

Dear incoming GISDE student,

Welcome to the Master of Arts program in Geographic Information Science for Development and Environment (GISDE). This will be a challenging, exciting, and rewarding year. In light of your transition to Clark, we've enclosed several items that may be of interest to you. Please also know that a lot of information is already available to you online at www.clarku.edu/departments/idce/admAdmitted.cfm. The program is extremely ambitious, so this letter outlines how you should prepare to gain the most from your experience at Clark University.

First, you must be completely settled in Worcester by August 17 in terms of housing, banking, recovering from jet lag, etc. For most of you, this means that you should plan to arrive in Worcester by August 13. August 17 is the official first day of the program. During the dates of August 17-21, you will have the required pre-semester intensive GIS training. Regular classes begin on August 31. If you haven't already, it's time to start thinking about housing arrangements for the fall. You should plan on arriving early to secure housing. Some students have already visited campus and toured the surrounding area looking for apartments or made arrangements to stay in University-owned graduate housing. Graduate students usually share an apartment with two or three other students to reduce residential costs. Only you can decide which option best suits your needs.

If you need an I-20 form to obtain a U.S. visa, please return the appropriate international student information form to Paula Hall, c/o the IDCE Office. If you are an international student, this form was previously sent to you in the packet with your appointment letter.

Second, we urge you to use these weeks before August to upgrade your computer skills. While at Clark, you will want to use your time to absorb the concepts presented in our most advanced courses, nearly all of which require general computer skills. Some courses assume that you already have some basic GIS skills. Therefore, you should learn those computer skills that you can teach yourself between now and August. In our computer lab, each student will have a computer with Microsoft Office, connected by Windows XP with full internet access. Therefore you will be expected to have competency in the major Microsoft office suite of tools: Word, Excel, PowerPoint, and FrontPage.

You should know intermediate level word processing with Word, including knowledge of how: 1) to work with a document in Outline View mode, 2) to manipulate tables and figures, and 3) to draw flow diagrams with the drawing tools. You should know how to make presentations in PowerPoint. You will make numerous oral presentations, and nearly all will be with a PowerPoint file that will contain figures from Excel, ArcGIS, and Idrisi. You should learn how to post web pages to your own personal web site, using either Word or FrontPage as your web editor.

We also urge you to spend time reading about analytical capabilities of raster and vector GIS packages. You should visit the Clark Labs web site (www.clarklabs.org/products/index.cfm) for information about Idrisi software, and the ESRI web site (www.esri.com/software/arcgis/about/desktop.html) for information about ArcGIS. Also, please read about GIS applications to various fields at (www.clarklabs.org/applications/index.cfm) and (www.esri.com/industries.html).

Third, we urge you to arrive on campus with a digital version of your job resume and keep it up-to-date. One of our major functions is to help you find employment upon graduation. We receive job announcements regularly; however, chances are that the announcement for the job that you really want will arrive on short notice during the time of year when you are most busy. So you should always have your resume up to date and ready to print and send. We suggest writing it in Word then saving it as a *.html file so you can put it on your website.

The Master of Arts program consists of 12 courses. Full-time status requires at least three courses per semester, while it is reasonable to take at most 4 courses per semester. Therefore, GISDE students are expected to complete the program in either three or four semesters. Tuition is based on a fee per course, so total tuition is the same under either the three-semester or four-semester track.

IDCE will supply you with a desktop computer in a secure computer lab that is reserved for only the GISDE students. The computers will be loaded with the necessary software and will be serviced by Clark University's Information Technology Services (ITS).

This letter is meant to enable you to enjoy and benefit from your time at Clark University. In past years, some students lacked at least one of the general computer skills outlined above. Those students gained the necessary skills, but at the expense of sleep and social life. You are wise to acquire those skills now. Conversations with current GISDE students confirm this. Those students who were best prepared were those who benefited most from the program. The GISDE program is a special group. In this program, we work hard; we also have fun and make deep friendships. I look forward to working with all of you.

See you in August!

Sincerely,

Yelena Ogneva-Himmelberger, Ph.D.
Coordinator, Master of Arts Program in Geographic Information Science for Development and Environment (GISDE)
(yogneva@clarku.edu)