October 16, 2018

Dear Prospective Applicant,

Thank you for your interest in applying to work with me on a MS degree at Western. I am planning to accept one new graduate student to start in Fall of 2019. I am currently on sabbatical this year, including travel to NZ, so please keep that in mind if I get behind with email communication.

Most of my (and my students’) recent work centers on the active tectonics of the Pacific Northwest of North America, although I am developing new projects both local and abroad. Current projects focus on the Olympic Mountains and the southern Cascades backarc of Oregon. Each of these projects involve some combination of surficial mapping, surface dating (e.g., cosmogenic, luminescence, radiocarbon, etc.), lidar analysis, and paleoseismic trenching. Additionally, I collaborate closely with folks working on geodesy and crustal deformation modeling, so there are opportunities to be involved with shorter-term deformation as well. More information on recent projects is on the research page of my website (https://tectgeowwu.wordpress.com/research/). I also recommend looking over some of the theses and publications from my recent MS students (https://tectgeowwu.wordpress.com/students-2/) to get a better feel for the type of work we do and the basic questions we try to answer.

I am currently seeking funding for the work described above, and will hopefully know more about the ultimate success of these proposals by the end of 2019. That said, I have been successful at funding student research projects through smaller grants from GSA, the USGS, Evolving Earth, Earthscope, etc., as well as internal departmental and university grants. I am also planning to seek TA funding through the department, which are awarded on a competitive basis based on our entire applicant pool. Basically, the department ranks all of the applicants to be considered for a TA based on grades, strength of the application letter, GRE scores, research experience, etc. These are also the basic parameters I use to admit students, with additional emphasis on the strength of the letters, past research experience, and writing proficiency. In the last few years we’ve had between ~6-10 TA positions for about ~50 applicants, so these typically go to the most competitive students. The TA positions include a tuition waiver and provide a stipend of ~$4,000 a quarter although I believe this number will increase for next year. There are also typically some class fees, which may run a couple hundred bucks a year or so. So, you certainly won’t get rich as a TA, but there are other benefits to coming to Western.

Right now, I am supervising two continuing MS students and I typically have an undergraduate student or two working in my lab. My current graduate students are all set to graduate at the end of the year, so I am definitely looking to recruit new and motivated lab members. I try to promote a balanced lifestyle for my students with focused work while we are in the office or field and focused rest/play when not. That said, my lab group tends to work hard, and all of them so far have graduated with first authored publications in less than ~2.5 years. The departmental time to MS degree is typically about a year longer than that, if that means anything. I like to think that my students are also very well positioned after they graduate for careers in consulting or with government agencies, or to continue on in academia having started a publication record. Either way, finishing in two years with an impactful, first-authored publication sets you up for success no matter your future plans.

Plus, you get to live, work, and play in Bellingham for a couple of years! Although geology permeate most of your time at Western, there are tons of really great opportunities here and in the northwest in general, no matter your passion. Bellingham sits on the water, at the base of the North Cascade foothills, with prime access to world-class trails, skiing, hiking, climbing, whitewater, mountaineering, foraging, fishing, brewing, etc. There are some good music venues and an excellent farmers market and co-op, and just a good overall community vibe in general. We are about halfway between Vancouver and Seattle. Yes, it rains here, but that just keeps it from becoming too crowded. Personally, I mostly recreate on the bike, taking advantage of both the trails on Galbraith Mtn. and the Chuckanuts, as well as road biking around

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greater Whatcom and Skagit Co. You definitely don’t need to be an athlete to come to school here, although I will probably encourage you to at least try to get out on the mountain bike with me once or twice.

Ok, so if you’re still with me, then what’s the best way to go from here? I’d love to say I had time for long phone or email conversations with each potential applicant, but it can be hard to get back to everybody during the busy fall quarter, especially with my upcoming international travel. Western also does not have funding for applicant visits, but there are a few additional ways to get more information. You can write to my current students Cody Duckworth and Katie Alexander, or recent students listed on my website. I won’t be at GSA or AGU this year, although I will be at SSA in the spring (after the application deadline). You can also come by for a visit if you are in Bellingham or the NW sometime during the fall. Please do contact me if you are planning to apply and are going to be in town or on campus, and we will set something up.

In any case, I hope this letter gives you some good information about the application process and working in my lab in general. Thanks for your time and interest.

Cheers,

Colin Amos
Associate Professor of Geology
Western Washington University