Guidelines for students with other background

Within the last few years, we have received a significant number of enquiries from students interested in our graduate program, falling into one of the following categories:

- outstanding graduates from other disciplines with weak or non-existent background in CS
- students with undergraduate degrees in CS obtained many years ago
- students with other types of deficiencies that would render them inadmissible to our program in the standard way

In exceptional circumstances, we may consider admitting such students to our graduate program, provided that they fulfill one or more of the following criteria:

- they have become established in their profession, with a serious practical experience in CS
- their accomplishments in their primary discipline are truly outstanding (for example, they hold a scholarship from a respectable funding agency like NSERC, AIF, SSHRC, CIHR)
- they have demonstrated their determination to pursue studies in CS and a genuine interest in the discipline (e.g., by participation in related projects or through a publication record)

To such students, we offer an admission option as "qualifying graduate students," who are graduate students not for a degree program. The following rules apply:

- As a **precondition**, a successful applicant must receive written support from at least two faculty members in the Department.
- Admission is only possible to the M.Sc. program; however, an upgrade to the Ph.D. program can be effected later, based upon the student's progress (as explained below).

The qualifying status is granted for at most one academic year. At the end of that year, the student must satisfy the qualifying conditions listed below.

All cases are assessed individually. We do **not** guarantee that a student will be admitted after satisfying the qualifying conditions.

Qualifying conditions

- **Background requirement**

  The student must demonstrate knowledge equivalent to having successfully completed 6 undergraduate CS courses in the following four areas:

  o Theory
  o Computer Systems and Architecture
  o Software
  o Applications
  Note: CMPUT 201, CMPUT 300 and independent study courses are exempt from serving as qualifying classes.

The background requirement may be satisfied by:

1) having taken courses in the listed areas at recognized institutions prior to applying to our graduate program
2) taking the respective course or courses in the area at our Department (In some cases, alternative courses may be acceptable and will be determined at the time of admission.)
3) taking background evaluation exams covering the specified courses/areas, or
4) a combination of the above.

The exact procedure will be specified by the Associate Chair (Graduate) at the time of admission.

One example of a possible set of courses is as follows:

o Theory: CMPUT 304
o Computer Systems and Architecture: CMPUT 379, CMPUT 429
o Software: CMPUT 301
o Applications: CMPUT 291, CMPUT 411

- **GPA requirement**

If the student chooses to take a background evaluation exam, then the exam must be completed by the beginning of the Fall term, before the first day of classes. The course syllabus for the exam will be made available to the student no later than in July of each year.

To pass a background evaluation exam, the student must achieve a minimum grade of **B** (**GPA=3**). If the student achieves a grade less than a B, then he/she must take the corresponding course and pass it with a minimum grade of **B**.

If the student chooses to take a course, in lieu of the corresponding background evaluation exam, then he/she must achieve a minimum grade of **B** in the course.

The Associate Chair (Graduate) may approve a graduate-level course to be taken instead of an undergraduate course in the same area, or an equivalent course offered at the U of A by another Department. However, a graduate course taken to satisfy the qualifying condition cannot be used to also satisfy the course requirement in the graduate program, if the student is admitted.

The overall GPA of courses or of background evaluation exams taken to satisfy the qualifying condition must be at least **3.5** (between a B+ and an A-).

Upon satisfying the qualifying condition, the student will be eligible for consideration of admission to the M.Sc. program with the same status
 as other applicants who have the formal background in Computing Science.

Outstanding students may be eligible for consideration of early admission if they have completed at least 4 out of 6 qualifying courses or exams of the requirement with significantly better than the required minimum GPA.

Funding during the qualifying stage

A qualifying graduate student will not be financially supported by the Department or eligible for any scholarship applications. It is up to the sponsoring faculty member or the student to provide funding. However, students who have been awarded major national scholarships, e.g. NSERC, AIF, SSHRC, CIHR will be eligible for special arrangements.

Fast track to the Ph.D.

An outstanding student admitted through this option may be eligible to upgrade his/her status to the Ph.D. program without completing the M.Sc. However, this will happen only if 1) the student is interested to go directly to the Ph.D.; 2) the student's performance during the first year of the M.Sc. program lends sufficient and tangible evidence of his/her superb ability in courses and in research; and 3) there is strong support from at least 2 faculty members in the Department.