FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

A) General Questions

B) Application Process

C) International Scholars / Immigration Questions

A) General Questions

1. **What’s the RI Summer Scholar Program?**
   The Robotics Institute Summer Scholars (RISS) Program is an intensive summer research program for talented undergraduate students. Summer Scholars have the opportunity to participate in state-of-the-art research projects, interact with a diverse research team, and to be mentored by leading faculty and technical staff. The program introduces aspiring students to dynamic research resources and methods, RI graduate education programs and research projects.

2. **What are the RISS program dates?**
   The RISS Program dates are the first Monday in June to August 15. Applicants must be available for the core program dates. Some scholars may be invited by the supporting lab to stay for an additional period (e.g. arriving earlier and/or departing later than the core dates).

3. **Is admission competitive? How many students participate in the program every year?**
   Yes. Several hundred students apply each year for the Robotics Institute Summer Scholar Program from U.S. and international institutions. Approximately 30 Summer Scholars are selected to participate in the program.

4. **What’s the profile of a successful applicant?**
   Past successful applicants have had:
   i. A strong academic record (for example a 3.5 or higher in a 4.0 GPA scale),
   ii. Relevant programming (e.g. C; C++),
   iii. Robotics experience,
   iv. One or more years of college or university,
   v. One or more research experiences at their home institution or with industry,
   vi. An engaging and meaningful statement of purpose with clear goals,
   vii. Particular Robotics Institute labs or areas of interest, and
   viii. Strong letters of recommendation from an academic advisor or faculty member.
5. **What countries have admitted students come from in the past?**
Students that participated in RISS have come from various countries including China, India, Mexico, Nepal, Pakistan, Puerto Rico, Romania, Spain, Turkey, United Kingdom among others.

6. **Is the Summer Scholar a paid or unpaid research experience?**
All selected scholars will be considered for financial support. We anticipate that all scholars will receive financial support from either the Robotics Institute, U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF) Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REU) scholarships administered by RI, or program partners.

7. **What is the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF) Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REU) scholarship?**
The Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REU) program supports active research participation by undergraduate students.

U.S. applicants can receive financial support through the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF) Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REU). To qualify for an NSF REU scholarship applicants must be still be undergraduate students in the immediate fall following the summer research experience. NSF REU scholarship recipients will receive financial support and additional travel support.

*Note: graduating students cannot apply for the NSF REU scholarships.

**NSF REU scholarship requirements:**
- U.S. Citizen, U.S. National, or U.S. Permanent Resident,
- Completion of at least sophomore year,
- Must still be an undergraduate during BOTH the summer during and fall following the summer scholar program,
- GPA of 3.0 or above

8. **Do I need to do anything special to be considered for an NSF REU scholarship?**
No. However, you must be one of the following: U.S. citizen, U.S. permanent resident, or U.S. National.

9. **How many NSF REU Undergraduate Scholarship recipients are selected?**
The Robotics Institute Summer Scholars Program chooses nine undergraduates to receive NSF REU scholarships each year.

10. **I was accepted to RISS in the past, but could not attend. Do I need to reapply?**
Yes. You need to reapply and your application will have to go through the regular review process. Please also contact the RISS team at riss-info@andrew.cmu.edu.

11. **If I am a graduating senior, can I still apply?**
Yes. You can apply for the RI Summer Scholars Program. The program is targeted for undergraduate sophomores and juniors. These applicants will receive first preference for placement.
12. Which labs participate in the program?
   Please see previous year’s Summer Scholars’ posters to see which labs have participated.

13. Can I get course credit for the internship?
   Yes. It depends on your home university policies, please check with them to discuss.

14. May I register for classes at Carnegie Mellon or work part-time during the program while an RI Summer Scholar?
   The program is a full-time intensive research experience. There are many free and open workshops and seminars on-campus that will enhance your research experience. However, scholars should not anticipate taking CMU courses or working part-time while participating in the program.

   Scholars electing to explore signing-up for regular credit-carrying classes should discuss with their RISS faculty advisor. Tuition and fees for summer courses are not covered by RISS. Course schedules and tuition information are available at www.cmu.edu/hub.

15. Will attending RISS help me to prepare for graduate school?
   RISS will provide tools for you to help you explore graduate school options available to you at CMU and other universities.

16. Can I live on campus during the program? Where do RI Summer Scholars find housing?
   No. RI Summer Scholars are not housed on campus; on campus housing is not available for the entire length of the program. Summer Scholars are responsible for finding housing.

   Accepted RISS scholars will receive more information about housing during online information sessions and pre-arrival online orientation. Some resources you might begin to explore are:

   http://pittsburgh.craigslist.org
   http://lobosmanagement.com
   http://www.abodo.com/pittsburgh-pa
   http://www.zillow.com
   http://www.forrent.com/
   http://www.apartmentfinder.com/
   https://www.airbnb.com/s/Pittsburgh--PA

   Many scholars choose neighborhoods close to the CMU campus, such as Shadyside, Squirrel Hill, or Oakland. We also provide information about possible sublets from graduate students.

B) Application Process

17. What documents are required to apply?
The application requires a resume or curriculum vitae, statement of purpose, one letter of recommendation from academia, and unofficial transcripts from one’s entire undergraduate period. Please note that documents will need to be saved as a Microsoft Word Document or PDF in order to be uploaded to the application website.

18. What should I do if my school, college, or university is not listed in the drop-down menu?
Contact us at riss-info@andrew.cmu.edu with the full name of the educational organization and its website. Your institution will be added to the database within 3 business days.

19. If I will need a visa, how do I answer the “Visa Status” question in the Biographical Information section?
If you are currently an international student studying in the US, please choose your current visa status. If you are currently studying internationally, please select J-1.

20. How many recommendations are required?
Only one recommendation is required. However, you may choose to add additional recommenders for a maximum of three.

21. How should I choose a recommender?
Your recommender should be able to speak about your academic potential and ability. A professor from your college or university with whom you have done research would be an excellent choice. The strongest recommendations often come from individuals who have known you for an extended period of time and had the opportunity to work with you in a research and academic setting.

22. May I get recommendations from industry?
Yes, but please be sure to have at least one academic recommender who can discuss your research experience and potential.

23. Can I submit other additional materials to strengthen my application?
Yes, links and publications are encouraged. No CDs or physical mail will be considered.

24. How do I check if my application is complete?
The submission button will not appear until you have completed all the requirements. Upon submission, you’ll see a confirmation message.

25. How and when will applicants be notified of admissions decisions?
90% of the selected participants will be notified by April 1st via email.
26. I am an international student studying at another United States institution. Can I participate? If so, will I need to apply for a visa?
Yes. The program welcomes applications from international students.
For currently enrolled international students in the United States, ask your international services office or academic advisor for the options that best fit your needs. You may be eligible to apply for Curricular Practical Training, Optional Practical Training, or Academic Training. You may not need immigration processing. Speak to your international services office or academic advisor before submitting your RISS application.

27. I am an international student studying outside of the United States. Can I participate? If so, will I need to apply for a visa?
The RI Summer Scholar Program welcomes students from around the world to our labs and classrooms. Most non-US participants apply for a J-1 intern visa. Once you are accepted into the program, Carnegie Mellon will help you obtain the correct visa documents.

28. I am an international student and I was part of the RISS cohort last year, do I need to do anything differently for the J-1 Intern visa?
You will only need to include that information on your J-1 Intern checklist and include a copy of your previous DS-2019 in the paperwork that you mail to CMU for this year’s cohort.

29. What are the English requirements for international students?
English requirements for J-1 Intern visa are set by U.S. Department of State regulations.

You do not need to take the TOEFL or other English language certification test, but you will need to have an English language instructor at your home institution sign off on a form saying that you have a sufficient fluency in English to be able to contribute in discussions and interact with the lab research team.

If you had an online or phone interview with the faculty director or member of the hiring RI lab, then this individual may be able to complete the English form required for the J-1 intern visa. Otherwise, you must submit the form with TOEFL scores or with the section completed by your home institution. If admitted to the program, you will receive an RISS Immigration Handbook for more information.

30. What forms do I need to complete after being accepted as an international scholar?
Please see the RISS immigration handbook. If you have any questions, that were not answered here, email riss-info@andrew.cmu.edu.
If the answer is in the RISS immigration handbook, you will be directed back to that resource.
31. How do I complete the TIP form (Training/Internship Placement Plan Form)?
After you receive and accept an offer of admission to the RISS Program under a J-1 Intern visa:
Send an email to riss-info@andrew.cmu.edu with the following information:
   a. Email subject line: TIP Form Details for (enter your full name).
   b. Full name, email, current field of study, type of degree or certificate, date awarded or expected of graduation
RISS organizers will send you via email a complete TIP Form based on the information provided in the email. Please check all the details on the form, print, sign, and reply to the email with a scanned copy of the TIP Form attached. Don’t forget to sign the form!

32. What if the RI Summer Scholars Program does not fulfill a requirement of my graduation at my home university?
As part of the J-1 intern status, this internship must fulfill a part of your degree program. Otherwise you may not qualify for a J-1 Intern visa according to U.S. Department of State regulations.

33. If I graduate before arriving on campus, will I need a J-1 or a J-1 intern visa?
You will need to fill out the paperwork for the J-1 if you complete your undergraduate degree before departing your home country for the US.

34. If I'm in a combined undergraduate and graduate program (i.e. a Bachelors of Science and Masters of Science) program, which visa forms should I fill out?
Most likely, if you are in your 4th or 5th year, you are considered a master’s level student and should fill out the standard J visa paperwork, not the J-1 intern paperwork (http://www.ri.cmu.edu/ripublic/J1Details.html). If you are in your 2nd or 3rd year, please fill out the J-1 intern paperwork.

35. A friend/classmate was able to receive their visa much faster than 75 days at another school by just sending scans of documents. Will I be able to do that as well?
No. Unfortunately, you will not be able to expedite the processing of your DS-2019 by only sending scans. CMU’s Office of International Education (OIE) requires original documentation, most notably for bank documents and the home institution letter and processes all requests on a first-come, first-served basis. This cannot be bypassed and there are no exceptions.

36. I don’t have an up-to-date passport. Will this delay processing?
Yes. You must have an up to date passport in order to get your DS-2019. If you do not have an up to date passport, your processing will be delayed. Please check with your passport authority government for expedited processing options.

37. How do I obtain health insurance while I'm in the Summer Scholars' cohort?
Please see the following site for insurance information while you are at CMU:
http://www.cmu.edu/health-services/student-insurance/index.html
You may also want to explore options with your home institution and providers of international health insurance.

38. When should I buy my airplane ticket?
Do not purchase an airline ticket until you have received your visa sticker on your passport. Note that some students purchase their tickets after they have received the DS-2019 from OIE, but this is at your own risk due to the fact that you could run into delays at the consulate or embassy getting your visa sticker.

39. What is required of me before I depart my home country?
You will need to apply for your visa sticker at the local embassy or consulate once you receive your DS-2019 from the Office of International Education at CMU. It will take about 3 weeks to receive this document once you send your completed packet to RISS organizers.

Please see our RISS Immigration Handbook for more information.