

Graduate School at BSU. **(written primarily for wildlife/zoology focused students)**

This system is similar in many universities. The sequence of event may differ, but the general process is usually the same.

There are four ways to go to graduate school and the differences all revolve around money! Regardless of the method, you **MUST** have a faculty member that agrees to be your advisor. While many schools say finding an advisor can be done after entering graduate school (like here at BSU), the standard is to find an advisor **PRIOR** to entering graduate school. Most often a student contacts faculty at various Universities that share the same interests as their own. Hopefully, the student can find an advisor that is willing to take on the student and **THEN** the student applies to the graduate school at that university. This method also saves students from having to pay the application fees for multiple schools. With this method you find the university and faculty member you like, then apply knowing you will get accepted!

The four ways to pay for Graduate school are as follows:

1. Pay for it yourself. Basically it works similar to an undergraduate degree. You pay for the classes, do your research and get a degree. One big difference is you must still have an advisor. This is rarely done in wildlife sciences.
2. Get a scholarship. Here the student applies and gets a scholarship from some source. Scholarships are usually available at the university level, college level (e.g. College of Sciences and Humanities), and sometimes department level. Of course there are lots of outside opportunities available from various agencies and organizations. Essentially this method is similar to #1, but someone else is footing the bill. Scholarships are **VERY** competitive. You must be the best of the best to get them. This is not a realistic option for most students.
3. Get a teaching (or graduate) assistantship (TA or GA). Teaching assistantships are very common. With this method the student is paid by the department to assist with or teach the lab portion of some class. In some cases you would teach 2-4 lab sections a week or you may be responsible for helping to set-up and run a lab with the instructor. In return you would get a stipend (salary) and free classes (still have to pay student fees). The specifics vary from school to school. The catch to this method is that there are a limited number of openings each semester and often there are very

few positions for summer semesters, leaving most TAs without work (or pay) during the summer. Some schools, like BSU, have deadlines for applying for these positions.

4. Get a research assistantship (RA). Research assistantships are less common. These are very similar to TA, but instead of teaching the student does research. The money that is used to pay the student's salary and for classes must come from the advisor (usually from a grant). The research work the student conducts may or may not be associated with their own research they must conduct as part of their degree.

Most often a graduate student will use more than one of the above methods to finance graduate school. I am a strong believer in supporting my students for a full 12 months. Most often I use a combination of TAs and RAs to support my students. They can expect to teach (TA) during the fall and spring semesters and be on an RA during summer. However, summer salary is dependent on grant money, which is never a sure thing.

Salaries: For Fall 2011

Department of Biology Graduate Teaching Assistantships (TAs) pay \$11,000.00 per academic year (Aug – May). These are competitive and the deadline for applying is January for the following academic year. All candidates are ranked based on a suite of variables including the student's credentials (i.e. GPA, GRE scores) and having a faculty advocate (a professor willing to be your advisor).

Research Assistantships (RAs) for the summer are dependent on grant money. When available, they typically pay about \$1000-1500 per month.

Degree Options:

Most schools including, Ball State University, offer both Master of Science (MS) and Master of Arts (MA) degrees. The difference revolves around the research requirements. A MS degree requires a research project that culminates in a thesis. A MA degree has no research thesis requirement. While both are offered at Ball State University, I will only support MS students. I feel that the research component is a critical part of the graduate experience and education in the field sciences.

Research:

Most students accept a position with a professor because they either like that professor and share the same interests or they like a specific project that is advertised. Often the professor gets funding for a project and then advertises for a student (or selects from a pool of applicants). These are usually "take it or leave it" deals – the student has little say in the research. The research the students do for their degree is on the same topic the

professor got the funding for. Alternately, the student may be able to create their own research topic; however, there is seldom any money to support that research.

Most of my students do their research for their degree while on RA during the summer months. Typically, most students have two separate field seasons (summers). This can create difficulties in completing a degree in 2 years since the second field season will come at the end of the second year leaving no time to write the thesis! As such, many schools are now considering a master's degree of 2.5 -3.0 years the norm. BSU is in the process of reconsidering our program, however, as of now MS students are limited to 2 years of TA funding from the university. My current philosophy is to have students start in May as a technician (when money is available) and do their first field season of data collection before they officially start. This will facilitate finishing in 24 months.

Some projects, however, are such that research is conducted throughout the year. Often this research is less intense for a given time, but spread over a longer period of time. In this case the summer RA may still be done, but the students may be asked to help with other non-related research in addition to their own. As you can imagine each student's research is unique and few projects fit perfectly into any one mold. The specifics of your project should be clearly laid out by your professor prior to you accepting the position - just so you know what you're getting into.

Entry Requirements:

At BSU all applicants must meet the entry requirements of the Graduate School and of the Department of Biology.

Master's Admission for Graduate School:

Admission standards are established for each master's degree program at Ball State University by the responsible academic unit.

You will be admitted to graduate study toward a master's degree when you have met specific degree requirements and the following minimum criteria:

1. Hold an earned bachelor's degree from a college or university that is accredited by its regional accrediting association.
2. Satisfy one of the following:
 - A. An undergraduate cumulative grade point average of at least 2.75 on a 4.0 scale (all undergraduate course work, including work completed prior to the baccalaureate degree, is used to calculate the grade point average).
 - B. A cumulative grade point average of at least 3.0 on a 4.0 scale in the latter half of the baccalaureate.

- C. An acceptable combination of cumulative grade point average on the baccalaureate and score on the Graduate Management Admission Test if the intended program is the master of business administration or accounting .
3. Meet departmental or program admission requirements.

Master's Admission for Department of Biology:

The Biology Department requirements do not exceed those of the Graduate School. However, GRE scores are required. Students that meet the Graduate School requirements are considered based on academic history, research experience, aspirations, volunteer work, character, and other considerations, and we do not have a set minimum GRE score requirement. We encourage you to apply.

More information can be found at my website: <http://tccarter.iweb.bsu.edu/>
Interested students should contact me prior to applying to the department.

Good Luck,
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