WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY
College of Arts and Sciences
Department of
Biological Sciences

Thank you for your interest in the graduate programs in the Department of Biological Sciences at Western Michigan University. We receive many emails to this account which often contain frequently-asked questions (FAQs). To expedite answering your question, please see the responses to FAQs below. If your question is on this list, you will not receive a response email.

What documents are required for my application?

All of this information can be found on the website for the program to which you are applying. Please read the website for your program of interest carefully, as answers to many common questions are there: https://wmich.edu/biology/academics

As an international student, can I receive an application fee waiver?

No, we cannot provide application fee waivers for international students. If you identify a faculty research adviser who wants to work with you then they may be able to pay the fee for you and we can waive the fee. Keep in mind that even if you are awarded a competitive assistantship, you will still be responsible for any fees over and above tuition, travel and housing costs. For any additional questions, please contact International Admissions. They can be reached by email at oiss-info@wmich.edu, or by phone at 269-387-5865.

The exception to this is if you are applying to switch from one WMU graduate program to another, or you are applying to two WMU programs, then we can grant an application fee waiver. Contact bios-gradadmissions@wmich.edu if this is the case.

What is the application fee?

$50 for domestic applicants and $100 for international applicants.

Is it necessary for me to identify a faculty research adviser before applying?

Yes. Your application decision is made by a group of faculty members who serve on the Graduate Policies and Admissions Committee in the Department of Biological Sciences. One of the main things we look for is whether a student will be supported, successful, and retained in their graduate program. The biggest key to this is whether the student has the support of a faculty research adviser, whose job it is to advise the student's research, provide funding for research, provide summer stipend support, etc. We recommend that you start reaching out to prospective faculty research advisers in the summer or fall preceding the Feb 1 application deadline. You can find a list of faculty and their areas of research interest here: https://wmich.edu/biology/research

Is the Graduate Record Exam (GRE) required for admission?

No, it is not required for admission to any of our programs.

Do I need to provide English Language Proficiency test scores (IELTS, TOEFL, etc.)?

International students from many countries may not need to provide these test scores. To see if you need to provide them, please check this website:

https://wmich.edu/internationaladmissions/proficiency

What English language proficiency tests are accepted and what scores are acceptable?

That information is also found on this website (https://wmich.edu/internationaladmissions/proficiency) but in general here is the answer:

- Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL): 80 iBT graduate
- TOEFL Essential: 8 Graduate
- International English Language Testing System (IELTS): 6.5 graduate
- Pearson Test of English, Academic Module (PTE): 54 graduate
- Duolingo: 115 graduate

Do I need to have official copies of my undergraduate transcript for admission?

You may apply for provisional admission with unofficial copies of your transcripts or photocopies of your official transcripts. Final acceptance requires official transcripts sent directly from the institution.

If you received your undergraduate degree from WMU, you do not need to provide an official transcript – just include a copy of your unofficial transcript with your application.

If you are currently enrolled in an undergraduate program but will graduate before the start of the next fall semester, you can apply to the program. You will only be provisionally admitted until your final completed transcript is provided indicating that you have graduated with your Bachelor's degree.

Can I transfer credits from another institution toward my MA/MS/PhD degree at WMU?

Yes - that is something you can work with our graduate adviser (to accomplish. Students can transfer 12 credits and should talk to the graduate adviser after they are admitted to our program to facilitate this.

What coursework does the admissions committee look for as adequate preparation for your graduate programs?

We like to see that applicants have a degree in Biology or a closely related field (i.e. Microbiology, Environmental Science, etc.) but since all undergraduate programs are different, we look for three specific things:

1) The equivalent of General Biology I and General Biology II (or at WMU BIOS 1610 and BIOS 1620)
2) An intermediate Genetics course
3) An intermediate course in Microbiology, Ecology, or Physiology with a laboratory

I want to apply for one of your graduate programs, but my GPA is below what is listed as the requirement. Should I apply anyway? Is there anything I can do in the meantime?

If you are applying to the MA program and you have a GPA between 2.5 - 3.0, go ahead and apply, if you have taken and passed all the pre-requisite courses for the program (see previous question). If your GPA is below 2.5, and/or you haven't taken some of the pre-requisite courses, then we recommend you take some biology courses at the undergrad/grad level (i.e. 5000-level at WMU) as a non-matriculated student to demonstrate your academic preparedness for graduate level coursework. You can contact WMU's Registrar's office for information on how to enroll as a non-matriculated student:

https://wmich.edu/registrar

For the MS and PhD programs, this isn't a frequent question. If your GPA is below a 3.0 (M.S.) or a 3.5 (PhD), but faculty member is really interested in advising you, then the committee would discuss this on a case-by-case basis.

Am I eligible for the Accelerated Graduate Degree Program (AGDP) in Biology?

We encourage you to check out the information on our website about this and contact your CAS undergraduate adviser and bios-gradadmissions@wmich.edu concurrently to determine if you are eligible and the best way to proceed.
https://wmich.edu/biology/academics

Can the MA program be completed online?

It is not currently designed to do so, but it is possible to complete a number of the requirements online or in late afternoons/evenings, particularly for elective courses.

Is it possible to work full-time and complete the MA, MS or PhD program?

For the MA program - yes, absolutely. For the MS and PhD programs, it is possible, but it will take you longer than the average 2-3 years (MS) or 5-7 years (PhD). You will need to talk about the details about how you will complete your research requirements, conference attendance, etc. with your faculty research adviser and make sure that they know that you intend to work full-time while completing your degree.

Are there funding opportunities for graduate students in the MS and PhD programs?

Yes, our MS and PhD students are predominantly funded by teaching assistantships (TA-ships). TA-ships provide an academic year stipend (i.e. the fall and spring semesters only) and 18 credits of tuition for the academic year (i.e. 9 credits in fall and 9 credits in spring). Summer stipends are often paid by the faculty research adviser from an externally funded grant or by a grant/fellowship/scholarship received by the graduate student themselves. After students are admitted, they are provided with an application for a teaching assistantship, usually in late February each year. These positions are competitive, based on the strength of your application and how many other TA-ships your faculty research adviser has been awarded, but most students receive TA-ships. The most current funding rates for graduate students are on this website:

https://wmich.edu/grad/assistantships

Often, faculty research advisers have grants that can cover ½ or a full research assistantship. This is something you should discuss with your prospective faculty research adviser.

For international students - we recommend you check into the Fulbright Scholars program for your home country. We have had several students funded through this mechanism.

Are there funding opportunities for graduate students in the MA program?

MA students typically pay for their tuition and do not receive a stipend. In some cases, TA-ships may be awarded to MA students on a semester-to-semester basis if we have a significant teaching need.

How do graduate students get paid in the summer?

There are a limited number of teaching assistantships available in the summer, but most students are either funded by their faculty research adviser from a grant or they are paid by a fellowship for which they applied themselves. There are many small pots of money available for graduate students to apply for summer funding, and we strongly encourage students to work with their faculty research advisers to do so. Our Office of Research and Innovation website lists a number of both internal and external funding sources for students:

https://wmich.edu/research/funding/students

When is the application deadline for the MS and PhD program and what is the timeline?

For the MS and PhD programs, the application deadline is February 1 each year for admission in the following fall semester. No matter when you submit your application materials, they will not be reviewed until February. Note that ALL materials must be received by February 1, including letters of recommendation and transcripts. The committee reviews applications in February and provides admission decisions by late February. You will receive a TA-ship application in late Feburary and likely hear whether you have been awarded TA-ship sometime in March. You have until April 1 to accept or decline admission.

When is the application deadline for the MA program and what is the timeline?

For the MA program, the application deadline is always the Friday that is two weeks before the last day of finals week in any of the four WMU semesters (Fall, Spring, Summer I, and Summer II). Please send an email to bios-gradadmissions@wmich.edu when you have submitted your application. Note that ALL materials must be received by the application deadline, including letters of recommendation and transcripts. The committee will review the application before

the end of the semester and if you are admitted you will be eligible to start taking classes the following semester. As an example: You apply by November 29, 2024, which is two weeks before the last day of finals week for the Fall 2024 semester. We review your application and admit you before the end of the semester. You can enroll to start taking classes in the Spring 2025 semester (January 2025).