

Graduate Study in IAD at UC Davis
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Graduate study is very different from undergraduate study, and graduate programs are much more different from each other than are comparable undergraduate programs. The purpose of this document is to explain some of the features of graduate study at UC Davis, and in the IAD Graduate Group in particular.

Graduate groups and graduate programs

IAD is organized as a graduate group (as opposed to a departmental graduate program). A graduate group is an interdepartmental organization to which faculty members from any department can apply for membership. Every graduate group has a home department (the home department of IAD is Plant Sciences), but this is just for administrative purposes and has little effect on how the group functions. One purpose of the graduate group structure is to provide students with the opportunity to select a major professor from a wide variety of departments. Faculty members who are not currently members of IAD are welcome to apply and are admitted upon a positive vote by the Executive Committee. For this reason, if you find a faculty member that you would like to have as a major professor, but this person is not in IAD, it is a simple matter for that person to join.

Plan I and Plan II

IAD is a Masters-only graduate group; it does not offer a PhD. There are two forms of study that can lead to an MS in IAD, called Plan I and Plan II. Plan I achieves the degree by written thesis, whereas Plan II achieves it by exam. Both plans require the same number of coursework units. The decision of which plan to pursue should be based on the student's ultimate career goals, interest in research vs. professional work, and on financial aid possibilities. These will be explained below.

Faculty advisor and major professor

The faculty advisor and the major professor, who are usually two different people, are commonly the most important faculty members for a graduate student. All IAD students are assigned a faculty advisor prior to their arrival at UC Davis. This is the person whom the student should consult for advice on academic plan, course selection, and other academic matters. Every major transition or event in the graduate student's progress at UC Davis has a form that goes along with it, and the faculty advisor is the person who signs the form. For students in Plan I, the major professor is the faculty member who supervises the student's thesis research. The faculty advisor will often consult the major professor as far as which courses the student should take. Plan II students do not normally have a major professor.

Students who wish to study under Plan I are generally expected to initiate their own contacts with prospective major professors. It is best to do this very early in the application process, possibly even prior to being admitted. Applicants should review faculty web pages and may also contact the IAD Chair for advice on faculty whose research appeals to the applicant. On the other hand, some students have used the first

year of IAD to explore areas of interest and deepen their educations, while searching for a major professor. They may find more doors are open to them once they are “on campus.” For these students, the IAD degree would typically require three years.

The admissions process

Unlike undergraduate programs, graduate groups and graduate programs at UC Davis have considerable autonomy in how they run their admissions process. In IAD admissions decisions are made by a committee that includes both students and faculty. Applicants are judged based on evidence of their intellectual capacity to complete a rigorous set of courses and on their demonstrated commitment to international agricultural development.

An important distinction between IAD and some other graduate groups is that IAD does not require prospective Plan I applicants to have an identified major professor as a condition of admission. Many graduate groups do have this requirement. However, if a student wants to write a thesis, it is his or her responsibility to identify the project and major professor. Because other graduate groups require this ahead of time, and because agricultural research commonly begins in the summer, it is beneficial to make contact with faculty early in the admissions process. It is important to emphasize that students should not restrict their search to faculty members of IAD, since any faculty member may join IAD.

Financial aid

Students are generally expected to fund their graduate studies through a combination of personal resources, loans, and financial aid. There are basically three forms of financial aid available to graduate students: fellowships, Graduate Student Researcher positions, and teaching assistantships.

Fellowships come in two forms. The first are university-wide fellowships, which often carry the name of the benefactor who provided the funds for the fellowship. These fellowships can be quite substantial, but they are *very* competitive. When you fill out the application for admission, you will be given the opportunity to specify fellowships for which you want to apply, and you should specify those for which you feel you are qualified. The second form of fellowship is the block grant. Each graduate program and graduate group receives a block of funds every year and makes awards to its students. These are generally smaller than university fellowships and provide financial relief as a safety net but not major support. IAD currently makes awards on a quarter by quarter basis, based on academic performance and need, shortly before the beginning of each quarter. If you receive funding for the fall quarter in your first year, this is no guarantee of continued funding at the same level. IAD also awards other fellowships, such as Jastro Grants, which provide a small amount of money for students to use in their research projects.

Graduate Student Researcher (GSR) positions (also known as “research assistantships”) are generally awarded by individual faculty members based on grant funding that they have received. Each student makes individual arrangements with individual faculty

members regarding GSR positions. Generally, but not always, a GSR position is held by a person for whom the research will form a part of the Masters thesis. For this reason most GSR positions are held by Plan I students. GSR positions are arranged in steps, with Step I being the lowest paid and higher numbered steps paid at a higher rate. Each graduate group has a standard step (also known as the “compensation plan”) at which its students are paid; IAD students are paid at a standard rate of Step III for 50% time. Some departments (in particular, Plant Sciences) also have GSR positions that are awarded on a competitive basis to students whose major professor is a member of that department. If you wish to compete for one of these, you should seek out a professor in that department, and be aware that the awards are highly competitive, but that a number of IAD student have won them. Students are advised to check department web pages for available GSR positions. The GSR position not only provides a salary, but also funds a student’s non-resident tuition costs and in-state fees for the quarter of hire. This is known as *fee remission*.

Teaching assistant (TA) and reader positions are awarded by individual departments. Teaching assistants play a number of roles in classes, depending on the class. Readers are paid less and generally only grade homework. The teaching assistantship and reader process at UC Davis is very decentralized. There is a central clearing house for TAs and readers that is available via the Graduate Studies web site, but not every department uses this. Students may apply for a TA or reader position to any department for any course for which they feel they have expertise (for example, foreign languages, biology, etc.). Students should not only rely on the central clearing house, but should also look on departmental web sites and directly contact the Undergraduate Advising Associates in individual departments offering classes for which they feel qualified. TA opportunities are also advertised through department mailing lists.

Undergraduate preparation

Students admitted to the IAD graduate group come from a very wide variety of undergraduate backgrounds. There are no coursework prerequisites for admission, but there are three courses that students are expected to have taken as an undergraduate or to complete during their first year of graduate school. These are *intermediate microeconomics* (ARE 100A or the equivalent) or (ECN 100 or the equivalent) prior to taking the core course IAD 201, *basic statistics* (PLS 120 or the equivalent) and a *basic course in crop management* (PLS 110A/110L or PLS 110C or the equivalent), with statistics and crop management prior to taking the core course IAD 202. If the student has an undergraduate/graduate background with classes equivalent to the listed above, he or she will be exempted of these requirements.

Double major

It is possible to double major in IAD and another graduate group or program. Some students find this option attractive because it combines the interdisciplinary IAD degree with a more discipline oriented degree such as Horticulture and Agronomy, Agricultural and Resource Economics, or Community Development. Students who wish to pursue this option must be admitted separately to both degree programs and complete the

requirements for each degree, although some overlap of courses is permitted. Students who select this option should expect to take at least three years to complete the combined degree programs. Many students apply to the second program after they are already on campus.

Classes in the first quarter

Some students begin the IAD program without having satisfied any of the three IAD prerequisites (ARE 100A, PLS 120, and PLS 110A or 110C). There are two options for these students. The first option consists of taking: a) IAD 200, PLS 120, and either PLS 110A or 110C in the fall quarter of the first year, b) ARE 100A in either the winter or spring quarters of the first year or the fall quarter of the second year and, c) IAD 201 in the winter quarter of the second year. Note that ECN 100 is an acceptable substitute for ARE 100A and may be taken if ARE 100A presents a scheduling conflict. The second option is to take IAD 200, ARE 110A, and PLS 110A or 110C in the fall quarter of the first year and to take IAD 201 concurrently with an alternative statistics course such as STA 100 in the winter of the first year.

Speaking with current IADers

The IAD Graduate Coordinator, Donna Maricich, can help you to find current IAD students who share your interests, and they in turn can refer you to others. Donna can also help you to set up a visiting day at UC Davis. You should talk to both faculty and students before making a decision about enrolling in IAD. Both perspectives are important to gain a complete picture of the possibilities at UC Davis.

Good luck from all of us at IAD!