



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 processing of your application.

GRADUATE DEGREES:

We offer three degree routes in our graduate program. The 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 that do not have a MS degree are expected to have substantial research experience.

The Masters degree is a MS in Biology. Masters degrees can be pursued through a thesis and 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.

Admission to graduate study is only granted if the applicant has met the requirements of both the Graduate School and our programs, and the Department of Biology faculty support the application. We don't use any single criterion to make admissions decisions, so extensive research experience or strong advisor support might mitigate low GPA or GRE scores. Applicants are required to have the equivalent of an undergraduate degree in biology or a related field. 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:

Before completing your formal application, **you must identify a prospective graduate advisor** 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 is most easily done by visiting the department's website and examining the research interests of the graduate faculty and adjunct graduate faculty. You are also encouraged to contact only the faculty members with which you share a close research interest; mass e-mails sent to all faculty members rarely result in the applicant identifying an advisor. The likelihood that you will be successfully admitted and receive funding will be substantially enhanced if you communicate with a potential advisor. The faculty member who agrees to advise you can also provide you with considerable information about funding opportunities available for new students. This requirement that you identify an advisor prior to admission pertains to the doctoral program and the MS thesis program; applicants without advisors can be admitted to the MS non-thesis program.. When a faculty member agrees to serve as your Advisor, you should inform me by email (France@Louisiana.edu).

APPLYING (GRADUATE SCHOOL FORMS):

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>

The following forms should be submitted directly to the Graduate School (please do not send these documents to me [the Graduate Admissions Chair] unless you are specifically asked to do so; the Graduate School collects and makes available to our program all of these documents):

- **Application for Graduate Admission**

The Graduate School requests that you use their online application (see this page: <http://gradschool.louisiana.edu/prospective-students/application-information>). A \$30 NON-REFUNDABLE APPLICATION FEE, payable to UL Lafayette, **MUST** accompany each application (payable online). The application will not be processed until the fee is received.

- **Applications for Fellowships and Assistantships**

Please fill these out even if you have alternative funding.

- **Proof of Immunization**

If obtaining your records will slow down submission of your application, request an exemption in section III; your complete records are needed for you to start classes.

- **Letter of Reference form**

Three letters of reference should also be sent directly to the **Graduate School** by your **references**. We would prefer your references include a letter along with the standardized Graduate School form. Your references can submit their letters to the Graduate School by email (Gradschool@louisiana.edu) or using the mailing address:

**Graduate School
P.O. Box 44610
University of Louisiana at Lafayette
Lafayette, LA 70504-4610**

- **Official transcripts and GRE scores**

These should be sent **directly to the Graduate School from the issuing organizations**. 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.

Questions about submission of **application fees, transcripts, GRE scores, the TOEFL (or IELTS), letters of reference, or your immunization form** should be directed to the Graduate School (Gradschool@Louisiana.edu or 1-337-482-6965). It is a good idea to check in with the Graduate School about the status of your application every couple of weeks after you think it should be complete. Many applications are never sent to the department 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 have completed your application.

A **CV or Resume** should be emailed to the Graduate Admissions Chair (France@Louisiana.edu); a statement of interest may also be emailed if you wish to provide one. **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). If your CV does not include your GPA or GRE scores (include percentiles), please include that information in your email message. If applying to the doctoral program or the thesis track of the MS program, please note in your email 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, transcripts, letters of recommendation, 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.

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 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, with a departmental supplement, have a stipend of \$18,000 for each 9-month academic year, with a duration of 3-4 years, and waiver of tuition and most fees (a fee of approximately \$442 is required of all international students, approximately \$270 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. University stipends are for 9 months; students can earn additional income during the summer as teaching or research assistants. To qualify for a University Fellowship, an international student must have earned a prior degree in the United States. 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 \$13,000 for MS students and \$17,000 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 \$442, which includes required health insurance; the cost of health insurance varies – see <http://studenthealth.louisiana.edu/content/student-insurance/international-insurance> – however the Graduate School will pay 50% of the university health insurance premium for TAs). An international student must earn a TOEFL score of 213 or higher 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; you need to discuss stipend levels with your advisor if such funding is available. Most, but not all, research assistantships include a waiver of tuition and fees.

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 students to the program that we cannot fund through one of the mechanisms described above. 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. Masters students can request to be admitted without stipend support, i.e. self-funded. Such requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis. The Graduate Admissions Chair and your prospective advisor are the best sources of information concerning questions you may have about funding.

WHEN TO APPLY:

Most fellowships and teaching assistantships are assigned 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/assistant 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 Chair](#) with a note that you have otherwise completed the application process. It is possible for us to use unofficial scores to make initial funding decisions, although 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's 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 Chair

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 Chair (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 Chair.