

Interview: Applying to IR Graduate Programs

The Tufts IR Program interviewed Laurie Hurley, Associate Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid at Tufts University's Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, on the IR graduate school application process and characteristics of Fletcher's programs.

What are the main degree programs offered at The Fletcher School?

The main degree programs that The Fletcher School offers are the Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy (MALD), Master of International Business (MIB), Master of Arts (MA), Master of Laws in International Law (LLM), Global Master of Arts Program (GMAP), and Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.). More complete descriptions and a comparison chart of all the degree programs can be found on the Fletcher website.

How is the Fletcher education similar or different to other graduate programs?

Fletcher is what you might call a "pure" international relations graduate school, in the sense that we only offer degrees in international affairs. Other schools may offer both public policy and international affairs degrees. In addition, Fletcher is a "stand alone" graduate school, in that it is a separate entity from say, a school of arts and sciences. Other universities may have an international affairs program that is integrated into a larger school with many different degree programs.

Apart from these structural differences, Fletcher prides itself on the flexibility of its curriculum, the diverse and cohesive community atmosphere, and the wide range of degree programs in international affairs that are available to its students. Fletcher is highly interdisciplinary and allows students to easily blend their professional, personal, and academic goals. Most Fletcher students have gained some professional experience before enrolling which often helps them to focus and find direction.

What types of undergraduate courses will best prepare me for graduate school in international affairs?

The most important courses for an undergraduate to take in preparation for any graduate school of international affairs are macroeconomics and microeconomics, as well as foreign language courses. Fletcher requires all of its graduating students to pass a reading comprehension and oral foreign language examination. Students must have proficiency in at least one foreign language.

Is my GPA a good indicator of my chances of being admitted to Fletcher?

Fletcher certainly looks for the best and brightest students in its applicant pool. However, we do not rank certain criteria in order of importance, but rather look at the whole individual. An applicant with a very high GPA might not have much else to offer, while someone with a relatively lower GPA might have many other outstanding qualifications.

What other qualifications do you look for in applicants?

Fletcher admits students from a wide range of undergraduate majors, from artists to engineers. Most importantly, we look for what an applicant has done to show their interest in international

affairs during and after college. A comprehensive description of all the qualifications we look for in candidates can be found on the Fletcher admissions website.

Does being a Tufts student help or hinder my chances of being admitted to Fletcher?

In every class that we admit, Tufts is usually one of the most represented undergraduate institutions. This is partly because the admissions committee knows the quality of education and level of preparation that Tufts undergraduates receive. Likewise, Tufts graduates tend to be very familiar with Fletcher and apply in larger numbers.

How can IR majors' best take advantage of their proximity to Fletcher during their undergraduate education?

Apart from registering for Fletcher courses, the school offers many guest lectures that are open to members of the Tufts community. Additionally, undergraduates should take advantage of the targeted resources that the Ginn Library has to offer. Perhaps the best way to take advantage of Fletcher is by working with and getting to know Fletcher students, and the career paths they have taken. Learning about these students' experiences can be a good way for undergraduate to learn more about what opportunities are out there and get some ideas for what they may want to do after graduation.

Do you recommend that students take time off before graduate school? What types of activities do you look for applicants to engage in during that time?

We strongly recommend that students take some time off before applying to Fletcher. Students will probably get more out of the Fletcher experience if they have taken some time off to work, volunteer, or travel. In addition, this kind of experience will allow students to contribute more to the Fletcher community when they enroll.

Every year we accept students from every sector, who have done all sorts of different things, from banking, to NGO work, to teaching, to public service work. What is most important is that students take positions that will help them develop professionally and explore what they really want to do in life. I always recommend that prospective students look at the student profiles on the Fletcher website and the websites of other international affairs schools (APSIA schools often have some good examples), which describe what these students did before they came to graduate school. Broadly speaking, common activities that will strengthen an application include volunteer activities, internships, international experience, work, and keeping up with foreign language skills.