

1. What is the MS/IM degree?

The MS/IM degree provides students with well-rounded training in management and policy; knowledge representation; human-centered design and systems; and data analytics. Information has never been a more valuable resource for organizations and governments who increasingly rely on the strategic use of information and models to solve society's most pressing challenges. The MS/IM degree provides training that will prepare you to manage and leverage information resources today and the theory that will serve you well into the future as a leader. Thus, the degree provides the foundation for a productive career, not just your first job out of school. Our flexible curriculum prepares our graduates to stand out as innovative, adaptable self-teachers who can assess information needs and integrate effective solutions in the workplace, in a range of settings. You'll learn important technical and problem-solving skills, along with the communication, teamwork, and adaptability skills necessary to translate those technical skills into practice. Learning with us is not about memorizing facts it is about how to bring the leadership necessary to ethically apply those methods to the complex problems faced by organizations and society.

2. Is the MS/IM a computer science (CS) degree?

No. We are the School of Information Sciences, one of the founders of the worldwide group of schools of information, called iSchools. Our approach is multidisciplinary. We look at the interactions between people, information, and technology.

Many of our faculty have degrees in CS and choose to base their teaching and research in an iSchool as the best home for their interests and commitment to advance human understanding in this exciting and rapidly growing area. They teach many courses that could be and indeed are taught in CS departments. These include data mining, data science, machine learning, data visualization, usability engineering, text mining, information assurance, information security, network analysis, etc.

Our programs infuse teaching with big picture thinking. This includes the following questions: Where did all this data come from? How did people collect the data and for what purposes? What were the collection and sampling biases? How should we account for these biases in our selection of appropriate algorithms and statistical methods? What do our analyses mean? How much do we trust them? How do we explain these issues to people with other intellectual backgrounds—including to senior management personnel who are not data analysts or data scientists, but who want and need to make critical and informed decisions?

The iSchool welcomes people with all kinds of prior degrees. If you hold a CS degree, that's wonderful. You can put your prior experience to great use in earning our MS/IM degree. If you have a degree in another area—engineering, business, journalism, linguistics, bench sciences, statistics, social sciences, or the humanities—you are welcome as well. We will teach you the technical skills you need, and we will teach you how to work in teams of people with diverse skill sets. Our students often become team leaders because they have learned how to enable such teams to thrive in solving challenging problems at the intersection of people, information, and technology.

3. What coursework is required?

There are three required courses: IS 507 (Data, Statistical Models, and Information), IS 504 (Sociotechnical Information Systems), and IS 515 (Information Modeling). These courses lay the foundation for your education at the iSchool. You may also be required to take IS 430 (Foundations of Information Processing) if you have no previous programming experience or IS 597 PR – Programming for Analytics and Data if you have little experience.

4. How much choice will I have in the courses I take?

You have a great deal of choice in your courses. Outside of the three required courses, plus IS 430 if you need it, you are free to take the courses that help you work towards your professional and personal goals. Your advisor is here to help you decide which courses fit your needs and introduce you to courses you may not have considered.

5. Can I take courses outside the department?

Yes. However, you are limited to 12 graduate credit hours total outside of the department.

6. How much mathematics and programming knowledge are required?

No programming or specialized knowledge is required to apply. We do recommend that students with less experience with statistics either take coursework at the undergraduate level or find other ways to gain at least some basic statistics knowledge before courses begin. If you do not know any programming languages, you will be required to take IS 430 (Foundations of Information Processing). All students are required to take IS 507 (Data, Statistical Models, and Information) regardless of their experience.

7. How much reading and writing are required?

The MS/IM is a STEM-designated degree, but it is rooted in the social sciences as well. Therefore, you can expect to do a great deal of reading and writing in some, but not all, of your courses. Communication skills are incredibly important for information professionals, so many of our courses ask students to write and present information in a variety of formats. In addition to reading and writing, students can expect to perform work in groups or teams, and present information and projects to their courses, whether alone or in a team.

8. Do I need a particular degree to apply?

No. While you are required to have a bachelor's degree, we welcome students from all majors! However, students who apply to our program should be students who are comfortable with being challenged – whether those challenges come from new technology, new ideas, or new ways of working together, we expect our students to be open to new experiences and ready to take their past skills in new directions as a graduate student.

9. What resources are available for international students?

International Student and Scholar Services provides great support for our international students through advising, immigration services, programming advocacy, and outreach. The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is the second top destination for international students attending public universities in the United States, and fifth among all schools in the U.S., according to the 2015 Open Doors report released by the Institute of International Education (IIE).

The MS/IM degree is STEM-designated, meaning that it allows students to apply for a two-year extension to their post-graduation Optional Practical Training (OPT) period, provided certain employment conditions have been met.

10. What are the English skill requirements for this degree?

International applicants whose native language is not English must submit Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) scores of 620 or higher (or 260 or higher for the computer-administered version OR 103 or higher with at least 25 in each section for the IBT). Our School's Institution code is 1836.

The IELTS test is also accepted with a minimum score of 7.5 in each section.

11. How much will the program cost?

Costs will depend on how you complete the program. Students with prior professional experience may finish the degree in one and one-half years, or three semesters. Students coming directly from undergraduate degrees, or students with little professional experience in the information field will most likely need to take two years, or four semesters.

On-campus tuition is billed in ranges based on the number of credit hours you take; campus fees are also assessed in a range. You can also view current tuition and fee information.

12. What funding opportunities are available?

There are some scholarship opportunities for IM students. It is important to note that MS/IM students are not eligible for tuition waiver granting positions such as teaching, research, or other graduate assistantships, but MS/IM students are eligible for graduate hourly positions on campus. Learn more about self-supporting programs like MS/IM and what self-supporting means.

13. What work or practical experience opportunities will I have?

MS/IM students are eligible for part-time positions listed as graduate hourly on campus. International students are limited to on-campus positions or positions with a very select list of companies in Research Park until they are eligible for CPT. Positions such as these, as well as paid or unpaid internships and iSchool Practicums, offer excellent practical experiences for MS/IM students.

We encourage and support students in gaining relevant work experience. We do not have a co-op program or internships for credit. Students are welcome to apply for full-time internships over the summer.

14. What research opportunities are available?

The iSchool faculty are researchers and educators with international reputations, many of whom teach courses relevant to the MS/IM. Read more about research at the iSchool. If you are interested in working on a particular topic or with a particular faculty member, contact your advisor.

MS/IM students also have the option of completing a thesis if they choose. The thesis is a major research project with a faculty advisor that requires a committee for review and defense. The thesis is a great option for students interested in pursuing a PhD or a career in research and development. If you wish to do a thesis, you will need to begin planning early in your program; a thesis can take multiple semesters to complete. You will not be able to complete a thesis in one semester or possibly even two. Discuss your thesis option with your advisor early.

15. Do you provide career services or job search help?

Yes. We have a full-time Career Services staff just for the iSchool. Our experienced staff collaborate with units all over campus as well as businesses and organizations all over Champaign-Urbana. They assist with Practicum, internships and other summer work, cover letters, resumes, and all aspects of your job search! They also hold informative workshops and seminars through the academic year. Connect with Career Services early to get the benefit of specialized career help!

