

Graduate Admissions FAQ

Is it possible for me to get an accurate prediction of my chances for admission?

No. It is impossible to accurately evaluate chances of admission before the admissions committee receives a full application and considers it in the context of that year's applicant pool.

Is it customary for prospective applicants to contact faculty members or the Director of Graduate Studies by email before applying for admission?

No. You are welcome to contact faculty members or the Director of Graduate Studies if you have a specific question that is not answered here.

What is the expected range for GRE scores and gradepoint average?

The general expectation is that the GRE verbal score for a native speaker of English should be within the 90th percentile (with the quantitative score within some reasonable vicinity of normal) and the gradepoint average in courses relevant to advanced study in comparative literature should be excellent, i.e., as close to 4.0 as possible.

How important are quantitative measures like GRE scores to in the admissions process?

Assuming that they are not noticeably alarming, quantitative measures are less important than qualitative measures, particularly the statement of purpose and the writing sample.

Does English count as one of the three required languages?

Yes.

How do I demonstrate language proficiency?

Usually through the courses you have taken and years of study. If your linguistic profile is varied and complex, you may elect to supplement the application materials with a separate account detailing your language proficiency.

Is it possible to study foreign languages while working towards the Ph.D?

Yes. Graduate students often use summer stipends to refine their command of their primary language or improve their second language. Students must, however, achieve a high level of proficiency in the primary language of study **before** entering the graduate program. The program is too short to allow a student to both acquire proficiency and pursue coursework and research in a new language.

How many applicants generally apply and how many are offered admission?

It varies. We receive generally around 90 to 125 applications and make between three and six offers of admission.

Do I need to have a master's degree in order to be considered for admission into Cornell's PhD program?

No, a master's is not required for application into our PhD program, nor does it necessarily increase chances of admission. A fair number of our students do come in with a master's and it can provide a head start as the PhD program is short, with a requirement of 12 courses usually completed within two and a half years.

Are applications from students with a master's degree evaluated differently?

Besides a general expectation that the applicant should have a more specific research project in mind than would be expected from a recent college graduate.

Does a student admitted with a master's degree gain advanced standing and follow an accelerated schedule to degree?

Not necessarily. There are no fixed expectations. The student would settle his/her course to degree in collaboration with the special committee which is endowed with the authority to approve an accelerated program.