

What Makes a Good Application for the Graduate Program in Anthropology at Western?

There are several components to the application for the graduate program in anthropology at Western. The link to the application and the individual components can be found in the Applicant Requirements found on our web site at: <http://anthropology.uwo.ca/gradappnew-6.html>. Each year we get many questions about the application and the evaluation process, so this document is an attempt to provide some additional information to help prospective students craft a good application.

Basic information for all prospective graduate students can be found on the School of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies' web site at: http://grad.uwo.ca/prospective_students/index.htm. International students should be sure to check out the international part of the Student Development Centre's web site at: <http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/int/paths.html?main>, and the School of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies at: http://grad.uwo.ca/prospective_students/.

- **First and foremost:** Pay close attention to the instructions and follow them to the letter. An incomplete application is difficult to evaluate, and worse, it suggests inattention to detail. Incomplete applications will not be considered.
- **Application:** Please use the button below to apply online. The School of Graduate & Postdoctoral Studies web site has the online application through OUAC. <http://horizon.ouac.on.ca/western/grad>.



Many institutions require one application for admission to the graduate program and a second to be considered for funding. At Western, a single application suffices for both.

1. **Letters of reference:**

- Who should you ask? Ask a professor who knows you and your work well. Ask someone who can write you a strong letter. The ideal person is a thesis (honors or MA) supervisor. If you are applying for a master's program you will need two referees; for a doctoral program you will need three.
- How can you help them write a good letter? The writing of a good reference letter is actually not an easy undertaking, but you can make it easier by making sure that your referees have: a copy of your statement of interest/intent, a copy of your resume or CV, a list of courses, assignments & grades you did with them, and a clear indication of the letter deadline. If there are any specific points that a particular referee could make, you can ask them (diplomatically) to be sure to include them. Give them plenty of lead time!
- Referees are sent instructions online through the application process.

2. **Statement of Academic Intent field:** This statement is extremely important, as it is your opportunity to tell us what you want to do, and how you will fit in with our program. This

statement should be customized for each program to which you apply, since each program is different. Thus, you need to do some homework to find out about the research interests of potential faculty supervisors. In the case of our program, start with the main web page: <http://anthropology.uwo.ca> and follow the three links under the header “*Anthropologists at Western specialize in the following core research areas*”. Also go to the individual web sites of the faculty members to see what they do and read some of their publications. Their areas of research are found on our People page: <http://anthropology.uwo.ca/people.html>.

Particularly effective statements outline a specific area of research that fits in well with your experience and training and with research being done in the department, but also indicates some flexibility. Briefly touch on issues such as: what research topic you wish to pursue for your thesis (keeping in mind that the thesis is expected to be an original contribution to knowledge); why this problem is significant anthropologically; how the topic relates to your background preparation and previous experiences; and why your interests are a good fit with our program. It is acceptable to describe the general area that interests you (the “big question” guiding your research), and then to suggest a couple of ways that you think you might go about exploring those issues (examples of research projects that would allow you to pursue your guiding interests). We are aware that students’ specific research plans may change during their coursework, but we do expect that they come in with a set of interests that have motivated them to pursue advanced study, and to do so in our program.

Vague statements are not very effective. But a specific one can also be ineffective. What about a statement that outlined a research interest in the analysis of ceramics from historic period sites in China? The topic is quite specific, it is archaeological and you might have lots of experience in that area, but it would not be persuasive because no one in our department does ceramic analysis and no one works in China. Thus, we would not be able to provide effective instruction or supervision, and a student interested in that area would be better served elsewhere.

Many students establish contact with potential thesis supervisors before submitting their application. This is useful for a variety of reasons. Two such reasons are: some professors may not be in a position to supervise students because they are going on leave, or because they already have several students; and this contact will often provide useful information that a student can use to refine their statement.

The application form indicates that this statement should be no more than 4000 characters. Effective statements are clear, concise and *brief*.

3. **Sample of your previous written work**: Select a paper that demonstrates your writing and analytical abilities. Ideally, the paper should be in the general area you outline in your statement of interest, since this will indicate the kind of background preparation you have to pursue your research, but this is not a strict rule. In sum, you should choose a sample that you think best represents your abilities and best communicates the kind of preparation you have for advanced study. Make a clean copy of the paper – don’t submit the copy covered with a former professor’s comments and grade. **We only accept electronic copies via email.**
4. **One official copy of university transcripts**: This applies to all universities outside of Ontario that you have attended. Ontario universities’ transcripts are requested electronically through the application. The process of obtaining official copies from your university’s registrar can be time

consuming, so make sure to start the process well before the application deadline. Note: transcripts from Western are automatically done internally and are NOT required to be ordered by the applicant.

A consideration of transcripts brings us to a consideration of grades in general. At Western, a 78% (B+) average is the minimum acceptable grade for funding and for admission (80% for international applicants). Thus, applications with an average below 78% will not be considered. The average for applicants to the MA program is calculated on the basis of all available courses taken in the 3rd and 4th years. The average for applicants who have taken extra courses, or who have done their degree part-time is calculated on the basis of the last 10 full course equivalents. The average for applicants to the PhD program is generally calculated on their MA level courses.

Information about Western's grading scheme can be found at <http://www.registrar.uwo.ca/index.cfm/student-records/transcripts/>- applicants from other universities should check this web site, as the A, B, C scheme can differ greatly between institutions (particularly between Canadian and US institutions). International students should go to the WES International Grade Conversion web site - <http://www.wes.org/gradeconversionguide/index.asp> - for information about grade equivalencies.

Note that we do not require GRE scores.

5. **English testing:** Applicants who do not have English as their first language must demonstrate English proficiency by means of a TOEFL score or equivalent. See section 2.01 on the Faculty of Graduate Studies web site: http://grad.uwo.ca/section_two.htm
6. **Supporting Documents:** All supporting documents should be sent to the [Department Graduate Coordinator](#) via email. The documents must be postmarked by February 1st – but ideally before that date. University transcripts outside of Ontario are sent directly to the UWO Anthropology Graduate Coordinator by your university registrar (see address below). Double check the application check list on the web site: <http://anthropology.uwo.ca/gradappnew-8.html>.
7. **Questionnaire:** This must be sent by email. If you have difficulties with the form not saving or sending, here are a few things you can try:
 1. You may need to get the latest version of Adobe Reader. (<http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep2.html>)
 2. Try to 'Save-As' from the link to your hard drive rather than just opening and 'Save'.
 3. When completed, there is an option to send this form by email using the little envelope icon on the Adobe Tool Bar.
 4. If the above still isn't working, then you can certainly try scanning and emailing it. You could also put it in a Word document and send that instead. Or,
 5. Lastly, you can print the form and fax it to 519-661-2157. Make sure to fax it to the Grad Program Coordinator's attention. Or mail your document directly to our department.



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