

BIOL 383: Graduate School and Work Seminar Fall 2025

Wednesday 3:30-4:20 pm, ISC 136

Instructors:

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Course Description:

In many cases biology majors must continue their education by earning a M.S. or PhD. or engaging in other formal training in order to expand their career options. The decision about why and how to pursue further training or education is a complex one. The purpose of this seminar is to help seniors through the process of (1) examining opportunities and issues around choosing biology as a profession, (2) discerning the best path of training and education for their career goals, and (3) applying to graduate school or other post-baccalaureate training opportunities. Applications for most graduate programs are due in January or February, so the seminar will be run in the Fall Semester. By the end of this seminar each student should have engaged in serious self-reflection and research about their career aspirations and examined the paths that successful biologists have taken to their current positions. They will select several programs to apply to, contact the programs and potential advisors, and complete their applications. Students will read about and discuss strategies for success in graduate school. Finally, the class will also explore alternative avenues for postgraduate training – internships, fellowships, and work positions. May not count toward elective credit hours for the biology major. Prerequisite: Senior standing in Biology. 1(1-0)

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this course:

- Students will identify career and personal goals (general and specific) that will influence decisions about planning their career after graduation from Geneseo and incorporate these into a personal mission statement.
- Students will examine and compare opportunities for advanced training in biology through internships, training programs, and graduate school opportunities
- Students will identify and communicate directly with potential grad school mentors, or experts in their chosen field, to identify opportunities and discuss strategies for the future.

- Students will read and evaluate through class discussions and journal entries how themes from course readings apply to their own decision-making process and career planning
- Students will write a thorough and thoughtful personal statement that addresses their current experience and skills, and clearly articulates how a particular graduate program or other (internship/job) opportunity will advance their training and move them toward their ultimate career goals.

Course Schedule (the course schedule is subject to change at the instructor's discretion):

Any assigned readings for a class meeting will be posted on Brightspace. Please check Brightspace and read over any posted readings before coming to class.

Date	Topic
08/27	Introduction to the course Tools for applications: letters of recommendation
09/03	How to plan for your next steps after graduation. Is graduate school a good fit for you? If/when should you apply? Assignment due: Intro to personal statement
09/10	How to find graduate and work opportunities
09/17	How to contact potential advisors (letters of inquiry) Assignment due: GRE and LORs
09/24	How to write a personal statement Guest librarian Sherry Larson-Rhodes Assignment due: Grad program research
10/01	How to write an "elevator pitch"
10/08	How to contact potential advisors (editing letters of inquiry). Bring your draft to class Assignment due: Inquiry letter draft
10/15	Elevator pitch round-robin Assignment due: Elevator pitch Assignment due: Draft of personal statement (or cover letter) due
10/22	Online via Teams: Q&A with Geneseo alumni

10/29	No class – finish inquiry letters (if applicable, send them to potential advisors). Work on personal statement Assignment due: Sending inquiry letters
*11/01	RAS Conference Sat 11/01 on Geneseo's campus, 8:00 AM to 3:00 PM
11/05	How to choose a mentor in graduate school
11/12	Online via Teams: Q&A with outside faculty member
11/19	Individual meetings with Drs. H
11/26	Thanksgiving break - no class
12/03	Strategies for successful interviews How are interviews set up? How to prepare? Potential interview questions? Assignment due: Final personal statement
12/11	Final exam period. Instead of a formal meeting, we will hold office hours from 3:30-4:30 pm Assignments due: Seminar attendance, Geneseo faculty chat

Grading

Writing Assignments 65% Class Participation 35%

This class is graded S/U; in order to earn an "S" grade, you must earn a 70% or higher.

Assignments turned in late will have a grade deduction of 10% per day that the assignment is late (until the grade reaches zero).

Writing Assignments

Most weeks students will have a writing assignment of some kind due. Some writing assignments will be a reflection on class discussions and readings, and in other cases the writing assignments will be directly related to putting together an application for graduate school or an internship (e.g. a personal statement or a letter to a prospective supervisor).

Participation

1. Attendance

During each of our class meetings there will be class discussions and all students are expected to actively contribute to the discussions; simply attending class is not sufficient to earn 100% of your class participation points. More than 2 unexcused absences will result in a U grade for the course. Please take note of the following participation assignments, as they occur outside of our scheduled class meeting:

2. Seminar and Conference Attendance

Also included in class participation is the requirement to attend at least one seminar. The Biology department will host seminar events (either on campus or virtual), and you must attend at least one of these and write up a 1-2 paragraph summary of the seminar. I would also encourage you to chat with the seminar speaker, if possible, about your career plans/goals. Alternatively, if you attend a conference (local or national), you can write this up for your seminar assignment. Finally, you should also plan to attend the RAS Conference that will be held Sat 11/01 on Geneseo's campus.

3. Faculty chat

You will need to set up a time to chat with a Geneseo faculty member (other than your instructors), in order to ask them questions about graduate school and/or careers in Biology. It does not need to be a Biology department faculty member, but ideally should be someone within the sciences.