Frequently Asked Questions
Concerning the PhD, MS, and MA Programs
Department of Mathematics, University of South Carolina

1. What is the availability of teaching assistantships for AY 2015-2016?

We anticipate awarding 10 to 12 teaching assistantships for AY 2015-2016. In AY 2014-2015, the stipends were between $17,300 - $18,300. The department also provides 100% tuition abatement for TAs.

We also have limited summer support for TAs (between $3,350 and $4,400 depending on what course the TA teaches). First and second year students have the highest priority. In the last few years we have been able to provide summer support to all first and second year students who requested it, so their stipend for the year was in the $20,650 - $21,700 range. When comparing stipends, keep in mind that the cost of living in Columbia, SC is relatively low (housing is inexpensive).

2. Is there availability of assistantships for spring 2015?

No. All assistantships are allocated to students who start in the fall. Also, most graduate courses offered in the spring are the second part of a course offered in the fall, so it is hard to have a reasonable program of studies for PhD students who start in the spring.

3. What are the deadlines to apply for AY 2015-2016?

The deadline of the graduate school is July 1, 2015. However, most of our assistantship offers are out by the end of March, so to receive full consideration for assistantship, we need your application no later than February 28, 2015. We will start mailing out assistantship offers in late February and expect to have our incoming class complete or close to being complete on April 15, 2015.

4. I received assistantship offer from USC. Can I visit the department?

Definitely. We encourage all US applicants to visit us - see the campus, meet faculty in areas of math they are interested in, talk to our graduate students, see Columbia, sit on classes, go to a seminar, explore ... We provide limited support for applicants who received assistantship offers from us.

5. Is GRE subject test required for admission?

No, it is optional. If you think that you will score well (above 600), by all means take the test, it will strengthen your application. On the other hand, if you anticipate that you will get a poor score, it is better not to take the test. A very poor GRE Subject score (below 350) weakens your application considerably.

6. What are the TOEFL requirements?

The University requires an Internet based TOEFL score of 80 or better (or equivalent according to concordance tables) for admission. For teaching assistantship, our Department requires an Internet based TOEFL score of 100 or better. If you completed a degree from an institution of
higher education in the US or Canada, the university waives the TOEFL requirement.

7. What are your minimum required GRE scores?

The Department has no minimum requirement. The middle 70% of our entering PhD students in 2012 had Verbal GRE in the range 151-164, Quantitative GRE in the range 154-166, V+Q GRE in the range 308-328, GRE Mathematics Subject in the range 580-760 (about one-half of the students took the GRE Mathematics Subject), and a GPA in the 3.7 - 3.91 range. These numbers are close to our historic average.

Note: If you are an excellent US student (GPA above 3.8, and have a strong math background), do not take the verbal GRE lightly. You may be nominated for the Presidential Fellowships for Doctoral and MFA Students, see

http://app.gradschool.sc.edu/faaw/view.asp?fellowshipid=2

and you will compete with applicants in other disciplines. Combined GRE score is very important. In the last three years seven applicants to our PhD program received Presidential Fellowship offers.

8. How important is having a strong math background? What courses should I have taken?

The strength of the applicant’s math background is the most important factor when making admission decisions. Ideally, PhD applicants should have taken a variety of math courses (at least 5-6 higher level math courses), including two semesters of analysis (and two semesters of abstract algebra if you will be doing a PhD in traditional math), and passed those courses with good grades. If you used a very advanced book in your analysis or algebra book and got a good grade, by all means, include the title of the textbook(s) in your personal statement. If you applied before the end of fall 2014, please e-mail me in 2015 with an updated transcript reflecting the courses you took in Fall 2014- graddir@math.sc.edu.

9. What are the areas of strength of your department?

The research groups in Applied Mathematics, Commutative Algebra and Algebraic Geometry, Functional Analysis, Discrete Mathematics, and Number Theory have national and international recognition. For more detailed information see:

http://www.math.sc.edu/graduate/faculty-research/

You can also check the seminars and colloquia at

http://www.math.sc.edu/seminar_ colloquia/

We encourage you to e-mail the faculty in whose research you are interested.

10. How many Mathematics PhD degrees does your University award each year? What are the job placement statistics of your graduates?

USC awards about 5 or 6 Mathematics PhD degrees every year, on average. In the past 5 years 26 Math PhD degrees were awarded by USC - Columbia. Exactly 1/2 of these PhDs found teaching jobs in liberal arts schools and similar institutions of higher education, about 1/3 found
post-doc or tenure-track positions in research universities or research centers, and the rest found industry jobs.

11. Are there any research assistantships available?
Every year we have 4 to 6 students supported by research assistantships. Usually these are students in their third, fourth, or fifth year.

12. What are the teaching duties of teaching assistants?
The Math Department TAs teach one course a semester. Most first-year TAs teach Calculus recitations and labs. After their first year, most TAs teach a stand-alone course. Our graduates have shared that having teaching experience has been very beneficial for them to find a job.

13. What is the timeline to graduate?
In the past three years all graduate students who have passed the comprehensive exam graduated in five years (about a third of them in four). The expectation is that successful PhD students graduate in five years (or in four, depending on area of research, type of job - industry, government, liberal arts colleges). In rare cases (mostly for health or family reasons) we support students a sixth year.

14. How would you characterize the atmosphere in the department?
The atmosphere is very cooperative; students help one another, and so do faculty. We are open-minded, multicultural department.