

Frequently Asked Questions for RISC Application

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Eligibility & Requirements

- **Is the program open to rising sophomores or students graduating soon?**
 - The program is open to ANY student if they are enrolled in class in the Fall of 2025.
- **Can I participate in the RISC program if I'm graduating in Spring 2026?**
 - Yes, you can apply if you have not graduated before Fall 2025. You should not have graduated more than one year from the start of the 2026 program.
- **Does starting a graduate program affect eligibility?**
 - It does not; graduate students, including those in master's and PhD programs, can apply. Those entering a graduate program in Fall 2026 are also eligible.
- **What are the chances for younger students to be accepted compared to graduate students?**
 - There are no specific selection criteria for the number of undergraduate versus graduates accepted each year; it depends on the applicant pool and project needs.
- **Are there any credit or prior job experience requirements?**
 - There are no specific credit requirements. Priority may be given to juniors and seniors due to their experience so previous job experience is helpful but not mandatory.
- **Is technical experience required?**
 - No, technical experience is not required. The past program participants have entered the program with varying levels of experience across different fields.
- **Is previous experience in intelligence and security preferred?**
 - Some experience is beneficial but not a requirement. Any experience in your interested field is beneficial, whether from jobs, capstone projects, or notable course projects.
- **Can a person with a U.S. green card apply?**
 - No. The program requires participants have U.S. citizenship due to a contract stipulation.
- **I am a dual U.S. citizen and in Canada attending a university out of the US. Can I still apply for this program?**
 - Yes, if you are a U.S. citizen you are eligible to apply!
- **I am an international student; can I apply for this program?**
 - No. The program requires participants have U.S. citizenship due to a contract stipulation.
- **Do I disqualify from a security clearance if I am a dual citizen?**
 - No, you do not disqualify from a security clearance if you are a dual U.S. citizen.
- **Do I need a security clearance to apply to this program?**
 - No, you do not need a security clearance to apply to this program.

- **If I have worked as a RISC participant before, can I reapply?**
 - Yes, you can reapply! It is recommended to discuss your previous experience as a RISC participant and what you hope to gain from a second RISC summer.
- **I do not go to a university that belongs to the INSURE Consortium. Does that pose any issues with my application?**
 - No! We do not give special treatment to applicants who belong to a university in the INSURE Consortium during the review process.

Academic Background & Program Fit

- **I am a dual major; does it matter which major I list on the application?**
 - Please list the major that you believe best represents your professional interests. You can highlight the other major on your resume and Letter of Interest.
- **My field of study does not fit with the set categories. What category should I put it under?**
 - Based on your overall judgment of the available categories, please place your field of study in the category that best describes it and if clarification is needed, the RISC Planning Team will reach out to you.
- **Is a STEM background necessary for this program?**
 - No! While a STEM background may be advantageous for some projects, it is not a requirement to participate in this program. However, it is generally advantageous to have at least some quantitative/computational background regardless of discipline.

Application Materials (Resume, Personal Statement, Letter of Interest)

- **Who should I address my Letter of Interest to?**
 - The Letter of Interest should be addressed to the RISC 2026 Selection Committee.
- **Should the personal statement be more like a cover letter or more of a personal essay?**
 - It varies by applicant! Applicants are encouraged to write the letter in a way that will best convey their desire to be in the RISC program.
- **How long should the Letter of Interest be?**
 - While there is no hard limit on the length of the Letter of Interest, most applicants submit letters that are 1 to 2 pages.
- **Should I focus on one topic or mention multiple interests in the Letter of Interest?**
 - It is encouraged that applicants mention multiple interests but highlight the topic they are most interested in pursuing.
- **What is a CV, and do undergraduates need to submit one?**

- A curriculum vitae (CV) is a comprehensive, multi-page document detailing your entire academic and professional history. However, if you have a resume, that is acceptable!
- **Will changing my name affect the application process?**
 - No, changing your name will not disrupt the application process!
- **Can we edit our application after submission**
 - Yes, the application can be edited after submission up until the application deadline.

Transcripts & Documentation

- **I transferred schools; should I submit my transcripts from both schools?**
 - Yes! If you recently transferred schools, include transcripts from BOTH schools.
- **Are unofficial transcripts acceptable?**
 - Yes! An unofficial (or official if available) copy of your transcripts is acceptable for the application.
- **If I indicate a language competency, where should I send the supporting documentation?**
 - The RISC Planning Team will directly reach out to you to collect the supporting documentation of your language competency. Please ensure you list your current test level, NOT the level you will be at during the summer.

Candidate Assessment Letter

- **What are the requirements for the Candidate Assessment Letter?**
 - It should come from a professor or supervisor, but a mentor or academic advisor is also acceptable.
- **Does the Candidate Assessment Letter need to come directly from the recommender?**
 - Yes, the Candidate Assessment letter should be turned in by the recommender ONLY.
- **Can I submit more than one Candidate Assessment Letter?**
 - Only one Candidate Assessment Letter is requested, so please only submit one LOR.
- **Who can write my Candidate Assessment Letter? (e.g., Can a TA write one? Would RISC accept one from a professor who is a PhD student?)**
 - It is encouraged that the writer of your Candidate Assessment Letter be a current or former mentor/advisor, professor, or employer.
- **When is the Candidate Assessment Letter due?**

- The Candidate Assessment Letter is due on the same day as the application on February 2nd, 2026.
- **Would I be able to submit a pre-made Candidate Assessment Letter?**
 - No, any pre-made Letters of Recommendations or Candidate Assessment Letters are not accepted.

Skills

- **For ranking of the skills portion of the application, do I need to have skills in all the topics or just what I know?**
 - You do not need to have skills in all the topics listed on the application. Please rank the skills at the most accurate level because this helps with aligning skills to project needs.
- **Do coursework projects count towards the programming proficiency ranking?**
 - Yes, coursework projects can count towards the programming proficiency rankings. Please include the scope of the project because it helps assess your collaborative skills.
- **Do all projects require a strong coding background?**
 - No, each project will require a different set of skills.

Security Clearance

- **Do I disqualify from a security clearance if I am a dual citizen?**
 - No, you do not disqualify from a security clearance as a dual citizen if you hold citizenship in the U.S.
- **Do I need a security clearance to apply to this program?**
 - No, you do not need a security clearance to apply for this program.
- **Does having an existing security clearance provide an advantage in the program?**
 - Yes, holding a security clearance can make you eligible for additional project topics.
- **Is everyone considered for a security clearance, and how does that process work?**
 - Yes, however, some past participants choose not to seek a security clearance, and some projects do not require one. Each accepted student in the program will complete a standard process that includes fingerprinting and filling out an SF-86. The background investigation may include interviews with those who know you well.
- **Can a security clearance from a previous job transfer to this program?**
 - It is possible but it would need to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis by ARLIS Security.
- **Should I mention my active security clearance in my Letter of Interest?**

- Yes, you should mention it, especially how it relates to your past work. This information is also requested on the application and can open doors to additional project opportunities depending on government projects.

Interviews & Events

- **Where can I learn more about any RISC information sessions in the future?**
 - Please visit the [RISC website](#) under the “Information Sessions” tab under “Apply for RISC 2026”
- **What is the interview process like?**
 - There is no interview requirement for the RISC program. All applicants are reviewed, and the selection is made based on project needs and candidate skills.
- **Is it appropriate to reach out to past RISC participants or faculty for insights about the program?**
 - YES! You are encouraged to connect with past RISC program participants or RISC faculty mentors to learn more about the program.

Application Process & Timing

- **Does the timing of my application submission impact the review process or are all applications reviewed after the deadline?**
 - The timing of the application submission has no impact on the review process. All applications are reviewed after the deadline closes on February 2nd, 2026.
- **Are applications reviewed on a rolling basis or all at once?**
 - All applications are reviewed after the deadline closes on February 2nd, 2026.
- **I have decided not to apply for the RISC Summer 2026 program. Is there a way I can formally withdraw my application?**
 - Yes, please email the RISC Planning Team that you would like to formally withdrawal your application.

Program Structure & Experience

- **If accepted, is it possible for me to be fully in person for the duration of the program?**
 - Yes, it is possible to work fully in person for the duration of the program. But note that the RISC Program is unable to provide housing for the summer session.
- **Will I need to be on Zoom all day during the program?**
 - No, you will not be required to be on Zoom the entire day. Participants should be available from 10 am to 3 pm (Eastern) daily, with the remaining hours scheduled in coordination with team members and project needs.

- **Are there any vacation days during the program?**
 - The program does not allow vacation days during the 10-week period, except for Juneteenth and Independence Day. Some expectations can be made but it is expected that participants will make up any missed time during evenings or weekends.
- **What if my spring semester ends in early July?**
 - Please reach out to the RISC Planning Team; we aim to work with you to find a solution that will accommodate your academic responsibilities and project expectations.
- **Is the program only for the summer, with no further commitments to the University of Maryland?**
 - Yes, the program is limited to the 10-weeks in the summer with no additional commitments.
- **What if I have a summer training commitment with a military service (i.e., National Guard)?**
 - You are still encouraged to apply! In past instances, participants with similar commitments have been compensated for eight weeks of participation instead of the full ten.
- **Can I earn academic credits from this program?**
 - Most universities allow either payment OR academic credits, but not both. If accepted into the program, please reach out to the RISC Assistant Director to handle all internship credit paperwork that your university may require.
- **Is the program in-person or online?**
 - The program is primarily virtual with the option for those local to the DMV area to work in person at ARLIS, by participant request. The Final Events require in-person participation so travel arrangements are made for participants.

Research & Projects

- **Is there any information on what projects you anticipate needing participants or at least what topic areas they would fall into?**
 - RISC project topics are generated by the needs of various customers during the academic year, so they tend to change year by year.
- **Are the projects the same as last year or are there a new batch of projects for Summer 2026?**
 - All the RISC 2026 projects are new, so the Summer 2026 projects will be different than the projects from previous years apart from a few projects that have been continued from previous years based on customer needs.
- **Will participants work on multiple projects or be assigned to just one?**

- Participants are assigned to one project, typically with 2-3 per project.
- **Are accepted applicants immediately assigned to projects?**
 - Applicants are not immediately assigned; project assignments are made based on interest expressed in the application and finalized prior to the start of the program.
- **When will I find out what project I'm assigned to if accepted?**
 - Project assignments are finalized by late April or early May, depending on various factors. To expedite this process, be specific about your interests in your Letter of Interest.
- **Can participants switch projects if they are not interested in their assigned one?**
 - No. Once assigned, it is challenging to make changes because project assignments are based on government needs and interests stated in the application. It is crucial to clearly express your interests in your Letter of Interest.
- **Do projects involve a mix of disciplines or a focus on specific majors?**
 - Most projects have a mixture of disciplines collaborating, although some projects may center around a specific area that require expertise in the topic.
- **Is the program limited to STEM fields?**
 - No! While there are STEM-related projects, the program is not limited to those topics.
- **What is the role of languages and linguistics in the program?**
 - Some projects may require language skills such as language fluency for communication or specialized skills for tools like speech recognition and natural language processing.
- **What advantages come from having a background in language other than English?**
 - Some projects may require language skills for accessing documents or designing software features for project needs. High-demand languages include Mandarin, Russian, Korean, Arabic, and Farsi.

Future Opportunities & Outcomes

- **What kinds of opportunities are available after the summer program for continued involvement or professional development?**
 - Depending on project needs, some participants continuing working on the summer projects into the academic year or are placed on an academic year project. It is project dependent, and the RISC Planning Team communicates this with you directly if this is a possibility for you.
- **If I am accepted into the program for Summer 2026 and decide not to move forward with an offer, is it possible to be considered for a Summer 2027 program?**
 - No, you would need to apply again for the RISC 2027 Summer program.

- **Is there a way to conduct my thesis research via ARLIS if accepted into the grad program with this requirement?**
 - Generally, no, but if accepted into the program, reach out to the RISC Program Assistant Director to inquire about potential options.
- **Do participants typically receive job offers from government entities after the program?**
 - Government entities usually do not offer jobs directly, but the experience gained will be beneficial for future applications.
- **Is this program a good opportunity for transitioning from the private sector to the public sector, especially without a security clearance?**
 - Yes! This program offers compelling work opportunities, a chance to learn about various intelligence and defense agencies, and the ability to build a professional network.

Miscellaneous / Special Circumstances

- **I am studying abroad this summer. Should I apply to the RISC program?**
 - If you plan to study abroad this summer, it is recommended that you wait to apply until a year when you can remain in the U.S. for the entire summer. Due to security requirements, you must be physically present in the U. S. for the full duration of the program.
- **Is there a preference for University of Maryland students?**
 - No! All applicants are considered regardless of their university affiliation.
- **If I apply and am not accepted, do I need to reapply in full the following year?**
 - Yes, but you can use the same RISCLink Account – some application questions may have changed to it is recommended to reapply each year.
- **Do you accept an equal number of participants from different disciplines?**
 - No, the number of participants varies each year based on government project requests. Typically, there is more demand for candidates with programming and data skills compared to those with a linguistics background without any computational training.
- **Are federal resumes or regular resumes preferred?**
 - There is no preference for federal resumes. We encourage applicants to submit a resume in a format that is easy to read and professional.
- **What is the GPA requirement?**
 - There is no GPA requirement for this program, but in general the average GPA of accepted students is around 3.7.
- **I am in my first year of graduate school and do not have a GPA yet. What value should I place there to convey that?**



- Please wait to submit your application until you have a GPA value from the Fall Semester or put your undergraduate GPA.