

Thank you for your interest in the Geospatial Ecology of Marine Megafauna Laboratory (GEMM Lab). Graduate school is no minor choice, as it shapes your future career path. Likewise, it is important for professors to choose graduate students carefully to assure intellectual, philosophical, and personal compatibility. Therefore I have written this essay to summarize what I look for in graduate students and what you can do to increase your chances of joining my lab. It is important to recognize that I receive many inquiries and have few opportunities for graduate students. Therefore, it is in your best interest to prepare a well thought out and organized package when you contact me about graduate school.

I view graduate school as an opportunity for students to gain valuable new skills and experience that will help you get a research job, advance an academic career, or enter the resource management field. I invest my time and energy on grad students, and therefore expect full commitment by my students to the program, classes, and their research. I am interested in students who are self-motivated and with research interests that align with my own. Due to the focus of my lab on spatial and behavioral ecology and conservation, I am particularly interested in students with strong analytical skills, previous field experience, and a strong foundation in ecology and conservation.

Students should have a clear project idea they want to pursue or theory they want to test. I am interested in projects that have a clear conservation application, incorporate outreach and engagement, or test an ecological or behavioral theory. Although the project idea does not need to be exact, it should be feasible and be based on a solid foundation of existing knowledge. I encourage students to link up with researchers to collaborate and extend existing projects, get access to archived data, and develop new projects. I can sometimes facilitate this process but the student must demonstrate initiative. I expect students to take ownership of their research by developing their own ideas and designing their own sampling program.

I feel that it is integral to your success and the scientific process that all research is published. Otherwise, effort and money is wasted, animals are burdened for no reason, and no knowledge is transferred to the community. I typically expect my master's students to publish at least one paper, and my PhD students to publish three papers, based on their thesis research. My students must also be prepared to develop and submit proposals for research funding and to attend scientific conferences to present their work. As a scientist, proposal writing is a constant and important component to a successful career, and I hope to help you develop the necessary skills.

Funding is also a critical component to graduate school. There are three components that must be supported during graduate school: tuition, stipend (living expenses), and research support. Often multiple sources are combined to support these costs from loans, scholarships, fellowships, personal savings, research grants, and research assistantships (funded through my own research grants to work on specific projects).

Please note that it is unlikely that I will take on a student without having a secure funding plan and appropriate datasets or field project to enable a research project. If a student can demonstrate the initiative and competence to start a research project, I may be available to help this process. I will work with qualified applicants to secure the necessary funding and encourage potential students to contact me early enough, so we can develop research plans and grants applications, if appropriate.

I am continually pursuing various research projects, many of which include dedicated funding support for graduate students to assist with the research. These graduate research assistance-ships are sparse and competitive, but if I feel your skills, background, career objectives, and attitude are appropriate, I will contact you.

Please be aware that you must also be accepted into the OSU Graduate School in addition to my agreement to be your supervisor. Therefore, please make sure to visit the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife website (<http://fw.oregonstate.edu/content/graduate>) and thoroughly read about the graduate school programs and application process.

If you are interested in working with me, please give thought to my advice above and I encourage you to send me an introductory package with the following materials (preferably via email):

- 1) A cover letter that outlines your research interests, personal background, and career goals. Please include a brief description of the research project you would like to undertake and why. Also outline your funding plan to support your graduate career.
- 2) Curriculum vitae (resume) summarizing your work and academic experience, and publication record.
- 3) Names, addresses, telephone numbers, and emails of three references
- 4) Unofficial copy of GRE results (if available)
- 5) Unofficial copy of your undergraduate transcript

Please combine items 1–3 into single PDF file. Official copies of transcripts and GRE scores are not needed for a first inquiry (your GRE scores could simply be reported on your CV).

If your application is competitive, I will contact you to discuss the situation, my impressions, and to share ideas. At this point I will also encourage all potential students to visit the main campus of OSU and the Department of Fisheries and Wildlife in Corvallis, and my lab at the Hatfield Marine Science Center (HMSC) in Newport. (My students typically split time between the two campuses as needed for research and classes.) This visit will give us the opportunity to talk in person, allow you to meet my current students, visit with other faculty in the department, and assess if you like the campuses and towns.

Thank you for your interest in OSU and the GEMM Lab. I look forward to hearing from you and good luck in your career.

Cheers,

Leigh Torres, PhD
Department of Fisheries and Wildlife
Marine Mammal Institute, Oregon State University

A few links to major graduate student funding sources:

[EPA STAR graduate fellowship](#)

[National Science Foundation graduate fellowship](#)

[NOAA graduate fellowship](#)

30 September 2014