

Contacting faculty & obtaining their agreement to serve as advisor is THE key!

The path to admission into WEC as a masters or PhD student begins with finding a WEC faculty member who has funding, a project of mutual interest, and agrees to serve as your thesis advisor. A comprehensive list of WEC graduate faculty, with links to their homepages, can be found on http://www.wec.ufl.edu/people/faculty_new.php.

The prospective student will need to:

- Find appropriate faculty members by reviewing faculty web pages.
 - Read their recent research and any advice they may have for prospective students.
- Contact each faculty member who you find to be appropriate.
 - Include a CV and a well-written email letter of inquiry that clearly relates your interests and professional goals to the faculty member's program.
 - Include your GPA and your most recent GRE scores and percentiles.
- Await a response. You may or may not get one.
 - If you don't, then try again in a couple of weeks, and then move on.

Tips for the initial email inquiry to faculty:

- Do your research on each faculty member's interests and current research activities.
- Hastily prepared or generic emails exhibiting no knowledge of a faculty member's area of expertise are likely to be ignored.
- Express yourself well in the initial email inquiry by making a reasonable argument for why you are the right person for **this** faculty member's lab.
- Email contact is best; professors are too busy to respond to phone call inquiries.
 - Because research online can reveal faculty research programs and interests to prospective applicants, faculty do not feel obligated to save you time.
 - There are lots of prospects per faculty member and we will only pursue those that stand out in some way.
- Faculty will often call prospects back after they have reviewed an interesting email inquiry; one that exhibits thoughtful research in the preparation.

Remember, graduate students are ***scholarly partners*** for faculty to collaborate with on shared projects of importance to them and to conservation; therefore, faculty members look for signs of ***talent*** and ***motivation***. Make sure yours shows!

KEEP IN MIND

When you do all of the above, you very often get this response – *“You look like a great prospective student! I would take you, but I have no funding.”* At some point when all appropriate faculty have indicated there is no spot for you (this is common), then look at other programs; don't lose your window of opportunity to matriculate elsewhere.

More tips:

- Be **EARLY** with your inquiries (September to December).
 - **In theory**, it is never too late to apply to WEC. But the main 'season' for admissions coincides with the schedule of commitment of various government monies to support graduate student training; this occurs between October and March (for the next Fall).
 - **Most** admissions and funding packages for graduate students in WEC are worked out by March or February because the majority of graduate students in WEC are supported on funding packages that include some level of government funding in the form of matching assistantships and fellowships.
 - Other opportunities occur on fully grant-funded projects that faculty can hire for at any time of year. Faculty will post these positions on the website or on electronic jobs boards nationally and internationally; so keep an eye out for them, and include inquiries to faculty concerning grant-funded opportunities upcoming.
- Present yourself professionally, as graduate school is professional training, not just extended undergraduate learning. Inquiries that say things like "I've always wanted to visit Brazil, and I see that you work there..." as justification for why we should take you as a graduate student will probably close the door.
- No matter how badly you want to work with Professor X in WEC/UF, **be mature enough to have a plan B!** (Plans C, D, and E are also smart to have lined up!)

NOTE

In WEC, a prospect can submit an application, but no one will look at it and no response will be sent the applicant unless a faculty member becomes interested. The prospect is responsible for generating that interest and cultivating a partnership with a faculty member.

Other critical pieces of the puzzle:

Funding is Fundamental:

To be admitted, a graduate student in WEC will need to have a support package including tuition, fees, and stipend, using academically linked funding in the form of Fellowships, Assistantships, and/or Grants. Funding packages arise from collaborations between your advisor, UF/WEC, and you. **(Graduate school is very different than undergraduate programs!)**

- Prospects can help coalesce necessary funding by applying for fellowships and other sources of funding that are available to them.
 - Spend some time learning online about the following kinds of opportunities:
 - NSF Graduate Fellowships,
 - EPA STAR Fellowships,
 - McKnight Fellowships.
 - These represent premier programs independent of UF that students can pursue to fund their graduate work (and there are others).
- Varied UF programs offer fellowships that prospects can work with faculty to obtain.
 - School of Natural Resources and the Environment (SNRE).
 - UF Graduate School Fellowships.
 - Tropical Conservation and Development fellowships and assistantships, et al.
 - Explore UF websites for these helpful opportunities.

- Self-funded students supported entirely on non-academically-linked monies (service jobs; parents) are undesirable prospects for a variety of reasons.

Test Scores and Grades Matter:

Graduate school is advanced academic training. In a nutshell, graduate school at the MSc level trains you how to obtain new knowledge through organized scientific approaches. If you seek a PhD, you should have a driving interest and capability to become proficient in applying rigorous scientific procedures, integrating knowledge across disciplines, and developing and testing theory in order to advance human understanding and societal improvement. If your interests do not lie in these pursuits, or if you lack a healthy dose of independent motivation, then graduate school might not be for you. During the application process, we weigh indicators of your abilities and motivation to excel in academia rather heavily. Written and Verbal expression, Quantitative problem solving (all part of the general test of the GRE) and overall academic performance (GPA) are the main indicators we use, although experience, enthusiasm, and advanced skills of various kinds can weigh in your favor.

GRE scores:

All applicants must take the General GRE exam, including three sections; Quantitative, Verbal Reasoning, and Analytical Writing. GRE Subject Tests are not required. If your Quantitative GRE score is below the 50th percentile, ***consider re-taking the exam*** as this is the first cut-off in minimum scores necessary for admission to WEC. If your Quantitative GRE score is between the 34th and 49th percentiles, your advisor will need to petition your admission to the department. Remedial coursework may be required of admits with scores below the 49th percentile. Applicants with Quantitative scores below the 33rd percentile will normally not be considered for admission.

WEC also requires all applicants to meet the current UF Graduate School Verbal GRE score minimum for international applicants, which in 2014-15 is 140 (10th percentile). While the department does not set minimums for the Analytical Writing section of the GRE exam, consider this advice. In practice, faculty weigh all of these scores carefully and holistically when deciding which students to admit to their labs. If **you** were a thesis advisor, would you want a graduate student who couldn't reason or analyze well verbally or in writing? If these scores come in low, therefore, then consider re-taking the exam. The GRE is a unique test. Most people need to practice taking the exam before their best performance can occur. If in doubt, re-take it!

TOEFL scores:

International applicants to WEC must take the TOEFL exam in addition to the GRE exam. An Internet-based minimum score of 80 is required for admission.

It is a Competitive World... Be Motivated!

Many students with sub-minimum scores re-take these exams because exam performance does improve with practice and study. Re-taking the exams to get your best score will pay off in the long run, and it says you are motivated to succeed.

GPA in Previous College Work:

The UF Graduate School (and WEC) requires a 3.0 GPA or higher for admission. Applicants calculate their own grade point averages by following instructions given while completing their online UF Graduate Admission Application Form. This GPA is to include all grades and credits, starting after the term where the applicant reached 60 semester hours or 90 quarter hours.

Applicants with top scores have an easier time throughout graduate school:

- No petitions for admission are needed.
- Competitive awards you can apply for after you are admitted (inside and outside of UF) will be easier to get.
- It is worth it (in real \$\$) to study hard for exams, consider re-taking GRE/TOEFL to overcome sub-minimum scores, and to work to keep your GPA up.

Experience also Matters:

Previous work experience in the field and in universally important positions (like supervisory positions or those with extra responsibility and training) is always a plus.

- Completion of an undergraduate and/or Master's thesis, and especially one that is published, is a strong point of any application, as are letters of recommendation from researchers who have worked with you on projects.
- Demonstrated proficiency with skills of note is important (e.g., field work under extreme conditions, database management, foreign languages, mathematical modeling, computer programming, oral presentation, Peace Corp/military experience).
- While these things can make your application very desirable, satisfying the academic minimum scores and grades is required. Poor scores and grades cannot be overcome by being worldly!

*OK – let's finish with the **most important thing** again....*

Contacting faculty to find one that agrees to serve as your advisor, and to help you put together your funding package, is THE key!

Questions after reading this?

- Contact the Graduate Program Coordinator (Dr. Sieving; chucao "at" ufl-dot-edu).