

The Robotics Institute MS and PhD checkboxes: Which one(s) should I check?

As you fill out the RI application form for admission to our graduate programs, you may have questions about whether to check only one of the Masters and Doctoral checkboxes, or both. This document provides you with some guidance to help you understand how we interpret these checkboxes so that you can make the right personal decision for yourself.

First and foremost, note that, if you intend to apply primarily to the PhD program in Robotics, additionally checking the MS checkbox in no way affects your chances of gaining admission to the PhD program. Those applying solely to the PhD program and those applying to both programs are evaluated identically for the PhD program and there is no variation in standards.

The next question often asked, then, is why shouldn't one always apply to both the MS and PhD program? The answer lies in your interests and goals. If you are quite sure that you do not want to pursue an academic research track, prepare a doctoral thesis based on original research and be in school for five+ years, then the PhD program may be wrong for you. On the other hand, if you are interested in a one-to-two year graduate program that sharpens your knowledge base and research skills in robotics while continuing to work in industry or quickly returning to industry, the MS degree is the appropriate choice. The MS program is also appropriate for those who want to explore robotics at a Master's level before deciding whether or not they would like to pursue the PhD degree.

Alternatively, if you know that you want to pursue an academic position or are interested in conducting deep research in robotics, then you may be considering PhD programs around the country. If you are determined to enter a PhD program, then checking the MS box is not useful for you. Others might want to consider checking the MS box in case of possible rejection to PhD program. Entering the MS Robotics program would provide students a chance to demonstrate their research productivity, intellectual development and enthusiasm and increase their chances of being accepted into PhD programs.

It is up to you to decide honestly whether you are interested in the PhD program only, the MS program only, or both. The important fact to remember is that we will evaluate you for both programs, starting with the PhD program, and that checking the MS box in addition will never affect your chances for admission to the PhD program.