement

Most of the time a personal statement will be required in your application packet and occasionally a writing sample will be requested.

❖ **Personal Statement**

- A personal statement is an essay (opening, body, closure) about who you are, your background, the reason why you are applying for the program and why you are suitable for it.
- Provide evidence of your suitability, your skills and your work experience.
- Articulate your ambition to complete the program and how it ties into your life – who you are and how you connect to the program. Describe what you will bring and what you will gain.
- Pay attention to word limit and stick to it.
- Research the courses and add specific interests in courses and/or professors teaching in the program.

- Make sure the story you are telling is compelling and interesting.

❖ **Writing Sample**

- A writing sample should showcase your ability to think critically and to articulate your skills in writing.
- This can be a paper you wrote from undergrad, or you may write something brand new.
- The content should be relatable, style needs to be smooth and uses scholarly style.
- The topic should be interesting and cited correctly.
- Does your sample show that you can make an argument that is evidenced based?

Preparing for an Interview

Interviews are generally not required for most Master programs, however, PhD programs will have an interview.

- Show up as if it were a job interview, with a professional appearance and professionalism in your speaking.
- If you are having a virtual interview, make sure your surroundings are appropriate.
- Remember they are evaluating you.
- Do your research. You will need to know about the courses, faculty and how the program will impact your life and how prepared you are for all of the adjustments you will have to make.
- Come prepared with your own questions for them so you can better evaluate if this is the right fit for you.

Admission Committees Want to See These Things

❖ **What are admissions committees looking for?**

- Admissions committees are looking to see that the applicant understands what the program is/isn't.
- The applicant has a strong reason to apply to the program and understands what it can/can't provide them.

Applying to Graduate School

Use this table to help track and rank different features from schools you have applied to.

Institution	Professor	Program	Project	Admission Requirements	Application Cost	Financial Aid	Preference Ranking

Choosing the Best School

After you have applied, track responses and offers from different Universities. Use the table below to help you decide which school to attend.

Institution	Financial Aid Offered (yes or no)	Total Cost of Program	Location	Cost of Living	University Housing Options	Preference Ranking