

What I wish I knew when I was applying to the MS program

What is the admissions committee looking for in an applicant? Our committee takes a holistic approach to assessing candidates. Successful applicants typically have some combination of: contact and mutual interest with a UCLA faculty member doing research in physiological sciences; strong letters of recommendation from previous mentors or employers; a strong personal statement; a strong track record of academic achievement; unique experiences or perspectives; teaching experience; mentorship or leadership experience. See more below.

How can I make contact with a UCLA faculty member to see if they are accepting students? Applicants are encouraged to find professors with whom they share genuine common interest and reach out (e.g., email) in a targeted way, discussing their specific personal interests in the lab's research. Cold-emailing large numbers of professors is generally a low-success method. Do not use AI to feign interest in a research topic; genuine interest and intellectual curiosity remains one of the few things that AI is bad at. Students may find it helpful to request to meet with either the faculty member or with a member of their lab; students outside the LA area can always request a virtual meeting while in-person meetings can be effective for students in the LA area. More information on faculty and their research interests is available on the [faculty](#) section of our website.

How do you weigh my GPA? Many of the successful candidates to the program have a strong academic background in their chosen field. Excellent performance in your coursework is a plus. Strong candidates typically have a GPA > 3.0, but there can be exceptions. For more information regarding admissions trends and outcomes, please visit the Division of Graduate Education [website](#).

Do I need to have research experience? Strong candidates typically have some prior research experience, but this is not required. Students should highlight any publications they have co-authored, any posters or talks that they have presented, and any other evidence of intellectual investment in their research.

Do I need to have previously completed courses in physiology? Completion of courses in physiology is not required, but generally viewed favorably, since many of our MS students are supported through Teaching Assistantships in physiological sciences courses. However, we also recognize that some candidates may be looking to shift fields (e.g. from physics or engineering or behavioral sciences), and therefore may not have completed specific courses in physiology but will be bringing a unique skill set and perspective, which is also important to highlight in your application.

How should I choose who should write my reference letters? Reference letters from people that have worked with you are most valuable, such as a previous research mentor or employer. These are generally stronger than letters from faculty who have been your course instructor. If you've had the opportunity to do research, it will be important to include a letter of

recommendation from your research mentor. *Make sure your letter writers place their letter on official letterhead.*

What makes a strong personal statement? This is an important part of the application where you can articulate your research passion, rationale for why our program at UCLA, and vision for your future career. Pro tips:

- **Your voice.** We strongly encourage you to use your own authentic voice - rather than chatGPT or other AI tools.

- **Your vision.** Our committee is excited to learn more about what drives you, what excites you, and why you specifically want to join the UCLA MS Physiological Sciences program. Why is this program the best next step for you?

- **Who you want to work with.** We are keen to learn whose lab you envision working with. Your personal statement is also a good place to mention if you have had any previous contact with faculty you are interested in working with. Identifying a faculty mentor(s) who you are interested to work with can also strengthen your application. Contact with any potential faculty mentors prior to application is strongly encouraged and should be mentioned in your statement.

Should I enroll in a Master's program or a PhD program? It depends on your career goals and interests. A Master's program is ideal if you want to deepen your knowledge in a specific field, gain professional skills, enhance your research or teaching expertise, or prepare for advanced career opportunities -- including applications to a PhD program. Our two-year MS program has a strong research focus, while also providing opportunities to strengthen your scientific communication and pedagogy skills through both coursework and teaching opportunities.

PhD programs are typically longer, research-intensive opportunities that are designed to prepare you for a career in academia and/or research. Pursuing a PhD is a great option if you are interested in a leadership role in science. PhD programs usually take several years to complete and involve original research with a higher degree of independence.

Is the MS program a good choice for gap-year pre-meds? Our MS program is not specifically a pre-medical program, but is absolutely appropriate for students interested in gaining research experience to take with them into a career in medicine. Students should be aware that the program is rigorous and requires coursework, teaching, and semi-independent research. Through our program, students interested in doing pre-clinical or clinical research in their careers can gain practical experience with lab-based research. Students simply hoping to improve the competitiveness of their medical school application can find more efficient opportunities to do so.

What is the cost of attendance and how do I support myself while in the program?

Graduate school fees are set by the University of California Board of Regents each academic year. The approximate cost of tuition and fees for the program as of Fall 2025 is estimated at

\$21,115 annually for California residents. Please visit the website for [UCLA Graduate Education](#) to learn more about the current fee structure and the [cost of attendance](#).

Is financial assistance available? The program does not provide fellowships for funding as part of a student's admission package. Students in the program are able to receive support as Teaching Assistants in the program but positions are not guaranteed.