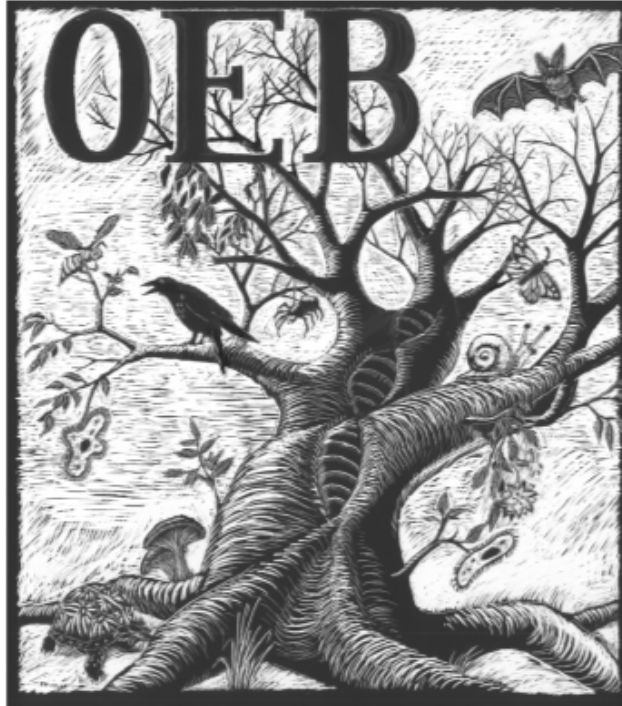


OEB Student Survival Guide

Spring 2023



Updated by the 2022 OEB Mentoring Committee (Emelia Kusi, João Menezes, Aly Putnam, Katrina Zarrella Smith) from the 2021 OEB Mentoring Committee (Aly Putnam, Jamie Stoll, Katrina Zarrella Smith) from the 2020 OEB Mentoring Committee (Jake Barnett, Alison Fowler, John Swenson, Alex Winsor) from the 2019 OEB Mentoring Committee (Jacob Barnett, Michelle Jackson, John Swenson with help from Rachel Bell, OEB steward) from the 2016 version (Aaron Grade, Lian Guo, Abby Van Linden) from the 2013 version (Laura Doubleday) from the 2010 version (David McMillan, Laura Wegner-Parfrey).

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Introduction

OEB: Organismic and Evolutionary Biology Program

OEB is an interdepartmental graduate program at UMass, with more than 75 Faculty from the Departments of Biology, Environmental Conservation, Microbiology, Psychology, Biochemistry & Molecular Biology, Kinesiology, Mathematics & Statistics, Anthropology, Geosciences, and the Stockbridge School of Agriculture at UMass, as well Faculty from Amherst College, Hampshire College, Mount Holyoke College, Smith College, Harvard Forest, Conte Anadromous Fish Research Center, the Massachusetts Division of Fish & Wildlife, the USGS, and the USDA.

OEB is a friendly community, committed to increasing representation and retaining a diverse body of students. In the words of some students, the best things about OEB are:

- ◆ The people
 - “Everyone is so enthusiastic and motivated”
 - “People are friendly and willing to help one another”
 - “The people are friendly, passionate, and warm”
- ◆ The community
 - “The OEB community is incredibly collaborative and friendly. I love how folks wear their science-nerdiness on their sleeves. It’s a small group, so everyone knows each other. It’s awesome how inclusive the community is, does such fantastic science and scicomm, and is so encouraging and supportive. It’s a fun group of researchers, and who can resist scientists with a sense of humor?!”
 - “OEB is extremely passionate about the program and this fosters a more inclusive community than most graduate programs”
 - “The sense of community and willingness of great people to work together on a wide variety of things.”
 - “Both the faculty and the students are very kind and helpful. Participating in events like the Friday seminar, bbq's and non-holiday parties builds a sense of community. By helping each other through studying for orals, preparing talks (GSSS), core courses, stats, etc. we raise the quality and profile of OEB in the larger scientific community. The broad spectrum of OEB students and faculty prepare students for conversing with people from different fields (such as one might encounter on a job interview in a Biology Dept.).”

IDGP: Interdepartmental Graduate Programs

The OEB graduate program falls under the umbrella of the Interdepartmental Graduate Programs, a group which includes grad students from OEB, Plant Biology (PB), Neuroscience and Behavior (NSB), and Molecular and Cellular Biology (MCB). Like OEB, students in these other grad programs work with faculty from many departments, such as Biology, Microbiology, Psychology, and others. OEB and the other programs were restructured under the IDGP starting in 2016.

UMass Amherst

UMass Amherst is a large public research university. Some of the best things about UMass Amherst are:

- ◆ “Our union. They fight for us and we are much better off than a lot of graduate students”
- ◆ “There are so many great facilities and resources right on campus. Because the school is so large, you end up meeting and making connections with many scientists who are researching different and interesting things.”
- ◆ “The free bus system”
- ◆ “Lots of opportunities to learn new things”
- ◆ “OPD – Office of Professional Development is an amazing resource for graduate students”
- ◆ “Great location, great food, focus on sustainability, active campus life. I have a soft spot for the UMass Student CSA organic farmshare!!”
- ◆ “Large university with a lot of resources; easy access to people and resources in the other five colleges.”
- ◆ “There are lots of opportunities, both personal and professional. From exercise options, to clubs, to collaborations across campus, there are lots of things to get involved with.”

The Pioneer Valley

The Pioneer Valley is a collection of towns and small cities interspersed with farmland and wilderness in the beautiful Connecticut River Valley. Some of the best things about the Pioneer Valley are:

- ◆ “The nature! Lots of opportunities to be in nature”
- ◆ “The bike path”
- ◆ “Outdoor activities”
- ◆ “Nice mix of beautiful rural setting and vibrant cultural community.”
- ◆ “A nice blend of things to do: natural areas/outdoor activities, bars/restaurants, coffeeshops, breweries, live music, farm CSAs, etc.”
- ◆ “Great food: farmer's markets, restaurants, farm stands, local organic vegetables, meats, and cheeses. Great hikes/outdoor activities: many wonderful trails easily accessible and some a short drive away. Swim, canoe, rock climb, bike, etc. Museums: Smith's, MassMoCA, Mellville others. Safety - I often don't lock my car in Northampton (don't steal my iPod after reading this, thanks). Short drives to big cities: NYC, Boston, New Haven has some cool things (art museum, food, Ikea). Good, make that great, coffee.”
- ◆ “Spring: Maple syrup milkshakes at a sugar shack. Summer: Tubing on the Deerfield River. Fall: Hiking in the fall colors, delicious apples. Winter: Cross-country skiing in Vermont (it's not far away).”
- ◆ “The diversity of available activities. My apartment is less than a ten minute drive from campus and there are hiking trails out my back door, local coffee shops down the street, and lots of great restaurants nearby.”

Arriving at UMass

What we wish we'd known...

- ◆ Start with this blog post titled, [“What I wish I had known: advice about grad school \(and life\) to my younger self”](#), written by an OEB student, Laura Hancock.
- ◆ While you're at it, check out the other blog posts in the [“Grad School Diaries”](#) category of That's Life [Science].

Other thoughts from OEB students:

- ◆ “Other labs/advisors are not off-limits. You can ask to attend other lab meetings, make connections with other advisors, and coordinate collaborative meetings with other groups. The more you expand your network, the more you will find support and develop resiliency when you meet obstacles.”
- ◆ “Don't be intimidated by further-along students! Reach out, get to know them – it takes more initiative since you're not in class together, but students across all years can mutually benefit by creating connection and community.”
- ◆ “The more you are a team player, the more other people help you. You will find a time when you need help whether it's with data collection, signing a form while you're in the field, statistics, mock orals, reviewing your grant application. Help other people. Go to the Seminar Series; it's not mandatory past first year, who cares, just go. Budget time for things like OEB seminar, Food for Thought, etc. every week. If an hour is crucial to your own work, make it up at another time. You can't do a PhD alone and if you think you can, well you're wrong.”
- ◆ “Certain Fellowships are not GEO-eligible positions, so you don't qualify for some benefits (Dental, Vision, etc.) while you hold one. We're working on this though.” (Update 2020: NSF GRFP fellows are now covered under GEO. Update 2022: UMass admin has proposed to include fellows with funding equivalent to a 10-hr appointment, GEO has countered with a no-minimum hour equivalency)
- ◆ “How much sleep I would lose; the cost of living in the area.”
- ◆ “I wish I had understood more fully what it meant to be in an interdepartmental program. It was more difficult to connect with other students that were all housed in the Biology Department, when I was housed in Fish & Wildlife halfway across campus.”
- ◆ “This is actually pretty tough because when I visited the hosting committee and other students really laid out what being in OEB was like. Also, the mentoring program was pretty helpful as my mentor gave me lots of general advice about living near UMass and getting set-up with healthcare etc.”
- ◆ “Everyone is willing to help and answer questions. Don't be too shy to ask - it's very likely that another graduate student or faculty member has encountered any problem you come across and can offer you advice.”
- ◆ “You will survive quals.”
- ◆ “I wish I had known how much time would be taken up by classes, meetings, teaching, and other commitments. I found it very hard to organize my time well in my first few years. That might always happen, but the better you can be at time management (especially early on), the more productive you'll be.”
- ◆ [“Your well-being is your responsibility.](#) Prioritize your health and happiness, even over your research. Eat wholesome meals, exercise each day, and practice mindfulness. The

healthier you are, the better you'll be able to focus and think creatively; the happier you are, the more motivated you'll be to complete your research, which means you won't have to fight as much mental inertia during the daily grind of life as a grad student."

- ◆ "Get involved in some kind of organized group on/near campus early, such as outreach with Graduate Women in Stem (GWIS) or other groups you're interested in. It's really helpful to meet people outside of your lab/department, personally fulfilling, and has a side benefit of helping you to think about broader impacts when writing grants. Also, you do not need to work crazy hours, every weekend, etc to do your Ph.D. It is necessary to set boundaries around your work and with your advisor to maintain your health."
- ◆ "Your dissertation doesn't have to be a perfectly cohesive document. Think about each chapter at a time and the theme that connects them all will naturally emerge."
- ◆ "OEB has students from many different departments. Your home department is technically the home department of your advisor. So although your Graduate Program is OEB (homed in the Biology Department, if your advisor is homed in a different Department, for example ECo, then your home department is ECo and you can participate in ECo events, have ECo admin staff assist you, etc."

UCard

The UCard is your official UMass Amherst campus picture identification card. It functions as an on-campus debit card (you can use it to pay for printer use at the library), a 5-College library card, a PVTA bus pass, a UMass recreational facilities access card (if you buy a gym membership), and as a key for some buildings (door access for some buildings needs to be set up separately through Physical Plant via Departmental request).

To get your UCard, you must be an active student and have a record in SPIRE and in the UCARD system before you visit the UCard Office. Students must be term-activated and must have registered for classes for credit. There is a fee associated with obtaining an UCard that is included in your entrance fees/Bursar's bill. There are additional fees to replace if lost, stolen, or damaged.

Submit your [UCard](#) photo

UCard setup and photo upload [information](#)

Contact the UCard Office: ucard@admin.umass.edu or 413-545-0197 for the latest information.

Keys

You can order keys to access buildings and offices on campus by filling out [this form](#). They should be free to you and available for pick up with your UCard at the Physical Plant building after receiving the confirmation.

Technology Resources

Office of Information Technologies ([OIT](#)) is responsible for computer and telephone services on campus.

To access these services, you must have an OIT account.

- Activate your OIT account using the NetID you received when you were accepted to the Graduate School

- Activating your OIT account will also activate your UMass email account (i.e. yourNetID@umass.edu) NOTE: your UMass email account will only be active if you are an active student, so any accounts like Google Scholar that you use with your email will terminate when you leave UMass unless you update the email associated with your account.

OIT provides secure Wi-Fi on campus (log in with your NetID and password). There are two main networks, called eduroam and UMASS. You will use the UMASS network to configure your devices (laptop, phone, etc) with Xpress Connect for eduroam to work; you should not have to sign in as long as your account password does not change. After connecting your devices to eduroam (check [here](#) for instructions), you'll be able to use it anytime on campus as well as in educational institutions around the world. You can also sign into the UMASS network anytime on campus using your NetID and password. This is also what visiting guests would use for Wi-Fi.

[Apps at UMass Amherst](#)

- Part of Google Suite which enables UMass grad students to access an official UMass Gmail account, Google Calendar, Google Drive, and Google Sites, among others.
- Storage is unlimited!
- Please be aware that if you are a teaching assistant, you are not allowed (by law) to email students from your personal account. Correspondence must be from the official UMass emails for class-related communication.
- Although your default e-mail will be a “@umass.edu...”, e-mail your home Department’s primary administrative contact to receive a departmental e-mail (e.g., @eco.umass.edu, @bio.umass.edu...)

[SPIRE](#)

- Your personal student center
- Search the course catalog and register for classes
- View your current course schedule
- View holds on your account
- View and request transcripts
- Approve TA/RA contracts
- Check your Bursar Account and make a payment
- View Financial Aid
- Change/edit personal contact information

[Moodle](#)

- Web-based learning management system for courses
- Many professors and instructors will use Moodle to post course information such as lecture material, syllabus, grades, etc. and to host online learning activities

[Marlin](#)

- For students working in Morrill, there is an additional server named Marlin that is in place specifically for the Morrill Science Center Complex.

- To get your computer on the Marlin server, you need to contact George Drake (George@bio.umass.edu) and provide him with the following information:
 - computer make and model
 - computer name
 - user name
 - room number
 - operating system
 - MAC address for your Ethernet connection & your wireless network adapters

Computer Software

There are several possible avenues to get the software you need (often for free) while you are a student at UMass. For software you must purchase, you can often receive a student discount. Visit the [OIT software page](#) for more information.

OIT hosts a variety of programs that are available free for download for Windows, Macs, and Linux machines. This includes antivirus software, Internet browsers, FTP/SSH clients, calendar programs, and miscellaneous other utilities.

You can get select Microsoft and Adobe programs for free or at a fraction of the retail price if you follow the links from the OIT website. Some programs that are available for free or for a discount are student versions of Adobe Creative Suite, Matlab, Mathematica, others. Make sure to check it before you purchase something full price!

There is a joint program between UMass and the Microsoft Developers Network to offer Microsoft software for free to University members as long as it is for personal use. Not everything is available, but if you need a different operating system, visual basic or other MS software, this is the best deal out there (it's free!).

The Biology Computer Resource Center (BCRC) is in Morrill, room 367. The BCRC is a computer lab run by the Biology Department that has several computers and a variety of software is available. If you need some software and can't find it elsewhere, check with the BCRC before you buy it.

Library and Library Account Resources

5-College Libraries:

- Amherst College: Keefe Science Library, Robert Frost Library
- Hampshire College: Harold F. Johnson Library
- Mount Holyoke College: Williston & Miles-Smith Library
- Smith College: Neilson Library, Young Science Library
- UMass Amherst: Science and Engineering Library (primary resource for Biology and natural resources reference material) and W.E.B. Du Bois Library (UMass main campus library, open 24hrs)

You can even borrow DVDs from the 5-College Libraries! Also, 3D printing services are available at the Digital Media Lab in the Du Bois Library:

<https://www.library.umass.edu/locations/dml/>

Library Account Resources

- Interlibrary Loan (ILL) & Document Delivery
 - If you are unable to find an item in the 5-College system, you can request it for free through ILL (this is a great service – it’s usually pretty quick too!)
 - The requested item will be sent to your location – if it’s a book, the physical copy will often be sent, but for journal articles, it might be scanned and emailed to you as a PDF
- Citation managers
 - The library provides [support](#) for getting you started on software for managing your citations that can be used both on- and off-campus to store and organize your citations from journals, books, databases, and websites
 - There are open-source reference managers out there that are free to you forever (i.e. Mendeley, Zotero)
- Library Databases
 - Web of Science, etc.
- Free subscriptions, such as The New York Times

Textbooks

In addition to online sellers, textbooks and other course materials can be purchased locally from the following locations:

- Amazon@UMass
 - Amazon has a partnership with UMass to give students free textbook shipping and delivery, free one-day pickup of most items, and free returns if you shop through [UMass Amazon](#)
 - Pickup is at the Amazon counter in the Campus Center from 9am-3pm Mon-Fri
- [Amherst Bookstore](#)
 - 8 Main St., Amherst, MA 01002-2328
 - More bookstores listed in the “Getting Settled” section.
- [UMass Extension Bookstore](#)
- Check if any other OEB students already have the book you’re interested in or check the OEB student google drive [folder](#).

GEO: Graduate Employee Organization

If you have any kind of assistantship while at the University, such as a teaching assistantship (TA), research assistantship (RA), internship, some working fellowships, etc., you can become a member of [GEO](#). GEO is our union that has negotiated several reductions in fees for its members. In order to qualify to be a GEO member, you must work at least 10 hours each week during both the Fall and Spring semesters as a teaching or research assistant (or 20 hours per week during either the Fall or Spring semester). Although many fees are waived for GEO-eligible students, not all are covered.

GEO was formed as a unit of the United Auto Workers local 2322, based in Holyoke, in 1990. GEO's main goal is to negotiate a contract with the University Administration that includes fair wages and benefits for its members.

Benefits of GEO

- Tuition and curriculum fee waivers
- Discounted health insurance (95% of premium waived on individual and 90% on family plans), which includes mental health services
- \$225 Wellness reimbursement
- Discounted parking permits
- Childcare reimbursements and subsidized childcare through the [UMass Center for Early Education & Care](#) depending on income level. More info on childcare below.
- Dental insurance (free for individuals and \$100/year for family plans)
- Free vision insurance
- Help in resolving workplace conflicts

Tuition & Curriculum Fee Waivers (does not cover CPE courses)

- If you work at least 20 hours per week during either semester (RA or TA), you qualify for tuition and curriculum fee waivers through GEO. This can be a single 20-hour assistantship in a single semester or one 10-hour assistantship in each semester. If you taught two 3 credit courses within a one-year period you also qualify for tuition and curriculum fee waivers. If you only work one 10-hour appointment during a single semester, then you will only qualify for the waiver for a single semester.

Time Off & Paid Leave

- If you have a 10 hour/week contract, you receive 20 hours of vacation time per semester. If you have a 20 hour/week contract, you have 40 hours of vacation time per semester. You have to work with your RA/TA faculty to schedule this time.
- GEO members are eligible for up to 5 weeks of paid parental/family and sick leave

Prestigious Graduate Fellows

- Previously known as “non working fellows”, (graduate students whose salaries are funded via externally secured grants), Prestigious Graduate Fellows are now eligible to join the union so they can receive these same benefits. The graduate college has some challenges with keeping track of who is a PGF so submit your award information [here](#) and be sure to follow up with Heidi Bauer-Clapp, hbauerclapp@grad.umass.edu, so you can receive health benefits, tuition coverage, and other GEO benefits. Please know that as of right now some benefits such as access to Adobe are not available because they are actually not through GEO but are “college employee” benefits. Hopefully the union will continue to bargain with the university to give that designation. You can purchase Adobe and then request reimbursement through the graduate college, which takes up to 2 weeks.

Workplace Conflicts

If you feel that your contract is being violated in any way (discrimination, overwork, late pay), you can contact the OEB GEO Steward (2023: Chris Claypool and Beth Rogers) or the GEO

office directly to speak with the staff about your options. The DEI Committee has also provided a resource on managing workplace conflicts [here](#).

Getting Involved in GEO

- Check out the [website](#).
- Information will be made available from GEO during the student orientation in the fall. Stay tuned for information at that point to learn how to pay dues, how to become involved, and who to contact with any questions.
- Visit the GEO office in room 201 in the Student Union Building. The staff there can answer any union-related questions you might have.
- Read the GEO emails that you receive to stay on top of what is going on
- Attend the membership meetings. All GEO members are welcome.
- Become the next OEB GEO Steward!

University Fees

Check with UMass for the most current information.

- [Graduate Entering Fee](#) (\$507)
 - Charged during first semester of enrollment only
- [Tuition](#) (value depends on number of enrolled credits)
 - Waived if GEO-eligible
 - Waived if on Continuous Enrollment
- [Service Fee](#) (value depends on number of enrolled credits)
 - Waived if on Continuous Enrollment
- [Continuous Enrollment Fee](#) (\$285)
 - Substitutes Tuition and Service Fee if you are enrolled but taking no classes (zero credit)
 - To do that, register for Class #61819 (Continuous Enrollment), under the “Graduate School” department (GRADSCH 999) in SPIRE
- [Student Health Fee](#) (\$417.50)
 - 95% discount if GEO-eligible
- [Student Health Benefit Plan – SHBP](#) (value depends on plan)
 - 95% discount if GEO-eligible
 - Value depends on plan (individual or family)
 - Waivable if student has another health plan
- [Graduate Senate Tax](#) (\$77.75)
 - 50% discount if on Continuous Enrollment

Important:

- You should register for something in the fall and spring semesters, even if just Continuous Enrollment, this keeps you in active-status in the program. If students do not register for anything during the fall or spring semesters, the Graduate School withdraws the student from the program, and then there are fees to reapply and be readmitted. Students do not need to register for anything in the summer semester to remain in active-status.

- Enrolling for less than 9 credits in spring or fall would automatically give you a part-time status, but IDGP staff will review and manually make the full-time status updates in Spire for those students enrolled in less than full-time (< 9 credits) coursework. The full-time status impacts student loans, and is important for international students for their visas too.
- To fulfill OEB and University residency requirements, you need to be enrolled full-time (9 credits) for at least 2 consecutive semesters. Before you register for the continuation fee or fewer credits, make sure that you have met this requirement.
- Continuous Enrollment (zero credit) is a more expensive Bursar's bill than enrolling in credits. With CE, you will have to start paying mandatory contributions to Massachusetts Social Security and Medicare (FICA) and employee funded retirement (OBRA). Graduate employees are exempt from FICA/OBRA withholdings if they are enrolled in at least 1 credit (i.e. a dissertation credit) and have full/half-time student status declared (see policy attached).
- FICA withholds 1.45% of gross pay and OBRA withholds 7.50% of gross pay- that comes out to roughly \$100 (before tax) per paycheck for a 20 hr/wk GEO contract. The money you pay into the mandatory retirement plan (by default, the "SMART Capital Preservation Fund" plan in Massachusetts- details attached) is still yours but you can't withdraw it until after you've left UMass (if you choose to). At that time, you can also roll it over into another retirement plan.
- If you have been on continuous enrollment before and have been paying into the fund, you can check your contributions and the balance of your retirement account through the SMART plan portal by registering for a login account here. You should definitely check your balance and see your rate of return, because there are management fees and interest rate is extremely low that DOES NOT keep up with inflation. In terms of a savings account, you would probably be better off investing your money elsewhere where you can get a much higher % and yield.
- If you just started continuous enrollment / contributing or you will start in the future, there may be a period of time during which you can select a different plan other than the default SMART preservation fund, which you should consider because of the above bullet.
- There are benefits to making pre-tax retirement contributions - reduced taxable income and thus an increased tax return, but the downside is that there is less money in your pocket at the end of the month. Ultimately, it's up to you to decide whether continuous enrollment or dissertation credits are better for you financially!
- It is recommended that until you reach the dissertation credit requirement, that you register for these to max out the number of credits in your fee schedule tier. For example, if you have met your residency requirements in the first year, for the following semesters until reaching 18 credits, register for the maximum number of credits in the lowest cost tier. If you are taking a class for three credits, also register for one dissertation credit. If you are taking no classes, register for four dissertation credits. If you are taking courses for five credits, add three more dissertation credits. Check your current fee schedule for the latest tiers.

Summer Registration

IDGP Students are recommended to register for summer dissertation credits (899 or 699) if you have a 10 or 20 hr RA over the summer. If you choose to enroll, you will be exempted from having FICA taken from your paycheck over the summer (saving of about \$500 over the summer). There is a fee of \$47 to register for the credits. The IDGP programs also benefit because a small fee per student is returned to us from Continuing Professional education office. A big advantage of enrolling for summer is that you can take up to 9 dissertation credits for \$47 total — much cheaper than taking these credits in spring or fall, when per-credit fees apply.

To enroll go to SPIRE (instructions below). If you enroll, the IDGP office will change your status in SPIRE to full time.

- Log into SPIRE, go to the Main Menu in the top left corner, and then navigate to Enrollment à Summer/Wtr/Non-deg Enroll Appt
- To enroll in a class in Summer, log into SPIRE and request a UWW Enrollment Appointment by navigating to Main Menu > Enrollment > Summer/Wtr/Non-deg Enroll Appt. This appointment represents the time period during which you will be able to enroll in UWW classes in SPIRE. For detailed instructions, please visit our Requesting an Enrollment Appointment in SPIRE page.
- Once you have your enrollment appointment, you can then enroll in your classes by navigating to Main Menu, Enrollment and then Add Classes/Shopping Cart. For more information, please visit the Enroll in Classes Using SPIRE page.
- Review all information (make sure summer is selected and agree to terms) and then press Request CPE Enrollment Appointment.
- Register for the 899 Dissertation (or MS 699) credits.

FICA/OBRA Exemptions apply if you:

- Register by the end of add/drop for at least 1 summer credit (899 or 699), have a 10 or 20 hour RA for the summer, and have full-time status in Spire. [Note: NOT applicable if registered for Continuous Enrollment (gradsch999)]

NOTES:

- In addition to the \$500 not being withheld from your pay, it will instead be paid to you in your bi-weekly paychecks throughout the summer:
- The credits you register for will only cost you the \$47 as long as the GEO waiver (for your RA appointment) has been processed. This allows you to register for 1 to 9 (899) or (699) dissertation credits for only \$47 (per credit fees are not applied) in addition to having the \$500, rather than fica/obra being held (1.45% for Fica, 7.5% for Obra).
- If you are an international student on an F1 or J1 Visa for fewer than 4 calendar years, the fees are not withheld from your pay. The one benefit to you of doing all of the above is that you can register for up to 9 (899) credits for only \$60.
- For more information about the voluntary Fica/Obra fees, see the SMART plan information.

- If you do have the fees withheld, you can get back the Obra portion (~7.5%) when you graduate. To do so, you will need to contact the SMART plan folks and request a disbursement of your retirement withholdings and fill out a lengthy form.

Meal Plan

The YCMP2 meal plan for graduate students includes 25 swipes into the dining commons. It's a large price up-front (\$265) but if you get it in the first few weeks of the semester, they include 2 free swipes (expect emails announcing it), which brings the price down to <\$10 per swipe (comparatively a great price, especially considering the quantity/quality of food available). You can purchase your meal plan through SPIRE. More details about YCMP2 [here](#).

Some advantages of purchasing a meal plan:

- High-quality food (#1 campus dining in the US)
- Allergy/vegan/vegetarian-friendly
- You'll always get way more food than if you went to a restaurant, probably for less money
- You can stay there and work through two meals
- They're open until midnight and on weekends
- You can use your swipes for other people
- The swipes don't expire, even after you graduate

Auditing

If you want to take a class, but don't want/need it on your transcript, consider asking the professor if you can unofficially audit it. Not everyone will allow this, but it's a way to learn what you want without paying for the credits!

Health Insurance

GEO membership entitles you to an exemption of 95% of the premium for those students who enroll in the Student Health Benefit Plan (SHBP). If you are taking more than 5 credits, you will be automatically enrolled in the SHBP. However, if you are in Continuous Enrollment or registered for less than 5 credits, you need to manually enroll in the SHBP by filling out the Enrollment Form and sending it to patientservices@uhs.umass.edu at the beginning of each fall (the coverage will automatically carry over to the spring semester as long as you are enrolled in credits). Find instructions and the form [here](#).

Likewise, if opting for coverage for family members, you must manually re-enroll in family health insurance every fall to receive coverage – do this well in advance (months) ahead of the deadline to avoid gaps in coverage. Instructions and the form can be found [here](#).

See “University Fees” above if you are planning to enroll for less than 5 credits.

Health insurance can be waived if you choose a different plan. Keep an eye out for emails about this at the start of the semester so that you will not be charged for SHBP.

GEO Wellness Reimbursement

If you're eligible for GEO benefits, you can submit a valid receipt to be reimbursed for up to \$225/plan year towards expenses for exercise or fitness programs. You'll use the same online enrollment process as the dental & vision plans, except that you must include a copy of a valid receipt demonstrating your payment of membership fees/fees/tuition to a gym, institution or organization.

Eligible wellness activities are defined as physical activity programming that promotes fitness and stress reduction through exercise. Examples include: a gym membership, yoga, dance, martial arts or aerobics classes, golf fees, ski lift fees, swimming passes, intramural team fees and marathon fees.

Both on-campus and off-campus programs are eligible. Yearly membership fees, monthly service fees and locker/equipment rentals at a gym are eligible; late fees are not. Receipts for enrollment fees or DVD's for nationally recognized weight-loss programs with an exercise component are also eligible for reimbursement (examples include Weight Watchers, Jillian Michaels, Insanity Workout & P90X). Receipts for only one (1) MOOV Now or Fitbit style personal coaching/tracking/workout program device per eligible employee will be reimbursed per plan year.

Activities that aren't eligible include: massage, acupuncture, healthcare costs, spa treatments, facials and equipment purchases. Family members' receipts are not eligible.

Details on eligible activities [here](#).

Dental & Vision Benefits

These plans are administered through GEO. **These benefits are separate from your health insurance**, so you must sign up for them every year, by early October. The effective date for the dental and vision plans is typically November 1st of each year.

- Individual dental and vision coverage is free for individuals.
- Family vision coverage is free, but there is a \$100 premium for family dental coverage.

Prestigious graduate fellows (those funded on an external grant) are now eligible for union benefits. File your PGF information through this form [here](#) and be sure to follow up with Heidi Bauer-Clapp hbauerclapp@grad.umass.edu.

Acupuncture

Believe it or not, the SHBP covers acupuncture. There are two acupuncturists that work in the Specialty Clinic of Health Services. Appointments with them are free and unlimited if you have the SHBP.

International Students

For international students in OEB, one of the best resources at [UMass is the International Programs Office](#). The purpose of this office is to help with everything from immigration documents, cultural advising, and coordination with other departments on campus, to helping you file your taxes. The office is located in room 467 of the Hills South Building.

There are several organizations on campus for international students and their spouses.

Some advice from previous students:

“Get travel insurance when coming to the US. Those of us from developing countries cannot imagine how expensive health care is here, so, in case of an emergency, travel insurance is much cheaper.”

“Stay in touch with the International Programs Office, take the international student orientation, and read every single handout they give you.”

Parking on Campus

You can purchase a yearly parking permit from [Parking Services](#). To park in numbered lots on campus between 8am and 5pm, a valid parking permit for that lot must be properly displayed on your vehicle. Violations of this will result in a parking ticket. Metered parking is also available at locations around campus, and you can register your vehicle through the **ParkMobile app** to pay for the metered spots electronically. (Note, this system is also used throughout downtown Amherst and Northampton, so it can be very useful.)

If you are a GEO member, you will receive discounted parking permits. However, for the discount, you will need to go to Parking Services (located in Lot 25, solar panel lot) in person with a copy of your TA/RA appointment. This can be found in SPIRE, under the Graduate Student Employment – [Review Graduate Appointment](#) links. By clicking “View Form”, you can print that page and bring it with you to the parking office.

The bus connects much of campus with the local community. There are two bus lines, however, that serve the immediate campus region (Line 34 Northbound, Line 35 Southbound). These lines have stops located near many parking lots on and around campus, so this makes the far (cheaper) parking lots a lot more accessible. For looking at bus schedules and routes, download the PVTA app on your phone (Pioneer Valley Transit Authority). Note that some of the bus lines only stop every 30 min to an hour at a given stop, so you’ll need to plan somewhat far in advance.

Some thoughts on parking from previous students:

- ◆ “I arrived in July and needed to park on campus for the rest of the summer, so I had to buy a special Summer Permit, which was almost as much as the GEO-discounted price of a permit for the entire academic year.”
- ◆ “The parking lots that were available for the academic year generally seem to be a bit of a walk from buildings where classes happen and offices or labs are located. Good if you like a little walk every day, not always so convenient.”
- ◆ “Metered parking is available, but you have to be careful to keep the meter fed or you will get a ticket. Parking in a permitted parking lot without the right permit is a recipe for a nice big ticket too.”

- ◆ “If you come in for a medical appointment at University Health Services, there is a designated parking lot you can use for free.”

Getting Settled

Housing

OEB students live all across the Pioneer Valley. Most current students live in Amherst or Northampton, with others calling the nearby towns such as Ashfield, Belchertown, Conway, Deerfield, Granby, Leverett, Sunderland, and Greenfield home. Your choice of where to live will affect your options for getting to campus: buses are available from Amherst, Northampton, Sunderland, and Belchertown, but bus service does not extend to all places that OEB students live. Rental units tend to be more expensive in Amherst and Northampton than in other towns, and many of the apartment complexes in the immediate vicinity of campus tend to cater to the undergraduate population. There is no campus family housing. Students choose to rent from condominium or apartment complexes, multi-family houses, or share a house or apartment with roommates. You can find more information on places to live at [off campus student services](#) and online rental websites. Many students post roommate and housing requests on the departmental list-serv.

Food

Groceries

Big Y and Stop ‘n’ Shop are the two main grocery chains in the area. Maple Farms and Atkins Farms are local grocery stores that have great prices on local produce. Hadley also boasts Trader Joe’s, Whole Foods, Walmart, Target, and Aldi. Northampton has the River Valley Coop Grocery Store and Deals & Steals (which is definitely worth checking out). Of course, one does not necessarily need to rely on a traditional grocery store when living in the Pioneer Valley, with its wealth of local foods. One could eat quite well from the farmer’s markets, farm stands, and various CSA (community-supported agriculture) options available. If you’re interested in signing up for a local CSA - where you pay in advance for local seasonal produce and make weekly pickups from the farm - inquire with fellow OEB members. Many of us have shares with CSAs and would be happy to connect you!

In Amherst, there is a large, vibrant year-round Saturday market (8am-1:30pm) and at least one weekday market during the growing season. Northampton also has a Saturday and Tuesday farmers market seasonally. You can generally find locally-grown fruits & veggies, eggs, dairy products, honey, maple syrup, and meat products at most of the local farmer’s markets.

If you are looking for sources of international food items, check out Ecuador Andino Store (Hadley), Trans International Market (Hadley), Mom’s House Chinese Market (Amherst) or Gohyang Korean Market (Hadley).

Restaurants & Bars

There is a lot of good eating and drinking to do in the Pioneer Valley. Some grad student favorites include:

Amherst:

- Bueno y Sano (burritos)
- Mission Cantina (Tex-Mex)
- Antonio's Pizza
- Pita Pockets (reasonably priced Greek food)
- The Moan & Dove (bring your own food bar)
- The Hangar (beer & so many wings)
- Miss Saigon (Vietnamese)
- The Taste Thai
- The Black Sheep (deli)
- The Harp (Irish pub with music on Thursday nights & where we sometimes host the Science Buzz)

Northampton:

- The Dirty Truth (upscale pub fare)
- McLadden's (dozens of beers and enormous soft pretzels)
- Tunnel Bar/The Platform/Deck Bar

Elsewhere:

- Bub's BBQ (Sunderland)
- Root Cellar (Greenfield)
- People's Pint (Greenfield)

Ice Cream

Around here, ice cream is a beautiful thing. Excellent locally-made ice cream can be found at Bart's in Amherst, Flayvors of Cook Farm in Hadley, Herrell's in Northampton, and Mt. Tom's in Easthampton, to name a few.

Transportation

Biking

The Norwottuck Rail Trail is a nice, paved multi-use recreational path that runs all the way from Northampton to Belchertown. The trail connects to a bike trail system that spans from Florence, to Easthampton, to Amherst, to Holyoke. In the winter, given enough snow, the trail is open to cross-country skiing. Some students choose to commute by bike on the trail, which has many miles of dedicated bike lanes. If that is the case, commuters are allowed on the trail after hours, given that they have a proper headlight and taillight on the bike.

Buses

The Pioneer Valley Transit Authority ([PVTA](#)) operates buses which can take you pretty much wherever you want to go. During the school year, you can ride for free with your UCard, within Amherst and on certain Northampton to Amherst routes, but some bus routes to more distant destinations aren't free, and other local routes aren't free during the summer. Check out the [UMass transit website](#) for more options. [Peter Pan Buses](#) also runs regular service from campus to New York City and Boston. All PVTA buses have bike racks.

Driving

Cumberland Farms is usually a go-to for gas, although with a Stop 'n' Shop or Big Y grocery card, you can often get discounted gas at certain locations.

Flights

The closest major international airport is Bradley International Airport in Windsor Locks, CT. Many students also utilize Boston-Logan or NYC area airports for long-distance and international flights. You may find it is easier and cheaper to fly out of Boston as there is public transport available direct to Logan and not to Bradley.

Longer-distance ground transportation

Amtrak has trains leaving from Northampton and Springfield. Peter Pan buses leave from multiple places across the Pioneer Valley, including Amherst and Springfield. Greyhound buses leave from Northampton and Springfield.

Recreation

Outdoors

There are tons of conservation areas that are perfect for a light hike or a trail run, including Mt. Holyoke, Mt. Tom, Mt. Toby, and High Ledges. There are also bigger hikes available in the area, like Mt. Greylock in North Adams, New Hampshire, with its White Mountains National Forest, and Vermont, with its Green Mountains National Forest are also only a few hours away by car.

During the Fall, leaves turn stunning shades of orange, red, and yellow; during the Winter, new snowfall makes the landscape appear magical; during the Spring, nature awakens and the forest becomes embellished with bright green leaves; and for a few fleeting weeks in the Summer, fireflies emerge at dusk to illuminate the air in a spectacular display of bioluminescence. There is a special kind of transient beauty to New England that comes and goes with the seasons.

Indoor Athletics

The [Central Rock Gym](#) is very popular and there are a limited number of discounted memberships available to GEO members.

[UMass gym](#) memberships include access to fitness classes.

[Planet Fitness](#) (Hadley and Northampton) offers a cheaper gym option.

[Northampton Athletic Club](#) is pricier than most, but includes a rock climbing wall and access to fitness classes.

Cinemas

[Amherst Cinema](#) features independent films and classic repertory films, as well as some Academy Award Winners & Nominees. You can also sign up for a membership, which includes certain benefits like discounts on certain films and free popcorn!

The Cinemark Theater at Hampshire Mall (Hadley) shows new releases.

[Greenfield Garden Cinemas](#) is another option - all movies are \$5 on Tuesdays!

Museums

Amherst College's Beneski Natural History Museum (Amherst) is beautiful and has free admission. Well worth a visit!

Smith College's Museum of Art (Northampton) – free admission between 4pm and 8pm on the second Friday of each month!

Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art (Amherst) – do you remember reading *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*? Admission for students is \$6.

Yiddish Book Center (Amherst)

MassMOCA (North Adams) - the Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art is a little bit farther away, but worth the trip!

Basketball Hall of Fame (Springfield)

Bookstores

Montague Bookmill (“books you don’t need in a place you can’t find”): 400 Greenfield Rd., Montague

Amherst Books: 8 Main St., Amherst

Broadside Bookshop: 247 Main St., Northampton

Festivals

[Mutton & Mead Medieval Festival](#) (Montague)

[Green River Festival](#) (Greenfield)

[Highland Festival](#) (Northampton)

[Wilco's Solid Sound Festival](#) (North Adams)

Doctors & Dentists

Doctors

Most students and their families use University Health Services ([UHS](#)). Care is generally free (if you pay the student health fee) and they provide a range of services including X-rays, ultrasound, vaccines, OBGYN. The grad student health plan includes low cost prescription drugs at the UMass pharmacy. All health services are open year-round, although summer hours are slightly reduced. There is a co-pay for vision services, \$35–\$55.

Dental

GEO-eligible students should sign up for the dental coverage, which is free or quite inexpensive. Many students go to First Advantage Dental and have been happy with these services.

Childcare

The office of [Student Parent Programs](#) has helpful resources for student parents. Visit UMass [Center for Early Education and Care](#). GEO has benefits for families, outlined [here](#).

Mental Health

Mental health matters. Grad school presents new challenges for everyone. Everyone has a unique experience and people handle different aspects of grad school differently. Sometimes it can feel like a lot. First thing to know is you are not alone! And there is always someone to talk to.

UMass has a [Center for Counseling and Psychological Health \(CCPH\)](#). They offer a variety of support groups throughout the year (all available remotely) as well as one-on-one counseling services, including:

- Crisis Services
- Let's Talk
- Resources for Students of Color
- Groups and Workshops
- Individual Therapy
- Specialty Services

UMass insurance also covers mental health services, though there is usually about a \$20 copay. CCPH is good for finding short term help or helping you find a therapist in the area, though you can find services in your area using [the psychology today website](#).

[Here](#) is a great Twitter thread about making grad school an enjoyable experience.

Assert boundaries between professional and personal life. Celebrate every accomplishment, even the 'small' victories! Take breaks. GEO Members get 5 weeks of paid vacation every year. Prioritize sleep and exercise. Talk to people (try [MeetUp](#)) and maintain a support network (stay in touch with family and friends), get involved in the community (lots of options in the rest of this guide), and invest in a hobby! It is especially important to carve out time for rest and fun activities while we adjust to living and working at home with limited in-person interactions. Reach out to your mentor if you need help identifying hobbies and activities to do during the pandemic.

Where to go and who to talk to if you have a problem

To report abuse, discrimination, assault, etc.: Start [here](#). You may also contact our GEO Stewards, Chris Claypool (cclaypool@umass.edu) and Beth Rogers (ejrogers@umass.edu), and GEO (geo@umass.edu). More information about GEO can be found in this guide.

The [Ombuds Office](#) is a unique place where all current UMass Amherst students, faculty, and staff can talk confidentially and "off the record" about any campus concern, issue, or conflict. The Ombuds staff work with visitors in a variety of ways to help them understand their options and resolve their concerns. The Office works to foster a culture in which differences can be resolved through respectful communication and fair process.

The [Office of Equal Opportunity and Access](#) is there to provide you with support, options, and guidance. They promote an inclusive, equitable, and caring campus culture and oversee Title IX policy and processes prohibiting sex-based discrimination in education.

UMass Amherst offers a number of diversity, equity, and inclusion resources for students, faculty, and staff. Whether you are seeking academic resources; looking for opportunities for social interaction in organizations; curious about campus policies and regulations; or need to find support during crisis or incidents of bias; they are here to help you. [Diversity Matters](#) is designed to be your one-stop shop for information. Use the resource navigation sidebar to explore resources related to academics, bias reporting and crisis support, campus life, policies, mentoring, and learn about available trainings and workshops.

If you join a lab and realize that it is not working for you for whatever reason, it is ok. OEB students have changed labs/advisors in the past. It is a process, but student-advisor relationships can be tricky and major mismatches happen. If you are having trouble with your current advisor, reach out to our GEO Stewards, the GPD, and/or the GOC.

If you are struggling financially, reach out to GEO.

Graduate students are also welcome to contact the Counseling Center ([CCPH](#)) on campus if you need someone to talk to. The student health insurance plan includes therapy sessions so definitely take advantage of this resource if/when you are struggling with anything.

Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) at UMass

Science is for everyone. UMass and OEB are actively working to make our community more inclusive, but this requires active involvement from all of us. It is important that we as scientists educate ourselves, our mentees, and our students about racism in the US, in STEM, and in our community. We encourage all OEB students to explore the resources below.

UMass has an [Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion](#), which offers many resources about antiracism, racial trauma, the university's Diversity Plan, and other programs. OEB is working towards setting up an OEB JEDI Fellow, designed to support a senior OEB student to pursue anti-racism and social justice work within OEB. The IDGP DEI Committee hosts regular meetings and opportunities to work towards our JEDI goals.

In addition to the Office of DEI webpage, please explore these resources:

- A [compilation of resources](#) put together by Kadambari, an OEB student.
- Another [compilation of resources](#) put together by Lian, an OEB student.

Blog posts from UMass students:

- [Diversity in the forest](#)
- [Cognitive Reserve and Racial Privilege in STEM](#) (also MéliSe co-runs a mentoring group called [M.U.S.E](#) to increase representation and mentorship in STEM).

Academics

People to know in OEB/IDGP

- IDGP Director: Sam Hazen (interim)

- o The IDGP Director oversees the four life sciences Interdepartmental Graduate Programs (OEB, NSB, PB, and MCB)
- OEB Graduate Program Director (GPD): Craig Albertson
 - o The GPD is responsible for overseeing the academic side of OEB, serving as our connection to the Graduate School, and overseeing everything from annual graduate reviews to preliminary comprehensive exams, to defenses.
- Darwin Fellow: TBD
 - o In addition to running the 1st-year Proseminar, the Darwin Fellow is a great resource for any questions related to graduate student life that you'd rather not ask your advisor.
- Program Coordinator: (unfilled position)
 - o Submit an [IDGP Query](#) for assistance.
 - o In charge of maintaining student files and managing the administrative aspects of OEB.

OEB Seminars & Speaker Lunches

Seminars

OEB seminars occur every Friday at 4pm in room 222 Morrill 2. There are **several** reasons to attend the OEB seminars including:

- Weekly opportunity to learn about some cutting-edge science
- Weekly opportunity to see other members of OEB
- Attendance is expected of all students, especially first-years (registering for the OEB seminar for two semesters is an OEB requirement)
- Refreshments before AND after the talk!
- Students usually coordinate after-seminar activities, including pool, drinks, and dinners!

OEB students can nominate speakers for the seminar series. Hosting a speaker is a great networking opportunity and ensures an interesting line-up.

Speaker Lunches

In addition to the seminar at 4:00pm, each seminar speaker may be scheduled to have lunch with OEB graduate students the week of their talk. This is a great opportunity to talk to the speaker one-on-one.

Other departmental seminars OEB members may be interested in:

- [Microbiology](#)
- [Plant Biology](#)
- [Molecular and Cellular Biology](#)
- [Neuroscience and Behavior](#)
- [Environmental Conservation](#)

Publications

The Graduate School's Office of Professional Development is a great resource for writing grants, fellowships, and for publishing advice. One way to get ahead in graduate school is to start publishing early and to publish often.

Some of the benefits of early publications include:

- Helping you get grants to fund your research
- Name recognition at meetings
- Relieve some of the stress when you are trying to finish your degree
- Greater mastery of your field

Even if you do not know what you are going to work on yet for your thesis or dissertation, you can still benefit by publishing early.

- Talk to your advisor about doing a review paper in the field of your intended research.
- Short projects leading to early publications can also be good, but be wary of taking on side projects (or at least selective).

Travel & Research Grants

When it comes to grants, start applying as soon as you get settled at UMass. Here is a partial list of some of the agencies and societies that OEB students have applied to for funding in the past. There are many grants from societies, so find out what your societies offer, or become a member of a relevant society that offers a grant that you would like to apply for. Talk to people in your field about specific funding options, especially for small research grants.

- [NSF Graduate Research Fellowship Program](#)
 - Available to 1st and 2nd year students who are U.S. citizens
 - Students can only apply once during graduate school (either 1st or 2nd year)
 - Due in late October/early November each year
 - All eligible students should apply; they provide 3 years of funding
 - Students who hold a Masters are ineligible to apply
- [Ford Foundation Fellowship](#)
 - Available to underrepresented students who are U.S. citizens, permanent residents, or in the U.S. as a refugee, asylum, or protected under DACA, with at least 3 years remaining of their PhD
 - Due in early December each year
 - All eligible students should apply; they provide 3 years of funding
- [Sigma Xi Grants-in-Aid of Research \(GIAR\)](#)
 - Up to \$1000, due March 15th and October 15th each year
 - Do not need to be a member of Sigma Xi to apply
- [UMass Natural History Collections Grants](#)
 - Awards range from \$300 to \$5,000
 - Geared towards collections-based research
 - More information emailed out to listserv as dates approach
- OEB Research Grants
 - Awards of up to \$1,200 for summer research
 - 2022 deadline was April 15
- [UMass Graduate School Grants](#)
 - Travel grants specifically for travel to present at a meeting - up to \$400
 - Pre Dissertation Research Grants - up to \$1,000
 - Dissertation Research Grants - up to \$1,000
 - Dissertation Fieldwork Grants - up to \$5,000

- o Others: Supplement for Travel with Children, Outreach Supplement, Inclusion & Diversity Fellowship, Dissertation Completion Fellowship, Supplement for Public Engagement
- [IDGP Travel Fund](#)
 - o All PhD students in the MCB, NSB, OEB and PB programs, who are in good academic standing are eligible, dependent on budget availability, to receive supplemental funds to attend conferences and workshops once each fiscal year, up to a lifetime limit of \$2,500.
 - \$450/year before completing the prospectus
 - \$800/year after completing the prospectus
- Other Funding Opportunities
 - o SICB – GIAR and GSTG
 - o Society of Systematic Biology
 - o American Ornithologists Union
 - o SARE: Sustainable Agriculture Research & Extension

This is just a partial list! Keep your eyes out for more.

The Graduate School also offers a neat service called [GrantSearch for Grad Students](#) that can help you find grants to apply for.

Travel

All University-related out-of-state or overnight travel by faculty, staff, graduate students, and undergraduate student employees must be registered through the [UMass Travel Registry](#) prior to the trip.

After your trip is registered and approved, the Registry will assign a unique ID number that must be included in your Travel Reimbursement Request.

Check with your advisor and/or program coordinator for the latest instructions on how to submit a travel reimbursement.

Preliminary Comprehensive Exams

All Doctoral students must pass a preliminary comprehensive exam. For OEB students, there are four sections: general Biology, Ecology, Evolution, and Statistics. If you are a joint student with a second program, you may have an additional section on your exam (e.g. Entomology). It is an oral exam.

Students are advised to form study groups with other members of their cohort and it is suggested that you select committee members for your exam that you have had a conversation about exam expectations with. Students preparing for the exam traditionally recruit more senior OEB students who have passed the exams to help them study by holding mock exams. Generally, students take this exam at the end of their second year in OEB.

There is a [collection](#) of previous prelims questions available on the OEB website. Thank you to those who have passed their prelims and contributed to this great resource!

[Lab Safety & Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee \(IACUC\)](#)

[Lab Safety](#)

[Environmental Health & Safety \(EH&S\)](#) requires that everyone working in a lab at UMass receive basic lab & fire safety training soon after they arrive.

[Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee \(IACUC\)](#)

If you are going to be conducting any kind of research on vertebrate animals, then you must have an approved animal use protocol on file in the Animal Care Office. The Office is located in the Research Administration Building.

- Before you begin writing a new protocol, check with your advisor. There may already be a protocol on file, but you need to make sure that it has been updated to include you as a researcher and you must have a copy of it.
- If there is no current protocol on file, work with your advisor to complete one before any animal research is conducted.
- IACUC requires that anyone who is listed on an approved protocol and who is going to have contact with animals must undergo appropriate training, including graduate students, undergraduates, and potential field and laboratory technicians.
- The protocol approval and training process can be lengthy, so it is best to begin as soon as possible once you know you will be working with vertebrate animals.

[Outreach](#)

There are many opportunities on campus to join or create your own outreach. Outreach is becoming a more important part of science research and many fellowships, postdocs, and jobs are looking for some previous experience with outreach. Here are a few of the student groups on campus that actively engage in outreach.

[That's Life \[Science\]](#)

That's Life [Science] or TLS is a science outreach and education blog written by grad students from the IDGP life sciences programs, ECO, and Microbiology. The goal of the site is to make life science research accessible and exciting to general audiences while honing our skills as effective writers and science communicators. Blog authors write and peer edit articles twice per semester, but there are also opportunities to get involved with the Web Design Committee, the Managing Editing Committee, and the Outreach and Communication Committee.

[Life Science Cafe](#)

The primary goal of the Science Cafe is “to engage the broader community in science discourse outside University walls, with a target audience of adult, non-scientific community members. We run our events throughout the year, typically hosting once a month. All events are free, open, and targeted to the public. Events typically run 1 to 1.5 hours with a featured speaker, Q & A, and quiz bowls with prizes.” Science Cafe turns into its laid-back alter ego, *The Science Buzz*, during the summer. These are usually at a bar and with trivia.

[Graduate Women in STEM \(GWIS\)](#)

The UMass Amherst Graduate Women In STEM organization is committed to the professional and personal advancement of women pursuing careers in STEM and related fields. By encouraging successful scientific research strategies and practices, developing professional networking skills and supporting the integration of career with personal goals, we seek to empower women to achieve academic and professional excellence. We embrace an inclusive and diverse membership in order to enhance the participation and recognition of women in STEM, catalyze change in the professional climate, and inspire the success of future generations of STEM professionals.

Fernald Club

The Fernald Club is one of the oldest graduate Entomology clubs in the US and offers fantastic insect (and other arthropod) displays of both live and pinned specimens on the 2nd floor of Fernald Hall at UMass Amherst. In addition to these displays, the Fernald Club also hosts other events throughout the academic year.

Community Leadership

One of the things that makes OEB a great program is student involvement in planning department social and academic events. Serving on a committee is also a great way to meet students from other cohorts and get involved in the OEB family. Here are some of the committees that rely on OEB student participation:

DEI Committee:

This committee focuses on issues impacting recruitment and retention of diverse people within OEB. Previous action items were to begin a minute fund to assist in paying for student applications and construct a flowchart to aid current students in finding resources to help resolve conflict and get help that is specific to a need (includes conflict at the workplace and mental health resources).

2022-2023 *Niah Holtz* niahholtz@umass.edu and *Sonja Glasser* sglasser@cns.umass.edu

Food for Thought Committee:

Food for Thought is a lunch discussion that occurs once a week in the spring semester. A student, faculty member, or lab host the week by presenting their paper of choice and open the discussion up to the OEB community. Responsibilities of committee members include brainstorming ways to increase participation in FFT, come up with a theme, solicit discussion leaders, coordinate FFT logistics for the spring semester.

2022-2023 *Stefanie Farrington* sjfarrington@umass.edu, *Alexa Hershberger* ahershberger@umass.edu

GEO Steward:

Serve as the OEB liaison to the graduate student union, GEO, which is part of the larger UAW organization, & represent OEB during GEO contract negotiations & bargaining.

2022-2023 *Chris Claypool* cclaypool@umass.edu and *Beth Rogers* ejrogers@umass.edu

Graduate Student Senate (GSS) Representative

Represent the OEB student body at GSS meeting by advocating for causes that reflect the academic, professional, and student-life concerns of OEB students

2022-2023 *Laura Hancock* lhancock@umass.edu

Hosting Committee:

Arrange overnight hosts and grad student meals for prospective student visitors, and facilitate relevant information transfer between the prospective student, student host, host P.I., grad student meal-goers, and the program coordinator.

2022-2023 *Will Pfadenhauer* wpfadenhauer@umass.edu , *Kimberly Acevedo* kacevedo@umass.edu , *Caro Munoz Agudelo* dmunozagudelo@umass.edu

IDGP Student Advisory Board:

Work with other IDGP representatives as the student voices in the IDGP decisions

2022-2023 *IDGP Student Advisory Board* is *Kim Acevedo* kacevedo@umass.edu and *Jori Barley* jbarley@umass.edu

IDGP Restructuring Task Force, OEB Rep: John Swenson

New position this year created in hopes of making improvements across IDGP in a wide range of areas

2022-2023 *John Swenson* jswenson@umass.edu

Mentoring Committee:

Mentorship is an important part of one's academic, professional, and personal growth and can aid in transitional periods such as the beginning of a PhD program. The mentoring committee brings together current students in the OEB program and pairs them with incoming new students in efforts to foster relationships, transfer of program knowledge, and ease the transition into graduate school. In addition, the mentoring committee runs events such as a summer reading group and social events to prepare students for the upcoming academic semester.

2022-2023 *Katrina Zarrella Smith* kzarrellasmi@umass.edu , *Aly Putnam* aputnam@umass.edu , *João Menezes* jcarnioteles@cns.umass.edu , *Emelia Kusi* ekusi@umass.edu

Outreach Committee:

Compile outreach opportunities and make them available to grad students (particularly first-years), track outreach participation and interest among students, help match students with outreach opportunities.

2022-2023 *Seanne Clemente* srclemente@umass.edu , *Michelle Jackson* michellejack@umass.edu

R Hacky Hour

Everyone in OEB learns how to code (most people use R). Working on analyses and coding in isolation is not only intimidating and leads to imposter syndrome, but also can yield irreproducible science and other bad practices. We hope this group brings students together across cohorts to work on code, troubleshoot, work through tutorials to learn something new, and review old material. We meet once a week and have a [Slack Workspace](#).

2022-2023 Alexa Hershberger ahershberger@umass.edu , Aly Putnam aputnam@umass.edu , Graziella DiRenzo gdirenzo@umass.edu , Riley Mummah rmummah@umass.edu , Will Pfadenhauer wpfadenhauer@umass.edu

Sunset Stroll Committee:

The Sunset Stroll occurs in the early part of the fall semester. Students and faculty gather at a nearby vista, enjoy the view of Amherst, and watch the sunset over the western hills. Responsibilities include planning & advertising the grape-juice & cheese “hike” for early in the fall semester.

2022-2023 Laura Hancock lhancock@umass.edu , Beth Rogers ejrogers@umass.edu , Emelia Kusi ekusi@umass.edu

Social Committee:

Make sure we have refreshments available for after seminar each week, coordinate relevant logistics and money-managing.

2022-2023 Will Pfadenhauer wpfadenhauer@umass.edu

Student Body President:

Oversee student committees & activities, serve as point person for the administration/GPD/OEB program coordinator, gather students at least once per semester to touch base on OEB business, etc.

2022 Fall Katie Schroeder kschroeder@umass.edu

2023 Spring Aly Putnam aputnam@umass.edu

Steering Committee Student Rep:

Bring student concerns/feedback/viewpoint to OEB steering committee meetings, serve as a liaison between OEB grad students and the graduate operations committee (GOC).

2022-2023 Katrina Zarrella Smith kzarrellasmi@umass.edu and current OEB president, Aly Putnam aputnam@umass.edu

Seminar Committee Student Rep:

Serve on the seminar committee to help bring awesome speakers to campus.

2022-2023 João Menezes jcarnioteles@cns.umass.edu (main), Emelia Kusi ekusi@umass.edu (alternate)

Welcome BBQ Committee:

The Welcome BBQ is one of the first events of the OEB community. Faculty, students, advisors, and staff gather, enjoy some scrumptious grilled food and sides, and socialize with the incoming cohort. Responsibilities of the committee include plan & advertise the OEB Welcome BBQ for the first Friday of the school year. Work with OEB program coordinator.

2022-2023 Sonja Glasser sglasser@cns.umass.edu , Stefanie Farrington sifarrington@umass.edu, John Swenson jswenson@umass.edu

Teaching Resources

The Center for Teaching and Faculty Development at UMass offers interesting workshops for graduate students as well as a teaching documentation program. Check out their [webpage](#).

Remote teaching may occur. [Here](#) is a good place to start; the School of Public Health has organized many resources on remote teaching. Additionally, UMass has a program called [FlexForward](#) to help instructors design and execute online courses. Here are some [modules](#) for designing an online course.

[Here](#) are tips for building an inclusive syllabus.

Slack Channels

[Slack](#) is a great tool for remote communication. There are multiple Slack “Workspaces” that some OEB students are a part of including OEB grad students, the Biology Department, the OEB R Working Group, the Bioinformatics Working Group, GEO Members, the Alt-Ac Working Group (Alternative to Academia careers, organized by OPD), and others. Some lab groups also use Slack. Reach out to your OEB mentor or the Mentoring Committee to ask about joining any of these Slack Workspaces.

Poster Printing

There is also a poster printer available in the BCRC (Morrill 367) if you need to print a poster for a conference you are attending. If you have a Bio account, you can also print 500 free pages in the BCRC per semester.

The UMass Library also has an excellent and easy to use [poster printing service](#). Off-campus, [Amherst Copy & Designworks](#) offers full-sized (36”x48”) posters for UMass Amherst students for \$30.

Life After OEB

Academia

If you plan to stay in academia, the next step after your PhD is a postdoctoral fellowship. Many postdocs are funded through a research grant to a professor. Begin your search for a postdoc a year or so before you anticipate graduating. Keep an eye out for potential collaborators/advisors at meetings and approach potential advisors that you are interested in working with. Set up meetings with potential advisors at conferences or email them. Some may have money and be looking for postdocs (this is the ideal situation), or they might be willing to write a grant with you or find money in other ways. There are also postdoctoral fellowships that are awarded to individuals through an application process. These positions are highly competitive, but they offer the flexibility to do your own research and possibly teach. Proposals for NSF and NIH postdocs are due in the early fall, as are many of the other competitive postdoc applications (Darwin Fellow-type positions).

Other career options

There are many other career options, including teaching at smaller colleges, government positions, science writing, consulting, industry, or teaching at the K-12 level. Some advisors in academia may not have a lot of experience with alternative careers, so you should plan to make contact with people that have jobs in the field you are aspiring to and ask their advice. Keep your eye out for emails from the Life Sciences Graduate Research Council or the Graduate School Office of Professional Development announcing panels or events where scientists from academia, industry, government agencies, or teaching institutions speak about their experiences in different careers. Don't be afraid to ask questions!

Other resources:

- [Advice for Graduate Students](#)
- [A Field Guide to Grad School book](#)
- [Here](#) is a great Twitter thread about “hidden curriculum, skills, and info for success in grad school”.