

Frequently Asked Questions for the Graduate Program Cal Poly Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering

This FAQ contains updated information about the graduate program in Civil and Environmental Engineering at Cal Poly. This should help shortcut a number of questions about the program, how to apply, and what to expect. Updated 12/9/20

Q: How long does it take to earn a MS degree?

A: Most students finish their MS within 3 to 5 quarters.

Q: Am I eligible to apply to the program if I have a BS degree in something other than a civil or environmental engineering?

A: Yes, you can apply for conditional admittance, and if you have 2 quarters or less of coursework to make up can take that coursework at Cal Poly.

Q: What are the criteria used to admit students to the graduate program?

A: An undergraduate GPA of 3.0 or better (in the last 90 units), GRE math score around 156 (old score 700), and strong letters of recommendation. The admitted pool has had a mean GPA around 3.4. Note: the GRE is waived for Cal Poly students.

Q: How many classes do I need to take for a MS?

A: An MS requires 45 units of 400 and 500 level course work. More than 60% of the 45 units must be from 500 level courses. All grad students are required to take two 1 unit graduate seminars (591 and 592). For a thesis masters, 9 of the 45 units will be thesis units (599).

Q: Can I do a curriculum only MS (non-thesis option)?

A: Yes, this requires 45 units of 400 and 500 level course work. More than 60% of the 45 units must be from 500 level courses. To complete the curriculum MS a student must pass a culminating MS experience in lieu of a thesis. This is a project requiring roughly 40 hrs of labor with the results presented in written and oral form to a committee of faculty.

Q: How do I apply?

A: See the departmental website for links (<https://ceenve.calpoly.edu/graduate-degree-programs>). A statement of purpose is where applicants declare which topic they want to focus on (Environmental, Geotechnical, Structures, Transportation, Water) and can highlight information about themselves that is not quantified in their GPA and GRE scores.

Q: What is the application deadline?

A: See the admissions web site for application deadlines (<https://admissions.calpoly.edu/applicants/graduate/deadlines.html>). For international students see (<https://admissions.calpoly.edu/applicants/international>).

Q: Who should the letters of recommendation come from?

A: Anyone who can speak towards your aptitude for succeeding in the graduate program; Professors who you have had contact with, employers who you have worked for...

Q: What information should I put in my statement of purpose?

A: Any pertinent information that is not otherwise evident in your application; area of specialization you are interested in (Water, Geotech, Structures, Transpo, Environ), prior relevant work experience, motivation for pursuing a graduate degree, etc...

Q: What is the Blended program?

A: This is a graduate program for Cal Poly students who want to pursue a thesis masters. Successful applicants are admitted to the program once they have completed all 300-level courses (90% of their units towards a BS). The Blended student will complete course work towards their BS and MS degrees concurrently. Both degrees will be conferred upon completion of the program.

Q: What is the application deadline for the Blended program?

A: The deadline is the end of the second week in the quarter prior to the quarter that you are applying for (e.g. if you want to apply to the Blended program starting Winter quarter then the deadline is the end of the second week of Fall quarter). Note you must be in the program before graduating, so if you are graduating in the Spring and want to be in the program then you must apply for Spring quarter with that deadline being the end of the second week of Winter quarter.

Q: How do I apply to the Blended program?

A: This application requires students to develop a research plan with a faculty advisor prior to applying. Once a research plan is developed the application process is; submitting an unofficial transcripts and a statement of purpose that lists the faculty advisor and the research plan you have developed with that faculty advisor. The three letters of recommendation are emailed directly to me from the recommenders.

Q: What happens if I start the Blended program and decide to bail?

A: Then you can exit with your BS degree.

Q: Are there funding opportunities for graduate students?

A: Some faculty have funded research that will pay graduates students to work on research. There are opportunities for graduates students to teach labs within the department and be paid as a lecturer. The financial aid office has grant and loan opportunities available for graduate students. There is also university wide money on a competitive basis through Grad Ed (<http://grad.calpoly.edu/financial-resources/financial-home-real.html>).

Q: How do I find a thesis topic?

A: Most thesis topics are proposed by the faculty. Many faculty have active research programs with new and ongoing projects that provide thesis topics for graduate students. Faculty may also be open to novel topics proposed by students. The point here is to approach faculty in the area that your are interested in and discuss possible thesis topics.