UNIVERSITY of LOUISIANA LAFAYETTE

Department of Biology
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Dear potential applicant:

Thank you for your interest in the graduate programs in Biology at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette. The intent of this letter is to help facilitate the application process.

GRADUATE DEGREES:
We offer three degree routes in our graduate program. Our **doctoral degree** is in Environmental and Evolutionary Biology. Admission is highly competitive and is dependent on both student credentials and the ability of our department to provide stipend support. This degree is most suitable for applicants pursuing a career in research. Applicants to the doctoral program who do not have a MS degree are expected to have substantial research experience.

Our **Master's degree** is a MS in Biology and can be pursued through a thesis or a non-thesis option. Students starting in one option may switch to the other with the approval of the Graduate Studies Committee. The thesis option is strongly recommended for students seeking a career in research, including students who will eventually seek a doctoral degree. The non-thesis MS option is for students seeking a terminal degree and a career that does not have a research component. This option is coursework intensive and will allow students to take a wide diversity of graduate classes. Following this letter is a short description of the two MS degree programs.

To be admitted to graduate study an applicant must meet the basic requirements of the Graduate School (e.g. have the equivalent of an undergraduate degree in biology or a related field and demonstrate English language proficiency), and have the support of the Department of Biology faculty. We consider your application using a portfolio approach, weighing all aspects of your package. We don't use any single criterion to make admissions decisions, so extensive prior research experience or strong advisor support might mitigate low GPA or GRE scores. Applicants without much training in biology should consider taking additional course work prior to seeking admission. Graduate courses can be taken prior to admission to the program through the Graduate School's Entrée program (http://gradschool.louisiana.edu/graduate-degrees/non-degree-programs/entrée).

IDENTIFYING A PROSPECTIVE ADVISOR:
Along with your application, **you are required to identify a prospective graduate advisor** from our faculty who is willing to support your application (unless you are applying to the MS non-thesis option, which does not require an advisor *a priori*). This would be the faculty member with whom you would conduct your research. The likelihood that you will be successfully admitted and receive funding will be substantially enhanced if you have established a relationship with a potential advisor, so we encourage you to start this communication early in the application process. For your assistance, at the end of this letter are the names, research interests, and e-mail addresses of graduate faculty and adjunct faculty who may have an interest in considering new students. I strongly encourage you to visit our department web site for more information on their research programs. You are also encouraged to contact *only* the faculty members with whom you share a close research interest; mass e-mails sent to all faculty members rarely result in the applicant identifying an advisor. Please inform me by email (France@Louisiana.edu) once a faculty member agrees to serve as your Advisor.

APPLYING (GRADUATE SCHOOL FORMS):
Application materials should be submitted directly to the Graduate School (please DO NOT email documents to me [the Graduate Admissions Coordinator] unless you are specifically asked to do so; the Graduate School collects and makes available to our program all of your documents). All necessary Graduate School forms for applying to the program can be downloaded from the Graduate School's web site: http://gradschool.louisiana.edu/node/300 , or the online application portal. You do NOT need to wait until all application documents are ready to begin your online application. Rather, we recommend you begin the online application as soon as you know you are interested in the program so that we know you are planning to submit a full application; your required documents can be submitted later as you get them (but by the deadline).

- **Application for Graduate Admission**
  The Graduate School website hosts an online application portal (http://gradschool.louisiana.edu/apply). Note that you must first create (and "submit") an application before you will be permitted to upload various necessary documents. To create your application, you will be asked to enter personal and background information and to certify three questions, and sign and date the application; you can pay the application fee at this time or pay later. *You must click on the Submission button to create your application*. Note this "Submission" is just the start of your application, not the final step. Once the application is created in this way you will have access to additional screens that allow you to request letters of reference, upload your CV, assistantship or fellowship applications, etc., once you are ready to do so (that is, you can gradually add additional documents and information over time once you have created your application).
- **Applications for Fellowships and Assistantships**
  Please fill these out even if you have alternative funding.
- **Letter of Reference form**
  You will require three letters of reference from people who can comment authoritatively on your academic accomplishments, work or internship experience, and/or potential for success in graduate studies; these are sent directly to the **Graduate School** by your letter writers via the application portal. We would prefer they include a letter along with the standardized Graduate School form.
- **Proof of Immunization**
  Proof of Immunization is required before you can attend UL and possibly before you can schedule classes, but not to have your application reviewed. Thus it can be obtained after the forms above.

- **Official transcripts** and **GRE scores**

GRE scores for applications to the Biology graduate programs will *not* be required for admission terms beginning Spring 2021 and through Spring 2023.

Academic transcripts and test scores should be submitted **directly to the Graduate School** in accordance with their instructions here: https://gradschool.louisiana.edu/admissions/official-transcripts. The biology subject area GRE test is **not required** for admission, but if you have subject area scores, we encourage you to submit them along with the regular GRE scores. Subject area scores will only be used in the admission decision process when they strengthen the student's application. Our institution test score code for the GRE is 6672. If asked to list a departmental code, you can leave the department code blank or enter 0000.
IMPORTANT: International applicants who plan to obtain an F-1 or J-1 visa will be required to submit Official transcripts *before* an I-20 is issued. The deadlines for issuance of an initial I-20 are June 30 for Fall semester admission and October 31 for Spring semester admission. If your transcripts will not be available before these deadlines, e.g. because your degree is awarded after these dates, then you should apply to a later semester.

- **Optional, but recommended**
  A CV or Resume and a Statement of Interest. Please send these materials as PDF files and **use your family name as the start of the filename (i.e. Smith_CV.pdf)**; do not use a compressed file format (zip or rar). These can be uploaded to your application or emailed to the Graduate Admissions Coordinator (France@Louisiana.edu).

Questions about submission of **application fees, transcripts, GRE scores, the TOEFL (or IELTS), letters of reference, or your immunization form**, or any issues with the online application portal, should be directed to the Graduate School (Gradschool@Louisiana.edu or 1-337-482-6965). It is a good idea to monitor the status of your application through your online account. Some applications are never sent to our program for review because letters of reference are not received or the student fails to arrange transcripts from all of the academic institutions they attended. I also encourage you to inform me (France@Louisiana.edu) when you believe you have completed your application. Remember, if you are applying to the doctoral program or the thesis track of the MS program, please note in an email to the Graduate Admissions Coordinator (France@Louisiana.edu) the faculty member with whom you hope to work.

THE I-20:
An I-20 will be issued to international students **only** after all credentials (application, official transcripts (and individual marksheets where needed), letters of reference, GRE and TOEFL scores, immunization form, and proof of financial support) have been received and evaluated, and after formal admission has been granted by the appropriate department and by the Graduate School. All of these documents must be submitted by June 30 for Fall semester admission and October 31 for Spring semester admission.

If for any reason you are unable to register for the semester for which you have applied, the Graduate School will update the I-20 upon its return. After two semesters, however, you must reapply for admission. The Graduate School is your best source of information for questions about the I-20.

STIPEND SUPPORT:
Students are typically supported through one of three mechanisms.
- **Fellowships** provide stipend support with little or no teaching commitment. University doctoral fellowships (UL) have a stipend of $20,000 (enhanced) or 19,080 for each 9-month academic year, with a duration of 3-4 years, and waiver of tuition and most fees (a fee of approximately $551 is required of all international students, a portion of which is for required health insurance – see http://studenthealth.louisiana.edu/content/student-insurance/international-insurance). No teaching is required in the first or last years of these fellowships; during intervening semesters students are required to teach one laboratory section. UL fellows can earn additional income during the summer as teaching or research assistants. Students requiring additional time in the program, beyond the duration of their fellowships, are usually funded as teaching or research assistants.

- **Teaching assistantships** (TAs) are available to both doctoral and MS students; availability is limited and preference is given to doctoral program applicants. Current target stipends are $14,500 for MS students and $18,500 for doctoral students; however this number varies slightly from year to year. Teaching loads usually consist of one or two laboratory sections per semester; an effort is made to keep teaching commitments as light as possible to provide the students with more time for their research. At their request, advanced doctoral students are sometimes assigned to lecture sections. TA stipends are for 9 months; students can earn additional income during the summer as teaching or research assistants. All TAs include a waiver of tuition and most fees (international students are responsible for a fee of

approximately $551, a portion of which is for required health insurance – see http://studenthealth.louisiana.edu/content/student-insurance/international-insurance – at a reduced cost as the Graduate School pays 50% of the university health insurance premium for international TAs). An international student may have to pass English proficiency test administered by the Department of Modern Languages to serve as a teaching assistant. The University provides instruction for students with difficulty communicating in English.

- **Research assistants** are paid from the grants of their major professors; the stipend level is dictated by the specific grant and can be discussed with your prospective advisor. Most, but not all, research assistantships include a waiver of tuition and fees.

- **Scholarships**. Our program also has available a limited number of Board of Regents Support Fund Endowed Superior Graduate Student Scholarships. These scholarships are awarded as an additional enhancement to our Fellowships, Teaching assistantships and Research assistantships. They range from $3,800 to $5,500/year and are used to support research and academic or professional experiential opportunities.

Funding and admission decisions are not based on any one criterion. We consider GREs, GPAs, past research experience, and letters of reference. Furthermore, the enthusiasm of the faculty advisor for having the applicant join their research program is an important component of our decision process. Funding and admission decisions are made by ranking applicants; offers of admission and stipend support are made to applicants with the highest ranks. Therefore an applicant's chances of funding are difficult to determine until the composition of the applicant pool has been established. We rarely admit doctoral students to the program that we cannot fund through one of the mechanisms described above; Master's students may be admitted without stipend support, *i.e.* self-funded. If a promising applicant cannot be funded in one funding cycle, we will, with their permission, consider them for funding and admission in future semesters. Such requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis. The Graduate Admissions Coordinator and your prospective advisor are the best sources of information concerning questions you may have about funding.

WHEN TO APPLY:
Initial offers of fellowships and teaching assistantships are made to applicants in March of each year. **You are encouraged to have completed the full application process by February 1st or September 15th to ensure full consideration for funding for the fall or spring semesters, respectively. Please note that these dates are earlier than the deadlines for admission listed on the Graduate School's web site.**

February 1st and **September 15th** are **target dates.** We have found that if applicants attempt to complete their applications by those target dates, they will have sufficient time to rectify any problems with their applications by the time the department starts to make decisions on funding and admission. **Students missing the target dates are still encouraged to apply.** Additional funding for student support does become available throughout the year and will be assigned to unfunded students who have been admitted to the program.

If you have not taken the GRE, are applying near or after the dates suggested above, and would like to be considered for as many fellowship/ assistantship opportunities as possible, we suggest that you apply immediately and prior to taking the GRE. You should also register to take the required test at the earliest possible date. Upon completing the test, you will receive unofficial scores. You should e-mail those scores to the Graduate Admissions Coordinator (France@Louisiana.edu) with a note that you have

otherwise completed the application process. Formal admission and funding decisions will not be completed until we have received official scores.

If you have any questions about admissions you should contact the Graduate School. If you have questions about the Department of Biology graduate programs, please do not hesitate to contact me. Best wishes and I look forward to reviewing your application materials.

Sincerely,

Scott C. France
Graduate Admissions Coordinator
Phone: (337) 482-6320 Email: France@Louisiana.edu

Information on the two Masters of Science tracks offered by the Department of Biology:

The Master of Science program has a thesis and a non-thesis track. The thesis track is recommended for students interested in pursuing additional graduate training and careers in research. The non-thesis track is recommended for students seeking a terminal graduate degree for a career that does not require research experience and for those interested in future study at a professional school. Students admitted under one track may switch to the other with the approval of their Advisory Committee and the Graduate Studies Committee.

Thesis Track
A candidate for the degree of Master of Science must present acceptable grades for a minimum of 30 hours of courses approved for graduate credit, including not more than 6 hours devoted to thesis (BIOL 599). Of the 24 non-thesis hours, at least 18 must be from courses in the Department of Biology. At least 12 of the non-thesis hours must be in courses at the 500-level or above, including 2 hours of the Graduate Seminar in Biology (BIOL 551/552). Students will also take 1 hour of Colloquium in Biological Science (BIOL 550) each semester they are in residence and have stipend support from the department; this course does not count toward the credit hours required for the degree. A research thesis is required of all students in this track. Students must also take a final examination in defense of the thesis, conducted by the student's Advisory Committee.

Non-Thesis Track
A candidate for the degree of Master of Science must present acceptable grades for a minimum of 36 hours of courses approved for graduate credit, including not more than 3 hours devoted to Advanced Problems (BIOL 560, 561, and 564). Thesis hours (BIOL 599) cannot be applied to this requirement. At least 30 hours must be from courses in the Department of Biology. At least 18 hours must be in courses at the 500-level or above, including 2 hours of the Graduate Seminar in Biology (BIOL 551/552). Students will also take 1 hour of Colloquium in Biological Science (BIOL 550) each semester they are in residence and have stipend support from the department; this course does not count toward the credit hours required for the degree. At least 3 hours of graduate course work (approved by the major advisor and Graduate Studies Coordinator) must be in an area of physical science or mathematics outside of biology. Students are required to pass written and oral comprehensive examinations conducted by the student's Advisory Committee.
Applicants and newly-admitted students should inform the Graduate Admissions Coordinator (France@Louisiana.edu) regarding which track they will initially pursue. Admission procedures are the

same for both thesis and non-thesis tracks, except that applicants will not be considered for the thesis track until they have identified a faculty member willing to supervise their thesis research. If a thesis advisor has been identified, the student should notify the Graduate Admissions Coordinator.

Faculty who may be considering new Graduate Students:

- **James Albert:** Fish evolution and biology, Amazonian biodiversity, jalbert@louisiana.edu
- **Loren Cassin Sackett:** Evolution in small populations, conservation genomics, ecology and evolution of infectious diseases, loren.sackett@louisiana.edu
- **Andrei Chistoserdov:** Environmental Microbiology, Biogeochemistry & Pathogenesis, andrei.chistoserdov@louisiana.edu
- **Baojin Ding:** Cell and Molecular Biology, Neuroscience and Neurological Diseases; Reprogramming human neurons from adult fibroblasts, baojin.ding@louisiana.edu
- **Bruce E. Felgenhauer:** Arthropod Adaptation & Functional Morphology; Microscopy, bruce.felgenhauer@louisiana.edu
- **Scott C. France:** Deep-sea Biology, Deep-sea Coral Taxonomy & Systematics, Evolution of Marine Invertebrates, france@louisiana.edu
- **Suzanne Fredericq:** Systematics, Morphology and Molecular Evolution of Red Algae, suzanne.fredericq@louisiana.edu
- **Mark Genung:** Community ecology, plant-pollinator interactions, within-species variation, quantitative ecology, mark.genung@louisiana.edu
- **Karl H. Hasenstein:** Plant Physiology, Phytohormones, Plant Movements, hasenstein@louisiana.edu
- **Emily Kane:** Ecological and Evolutionary Biomechanics, Emily.Kane@louisiana.edu
- **Nicholas J. Kooyers:** Plant ecological genetics and genomics, adaptation**,** plant evolutionary ecology, global change biology, Nicholas.Kooyers@louisiana.edu
- **Ritwij Kulkarni:** Effects of Environmental Pollutants on the Immuno-Pathogenesis of Respiratory Infections; Role of Inflammasomes in Bacterial Urinary Tract Infections, ritwj@louisiana.edu
- **Paul Leberg:** Conservation Genetics and Ecology of Birds, Mammals & Fishes, Leberg@Louisiana.edu
- **Brad Moon:** Functional Morphology and Physiology, Muscle Function, Herpetology, BradMoon@louisiana.edu
- **James Nelson:** Stable Isotope Ecology, Food Webs, Ecology of Marine Fishes, and Coastal Ecosystem Ecology, nelson@louisiana.edu
- **Thomas C. Pesacreta:** Plant Cytoskeleton, Movements and myosin; microscopy, thomas.pesacreta@louisiana.edu
- **Daniel J. Povinelli:** Evolution of Learning and Cognition in Primates; Theory of Mind, povinelli@louisiana.edu
- **Kelly Robinson:** Marine Zooplankton Ecology, Jellyfish, Climate Change & Variability, Food Webs, kelly.robinson@louisiana.edu
- **Karen M. Smith:** Use of transgenic mouse models to investigate genes influencing nervous system development, karen.smith@louisiana.edu
- **Beth A. Stauffer:** Phytoplankton/Protistan Ecology, Coastal Water Quality Issues, stauffer@louisiana.edu

- **Francois Villinger:** Immune response and vaccine development, francois.villinger@louisiana.edu (at New Iberia Research Center)
- **Yi-Hong Wang:** Molecular genetics of Sorghum, biofuels development, yihong.wang@louisiana.edu

Adjunct Faculty who may be considering new Graduate Students (note: LUMCON and NIRC facilities are off main campus):

- **Craig R. McClain:** Marine biodiversity, body size and energetics, cmcclain@lumcon.edu (at LUMCON)
- **Beth A. Middleton:** Wetland plant ecology, and wetland restoration, beth_middleton@usgs.gov
- **Guillaume Rieucau:** Marine and estuarine behavioral ecology, fish collective behavior, predator-prey interaction, ecology of fear, grieucau@lumcon.edu (at LUMCON)
- **Patricia E. Rosel:** Population genetics and evolutionary histories of marine vertebrates, Patricia.Rosel@noaa.gov
- **Ruth Ruprecht:** Virology and Immunology, Molecular Biology, Vaccine Design, Ruth.Ruprecht@louisiana.edu (at New Iberia Research Center)