The department offers advanced work leading to Master of Science degrees in biological sciences. The Master’s degree generally requires a thesis and research publication. At the doctoral level, the Doctor of Philosophy degree is offered in ecology and environmental sciences, biological sciences and in fish and wildlife biology. At both the Master’s and Doctoral level the following areas of study are available: terrestrial and aquatic ecology, fish and wildlife management, evolutionary biology, quantitative ecology, and conservation biology. Successful applicants are accepted into both the department and The Graduate School.

Admission

Only a limited number of graduate students are admitted to our program each year. We accept students into the program based on their academic performance, graduate record examination scores, recommendation letters, experience, and potential for scientific and professional excellence. Students must meet the minimum entrance requirements for the department to recommend admission. In exceptional cases, at the request of a faculty member, the Department Head may waive one of the qualifications. The following is a list of admission requirements:

- A composite of the applicant’s letters of recommendation must indicate the student has good prospects of success in graduate school.
- The applicant should have at least the equivalent of three-fourths of the science courses required in the undergraduate curriculum at Montana State University in the option chosen for graduate study.
- Official Graduate Record Examination (GRE) General Test scores must be submitted at the time the student submits the full application. The sum of the verbal and quantitative scores should be at least 1100 for GRE scores before July, 2011. The sum for the verbal and quantitative scores should be a minimum of 300 for the current GRE tests.
- The applicant should have maintained the following minimal undergraduate grade-point averages: 3.0 average in all biology courses; 3.0 average in all courses taken during the junior and senior years; and 2.5 average in all chemistry, physics and mathematics courses.
- International students: a minimum TOEFL score of 550, 230 on the CBT, 7.0 on the IELTS test, or 80 on the iBT is required for admission.

All qualified students must secure an agreement from a faculty member who is willing to serve as major professor, or graduate academic adviser to be considered for admissions. We do not accept students into the program unless a department faculty member confirms an agreement to mentor a student’s degree completion. Generally, the major professor will have identified a research project and possible sources of funding that will allow the program to be completed. We highly recommend that you apply only after a faculty member indicates that he or she is willing to serve as your graduate adviser.

Program Requirements

The minimum credit requirement for a master’s degree is 30 credits, and at least 20 credits must be from coursework and must be from coursework other than thesis work. A minimum of 10 thesis credits must be successfully completed. Minimum thesis registration is one (1) credit for a semester. There are two (2) one credit courses required for all master’s candidates: BIOE 554 Foundations of Ecology & Mgmt and BIOE 555 Communication in Ecol Sciences. Students are required to choose from a specific list of electives for part of the credits. The remainder of the program of study is determined by the graduate committee following The Graduate School guidelines.

The minimum credit requirement for a doctoral degree is 60 credits beyond the bachelor’s degree, and at least 42 credits must be from coursework other than thesis work. A minimum of 18 thesis credits must be successfully completed. A maximum of 30 credits from a previously earned master’s degree may be applied toward the 60 credit requirement. No specific courses are required for a doctoral degree. The program of study is determined by the graduate committee following The Graduate School guidelines.

Financial Assistance

A Graduate Teaching Assistant appointment (GTA) is assigned in the semester before the next academic semester and reflect teaching needs and financial assistance needs. GTA’s receive tuition fee waivers and a stipend (In 2013/14 this was a total of $5134/semester). Part of stipend may be used for medical insurance which is not provided directly by the department (For further graduate school expenses, consult the MSU fee schedules as provided in the Graduate Catalog). A Graduate Research Assistant appointment (GRA’s) is a research project-specific and is awarded by individual faculty as funds are available. GRA stipends have a considerable range of amounts, and some fee waivers and health insurance may be available with GRA’s depending upon funding sources.

Degree Offered

- M.S. in Biological Sciences (http://catalog.montana.edu/graduate/letters-science/ecology/ms-biological-sciences)
- M.S. in Fish and Wildlife Management (http://catalog.montana.edu/graduate/letters-science/ecology/ms-fish-wildlife-management)
- Ph.D. in Fish and Wildlife Biology (http://catalog.montana.edu/graduate/letters-science/ecology/phd-fish-wildlife-biology)
- Ph.D. in Biological Sciences (http://catalog.montana.edu/graduate/letters-science/ecology/phd-biological-sciences)
- Ph.D. in Ecology and Environmental Sciences (http://catalog.montana.edu/graduate/letters-science/ecology/phd-ecology-environmental-sciences) (interdisciplinary)