



OEB Student Survival Guide Fall 2020

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Introduction

OEB: Organismic and Evolutionary Biology Program

OEB is an inter-departmental 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 diverse and friendly community. In the words of some current 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, GSSS, 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, so there is still an ongoing period of adjustment. However, everyone is very friendly and willing to help out!

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 connection 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. Mostly good politics and liberal mindset. 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:

- ◆ “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 Graduate Student Seminar Series (GSSS); it's not mandatory, who cares, just go. Budget time for things like GSSS, 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.)
- ◆ “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 inter-departmental 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.”

UCard

One of your first stops on campus after you arrive should be the [UCard](#) Office (room 168 Whitmore Administration Building). Regular hours are 8:30am – 5:00pm Monday to Friday and they offer extended hours at the beginning of the Fall and Spring semesters.

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.

The cost of your first UCard is wrapped into the entering fees that new graduate students pay (you won't be charged any money at the UCard Office), but it costs \$25 to replace a lost or stolen UCard and \$10 to replace a damaged UCard.

At the UCard Office, you will present current picture ID to UCard staff (driver's license or passport) and they will take your picture. UCards must be picked up in person and will probably be ready a few minutes after your photo has been taken.

2020 Edition:

Contact the UCard Office: ucard@admin.umass.edu or 413-545-0197 to get your card.

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)

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. Check [here](#) for help on how to connect all your devices to eduroam. You can 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 to 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
- Squirrel Mail
 - Squirrel Mail is available for anyone who would like an email address with the @bio.umass.edu extension

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 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 (no MS Office), 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 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
- RefWorks
 - RefWorks is 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
 - RefWorks is a subscription-based service available for free while you are a student at UMass Amherst
 - Many people use EndNote, which is commercial software with similar functionality, but is available for an initial purchase price, but then does not expire
 - Of course, there are open-source reference managers out there that are free to you forever (i.e. Mendeley, Zotero)
- Library Databases
 - Web of Science, etc.

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, working fellowship, 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 family plans)
- \$190 Wellness reimbursement (can be used at gym, or can use wellness stipend for pre-existing wellness packages such as a discounted Rock Gym membership or set of massages)
- Discounted parking permits
- Childcare reimbursements and subsidized childcare through the [UMass Center for Early Education & Care](#)
- 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.
- GEO members are eligible for up to 5 weeks of paid parental/family and sick leave

Non-Working Fellows

- GEO is working to make sure Non-working fellows (graduate students whose salaries are funded via externally secured grants) are eligible to join the union starting in September 2019 so they can receive these same benefits

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 (currently Rachel Bell: rbbell@umass.edu) or the GEO office directly to speak with the staff about your options.

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--we will need a new OEB Steward in Spring 2021, and it could be you!

University Fees

For GEO-eligible students:

- Entering Graduate Student Fee
- [Registration Fees](#)
 - Based on number of enrolled credits
- Continuation Fee
 - If you are taking no classes and wish to stay enrolled, you can register for the continuation fee, Class #57092, under the “Graduate School” department (GRADSCH 999) in SPIRE
- Health Center Fees
 - University Health Center Fees
 - Student Health Insurance Plan (SHIP)

Important:

- If you register for less than 9 credits or for the continuation fee and you wish to remain a full-time student, you need to have Maggie (the OEB Program Coordinator) send an email to the Graduate School at the beginning of each semester saying that you are a full-time student in the program. This memo is important if you wish to be considered for student loans or if you are an international student with full-time student status as a visa requirement.
- 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.
- If you are taking more than 5 credits, you will be automatically enrolled in the Student Health Insurance Plan (SHIP). However, if you are enrolled for the continuation fee or less than 5 credits, you need to enroll in the SHIP by going to University Health Services to sign a form and pay a fee at the beginning of each semester.

Health Insurance

GEO membership entitles you to exemption of 95% of the premium for those students who enroll in the SHIP, leaving each to student enrolled in 5 or more credits per semester to pay approximately \$74 per semester. 95% of the Student Health Fee (currently \$355.77 per semester) is also covered – the total cost of health coverage for a graduate student who is part of GEO is currently \$185.96 per year.

Health insurance can be waived if you choose a different plan (i.e. stay on parents’ health insurance). Keep an eye out for emails about this at the start of the semester so that you will not be charged for SHIP.

GEO Wellness Reimbursement

If you're eligible for GEO benefits, you can submit a valid receipt to be reimbursed for up to \$190/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.

To submit a receipt, you'll use the same online enrollment process as the dental & vision plans. Email your receipt to uawdental@external.umass.edu

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.

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.

Most “non-working fellows” are not eligible for GEO benefits, such as Dental and Vision. As of 2019, NSF fellows are now included in GEO, and we are working on getting all “non-working fellows” covered. If you are funded on an external fellowship, check with your GEO steward to see if you are included in GEO or not.

Acupuncture

Believe it or not, the SHIP 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 SHIP.

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.

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. Just take a ticket and turn it in for a token after your appointment.”

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. 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. Below, you can find survey results on how current OEB members found their housing and roommates.

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 and Whole Foods. 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:

- High Horse (brewpub and restaurant; good quality burgers with local ingredients)
- 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)
- WWII "The Deuce" (bar with karaoke and dancing)
- 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, Flavors 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.

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.

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.

[Popcorn Noir](#) (Easthampton) is a private members-only cinema (membership is \$10/year).

[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 or Triangle Family Dental and have been happy with these services. White fillings are NOT covered by the UMass plan, and are expensive.

Childcare

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.

[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, Rachel Bell (rbbell@umass.edu) and Chris Claypool (cclaypool@umass.edu) and GEO (geo@umass.edu). More information about GEO can be found on page 9 of this guide.

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 an arduous process and is not encouraged, but student-advisor relationships can be tricky and 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 and racism in STEM. 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.

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 Méliase 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: Patricia (Pat) Wadsworth (Biology)
 - The IDGP Director oversees the four life sciences Interdepartmental Graduate Programs (OEB, NSB, PB, and MCB)
- OEB Graduate Program Director (GPD): Craig Albertson
 - 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 (OEB)
 - In addition to running the 1st-year Proseminar and GSSS, 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: Maggie DeGregorio (OEB and NSB)
 - Maggie is in charge of maintaining student files and managing the administrative aspects of OEB. IDGP Office Manager: Sarah Czerwonka. Their contact information is at the end of this document.

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.

2020-2021 student seminar representative is Josh Moyer.

Speaker Lunches

In addition to the seminar at 4:00pm, each seminar speaker is scheduled to have lunch with OEB graduate students on Fridays from noon until 1:30pm. This is a great opportunity to talk to the speaker one-on-one. Plus, these lunches happen at the University Club and are paid for by OEB.

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 (Predoc)
 - 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
- Ford Foundation Fellowship (Predoc)
 - 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 \$4000
 - Geared towards collections-based research
 - In 2019, proposals were due March 1st and grants were awarded March 20th
- OEB Research Grants
 - Awards of up to \$1000 for summer research

- Irwin Martin Award of \$2500 was also awarded to one student
- 2019 deadline was April 10th
- UMass Graduate School Travel Grants
 - Specifically for travel to present at a meeting
 - Awards of up to \$400. The GPD (Paige Warren) will send out an email announcing this, so keep your eyes peeled.
- OEB Graduate Student Fund
 - OEB allocates some money for each student to use for conference travel or for research each year.
 - For the 2014 fiscal year, you are eligible for \$500 if you are presenting your research at a conference or \$350 if you are not presenting at the conference or are using the money for research.
 - You must complete an [OEB Travel Information Form](#) and submit it to Maggie (the program coordinator) prior to your departure.
- Other Funding Opportunities
 - SICB – GIAR and GSTG
 - Society of Systematic Biology
 - American Ornithologists Union
 - 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.

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 taken a class 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.

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 (kids enjoy our Cafes as well, though!). 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:

Interdepartmental Graduate Programs Committee:

Represent OEB in the CNS Graduate Consortium and help put on programming to facilitate engagement between the life science graduate programs.

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.

Mentoring Committee:

Arrange mentor-mentee matches between incoming cohort members and 1st/2nd-year cohort members and encourage pairs to meet up during the first semester, plan mentor/mentee events, update 'OEB Survival Guide'.

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.

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.

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.

For Fall 2020: Hopefully we can organize a socially-distanced/mask-wearing Sunset Stroll.

Happy Hour Committee:

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

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 spring 2021 semester.

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.

2020 Fall President is Eve Beaury ebeaury@umass.edu

2021 Spring President is Jake Barnett jbarnett@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).

2020-2021 Steering Committee Rep is Lian Guo

Seminar Committee Student Rep:

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

2020-2021 Seminar Committee Rep is Josh Moyer with alternate representative Luis Aguirre

IDGP Student Advisory Board:

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

2020-2021 IDGP Student Advisory Board is Kim Acevedo

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

2020-2021 Graduate Student Senate Representatives are Elsa Cousins and Chris Claypool

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.

2020-2021 GEO Stewards are Rachel Bell and Chris Claypool

R Working Group

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](#).

2020-2021 organizers are Alison Fowler and Chris Claypool

Teaching Resources

(especially for online courses in 2020!)

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](#).

Many TAs will be teaching online for the first time this fall (2020). [Here](#) is a good place to start; the School of Public Health has organized many resources on remote teaching. Additionally, UMass has started a new program called [FlexForward](#) to help instructors design and execute online courses. Here are some [modules](#) for designing an online course. And [here](#) are some workshops offered during summer 2020 before the start of the semester.

[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 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. Most advisors in academia don't have 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”.