RISC Application FAQs

Eligibility

Is the program open to rising sophomores?

Yes.

Can a person with a US green card be eligible for the program?

No -- the contracts paying for the internship generally stipulate U.S. citizenship as a requirement, even if individual projects do not always have that requirement.

Since this internship is related to intelligence and security, is this internship mostly for people interested in cybersecurity or can someone interested in software engineering benefit from this internship too?

Yes, software engineers can benefit; there are often projects that require tools to be developed.

I'm currently an undergrad at binghamton university studying mechanical engineering. Is this program offered to M.E's?

Yes, M.E's can apply.

If I have already worked in RISC and wish to apply for the new program, am I eligible to reapply?

Yes, you are eligible to reapply. We recommend that you talk about your previous experience in RISC, how they might qualify you, and anything different you might hope to get out of the experience of a second RISC summer.

I am beginning a graduate program in January. I do already have my undergraduate degree. Would that preclude me from being eligible for this summer?

No. We've had graduate students in the program, including masters and PhD students.

I'm seeing a lot of graduate students and I was wondering what are the chances of younger students getting accepted?

Though the exact statistics or figures are unknown, there is no specific criteria for how many undergraduate and graduate students are accepted into the program every year. It depends on the applicants' pool and backgrounds in the given year.

Do you need to be a student in the Fall semester after the summer internship to apply? Are we still eligible to apply if we graduate before the internship starts?

If you are a student now (in the Fall current semester), you are eligible to apply, even if you e.g., graduate in May.

Is the program open to someone who's graduating from undergrad in May? Or are you required to be matriculated in a degree program?

As long as you were enrolled in the fall semester, you are eligible. You should not have graduated more than one year from the start of the program.

Are there any credit requirements? The website mentions that priority is given to rising juniors and seniors. Is that based on credit or year?

There is no credit requirement. Generally, juniors and seniors have more experience which is beneficial. However, it is open to all years. Technical expertise and experience is important. We have had multiple sophomore interns in previous years.

Is there a limit on the years of professional experience a potential candidate can have?

No. The only requirement is that the candidate be enrolled in a degree program. We've had interns from a wide range of ages and professional backgrounds.

Is technical expertise required?

No, though it is a plus. We anticipate a range of projects from highly technical to generally quantitative to fully qualitative types of analysis.

Is there a particular amount/type of prior job experience required? I have experience with various coding languages and projects, but not much work.

Interns enter the RISC program with a wide range of experience types. Past job experience is helpful but not a requirement.

Is it required and/or preferred to have previous experience in your interested field? For example, I would need to have completed coding projects in order to apply for the software engineering subject (in the program)?

You should have experience in your interested field in some form. That might have come from a job, a capstone project, notable course projects, etc.

Application Components

What's a CV? I'm an undergraduate. Do I still need to submit that?

A CV is essentially a resume that highlights everything you have done. If you already have a resume that is acceptable.

For Letter of Recommendation is it preferred if that comes from a professor or a supervisor?

We would try to get a letter from a professor or supervisor, but if you are unable to, a mentor or advisor might be okay.

How long is the letter of interest supposed to be?

Most are around one page.

It said on the website that interns get paid $9-12k, how do you determine who gets paid a certain amount?

Stipend levels are based on seniority, experience, and background.

Can I submit more than 1 recommendation letter as an undergrad?

Only one letter of recommendation is requested.

Can we edit our application after sending?

Our current system does not allow that. If you are suspicious you might have some things to include which will benefit your application, you should hold off submitting it till the deadline.

In the application, under the part that asks us to rank our proficiency in programming languages and techniques, do projects from coursework count as contributing to projects?

Coursework projects can count, but there's a difference between a small task/effort and a capstone project. It helps us understand whether you would work well working with a team of other developers or if you are the one developer in the project.

Does the letter of recommendation need to be on like some sort of template with the company logo or something because it was a small company or can it just come from the supervisor?

The Letter of Recommendation does not need to be on letterhead, though it should be submitted as a PDF and clearly identify the writer's affiliation.

Is there a limit on long the letter of interest has to be? Ex. Is the max pages 2?

No hard limit.

Can the letter of recommendation come from someone at ARLIS?

Yes, definitely.

Do we need official transcripts, or are unofficial transcripts okay?

Unofficial transcripts are okay to use for the application.

What would better someone's chances of getting accepted or what are y'all specifically looking for in the applications?

Submit a well-written cover letter so the RISC selection committee knows the whole "you" and how "you" can serve project missions and add value to a team. Leverage your unique background, your skills sets and career interests and try to tie these in to the general ARLIS mission or specific RISC project description from last year. Do some research here and be creative when connecting your own traits and background to ARLIS to make your cover letter original.

For the letter of interest, should we focus on one topic within a discipline, or is it okay to mention that we are interested in multiple?

Listing multiple disciplines is definitely good, and it shows the reviewers you have flexibility to jump into multiple topics.

If you are applying under the group/topic of Computer Science, would it be wise to list coding projects in your resume rather than exclusively work experience that does not deal with your field of study? I have both, but sometimes resumes must be written differently/include more of one thing based on what you're applying to.

For this internship, including both experience + coding projects is useful.

I'm currently in the middle of having my name legally changed. Would that disrupt the application process?

Changing your name would not affect the application.

Timing

If I am graduating in Spring 2023, can I still participate in the RISC program?

Yes, you can. You are eligible to apply as long as you have not graduated before Fall 2022. You should not have graduated more than one year from the start of the program.

I heard that we had to be there for the summer, no vacations or so. I was also applying at the same time to an academic conference in July 20-22 in Brazil (Thursday thru Saturday). Would that be unacceptable for the internship?

It is accurate that there are no vacations during the 10-week program (which flies by quickly enough!); most interns vacation before or after the program. The University of Maryland is also closed one day each for Juneteenth and for Independence Day), which means RISCers get those days off too. For the case of academic conferences, exceptions can be made. Interns are still expected to work forty hour weeks though on average, so time would need to be made up evenings/weekends. To do otherwise would be unfair to your teammates.

My spring term for university does not end until early June. Would I still be able to participate in the internship?

Talk to us. We would like to try and work with you, if we can find a way that is fair to your teammates and gives you as much time as possible to get your work done in the lead up to final week in-person briefings and events.

Are applications reviewed all at once or on a rolling basis?

They are considered on a rolling basis. However, the February 5th deadline is the date for best consideration. If you apply after the deadline, you may run the risk of positions not being available.

If I was accepted into the program, when would I find out what project I was assigned to work on?

It may vary this year, depending on a number of factors, but you should know by late April or early May at the latest. Being as specific as possible in your interests, abilities and skill sets in your cover letter increases the odds you will know sooner than later.

With the internship, we would only be signing on for the summer, correct? Meaning that there would be no further commitments to the University or Maryland.

That is correct.

I'm a service member with the US Army National Guard and I have a 2-week summer training commitment in June, would this still be an issue?

I would still encourage you to apply. We have had one instance of this in the past; that intern was compensated for eight weeks of work instead of ten.

Will this internship require you to be on zoom the entire time? From what time to what time are you required to work each day?

You do not need to be on a Zoom call throughout the entire day. We expect interns to be available from 10am - 3pm EST daily; the other ~3-4 hours/day can be determined by your schedule and in coordination with your team members.

Project Topics

I noticed there are multiple disciplines this internship incorporates. Will interns be working multiple projects or are they selected/assigned to just one project?

Interns are assigned to one project with multiple interns per project.

Does each project have a mix of disciplines or are the project assignments centered to focus on one's major?

Most projects last summer had a mix of disciplines.

Does this internship involve ux/ui design?

Typically no, though specific projects might have requirements.

How many interns are assigned to each team?

2-4 interns.

Does the program offer the subjects aerospace/aeronautics or astronomy under Engineering?

Astronomy might not be offered, but aerospace/aeronautics could be useful.

Is the internship program for STEM only?

No, we have STEM related projects but we need domain expertise in social sciences domains.

What does involvement in topics for languages and linguistics look like?

The projects come to us from the government. We try to find the government with the right set of interns that would fit the project. We've had a lot of different varieties of projects; It could be language skills in the traditional sense - being able to speak/read/write language fluently. It could also be that you have to be good for e.g., computerized tools for speech recognition and natural language processing.

Do you have any projects related to biology or biotechnology?

We don't know what the projects are yet. However, most of the projects we've had in that space are more related to critical technology protection or identifying ways to anticipate what's going to be a destructive technology. Having a background in biology or biotechnology can be very helpful to sponsors depending on the topic of the projects.

Where can find the projects being offered in this internship to preview?

We usually don't know the projects until government sponsors propose the topics. However, they are mostly related to the mission spaces listed in the application.

Can you explain further how linguistics and political science could play a role within the internship?

Political science covers a diverse set of subfields, of course, but we'll answer generally. PoliSci has played a role in several projects, largely in the context of conducting policy analysis, informing the design of interview with subject matter experts, understanding a particular nation/region's history and culture, and assessing RISC project problems within a geopolitical context to inform recommendations.
Language fluency and cultural knowledge are more frequently valuable than classical linguistics, but we have certainly had projects where linguistics -- particularly sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics -- have played a key role. Computational linguistics too has been valuable for several past efforts.

If you are not interested in the project you are assigned, can you be added to a different one? Do we have the choice to choose the project we want to work on?

Intern project assignments are made based on the needs of government-requested projects and interests stated in intern applications. Once announced, it is very challenging to make assignment changes. The best way to ensure that you're placed in a project that will be interesting and beneficial to you professionally is to make your interests and context clear in your Letter of Interest.

Can you speak more to the advantages of having a background in a language other than English?

Some projects require accessing documents or other information in another language, or otherwise having sufficient knowledge of the language to help e.g., design features of a software tool. The highest demand languages for intelligence and security work tend to be Mandarin, Russian, Korean, Arabic, and Farsi.

Are accepted applicants immediately assigned to a project? Or is there a ranked selection process?

In your application, there are different fields in mission spaces and fields, and you are asked to select based on your interests. That, combined with your letter of interest, helps us understand what kind of project you'd fit in. You are not immediately assigned to a project but you will be assigned before the internship program starts.

Security Clearance

If someone already has secret clearance, do they have an advantage?

Potentially. Holding a clearance makes a candidate eligible to contribute to additional project topics, and typically also reflects both past relevant experience and sustained interest in contributing to national security work.

Does everyone get considered for a security clearance? How does that work?

Last year we had 122 interns, and by the time all was said and done, I think we got about 90 to at least provisional Secret. There were a few who did not seek a clearance.

If you already have a security clearance from a previous job would that transfer?

Possibly, yes, but on a case-by-case basis.

If I already carry an active security clearance, is that something I should make known on my letter of interest?

You can, especially how you used the security clearance to do a particular type of work. We do ask specifically in the application portal as well. It certainly opens up doors for new additional projects you can get involved in.

General

What are you looking for in a candidate?

The selection criteria focus on excellence in a relevant discipline, relevant experience (e.g., completing research or analytic projects, working in teams, leading teams, having some existing context of defense/intel culture etc.), and other workforce factors (i.e., does this person have sincere interest in a potential career in intelligence or security? Does the candidate come from an underrepresented demographic (e.g., race, gender, some unique and relevant life experience)? Does the person bring hard-to-find /high market rate skills)?
A more informal take: Overall we're looking to staff projects with teams with a cross section of disciplinary and experience backgrounds who can take a project and run with it, take the time to understand and synthesize what it is the sponsor really cares about within the problem space and why, work well together, and take advantage of the professional connections we offer them to do good work for the summer and hopefully continue on a path to a career in the space.

Can I get academic credits from this internship?

At most universities, an internship can yield payment or academic credits but not both. With that said, if your program includes your taking on an internship as an (uncredited) requirement, we have experience in certifying this.

Is this internship in person or online?

This is primarily a virtual internship. That said, there are required in-person events the final week (expenses paid by RISC), some projects may require occasional information access in secure facilities, and other teams with co-located members (e.g., in the DC area) choose to meet in person. ARLIS has workspace available for interns who request it.

What is the interview process like? What can we expect?

The RISC program does not include an interview requirement. All applications are reviewed by ARLIS and UMD reviewers and selections are made and notices are sent out; projects are then assigned as we know what the needs are for projects and skills of the students.

Is preference given to UMD students?

No preference is given to UMD students, we look at everyone equally.

How many available positions do you have and how many applicants do you typically get?

We are expecting between 100-150 positions this year, and around 600-700 applications across all disciplines.

With the limited roles, if someone applies this year and is not accepted, do we have to go through the application process again if we want to apply again?

This year's new application system allows past candidates to build on past years' applications rather than starting anew (presuming you use the same email address). That said, of course ensure that your application is up to date and reflects your interests and relevant skills/experience.

How often do interns get job offers from whatever government entity they were working with during the program?

The government does not normally offer jobs directly because of the nature of government hiring but the experience will help you when applying for these government jobs. We are working with the government to establish pilot programs that would help the government hire RISC interns directly.

Would it be appropriate to reach out to past RISCers or faculty to pick their brains on the program?

Absolutely, feel free to do so - https://www.arlis.umd.edu/our-people/internship

Is this a good opportunity for someone looking to transition from the private sector to the public sector? Especially someone who does not have a security clearance?

I would say, absolutely! Besides doing hopefully interesting and compelling work, interns have the opportunity to learn about the mission space of a wide range of IC and DoD agencies and build a network of interns + USG project mentors + ARLIS's deep bench of former senior mil and government personnel. And we initiate a secure clearance for interns as well which is obviously highly marketable.

Do you accept an equal number of interns from different disciplines?

It varies every year depending on the project topics the government requests, but it is not an equal amount. There's more demand e.g., for interns who have ability to program and

work with data than for interns with a linguistics background and no computational training. We try to recruit more directly for disciplines where we anticipate greater need.