

Frequently Asked Questions

I. Applications and Admissions

How can I apply?

All applications need to be submitted online to the central Student Administration Office. Please click [here](#) to view the application information sheet and list of documents required for application.

The application is done online by clicking on the link found on the bottom of the page [here](#). Applications for the fall semester 2023 are possible from 1 February 2023 (application deadline: 30 April 2023).

It is only from 1 February that you will be able to successfully follow the link and apply. International applicants are strongly encouraged to apply as early as possible after 1 February, in order to allow for enough time to obtain the student visa.

Is there a fee I have to pay for the application?

Yes, there is a fee of CHF100 to be paid online in the application portal once you have filled out the necessary application details. For more information, please click [here](#). In addition, some documents will have to be couriered to the university, the fees of which will be covered by the applicant.

I just missed the deadline. Can I still apply?

For international students who do not hold a bachelor's degree from a Swiss university, unfortunately you cannot apply once you have missed the deadline. For students with a bachelor's degree from a Swiss university, they must pay a late fee. For further deadlines, please click [here](#).

Is the number of students limited?

No, all students meeting the admission criteria will be admitted to the program. However, the places in Cape Town for the 'Urbanism from the South' track are limited to 15 students.

Attending the Critical Urbanisms Orientation day in the fall semester will provide you with all necessary information.

Can I get a scholarship?

Unfortunately, the University does not grant any scholarships to MA students. Please contact sozial-beratung@unibas.ch as they will be more knowledgeable as to where you can apply for scholarships outside the University.

Do I need an English certificate?

You do *not* need an English certificate to apply to our program. However, it is in your own interest to have a good command of the language in order to be able to follow and successfully participate in the courses. You will also be required to write seminar papers and a thesis in English.

Could you please look at my CV and tell me whether I am eligible to be accepted into your program?

We do not pre-evaluate applications. Your application will be thoroughly evaluated by the Student Administration Office after you have submitted your application. For detailed information, please click [here](#) to see the prescribed study plan for the program where you can see our admission criteria.

I have a bachelor's degree from a Fachhochschule. Will I be admitted to the program?

You need an average of 5.0 to be admitted to any Masters program at the university. To find out whether your specific bachelor is eligible for acceptance into our program please see our [study plan](#).

Will I be able to work during my studies?

You will be able to work, but this will likely prolong your study time. During the second semester where you will take either the 'Urbanism from the South' track in Cape Town or participate in the fieldwork-intensive 'Urbanism Across Geographies' track, your ability to work will be very limited. In addition, in the third semester there will be a fixed studio day where attendance is mandatory.

If I started in the Spring semester can I attend all courses?

Students enrolling in the Spring semester will begin their degree with a focus on completing their extra requirements. If you have been admitted with extra requirements (up to 15CP of independent study plus possibly a 5CP seminar paper), we strongly recommend you use the Spring semester to complete those. You can also take some elective courses this semester. Once you commence the Fall semester, you will be able to enroll in all core courses, including the Critical Urbanisms introduction course, and select one of our two offered tracks of study (Urbanisms from the South or Urbanisms Across Geographies) for your fieldwork in the following semester.

I have been admitted with extra requirements. How do I fulfill these and who do I coordinate with?

Once you receive your official admission letter from the Student Administration Office, you can contact Jennifer Felsenberg (jennifer.felsenberg@unibas.ch) for further information.

How do I find out if I've been accepted?

You will be notified via mail that you have been accepted to the program. In some exceptional cases, especially in the case of international students where the postal system may be difficult, you will be notified via the email address you provided in your application. Should you not receive any word by June, kindly contact our program administrator Jennifer Felsenberg to find out the status of your application.

What do I do once I've been accepted?

Your next steps of action will be outlined in your acceptance letter. A tuition fee payment slip will also be sent at a later date, which you will have to pay prior to registration. This is especially important for international students as part of your visa application process. For more information, please see [International Students - Visa](#).

For new students, you will have to present yourself physically at the Student Administration Office in order to matriculate and register for courses for the first time, especially in the case of international students.

How much is the tuition fee for each semester?

The tuition fee for both local and international students is CHF850 per semester. For more information, please click [here](#). A fee of CHF10 is also charged by [SKUBA](#), the University's official student body union, at the beginning of each semester.

II. International Students - Visas and Residence Permits

I am an international student and have been accepted to the program. How do I arrange the student visa?

Visas and residence permits are necessary to be able to begin your studies in Basel. Please note that EU students and non-EU students have different requirements to fulfill. The University provides [basic information on visa requirements](#).

If you are a non-EU student, you must check the requirements for a student visa as stipulated by the Swiss embassy or consulate in your respective country. Each country typically has varying requirements for the visa application. As successful international applicants are notified of their acceptance to the program around May, we highly encourage you to process your visa application as soon as possible so as to ensure that you can join us promptly in September at the start of the Fall Semester.

Upon arrival in Basel, you must immediately visit the Student Administration Office so as to successfully register for the new semester. This is an important step as you will be given a 'matriculation certificate' that is necessary to register for your residence permit in the migration office of Basel-Stadt.

Are there financial requirements that I have to meet in order to get a visa?

For many countries, proof of a certain amount of funds is necessary to qualify for a visa (see the [previous question](#) for the link to the list of requirements). Alternatively, a Swiss person can sponsor a prospective student, offering guarantees for their stay. Unfortunately, these requirements have to be met by prospective students themselves. However, if you feel this or if any other part of the visa process may be a struggle for you, feel free to contact the Racial Justice Student Collective, a group of Critical Urbanisms students, for advice and support by people who have already gone through the process.

I have received my visa and have arrived in Basel, Switzerland. I have visited the Student Administration Office to receive my matriculation certificate. What do I do next?

You must physically present yourself to the [migration office of Basel-Stadt](#). Their office is located at Spiegelgasse 6, 4051 Basel. You may view their location on Google Maps [here](#). The University provides a list of required documents [here](#) that you must bring with you when you present yourself to the migration office.

It is important that you also have a working address (a housing contract is required when you register at the migration office) to which they can later on mail you important documents after registration. For more information on accommodations, please head to [Living in Basel](#).

Do I have to pay for anything when I visit the migration office?

Yes, they will charge you approximately CHF25 for the registration once you have completed the process in their office. A payment slip will be mailed to your address a few days later which will indicate that you will need to then pay approximately CHF238 for the ZEMIS (Central Migration Information System) registration. This can be paid via online banking or via any post office (the post office accepts cash or debit cards; credit cards are not accepted).

I have paid for all the residence permit dues. What do I do next?

Once these have all been paid, you will be notified again by mail that your new residence permit is ready for pick-up at the post office. Please bring an identification card (e.g. your passport) as you will need to verify your identity when you pick up your card.

Can I be registered in Basel-Stadt but live elsewhere in another canton?

It is important to note that it is difficult to apply for a visa to study in Basel-Stadt and then live in another canton. It is recommended that students who intend to live outside of Basel first apply to live in Basel and then change their address/canton at a later stage.

III. Arriving & Living in Basel

How do I arrange for accommodations before I come?

The University provides affordable options to find housing in Basel [here](#). You may also opt to look for a place to live on your own. It is recommended that you apply as early as possible to potential living options as affordable housing options are highly coveted may be gone soon.

Again, it is essential that you have a proof of address in order to register for residence in Basel-Stadt. Please read more about residence permits [in the previous section](#).

What is the projected cost of living in Basel as a student?

In Switzerland, there are many useful and efficient services that people can use, but they often come at a cost. Hardly anything is free (gratis). We recommend that students carefully budget in the initial months to ensure that they do not have financial difficulties later in the program. The University projects the monthly cost of living to be approximately between CHF1600 and CHF2000. In terms of participating in the second semester field-work tracks, there is a ring-fenced budget to support students in paying for additional travel and related expenses. The final amounts paid out to individuals from this fund depends on the overall number of students in the cohort.

For more information on student life, the University provides a handbook in English [here](#).

Where do I go for day-to-day shopping?

Supermarkets that you can find in Basel (and in Switzerland in general) include the following: Migros, Coop, Denner, Spar, Aldi, Lidl, etc. Should you need specialty stores (e.g. Middle Eastern stores, Asian stores, etc.) there is quite a good selection available in the city.

You may also opt to travel to Weil am Rhein in Germany, as shopping there is generally more affordable than in Switzerland. Just please bear in mind that a passport and/or residence permit are required and that there may be restrictions to bring in large amounts of certain produce, e.g. meat, alcohol, etc. Please click [here](#) for more information. To get to Weil am Rhein, you may walk, take the tram (Tram 8) or ride a bicycle if you own one.

Brockis are second-hand stores which sell a variety of items at fair prices: clothes, furniture, crockery, etc. There are many in Basel, such as [this one](#).

[Tutti](#) is an online buying and selling platform for individuals in Switzerland. Sometimes there are very good deals to be found.

[Unimarkt](#) is similar to Tutti, but specific to the university. You may also find jobs and available apartments advertised there.

I would like to open a bank account in Switzerland. What would you recommend?

There are a variety of banks to choose from in Switzerland. The general recommendation is that no matter which bank you choose, always enquire about available student account offers.

[Postfinance](#) is a relatively easy banking option for students but the usage is limited to Switzerland.

UBS provides information in English online and across their platforms. They also offer student packages. For more information, click [here](#).

Basler Kantonalbank (BKB) is another option with student offers. For more information, click [here](#).

I want to get a local mobile number while I'm here. What would you suggest?

There are many mobile services to choose from here in Switzerland, so you may want to check which service suits your needs best. You might need to decide between a prepaid offer (better for lower usage) and a monthly payment plan (generally worth it if you use more data/minutes):

- Lebara - <https://lebara.ch/en>
- Salt - <https://www.salt.ch/en/#>
- Sunrise - <https://www.sunrise.ch/en/residential/welcome-page.html>
- Swisscom - <https://www.swisscom.ch/en/residential.html>
- Wingo - <https://www.swisscom.ch/en/residential.html>
- Yallo - <https://www.yallo.ch/en>

It is worth noting that Switzerland is not part of the free data mobile service that is provided across the EU. In other words, if you travel to Germany, France, Italy, etc. your mobile will be charged roaming services for any data you may use. Please keep this in mind so as to be more cautious when using data services outside of Switzerland.

Do I need to have insurance?

It is compulsory in Switzerland that you have medical aid insurance. If you do not organise your own insurance, Switzerland will provide one for you, but it probably won't be as affordable as alternatives.

Most international students use Swisscare due to its affordability, but there are other providers depending on your needs and finances. Always enquire about student options.

- Atupri - <https://www.atupri.ch/de>
- Swisscare - <https://swisscare.com/>
- Groupe Mutuel - <https://www.groupemutuel.ch/en/private-customers.html>
- Visana - <https://www.visana.ch/de/privatkunden>

Here is some general information about health insurance and medical services in Switzerland:

- <https://www.expatica.com/ch/healthcare/healthcare-basics/healthcare-in-switzerland-103130/>
- <https://www.ch.ch/en/health-insurance-foreigners/>
- Emergency numbers:
<https://www.expatica.com/ch/healthcare/healthcare-basics/emergency-number-switzerland-102083/>
- Comparisons of various Swiss Medical Aids:
<https://en.comparis.ch/krankenkassen/umfrage/hitlist>

Where do I go if I have an emergency or health issue?

You may opt to go to the [University Hospital](#) which is located just down the road from the main university building at Petersplatz and which provides great service. For more information, please check out Expatica's [comprehensive webpage](#) on hospitals in Switzerland.

How do I get around via public transportation?

Getting around Basel is easy since the city is small enough, but this also depends on where you live.

Basel has great public transport, as does Switzerland in general. Buses and trams can take you to and from most places in the city. If you do plan to use public transport in Basel, consider the U-Abo, which allows you to ride all public transport in the city on the basis of a monthly or yearly subscription.

Buying a bicycle is recommended since the streets are usually bike-friendly, sometimes with specific lanes, and it is easy and safe to park in most places. Buying and riding a bike might very well be cheaper than public transport in the long run. Velomarkt occasionally has market days, where second-hand bicycles can be bought. Click [here](#) for more information. Also check the Unimarkt for potential offers. However, please take the time to read any rules and regulations related to traffic, right of way, illumination at night, etc. to avoid accidents and/or fines.

Depending on how often you plan to use public transport and leave the city to travel in Switzerland, there is a variety of options to make traveling more affordable: a half-tax card, student GA (General Abonnement), late-night tickets, day tickets/passes from the Gemeinde, supersaver tickets, bicycle tickets, etc. Click [here](#) for more information. It is thus recommended that you download the SBB app which can be used throughout Switzerland to check public transportation routes and schedules, plan trips and buy tickets online.

What else should I know when I get to Basel?

Make sure to plan your shopping days. Most places are closed on Sundays, with the exception of main supermarket stores near and in the main SBB station (e.g. Migros inside Basel SBB, Coop across the Basel SBB, etc.).

It is possible for students to commute to university from other cities in Switzerland. In previous years, students regularly traveled from Bern and Zurich (approximately one hour commute by train). Others traveled from further away (e.g. Geneva) but stayed in Basel during the week.

How is Basel connected to the rest of Switzerland and to the rest of Europe?

Basel is unique in its situation on the border with both France and Germany. This location makes it one of the most international cities of Switzerland. People regularly take advantage of the proximity of the border for cheaper shopping and living, as well as trips to sites in France and Germany. Some of the tram lines run into the closest towns in these countries, and trains connect to bigger centres. Trains are also the main connection to the rest of Switzerland, with Zurich and Bern being around an hour away. A cheaper, but less comfortable alternative to trains are the [Flix Bus](#) and similar international bus services which serve larger destinations both within Switzerland and internationally. Finally, the Basel Mulhouse Airport is located a bus ride away from the city.

IV. University Registration and System

What do I need to know about registering at the university?

In order to access most of the university's resources, it is important to register quickly on arrival. For more information, please click [here](#).

I'm a little lost in the Swiss university system. How does it work?

Swiss university degrees are split up into Bachelor and Master. Commonly, a Bachelor degree takes around three years, and a Master around two. Access to Bachelor degrees is open to anybody with the highest school leaving certificate, the Matura, with the exception of very few subjects, like medicine.

Grades are given in steps from 1 to 6, with 6 being the highest and 4 being a passing grade. An assortment of grades from your studies, in Critical Urbanisms' case the Master Thesis and Master Exam grade, make up the final grade for your studies.

Courses are largely split up between lecture format, which usually are aimed at a larger group of students and graded through a test at the end, and seminars, which are smaller groups and graded through participation, presentations and papers.

What is the difference between lectures and seminars? What are their outcomes?

Teaching formats in the University typically feature lectures and seminars. Lectures are held in a usual classroom setting where the professor teaches a subject matter to students (e.g.

powerpoint presentation, etc.). In a seminar, the students are expected to be more actively engaged to participate in the discourse of the subject matter, usually by way of reading relevant literature on the topic at hand (these are assigned in the reading list at the beginning of the semester) and then participate in the conversations happening in class.

How am I evaluated in these courses?

Courses are evaluated mostly on a basis of pass/fail depending on either your participation in class or an examination towards the end of the semester. There may be some courses that are graded in a range from 1 (poor/failed) to 6 (excellent).

What is a seminar paper?

Seminar papers are written papers that make up a significant amount of the necessary credit points towards finishing your degree, typically constituting 5 credit points per paper written successfully. They are accredited separately from course work. Over the course of the Critical Urbanisms program, students are required to write at least three seminar papers. These are usually assessed according to: originality, accuracy, and thoroughness of research; integration of research methods and literature from different disciplines; insightfulness, clarity, and persuasiveness of arguments; effective use of evidence; attentiveness to diverse perspectives and positions; and ability to collaborate with team-members (where relevant). To find out the breakdown of credit points for Critical Urbanisms, please click [here](#).

Seminar papers can be written electively, in conjunction with one of the courses in the following modules (see [Study Guidelines](#), p. 9): Urbanism from the South, Urbanism across Geographies, Anthropological Fieldwork, Interdisciplinary Urban Research, or The Urban across Disciplines. The seminar paper guidelines are defined by the course instructors, and students should develop their seminar topics in consultation with their course instructors.

The required length of seminar papers is up to the discretion of the instructor for each course, but is usually between 6000 and 9000 words. Unless otherwise mentioned, please use the Chicago Manual of Style for style and citation, using footnotes. Students receive a final grade (1(lowest) through 6 (highest), with 4 = sufficient (lowest passing grade), 4.5 = satisfactory, 5 = good, 5.5 = very good, and 6 = excellent) and written feedback on their work. Along with the

seminar paper, students need to submit a signed form, to confirm that their work fulfills the standards of academic integrity (see [here](#)).

In order to submit a seminar paper and officially have it listed in the transcript of records, students must then do so by way of a learning contract. Please see the succeeding section on learning contracts.

V. Learning Contracts

What is a learning contract?

You may find more information on learning contracts [here](#), but it is in German. We have loosely translated the explanation as follows: Learning contracts regulate the conditions for the acquisition of credit points outside of the regular courses on an individual basis. They define the award of credit points for student achievements in the context of extraordinary forms of teaching, namely for accompanied self-study, for individual excursions, for participation in research projects, for individual internships, for tutoring activities as well as in student self-administration and free seminar work. You may also check with faculty members for more information.

In Critical Urbanisms, learning contracts are used to assign credits to seminar papers as well as electives taking in the ‘Urbanism from the South’ track.

How do I go about making a learning contract for a seminar paper?

Follow the instructions in ADAM to create a new learning contract. Select the Learning Format from the drop-down menu: “Seminar Paper”. For the Title, write the final title of your seminar paper. For the Contents, write a few lines on what your paper argues (very short abstract). The Start Date can be written with today’s date, e.g. today. The Due Date is when you intend to submit the paper. For the number of CPs to be earned, it is typically 5 CP unless noted otherwise. For the Credited Module, select “freie Wahlbereich / Komplementärer Bereich”. For Assessor, select “Internal” and fill out the name and email address of your instructor. For Assessment, select “Graded (6.0 1.0 0.5)”. For Review or Repetition, select “no possibility for repetition”.

Once the form has been duly filled out, follow the rest of the instructions in ADAM in order to submit the contract to the system.

VI. Critical Urbanisms Program

What is the research studio in Critical Urbanisms?

In the Critical Urbanisms program, studio learning consists of lectures and seminars, workshops, guided field trips, one-on-one tutorials, as well as group discussions of student work. The studio fosters a form of research-based learning that puts intellectual debates and analytical methods into dialogue in order to foster new forms of interdisciplinary research. It is offered in the Interdisciplinary Urban Research, the Urbanism across Geographies, and Urbanism from the South modules.

The research studio usually takes place in a space that is reserved for the students to use at any time, and that thus acts as a laboratory for working both collaboratively and individually. All classroom-based activities related to the studio occur in this space, as physically expressed by the presence of maps, drawings, photographs, sketches, texts, and models on the walls and desks. This ensures that the material that is worked on does not only exist in the minds of students and faculty, or on their computers, but is constantly visible and debatable in the studio setting.

The teaching covers one full day per week, but students are expected to work at least one additional day in the studio. They can also come back at any other time throughout the week to continue working on their projects. Regular presentations of student work are moments of mutual engagement, in which faculty and students review the work. On both an academic and social level the studio builds a spirit of joint endeavor, in order to develop confidence and experience in research and communication skills which are essential in urban studies. For more information, please click [here](#).

Are there different tracks in this program? What do they entail and how do they differ?

There are two main tracks in the Critical Urbanisms program. The “Urbanism from the South” and “Urbanism across Geographies” tracks are offered in the spring semester. Meanwhile, the “Anthropological Fieldwork” track is year-long and starts in the fall semester.

The “Urbanism from the South” module entails a semester of study at the African Centre for Cities at the University of Cape Town. The module explores the urban from the perspective of the global South. The “Urbanism across Geographies” module explores how cities and territories are produced through translocal processes that cross the Global North/Global South divide and are accompanied by multi-sited fieldwork that may include Swiss, European and African sites.

The Anthropological Fieldwork track can only be taken by students who have legitimate reasons not to join the above-mentioned tracks and requires written approval from the program director. The module entails a year-long, methods-based field course offered by the social anthropology program. This includes a preparatory course in the first semester, followed by a field trip during the January-February break and a follow-up course on methods during the second semester. In addition to this package of 15 CP, students in this track also need to write a seminar paper (5CP), which connects their fieldwork to urban studies themes and debates. This seminar paper is supervised by an Urban Studies instructor and is to be counted in the Anthropological Fieldwork module (which reduces the Free Electives to 15 CP).

This section is more comprehensively explained [here](#).

Is there financial aid available to help me pay for travel costs during the second semester tracks?

Students are generally in charge of raising their own funds to pay for travel and related expenses during the second semester tracks. However, there is a ring-fenced budget to support students to cover some of their travel, accommodation and related expenses. The final amounts paid out to individuals from this fund depends on the overall number of students in the respective cohort.

What should I know about the structure of the program (credit points, grading system, etc.)?

In the Master of Arts in Critical Urbanisms, students earn a minimum of 60 credit points by completing disciplinary as well as interdisciplinary and thematic modules. The modules form complementary teaching units, each with its own content and objective of imparting knowledge and skills. The students further acquire 30 credit points for the master’s thesis, and an additional 10 credit points for the two oral master’s examinations. The remaining 20 credit

points stem from free electives ("Freier Wahlbereich"). Refer to the [study guidelines](#) for more information and the breakdown of credit points allocation.

VII. The Racial Justice Student Collective (RJSC)

What is the Racial Justice Student Collective?

The Racial Justice Student Collective, formed in 2020 by Critical Urbanism students, is a multi-racial group committed to addressing systemic racism at the University of Basel, and to supporting racial justice organizing across Switzerland. They are particularly interested in connecting with students who are engaging in, or hoping to have, similar conversations leading to actions towards racial justice.

A statement and set of commitments have been published on the Critical Urbanism website and can be found [here](#).

The Collective is also committed to providing support for students of colour in the Critical Urbanism program.

Where can I get in touch with RJSC?

If you wish to get in touch with the Racial Justice Student Collective, they can be contacted by email: racialjustice.unibas@gmail.com

VIII. Student Life in Basel

Where do I eat and have coffee in Basel and near the university?

It is obviously cheaper to make your own food, but there are still affordable options in and around the university and the Critical Urbanisms offices. Some cater specifically to students and provide lunch time specials and affordable coffee. Click [here](#) for more information.

The university has a Mensa, which is convenient for Critical Urbanisms students, as it is located near our own building, with one location inside the Kollegienhaus and another, the main hub, across the street from the University Library and a third in the Library itself.

Students who present their student card pay reduced prices for certain food and drinks. Click [here](#) for more information.

Outside our own building near Spalendor, there is [Äss-Bar](#), a local bakery which attempts to reduce food waste in Switzerland by offering baked goods and sandwiches that would otherwise go to waste for sale at a reduced cost. It is a perfect place to get a croissant (gipfel) to buy before class. Other choices include Pasta Popolare, Sutter Beck (another bakery), Mandir (Indian) and Saponi del Sud (Italian).

I don't speak German. Will that be an issue?

Many people speak English in Switzerland, especially in a multicultural city like Basel, so most students won't have much difficulties. However, day-to-day life can be made easier if you know a bit of the local language and dialect. Many signs and official documents, for instance, will not be translated.

Upon your residence registration in Basel, you will be given coupons by the canton to be able to participate in particular language schools. If you're keen to learn German, this is especially useful, as the canton essentially subsidizes the lessons in certain schools and thus makes it more affordable for you to pay for your language classes. Language schools are also a good way to meet new people and learn more about events and culture in Basel and Switzerland in general.

As for the Critical Urbanisms program, it is taught entirely in English. You will also find a large amount of other courses available in the university taught in English.

I want to work while studying. Is this possible?

International students are not allowed to work in the first semester according to the student visa rules and are only able to take up work after six months into their studies. Only then can they be gainfully employed and work part-time at a maximum of 15 hours per week during the semester and then full-time during holiday breaks. For more information on student and work permits, the University provides the basic information [here](#).

Finding part-time work can, however, be difficult but is not impossible. You may find some options on the [Unimarkt](#), via [Working Bicycle](#) and [pet-sitting](#).