Frequently Asked Questions

General

Who will my classmates be?

As a student in the Master of Science in Data Science program, your classmates will be global data science professionals living and working around the world. SMU looks for candidates with strong technical and academic backgrounds, and students in the online M.S. in Data Science must meet the same rigorous admissions standards as students in our on-campus programs.

When do classes begin?

There are four cohort start dates each calendar year. January, May, September, and November. Visit our admissions overview page for cohort start dates and application deadlines.

What are the graduation requirements?

You will be required to complete 33.5 credits, which includes 30 credits of coursework, a 1.5-credit immersion located on an SMU campus in Texas, and a 2-credit capstone project. Classes are live, held weekly and led by SMU faculty. Between classes, you will complete self-paced online coursework such as readings, case studies and hands-on assignments. The immersion is an in-person experience with classmates.

How long will it take to complete the M.S. in Data Science?

Although the program can be completed in 20 months on an accelerated path, most students will take 24 months to complete it.

Is DataScience@SMU delivered completely online?

While all coursework and weekly classes are hosted online, you will be required to attend two in-person immersion experiences located on one of the SMU campuses in Texas.

How much time should I expect to dedicate to my M.S. in Data Science coursework?

This is a rigorous program for highly motivated students. In addition to the weekly class sessions, you can expect to dedicate approximately 10 hours per week per class to studying and completing self-paced online coursework.

Will my course schedule be flexible?

The DataScience@SMU program is designed with working professionals in mind, and most classes are held in the evening. Weekly class sessions are held at designated times, and you are required

to attend all sessions. Coursework that is assigned in preparation for weekly classes can be completed when your schedule allows, by specified deadlines.

Will my diploma denote that I earned my degree online?

You will receive the same diploma as SMU's on-campus students, with no indication that you earned your degree through an online program.

What resources and materials will be needed to complete each class?

The DataScience@SMU curriculum provides a significant amount of course content and materials through the program's virtual campus. However, resourcefulness is an important trait for data scientists, and our students are expected to find papers, videos and various other materials beyond what is covered or recommended during a particular course in order to master each course's contents. To better prepare students for the program, DataScience@SMU offers self-paced bridge courses prior to the first day of classes. [Click here to learn more about the available bridge courses](#).

How much programming is required in the degree program?

DataScience@SMU students use both Python and R extensively to implement the techniques and methods learned throughout the program. In addition, SAS and Javascript are used in several courses. It is strongly recommended that students have a working knowledge of both Python and R, and it is required for students to have basic knowledge of at least one programming language prior to beginning the program. SMU offers a programming bridge course designed to equip DataScience@SMU students with essential programming skills to be successful in the program. [Click here to learn more about the Bridge to Programming course](#).

Admissions

Is there an application fee?

Yes, the application fee is $45 for applications submitted before the priority deadline and $75 for those submitted after the priority deadline. The fee is nonrefundable and must be paid when you submit your application.

Is there an undergraduate GPA requirement?

The desired undergraduate GPA for admission to the program is 3.0. However, this is not a requirement. The admissions committee reviews applications holistically, taking into consideration prior work experience, technical background and any relevant certifications.

Are GRE scores required for admission?

[GRE scores](#) are required for admission to the program. The SMU school code for GRE scores is 7478. The GRE requirement can be waived if you have five or more years of industry experience in a related field or a previous master's degree.

Are there prerequisite courses?

Knowledge of the basics of computer programming is essential, regardless of the programming language. R, SAS, JavaScript and Python are used throughout the program's coursework; however, with knowledge of computer programming, students can learn these languages easily. We also recommend completion of two calculus courses (not business calculus) and one introductory statistics course.

Are letters of recommendation required?

We require a minimum of one letter of recommendation. However, providing two is strongly encouraged. You should obtain references from professional and academic colleagues who can speak to your goals, motivation and ability to excel in a data science program. The best recommendation letters contain specific examples of your work that illustrate your quantitative, analytical or programming skills, and your motivation to go beyond what is expected to complete a task.

Is work experience required?

Although prior work experience in a technical or statistical field is preferred, it is not required for admission.

What educational or professional background is required for admission?

Applicants from a range of academic and professional backgrounds will be considered, including engineering, physics, math and other fields related to data science.

I'm not a U.S. citizen or permanent resident. Am I still eligible to apply?

Yes. However, you may need to submit TOEFL scores External link to complete your application. The SMU school code for TOEFL scores is 7493. If you are unsure about whether you need to take the TOEFL, contact an admissions counselor.

Can I request that my transcripts be sent electronically?

Many schools issue transcripts electronically, either through their own web services or through vendors. If this option is available through the institutions you attended, please specify that your transcript(s) be sent to applicationservices@datascience.smu.edu as this will expedite the delivery of your transcript(s) and the completion of your application.