Commonly-Asked Questions

(D) Other Questions About the Graduate Program at Stanford

How long does it take to complete the MS program?
How do current MS students apply to go on for a Ph.D.?
How long does it take to complete the Ph.D. program?
I have been admitted. Can I postpone my admission to a later year?
When will I receive my I-20 form?
I have not taken an organic chemistry course. What should I do?
I have not taken a fluid mechanics course. What should I do?
I have not taken a molecular/cellular biology course. What should I do?
How/When do I pre-register for classes?

Answers

How long does it take to complete the MS program?

Our MS program is coursework only, and can be completed in 3 quarters (9 months). About 20% of our students choose to spread out their MS studies over 5 quarters (15 months).

How do current MS students apply to go on for a Ph.D.?

Students who wish to stay on for a Ph.D. become affiliated with a particular research group when they begin their post-MS studies. Since many students starting an MS are not sure whether they want to stay on for a Ph.D., our program does not require them to make this decision until midway through their MS studies. If they decide they are interested in pursuing a Ph.D., then a faculty member must agree to officially admit the student into his/her research group. Students are not admitted to the Ph.D. unless full funding (tuition and stipend) is available to support them, usually from the faculty member’s sponsored research funding.

How long does it take to complete the Ph.D. program?

Stanford requires Ph.D. students to complete at least 90 units of study beyond the M.S. degree. This represents a minimum of 2-1/2 years of post-MS study. However, it is typical in the EES program for a PhD student to take 4-5 years to complete a PhD thesis of the quality and
depth we expect of our students.

*I have been admitted. Can I postpone my admission to a later year?*

In the EES program, we routinely grant requests to defer admission by one year, but do not allow deferrals of more than one year. If you have been offered financial aid, you cannot defer your funding offer. Requests for a 1-year deferral, should be sent to the department’s admissions coordinator (CEE-admissions@lists.stanford.edu). If you wish to be considered for funding a second time, you will need to notify the department’s admissions coordinator by the end of January of the following year that you wish to reactivate your admission and be considered for financial aid; otherwise, you should notify us of your intent to attend by the beginning of March of the following year, so that you will receive materials like on-campus housing information in a timely manner.

*When will I receive my I-20 form?*

Foreign students offered admission to a U.S. university are sent an I-20 form so that they can get a visa. At Stanford, a single central office is in charge of filling out the thousands of I-20 forms needed each year for newly-admitted foreign students. They will not begin preparing your I-20 form until after you mail in the response form, indicating that you will be attending Stanford. Once this response form is received from you, it typically takes 8-10 weeks for Stanford to mail an I-20 to you. At the department level, we cannot do anything to speed up this process. Foreign students are encouraged to seek a visa promptly upon receiving their I-20; we have been told that in certain countries, non-immigrant visa requests are currently taking up to several weeks to be processed by the U.S. Consulate, due to increased security procedures.

*I have not taken an organic chemistry course. What should I do?*

Your offer of admission to the EES MS program is not contingent on completing an organic chemistry course, nor will we "check" when you arrive to see whether you have taken such a course. You should view our concerns about your organic chemistry background as a "let the buyer beware" type warning: students in recent years who have attended our program without an Organic Chemistry background have told us that they feel at a disadvantage relative to their classmates in certain classes, and have found that they need to work harder at times, or to seek more help from the TA.
If you cannot take an introductory organic chemistry course before arriving at Stanford, then we strongly recommend that you undertake a self-study to learn the basic concepts. One reference students have found helpful is Chapter 5 of “Chemistry for Environmental Engineering”, by C.N. Sawyer, P.L. McCarty, and G.F. Parkin, McGraw Hill Inc., ©2003.

If you feel comfortable with organic compound nomenclature, how chemical composition can influence characteristics like solubility, volatility and susceptibility to reaction, and the basics of kinetic and redox reactions in aqueous systems, you will be adequately prepared for our program.

I have not taken a fluid mechanics course. What should I do?

Your offer of admission to the EES MS program is NOT contingent upon having to complete a course in fluid mechanics. We will not check when you arrive here to see whether you have taken such a course. We realize that it is not typical for non-engineering majors to take such a course. Instead, we wanted to let you know that students in recent years who have entered our graduate program without having had a fluid mechanics class have found that they have had to work harder in certain classes, due to this gap in their education. We will be assuming at the beginning of autumn quarter that you are already familiar with basic fluid mechanical concepts (like streamlines; laminar vs turbulent flows; conservation of momentum, mass and energy; Stokes law); if these concepts are familiar to you from a class you took in Physics or some other scientific area, you will be adequately prepared.

I have not taken a molecular/cellular biology course. What should I do?

Your offer of admission to the EES MS program is not contingent on completing a biology course, nor will we "check" when you arrive to see whether you have taken such a course. We realize that some of the more traditional undergraduate civil engineering programs do not require such a course, despite the growing importance of environmental biotechnology as a remediation strategy.

However, you will not be able to take CEE274A in the autumn unless you have a basic background in cellular/molecular biology. Students lacking this preparation will be encouraged to take our undergraduate
Aquatic Chemistry and Biology class (CEE177) instead. Either CEE274A or CEE177 is required as a prerequisite for students wishing to take the Environmental Biotechnology class (CEE271B) in the winter.

*How/When do I preregister for classes?*

Stanford does not do preregistration for classes, because the vast majority of courses do not have limits on class size. Instead, students spend the first week or two of each quarter sitting in on classes they are thinking of taking, to better assess which courses they would benefit from the most. Each year, our department holds an orientation for new graduate students, usually on the Thursday before autumn quarter classes start; you will be mailed an announcement regarding this orientation in August. As part of the orientation, each program will meet with their newly-admitted students to go over the degree requirements, describe their course offerings, and offer advice on which classes you should consider taking.