

Department of Geography and Environmental Engineering Assignment as Instructor: Frequently Asked Questions

The following are some of the common questions asked by officers with an interest in teaching in the department. If your question isn't included below, please contact the department personnel officer for clarification.

What is the format for the letter of intent?

There is no standard format for the letter, but here are a few basic guidelines.

- 1) It should be in memorandum format addressed to the Department Head, COL Eugene J. Palka.
- 2) As a minimum you should address the following:
 - Why you want to teach at USMA and in the department.
 - What you would like to teach: Human/Regional Geography, Environmental Geography, Environmental Engineering, Environmental Science or Geospatial Information Systems.
 - When you will be available to attend graduate school.
 - Special qualifications or experiences that make you a strong candidate.
- 3) Typical memorandums are 1 page in length.

What are the steps in the selection process?

Each fall we begin collecting and assembling packets from interested officers. By 1 November, the packets from potential candidates should have been received. Shortly after this, files are reviewed by all of the group directors and department head to select candidates. This process usually concludes about mid-January. Packets are then sent to the AG on post and compiled, and all USMA requests are sent to PERSCOM for final approval. In August (12 months before you begin graduate school), we receive final approval from PERSCOM and then contact the officer about the graduate school application process. Selected candidates are then given guidance on where to apply to graduate schools and, once accepted, complete paperwork indicating where they would like to go school. The group directors and department head make the final decisions on where you are allowed to go to school. The final graduate school acceptance and approval takes place in the Spring before you start school.

What is the minimum GPA required?

A GPA of over 3.0 is recommended, but not required. However, if you have a low GPA (2.5 – 2.7), you need to do very well on the GRE. The concern with a low GPA is the ability of getting accepted to a quality graduate program. A high GRE score will overshadow undergraduate grades at most schools. Some schools only evaluate the last four semesters of work.

What should I score on the GRE?

The minimum required score is 500 Quantitative and Verbal and 4.0 on the Analytical Writing. Scores must be no more than 4 years old when applying. You can get a waiver from PERSCOM for a lower score. However, experience has shown that many schools will not accept a prospective student that does poorly on the GRE and this often serves as a discriminator in our selection process.

What is the added commitment incurred for fully funded graduate program?

You are required to pay the Army back three days of service for every day at graduate school.

Do I have to be accepted to a graduate school as part of the application process?

No. Once selected and approved, you will be given guidance on where to apply. Each group in the department has a list they generally work from. The schools represent the top graduate programs in the field and have a well-established reputation with our department. See the link on the assignment page for a list of schools.

How competitive is the process?

The number of candidates varies from year to year, but typically we review 35 – 50 files for master's candidates and 10 –20 files for Ph.D. candidates. Additionally, the number of available slots varies annually.

Can I get another masters degree if I already have one?

Yes. The goal is to get the best-qualified instructors in the department, so it is imperative that your graduate degree matches the discipline you will be teaching. However, it is possible to come here as a direct assignment if you have the appropriate degree.

Is there anything I can do to improve my chance of selection?

There is not one thing that stands out above another in the selection process. Typically the selected officers have a well-rounded file. They have a strong military file, a superb academic record, a good looking photo, and one or two strong letters of recommendation. It is good to make your PERSCOM branch representative aware of your intentions and get a feel for your timeline and potential future assignments. An expressed desire on your part sometimes helps in getting PERSCOM approval. Finally, ensure you have a complete file at the beginning of the application process. Materials can and will be added to the file on a continuous basis, so it is recommended you send in a majority of the material when you get it and then continue to build the file.

Do copies of transcripts need to be sent directly to you or should I compile the entire packet prior to sending it?

Have the schools send sealed transcripts directly to us. We will upload them into your online file.

How do I send my information to you in order to complete my application packet?

As of 19 July 2007 we are using an online application system. Go to the Department of Geography and Environmental Engineering assignments page (<http://www.dean.usma.edu/departments/geo/Assignments/Assignment.htm>) and click on the link to apply (<https://ams-external.usma.edu/apps/dean/inbound/interest/interest.cfm>). This link will take you to a USMA Interest Form which you will fill out and submit. We will review your interest form. Once approved (usually within 10 days) you will be given a userid and password to the online application system. From that point you will be able to update your file by uploading .pdf, .jpg, .jpeg, or .gif copies of your records into the system. You can also update your basic information and review your file at any time. We will upload any letters of recommendation sent to us on your behalf, as well as any transcripts sent to us by universities and colleges. You will be able to see what we have and have not received, and know what your file is missing.

I have a file with another department at USMA, do I need to send you one too?

Yes. Each department conducts its own selection process, so if you are competing in two different departments you need two files.