

# The University of South Alabama Biology Department

## Graduate Student Handbook



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## **INTRODUCTION**

Welcome to the University of South Alabama Department of Biology. We are glad that you chose to do your graduate studies with us. We have produced this short handbook to help you navigate through the various aspects of your graduate career. An understanding of this process is needed to make your graduate experience as rewarding as possible. Most of this information is available in detail elsewhere, but it is somewhat scattered -so please consider this handbook as a basic guide to information sources. As such, it does not supersede information in the Bulletin and the Special Policies and Procedures document.

## **ABOUT US**

The Master of Science degree in Biology is designed to provide qualified students the opportunity to further their knowledge in generalized and specialized areas of biology, as indicated by course offerings and faculty research interests. In addition, the Department also offers training leading to a concentration in Marine Biology (through cooperative agreement with the Department of Marine Sciences and/or the Dauphin Island Sea Laboratory).

The Biology graduate faculty are nationally and internationally recognized in their specialties, and have vigorous research programs supported by state, federal, and industrial organizations such as the National Science Foundation (NSF), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), The National Geographic Society, and many others.

Additional information on the department, including details of faculty research, can be found at this link:

BLY website

<http://www.southalabama.edu/biology/>

## **GRADUATE FACULTY**

Axsmith, Brian	Paleobotany & Evolution
Boettcher, Anne	Physiological & Chemical Ecology
Borchert, Glen	MicroRNAs & Genomics
Chiari, Ylenia	Evolutionary Biology & Herpetology
Freeman, John	Crustacean Development
Major, Kelly	Plant Physiological Ecology
Mata, Juan Luis	Fungal Biology
McCreadie, John	Freshwater Ecology & Entomology
Ní Chadhain, Sinéad	Marine Microbial Ecology
O'Brien, Jack	Ecological Parasitology
Sherman, Tim	Plant Physiology & Cell Biology

## ADMISSIONS

This handbook is mainly intended for students already in the BLY graduate program, so the main emphasis here is on change of status. Information on general admissions policy can be found at these links:

Graduate School Main Website

<http://www.southalabama.edu/graduateprograms/index.html>

Graduate School Contact Information

<http://www.southalabama.edu/graduateprograms/contactinfo.html>

### Non-Degree

The Biology Department accepts Non-Degree Graduate Students within the general admission and credit regulations of the University of South Alabama with certain reservations and limitations. Students should consult the Department concerning these limitations **before** applying for such status. Included, but not limited to, are the following:

1. Students are restricted to enrollment in courses prefixed BLY that the Chair determines will advance their career development in biological sciences. Only in exceptional cases wherein it is determined to the satisfaction of the Chair that the aforementioned career goals are enhanced will a non-degree student be permitted to enroll in courses in other departments.
2. Students must confer with the Chair or the Graduate Coordinator of the Department of Biological Sciences before attempting to enroll in any class.
3. Students seeking to change from non-degree status to a degree-granting program *must reapply and be evaluated as any other student who has not previously applied to such program.*

### Provisional

In some cases, a student showing promise for success in graduate school but lacking certain criteria for regular admissions may be considered for provisional admissions. However, a willing mentor is required, and fulfillment of the criteria below is not a guarantee of admission.

1. Undergraduate major or minor (or equivalent) in Biology, Botany, or Zoology.

2. A minimum undergraduate GPA of 2.5 (on a 4-point scale), with a minimum of 2.8 on all biological courses taken.
3. Submission of GRE (or MCAT) score as outlined above, but without minimum score requirements, and a minimum TOEFL score of 600.
4. Three letters of reference.
5. A letter from the student indicating their research interests.
6. A willing mentor from Biology (in this regard, the student should contact the Graduate Coordinator before applying to the program).

For more information about contacts you can visit the USA Graduate Program website: <http://www.southalabama.edu/bulletin/artbio.htm>

**Upon the successful completion of 9 credit hours of graduate level courses in BLY, a student may be considered for regular status.** The form Recommendation for Change of Status, which can be downloaded from this link <http://www.southalabama.edu/graduateprograms/forms.html>, must be filled out and signed.

## DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

### All students

Students will find detailed explanation of special departmental requirements in a document, [Special Policies and Procedures](#). This document is available from the departmental office or the Biology web site (click on link above), and describes initial orientation for new students, administration of the comprehensive examination, departmental seminars, and the like.

The form "Appointment of Graduate Faculty to a Dissertation of Thesis Committee" can be downloaded here: <http://www.southalabama.edu/graduateprograms/forms.html>

The student's advisory committee in view of the student's professional goals will develop the curriculum. If, in the opinion of a student's committee, the student lacks adequate undergraduate preparation or English skills, the student will be required to make up such deficiencies.

All requirements must be met within five years. In addition to satisfying the general requirements of the Graduate School, the candidates for the Master of Science degree in Biology must satisfy the following requirements:

### Thesis Program

1. Complete, with a minimum grade of "B", thirty hours of graduate credit hours at the 500 level. All Biology graduate students, including those with a Marine Biology concentration, must complete at least 18 hours of formal coursework in BLY (excluding directed studies and thesis) listed courses. This required coursework must include one semester of Seminar (BLY592) and Professionalism in Science (BLY590). No course at the 400 level or below may be taken for graduate credit. A maximum of six credit hours may be granted for Directed Studies (BLY 594). All courses must be accepted by the student's graduate advisory committee. The student's graduate committee may, at its option, after consultation with the student, require demonstration of additional proficiency in mathematics computer skills, statistics, and/or require the student to take additional course work.
2. Complete a thesis representing original research. A maximum of nine hours credit will be granted for the thesis. Enrollment in BLY 599 (Thesis) is not permitted until the student's research prospectus has been approved by the advisory committee and the Directory of Graduate Studies, College of Arts and Sciences.
3. After submission of the written research prospectus to the committee, students will schedule a committee meeting and comprehensive qualifying exam. The

exam will be oral and will start with a presentation of the prospectus and, where applicable, a progress report. Students will first be examined on the prospectus and progress report, and then any area of study closely or broadly related to the student's area of specialization. The exam committee will consist of the student's thesis committee. The student will be graded by all committee members, following a rubric that considers various aspects of the presentation and has three possible scores for each category: 1 (insufficient), 2 (meets expectations), and 3 (above expectations). In order to pass the exam, a student will have to score an average of 2 or higher. Students are encouraged to look at the rubric before the presentation to be aware of the committee's expectations. Students who fail the exam will be given a second opportunity.

The form "Comprehensive Evaluation Committee Appointment Request and Evaluation Report" must be filled out and approved at least two weeks before the exam and can be downloaded at:

<http://www.southalabama.edu/graduateprograms/forms.html>.

The "Thesis/Dissertation Submission Form" can also be found at this link.

4. Make an oral defense of the thesis.



## **Proposed Timeline for Biology MS Students**

### **Upon admission**

Meet with mentor and graduate adviser regarding selection of thesis committee, initial course work, and funding.

### **By end of first semester**

Formation of thesis committee  
Thesis committee meeting  
Coursework outlined  
Teaching requirements discussed

### **By end of second semester**

Draft of prospectus submitted to mentor  
Review of progress by thesis committee

### **By end of third semester**

Thesis committee meeting  
Prospectus approved by thesis committee/Comprehensive exam

### **By end of fourth semester**

Review of progress by thesis committee

### **By end of fifth semester**

Complete all coursework  
Complete teaching requirements  
Complete and defend thesis

## **FAQS**

### **How many people need to be on my committee?**

A student's committee will normally be made up of his/her Mentor (the Committee Chair) and 2 other graduate faculty in fields related to the student's thesis. The minimum number of Committee members is three; there is no maximum number. For further information, please visit this link: <http://www.southalabama.edu/graduateprograms/thesis.html>

### **Do I have to teach?**

Yes. All biology graduate students must teach at least two lab sections at some time during their tenure regardless of the availability of funds.

### **Is there funding available? Can I get a Research or Teaching Assistantship (RA or TA)?**

There are a limited number of Teaching Assistantships available through the department. There are not enough TAs to fund all of the graduate students. Research Assistantships are typically provided by your mentor/committee Chair.

### **What rooms will I have access to?**

Graduate students typically have access to his/her Mentor's lab space and to the rooms in which they teach. Access to any rooms needs to be cleared by the student's Mentor.

### **Where do I get keys to the rooms that I need to access?**

You will need to arrange getting keys with your Mentor.

### **How do I get permission to use the boat/van? What are the rules regarding boat/van use?**

You will first need to apply for permission. You will need a valid driver's license and good driving record. Please see the Biology Office Manager for more information, BLY 124, or call 460-6331.

### **What if I need to take a leave of absence?**

A leave of absence is granted only for **nonacademic extenuating circumstances** such as a family emergency. You will need to make a formal request in writing to your Mentor and Committee. A formal request will be waived in cases of accident or severe illness. After a leave of absence, you may need to apply for readmission to the program.

### **What are the comprehensive exams and when do I need to take them?**

The comprehensive exam consists of the student's prospectus presentation followed by questions from the committee (This should occur by the end of the third semester (see Timeline above). See page 9 for more details.

### **Do I have to give a seminar or talk?**

All graduate students are expected to act as professional scientists. Therefore, all thesis graduate students must have submitted a paper for publication or presented a talk at a professional meeting before he/she graduates.

### **Do I have to attend departmental seminars?**

Yes, they are for your benefit.

### **What specialized equipment and facilities can I use?**

Various equipment and facilities such as specialty microscopes, freezers, hoods, herbaria, greenhouses, growth chambers, etc. are available in the department. Many of these are under the care of certain faculty members and will be made available to students with proper training and instruction. Please discuss this issue with your graduate advisor and the relevant faculty member.

### **Is there a BLY Graduate Student Organization?**

Yes, and is it important for you to join and become involved. The Biology Graduate Student Organization is a primary source of recent information. Please see the office staff for the name of the current president.

## **IMPORTANT SITES AND FORMS FOR BLY GRAD STUDENTS**

### **Graduate School Main Website**

<http://www.southalabama.edu/graduateprograms/index.html>

### **Graduate School Contact Information**

<http://www.southalabama.edu/graduateprograms/contactinfo.html>

### **Graduate School Faculty**

<http://www.southalabama.edu/graduateprograms/faculty.html>

### **BLY website**

<http://www.southalabama.edu/biology/>

### **Registration Information**

<http://www.southalabama.edu/paws/>

### **Parking Information**

Your desired parking zone will probably be the north parking area.

<http://www.southalabama.edu/parkingservices/>

See the Department Office Manager for further instruction.

### **Student Services**

<http://www.southalabama.edu/currentstudents.html>

### **Van and Boat Operations**

Drivers License and Insurance Information—see Department Office Manager

### **Payroll Office Information**

<http://www.southalabama.edu/financialaffairs/payrollaccounting/index.html>

<http://www.southalabama.edu/studentaccounting/>

<http://www.southalabama.edu/financialaffairs/traveloffice/index.html>

**General Forms for Graduate students (Change of Status, Appointment of Faculty to Committee, Thesis Submissions forms, Comprehensive Exam Forms, etc.)**

<http://www.southalabama.edu/graduateprograms/forms.html>

**Calendar for Graduate School**

<http://www.southalabama.edu/graduateprograms/forms.html>

**Pay Schedule for Graduate Assistants**

<http://www.southalabama.edu/graduateprograms/forms.html>

**Directed Studies Paperwork**

See Department Office Manager.

**Library Information**

<http://www.southalabama.edu/library.html>

**Thesis Hours Paperwork**

Must have completed Committee Forms, Prospectus Meeting, and have all signed documents into the Graduate Office before registering for thesis hour credit.

**Thesis and Dissertation Guide**

<http://www.southalabama.edu/graduateprograms/thesis.html>

**Intent to Graduate Paperwork**

<http://www.southalabama.edu/registrar/gradmain.htm>

**Thesis Submission and Defense Paperwork**

<http://www.southalabama.edu/graduateprograms/forms.html>

**Graduate Personal Action Form**

<http://www.southalabama.edu/graduateprograms/forms.html>

**Inactive Status / Leave of Absence Paperwork**

<http://www.southalabama.edu/registrar/readmission.htm>