EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

Department of Biological Sciences
Graduate (Master's) Student Handbook

1. Overview of the Biological Sciences Master's Program

Biology is a vast and exciting field that connects to every aspect of nature and human well-being. Our graduate program prepares students to contribute to science and society by building literacy in biology and by conducting integrative and innovative research that informs and inspires the community at large.

The Biological Sciences Master's Program at ETSU is intended for students with interest in the life sciences and potential careers in **academia, conservation, teaching, private industry, agriculture, state and federal agencies** (forestry, fish and wildlife) among many other fields related to science and natural resources.

The Department of Biological Sciences at ETSU offers diverse opportunities for graduate training. Research fields in our program include **genomics, evolutionary biology, community ecology, chemical ecology, biochemistry, behavioral ecology, bioinformatics, synthetic biology, developmental biology, forest ecology, biomedical sciences**, and other exciting fields.

The Master's program is divided into three main concentrations**: 1) Biology**, **2) Biomedical Sciences and 3) Microbiology**. As a master's student, you will join a collaborative laboratory led by one of our productive and engaged faculty members, along with a diverse and enthusiastic group of graduate students. You will conduct research using novel and diverse methodologies and state of the art equipment in the lab and in the field, and you will enhance your professional skills by participating in research seminars, graduate workshops, teaching, and social events.

Our program is **research-based** and requires students to design and conduct a sound a scientifically robust research project as well as write a thesis. During this process students learn how to design experiments, collect and interpret data, draw conclusions from the results and fit their findings into a larger framework of scientific knowledge. The thesis project is conducted along with course work and is defended at the end of the program in front of a thesis committee. A faculty advisor assists the student in planning and conducting the research thesis as well as provides mentoring to help the student succeed in the program and achieve future academic goals. There are currently 15 faculty in the Biology Department plus faculty from the Biomedical Sciences and College of Public Health participating in the program.

Our program is interdisciplinary and allows students to take courses in other departments as long as they are pertinent for their research and academic goals. In addition to the thesis and course work there are other activities that promote scientific exchange, such as seminars, conferences and scientific meetings, workshops and journal clubs. Most of our students receive financial support through graduate assistantships, which provide a stipend and cover tuition. Attainment of the Master's degree normally requires two years.

2. Administration and personnel

ETSU College of Arts and Sciences Gilbreath Hall Room 206 441 Stout Drive, P. O. Box 70730 Johnson City, TN 37614-1710 Phone: 423-439-5671 Email: artsandsciences@etsu.edu	Dr. Joe Bidwell Dean, College of Arts and Sciences Email: bidwell@etsu.edu
College of Graduate and Continuing Studies ETSU Graduate School 3rd floor Yoakley Hall 550 J L Seehorn Jr Dr Johnson City, TN 37614 PO Box 70720 Phone: 423-439-4221 Email: gradschool@etsu.edu	Sharon J. McGee, Ph.D. Dean, College of Graduate and Continuing Studies Email: mcgees@etsu.edu
Biological Sciences Department Brown Hall, Room 125 PO Box 70703 Johnson City, TN 37614	Dr. Dhirendra Kumar, Department chair Phone: (423) 439-4329 email: kumard@etsu.edu
Biological Sciences Graduate Program Dr Gerardo Arceo-Gomez, Graduate coordinator Brown Hall, Room 327 Phone: 423-439-6613 email: gomezg@etsu.edu	

Biology Graduate Program Committee
Dr. Gerardo Arceo-Gomez – (Chair)
Dr. Richard Carter
Dr. Dhirendra Kumar
Dr. Tianhu Sun

The responsibilities of the graduate committee are to:

1. Develop and revise the Biological Sciences Graduate Program curriculum.
2. Make decisions on admission to the program and offers for graduate assistantships
3. Make recommendations on a consistent and streamlined academic program for all graduate students.
4. Work with the Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Education on matters concerning recruitment, student advisement and financial assistance policies.

3. What you should expect of us

The Biological Sciences Master Program has as its primary mission to prepare students to contribute to science and society by building literacy in biology and by conducting integrative and innovative research. We are also committed to provide strong and diverse opportunities to acquire knowledge and training via a strong curriculum and research opportunities for students wishing to study in an interdisciplinary environment.

We are committed to:

1. Providing quality graduate programs consistent with freedom of inquiry and student welfare.
2. Recruiting and retaining excellent graduate students, including minority students, from a large pool of candidates.
3. Financially supporting graduate students
4. Providing access of students to highly skilled faculty in an adequately staffed graduate program.
5. Making supportive academic counseling and research mentoring available to students.
6. Furnishing course and laboratory work that yields a productive graduate educational experience.
7. Ensuring engagement of students in a high-quality research program under the supervision of a mentor and committee of graduate faculty.

4. Curriculum

Biology Concentration

The Master of Science degree program in Biology is designed to provide a broad-based education while developing research skills. Areas of particular interest to the faculty include Anatomy, Aquatic Biology, Biochemistry, Synthetic Biology, Developmental Biology, Biomedical Sciences, Cell Biology, Conservation Biology, Plant and Animal Ecology, Chemical Ecology, Genomics, Bioinformatics, Immunology, Microbiology, Population Biology and Physiology. The program has financial support available in the form of Graduate Assistantships and Tuition Scholarships. In order to receive full consideration, applicants are strongly encouraged to submit all materials by February 1 (for fall admission) and August 1 (for spring admission).

Core Requirements

- *At least two Topics courses (selection of the appropriate courses will be made in consultation with the student's advisory committee and/or the graduate coordinator):*
    - Biol 6100 - Cell/Molecular Biology
    - Biol 6300 - Ecology/Evolution

Students will also complete the following courses:

- Biol 5500 – Biometry
- BIOL 5800 - Scientific Writing for the Biological Sciences
- Biol 5600 – Introduction to Biological Research (must be taken the first fall semester)
- Biol 5700 - Seminar (students are required to take this course for two semesters, but are expected to attend departmental seminars on a regular basis, regardless of enrollment in the course)
- Biol 5900 - Independent Studies (not to exceed a total of 9 credit hours when combined with Biol 5910)
- Biol 5910 - Research in Biology (not to exceed a total of 9 credit hours when combined with Biol 5900)
- Biol 5960 – Thesis

***All students receiving a GA must also be enrolled in supervised teaching every semester**

Biomedical Sciences Concentration

The Master of Science in Biology, with a concentration in Biomedical Sciences, is to prepare students to do research in industry, academia, or a clinical environment. Students can work with any of the faculty in Biological Sciences or may be accepted into the laboratories of College of Medicine faculty. It also prepares students that may want to enroll in an MD/PhD program. It may be of interest to students who have performed well enough for graduate school admissions but are not fully prepared for medical school admissions and want to take additional graduate level course work to improve their critical thinking skills through an intense research experience in pure or applied biomedical sciences. In order to receive full consideration, applicants are strongly encouraged to submit all materials by February 1 (for fall admission) and July 1 (for spring admission).

Core Requirements

- At least two of the following courses. **At least one of which must be in Biology (Biol).** *(selection of the appropriate courses will be made in consultation with the student's advisory committee and/or the graduate coordinator):*
    - Biol 6100 - Cell/Molecular Biology
    - Biol 6300 - Ecology/Evolution
    - Biom 6010 - Biomedical Science I: Molecular Organization of Cells
    - Biol 6020 - Biomedical Science II: Gene Expression and Regulation

Students will also complete the following courses:

- Biol 5500 – Biometry
- BIOL 5800 - Scientific Writing for the Biological Sciences
- Biol 5600 - Introduction to Biological Research (must be taken the first fall semester)
- Biol 5700 - Seminar (students are required to take this course for two semesters, but are expected to attend all departmental seminars, regardless of enrollment in the course)
- Biol 5960 - Thesis **OR** Hsci 5960 – Thesis

***All students receiving a GA must also be enrolled in supervised teaching every semester**

Course registration

Students register for courses each term (Fall, Spring) through Goldlink. All Graduate Assistants must maintain nine credits for the Fall and Spring semesters. All course registration should be arranged and approved by the program office. Students should plan ahead and talk with their advisor well before the start of the semester about the courses they plan to take.

5. Additional program information

Biology, M.S. (Biology Concentration)

Research Faculty: Gerardo Arceo-Gomez; Joe Bidwell; Richard Carter; Cerrone Foster; T.J. Jones; Aruna Kilaru; Dhirendra Kumar; Darrell Moore; Lev Yampolsky, Melissa Whitaker, Ryan Stephens, Tianhu Sun, Benjamin Lee, Anoop Arunagiri.

Program Admission Requirements

In addition to the requirements of the Graduate School, applicants must:

1. Have a 3.0 overall grade point average (on a 4.0 system) in their major (biology or related field)
2. An undergraduate major in the life or physical sciences, with supporting courses in general chemistry, organic chemistry (microbiology concentration will accept one semester of organic and one semester of biochemistry), and physics are preferred
3. A course in calculus and/or a course in probability and statistics is recommended
4. 2 letters of recommendation
5. **GRE score is not required** (but is optional for Microbiology concentration applicants)
6. **We strongly encourage students to contact potential research advisors before they apply**

Program overview

The student will choose a major professor by the end of the first semester. The major professor, in consultation with the student, recommends at least two additional members of the student's advisory committee. Persons from outside the program may also be added. The advisory committee will meet with the student to set up the plan of study based on the student's background and interests. The program must be approved by one of the program coordinators. The student's advisory committee will meet with the student a minimum of once per semester to assess progress, check the plan of study being followed, make suggestions and provide supervision as needed. The advisory committee's composition is not binding, and it may be changed upon written justification. It is the student's responsibility to maintain acceptable progress toward the completion of all degree requirements.
All students pursuing an M.S. in Biology are required to complete a thesis. A minimum of 30 semester credits are required for the degree. The thesis (writing) comprises three (3) of the 30 credits. BIOL 5900 and/or BIOL 5910 may be taken for a total of nine (9) credit-hours.
Before admission to candidacy, the student must meet the minimum requirements of the Graduate School and the student's advisory committee. Before graduation the student must satisfactorily complete a written qualifying examination preferably near the end of the third semester. One re-evaluation is allowed. Failure to complete the evaluation satisfactorily will result in removal from the program. The evaluation will include emphasis on interrelationships, problem solving, and analysis.

Final evaluation involves an oral presentation of the thesis and an oral examination in the area of specialization.

Academic Requirements

- **Biology, M.S. Degree Requirements: 30 credits**

Core Requirements	15 credits
Concentration	12 credits
Thesis	3 credits
TOTAL	**30 credits**

Graduate Committee

During the first semester the student is expected to identify a research advisor and in collaboration with them, identify a potential research project and other members of the student's committee. Students are encouraged to have their committee in place and schedule their first committee meeting by the end of the first semester (during their second semester at the latest).

Qualifying Exam

M.S. Biology Program – Biology Concentration

During the third semester or before the start of the 4th semester each student must complete the qualifying examination. This exam is to be given by the student's advisory committee and administered by the Major Professor. The format of the exam is provided below. The student must pass the exam and one re-evaluation is allowed. **Failure to pass the qualifying examination will result in removal of the student from the program.**

Standardized questionnaire format/evaluation

After the student has completed and the exam, a copy of the student's responses to this assignment will be submitted to the Graduate Coordinator by the major advisor **along with the graduate learning outcomes assessment**. At the end of each academic year, the Graduate Coordinator and the Chair will assemble a group of graduate faculty to make a collective assessment of students' performance.

EAST TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

Example of Qualifying Exam questions (Biology Concentration)

The following assignment is **to be completed before the end of the 3rd semester** and is designed to assess the student's ability to understand primary research literature and design scientific experiments in a specialized area of research. The questions below relate to a particular paper which has been selected by the committee and is based on the student's area of research.

The student will have **up to two weeks** to complete the written portion of the exam. After completion of the written portion, the committee will meet with the student (within the following two weeks) and, based on the paper and the written responses, the committee members will conduct an oral examination to assess the student's ability to **1)** think broadly (ecologically and/or evolutionarily), **2)** think mechanistically, **3)** integrate concepts and ideas, **4)** understand experimental design and data analysis and **5)** evaluate knowledge on any pertinent topic in the student's area of study.

After completion of the oral portion of the exam, the committee will assign a pass/fail grade and complete the **rubric for assessing Graduate Student Learning Outcomes**. The grade and rubric will be sent to the graduate coordinator. In case of a failed grade, the student will be allowed one attempt to retry. In case of a second failure, the student may be dismissed from the program.

The exact timing of the exam will be determined in agreement with the student and all the committee members.

Qualifying exam question for _____; prepared by_____.

Read carefully the primary research paper provided by the mentor/committee.Then prepare a well-organized typewritten paper, no less than 3, nor more than 5, single-spaced pages long, responding to the following questions or assignments:

__/15% 1. Explain in your own words what "big question" this research attempts to answer.

__/15% 2. Explain in your own words the principal conclusion of this paper.

__/10% 3. How does this conclusion contribute to our overall understanding of this field?

__/15% 4. How does this paper relate to your own M.S. research project?

__/10% 5. Consider figure or table, _____, and explain how the data were obtained and analyzed.

__/10% 6. What is your most serious criticism of either methods or analysis in this paper?

__/10% 7. . Identify a novel hypothesis not tested in this paper but logically arising from the findings. Clearly explain its basis and significance.

__/15% 8. Propose an experimental or observational research protocol to test the new hypothesis. Justify your approach and outline expected outcomes and potential limitations.

Research Prospectus (Biology concentration)

Before initiating thesis research, each student is required to submit a written prospectus describing their proposed research project. The document is to be submitted to their advisory committee. Upon submission of the finished prospectus, the student will give a brief oral presentation of its contents during the departmental seminar (BIOL 5700). The following are meant to serve as a guide for preparing the prospectus. It is expected that the student will consult regularly with their Major Professor/Advisor and utilize additional criteria as deemed necessary by their Advisor.

The prospectus should contain at least the following components:

A. An Introduction relevant to the topic that demonstrates sufficient understanding of the field and relevant literature. The document must include all relevant citations
B. A clear statement of the biological question to be answered.
C. An outline of the methodology to be used to answer the question.
D. A discussion of methods to be used to analyze the data.
E. A statement of significance of the expected results.

Student progress report

A student progress report must be completed for every semester. The link for the progress report can be found on the Departmental website under 'useful links' in the Graduate student tab. This form will be routed and signed by the committee chair and all committee members to ensure adequate progress of graduate students in the program.

Academic Standing and Course Load Requirements

- The minimum passing grade in a graduate course is 'C'.
- A Grade Point Average (GPA) of 3.0 is required to remain in good standing (not be placed on academic probation), to be admitted to candidacy, and to graduate.

Graduate Assistant Special Course Requirements

- Graduate Teaching Assistants are required to register for Supervised Experience in Teaching – BIOL 5019.
- The full-time course load for graduate students is 9 graduate credit hours.

Academic Probation: Any student who falls below an overall GPA of 3.0, or a program GPA of 3.0 will be placed on academic probation until they reach the minimum GPA for good standing (3.0).
- Policy dictates students are allowed two (2) semesters of probation, unless GPA worsens, or the program wishes to dismiss the student.
- Academic probation may be extended beyond two (2) semesters if GPA improves or the department requests it.

Academic Dismissal: Students can be dismissed for grades, failure to progress in their program, or not meeting the provision(s) of their admission.

The department of biology also reserves the right to dismiss students from the program if the graduate committee determines the student has violated professional and/or academic codes of conduct during their learning (courses), teaching or research activities.

Thesis defense and graduation

Thesis - All masters students must complete a thesis as a major requirement for the Masters in Biology degree. The thesis topic will be selected by the student with the advice and approval of their graduate advisory committee. The student must present a prospectus describing the research project for review and approval by their graduate advisory committee. After the thesis topic has been researched, written, defended, and accepted by the committee, it must be prepared in the proper format and submitted to the Graduate School by the initial submission deadline listed in the Academic Calendar. The Graduate School receives the submission electronically. Please follow the guidelines and checklist of requirements listed on the Electronic Thesis and Dissertations (ETD) website for further instructions.

Thesis defense – All masters students must orally defend their thesis to their graduate advisory committee. Typically, thesis defenses are open to the public and are also attended by the Department and other members of the public. The exact structure of the defense will be determined by the student and their research advisory committee, but usually consists of an oral presentation by the student of the work conducted, followed by questions from the audience. The student's graduate advisory committee ultimately decides if the student has passed or failed the defense and what thesis edits or remediation are required.

Biology Graduate Association

The Biological Graduate Student Association (BGSA) is a student-led organization that serves as the official voice for biology graduate students at ETSU. Our core mission is to act as a liaison between the graduate students, University administration, and the Biology Department leadership to advocate for student needs, concerns, and overall well-being. We also focus on promoting professional development, and collaboration between concentrations. Overall, BGSA acts as a voice and support system for the students to improve their experience in the biology department.

Graduate Symposium

Towards the end of every semester, the Department of Biological Sciences hosts the ETSU-Biological-Health Sciences Graduate Student Symposium. This all-day event aims to highlight and celebrate the work done by our graduate students in their respective research labs. Every M.S student enrolled in Seminar (BIOL 5700) during the semester, is expected to present their work during the symposium of that semester. For students who do not yet have original data, a

presentation on pertinent background information, potential hypotheses, predications, and methods is suitable.

Graduate Research Awards

Three graduate student research grants up to **$500** are available to **M.S. Biology/Biomedical Sciences** students each year, which are administered by the Department of Biological Sciences.

The actual award amount may vary based on the investment earnings on the endowments. The Geraldine Rita Slemp Memorial Award is a minimum of $500.

Research Grant Awards:

- **Marcia Davis Research Award** - Supports research towards the conservation of natural resources in Tennessee.
- **Denise Pav Scholarship Award** – Supports students who are in their second (or third) year of their M.S. Biology Program (only open to Americans, Canadians, or Landed Immigrants).
- **William Harvey Fraley and Nina M. Fraley Memorial Research Award** - Supports research in molecular, cellular, or organismal biology (not conservation or population biology).

Other Award:

- **Geraldine Rita Slemp Memorial Award –** Supports experiential learning, travel, and research opportunities for **international students** enrolled in the East Tennessee State University M.S. Biology degree program.

Eligibility:

- Awards are open to students in all concentrations of MS Biology (Biology/Biomedical Sciences/Microbiology).
- The student must have completed at least one semester of MS program, be in good standing (minimum GPA of 3.0), and have chosen their program advisory committee.
- Students can apply for more than one departmental award (PAV, FRALEY, DAVIS, and SLEMP awards), but no one can receive more than one award in the same year.
- If you are applying for more than one award, simply indicate by checking multiple boxes and justify in the space provided, how your application qualifies for each of the awards.

Guidelines for Application:

- Application must be submitted electronically as a single PDF file to carterrt@etsu.edu, **by March, 5th at 5:00 PM**. File name should be saved as students' last Name followed by type of award (Pav/Fraley/Davis/Slemp) and the Year. Include "Biology Research Grant/Award Application" in the subject line of your email.

- For the Research Grants, a complete **six-page application** will include **a**) Signed Application Form, **b**) Project Description (3 pages), **c**) References (1 page) and **d**) Proposed Budget with Justification (1 page).
    - Project description should include **a**) background information on the topic, **b**) statement of the problem, c) hypothesis and specific goals, **d**) description of experimental approach, **e**) a summary of preliminary results (if available), **f**) significance of the project and **g**) a timetable for completion of the project and thesis. This description is limited to 3 single-spaced pages, with 1" margins and 11 point or larger font. References must be cited as appropriate and can be listed on a separate page.
    - Budget should be proposed on a separate page and must include a list of specific expenditures and justification. Describe why this research grant is necessary and how it will be used to further your thesis project. If the funds are requested for travel to collect samples or make observations, have an estimate of miles traveled and cost/mile. If it is to be used for chemicals or supplies, have item, vendor, and costs listed.
- For the Slemp Award, a complete four-page application will include a) signed application form, b) brief (2-page) project description with timeline, and proposed budget with justification. Appropriate expenditures of the Slemp Endowment include but are not limited to: research project supplies, equipment, and operational costs; conference travel or registration fees; and travel associated with research projects. **Travel to present research at a professional scientific conference is especially encouraged for support**.

Award selection and presentation:

- An *adhoc* committee will be selected to review the applications and select the awardees.
- Awardees will be notified electronically.
- Awards are made at the Biology Spring Celebrations held by the Department of Biological Sciences and/or at the Spring Graduate Studies Awards Ceremony.

- **The Biology department also offers financial support for conference travel to graduate students upon request to the Department chair**

7. General information

Access to Graduate catalog: https://www.etsu.edu/reg/catalog/

Summary of program requirements per semester

First semester:
Fall start: Enroll in **9** credit hours. Suggested courses: BIOL5600 Intro to Biol Research, GRAD 5110 Teaching Pedagogy, GRAD 5017 Responsible conduct of Research.

- Biology concentration requires students to take two topics courses during the program. Biomed concentration students substitute a topic course for *Biomedical Science I* (see graduate catalog)
- Have committee in place at the end of the semester. Fill out committee appointment form here

Spring start: Enroll in **9** credit hours. Suggested courses: BIOL5500 Biometry

- Have committee in place at the end of the semester. Fill out committee appointment form here

Second semester

Enroll in **9** credit hours including the BIOL5700 Seminar course (BIOL 5700 seminar course should be taken **twice** during the program).

- **A second committee meeting at this point is highly recommended where the full research prospectus will be presented**

Third semester

Enroll in **9** credit hours

- A third committee meeting at this point is recommended
- Qualifying exam must be completed during the 3rd semester and before the start of the fourth semester
- The standard qualifying exam questionnaire should be performed by at least one committee member (ask graduate coordinator for the guidelines)
    - Make sure that the committee chair sends a copy of questions and final result to the Graduate coordinator.
- Apply for petition to graduate with the School of Graduate studies before start of fourth semester (also notify graduate coordinator of your intent to graduate). Form can be found here Apply to Graduate

Fourth semester

Enroll in **9** credit hours. Enroll in **BIOL 5960** for **Thesis credits** during this semester.

- Students must defend their thesis (**oral defense)**

- Notification of thesis defense here (form initiated by the committee chair used to notify graduate school **at least 10 days prior to defense** to schedule an outside observer)
- Thesis supervisor/ committee members must submit final student assessment rubric to graduate coordinator (available in S-drive).
- Final draft of thesis submitted to School of Graduate Studies (electronically)

- Thesis supervisors must submit the results of final defense form (dynamic form here)
- Culminating experience form submitted by graduate coordinator **(email coordinator: full name, #E Number, thesis title and date of defense)**

If defense during fourth semester is not possible

- Student can defend before the 5th semester starts without any additional cost
    - Students can apply for a graduate school **Thesis and Dissertation Scholarship** (https://www.etsu.edu/gradschool/funding/scholarships.php) if only the thesis writing is incomplete.

8. Other useful links and information

ETSU Graduate assistant handbook here

Checklist of electronic thesis requirements here

Thesis guide here

Application for graduate faculty appointment (e.g. outside committee members) here

Change of Committee Form: Students must complete this form if a faculty member can no longer serve on a committee.

Forms and links can be found here: Graduate forms

9. International students

Part 1: Before you arrive
Please visit ETSU International Enrollment and Services website below for detailed instructions: https://www.etsu.edu/international/admitted/default.php

a. Visa

1. Obtain I-20 (F1 visa) or DS2019 (J-1 visa) form: All international students on F-1 or J-1 visas will need an I-20 or DS-2019 from ETSU. To request I-20 from ETSU, please follow these steps:

STEP 1: ACTIVATE ETSU ACCOUNT: Please visit www.etsu.edu/activate to complete this step. You will need your ETSU E-Number to activate your account and this can be found in your official acceptance letter.
STEP 2: COMPLETE I-20 REQUEST FORM: Students will receive an email within 3 days of being admitted to ETSU that contains a specific link to request an I-20/DS-2019. This link is individual for every student and should not be shared with others. Please watch this for this email after being admitted to ETSU. The deadline to request an I-20 for the fall semester is July 15. The deadline to request an I-20 for the spring semester is November 15.

STEP 3: UPLOAD FINANCIAL DOCUMENTS: The I-20 Request Form will ask for multiple different documents to be uploaded. Uploading readable, accurate documents will help ensure that the I-20/DS-2019 is processed in a timely manner.
1) Passport Biographical/Picture Page - Please be sure to include the passport biographical/picture pages for all dependents that you plan to include on your I-20.
2) Scholarship Award Letters - If you have a scholarship award letter or email, please ensure that it shows the specific dollar amount of the scholarship. Please keep in mind that many ETSU scholarships do not cover the cost-of-living expenses.
3) Funding Sources - Uploads must be clearly readable and the amount of funding must meet or exceed the estimated cost of attendance after scholarships.
4) Financial Agreement Form - This form will be found within the I-20 Request Link
STEP 4: RECEIVE I-20 WITHIN 2 WEEKS: Completed I-20's and DS-2019's will be sent to the student by email as soon as they are processed.

2. Schedule visa appointment:

You can start the student visa application process as soon as you have your ETSU I-20 or DS-2019. Please visit the website below to schedule a visa interview in the city closest to you: https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/study/student-visa.html Please keep in mind that wait times for appointments vary greatly by country. We recommend scheduling your appointment as quickly as possible after receiving your I-20 or DS-2019.

b. Immunization

For international students, it is a good idea to obtain your immunizations at least 30 days prior to leaving your country. If not, it may delay your TB testing and registration. The immunization requirements can be found at: https://www.etsu.edu/nursing/universityhealth/immunization-require.php

Part 2: Campus life

a. On-campus living: Buccaneer Ridge Phase 5 offers a great choice for graduate students and students with families who wish to enjoy the benefits of living on-campus. A limited number of efficiency and 1-Bedroom apartments are available for married couples, single parents with one child under the age of 7, or graduate students. The responsible leaseholder must be a full-time student. (https://www.etsu.edu/students/housing/prospectivestudents/viewhalls/default.php)

b. Language support: The Language and Culture Resource Center invites international students and multilingual members of the community to practice speaking English in fun, casual conversations with ETSU students who work at the LCRC (https://www.etsu.edu/cas/lcrc/services/conversation_partner_program.php).

c. Avoid scams

Scams are fraudulent attempts to trick people out of their money. Unfortunately, these lies are easy to fall for, and you might not know a phone call, email or interaction is fraudulent until it is too late. **International students and scholars can be targets of scams and should take extra precautions to avoid them.**

How to avoid scams?

Protect yourself by staying alert and knowing what to look for. Think twice before communicating with someone you do not know—whether over the phone or online Remember that if it does not 'feel' right, check with others before acting.
When renting an apartment or place to stay off campus:
One of the most common scams include rental or apartment scams, which involves fake advertisements for apartments that do not exist. To avoid rental scams, follow these suggestions.

- Insist on meeting a landlord or property manager in person before signing a lease or paying any money (money is usually due when you sign the lease)
- Avoid sending money in exchange for keys or to see or rent a property!
- Research the property and landlord before paying any money−ask for references, check property records and read online reviews

Here are some signs that the person you are talking to might be trying to scam you. End the conversation if the person:

- Warns or threatens arrest or legal action
- Pressures you for your personal information
- Requests secrecy
- Threatens to suspend your Social Security number or visa (even if they have part or all of your information, such as part of your Social Security number)
- Promises to increase your Social Security benefit
- Demands or requests immediate payment
- Requires payment by gift card, prepaid debit card, internet currency or by mailing cash
- Offers you a job even though you have not applied for or expressed interest in one
- Instructs you to spend money for a job, either by buying supplies or gift or prepaid debit cards
- Threatens to seize your bank account
- Tries to gain your trust by providing fake documentation, false evidence, or by claiming to be a government official (please note: The United States government will NOT call or email you.)

d. Local activities

ETSU events: Please check https://www.etsu.edu/students/sao/events.php for university events, student organization events, and weekend events.
Johnson City is in east Tennessee. It's known for outdoor activities at Winged Deer Park, which offers boating and disc golf, and Buffalo Mountain Park, with trails and sweeping views. Northwest of the city, Gray Fossil Site and Museum is an active Miocene-era excavation site with mastodon fossils. To the east, Sycamore Shoals State Historic Park is a former Cherokee site with a replica of 18th-century Fort Watauga.
You can also search local activities on Facebook or Instagram including shows in the ETSU Martin Center for the Arts and Johnson City Farmers Market events.

e. Maintain your physical and mental health

ETSU Fitness center: the Wayne G. Basler Center for Physical Activity (CPA) offers a variety of both indoor and outdoor facilities to ETSU students. You can find your recreational passion in one of our five diverse recreational programming areas: Aquatics, Fitness & Wellness, Intramural Sports, Sport Clubs, and Outdoor Adventure. Non-Credit Instruction is also offered by certified trainers, as well as facility times dedicated to self-directed recreational activities.

Mental health: The ETSU Counseling Center falls under the domain of the Division of Student Life and Enrollment, which strives to promote student success and wellness. When something's bothering you, talking about it is often the first step toward a solution. The ETSU Counseling Center offers an informal, convenient, confidential program– "Let's Talk."

The program offers free, friendly drop-in sessions with counselor consultants from the ETSU Counseling Center, at locations around campus. "Let's Talk" isn't formal counseling or mental health treatment. It's a chance to briefly share what's on your mind, find support, and get recommendations. No topic is off-limits. It is FREE to ETSU students; No appointment needed - first come, first serve; Confidential, and No paperwork or commitment.

10. Advice for GAs

1. Any changes you would like to make to the course work should be discussed with the supervised teacher, and make sure all GA's are up to date and on the same page. There should be a small variance between quizzes and exams, but the overall material should be similar.
2. It is important to set strict expectations in the beginning, and then choose leniency once you understand your students and overall class.
3. It is ok if you do not know every question your students will ask you. If you do not know something, use this as an opportunity to have a discussion. Previously, GA's would look up the answer using primary literature. This allows the students to see how to find answers without relying on Wikipedia or unreliable sources.
4. When you begin teaching, you may want to ask a fellow GA if you can sit in on their class. This will allow you to become more comfortable with your role in the classroom as well as demonstrate what topics from the lab you should focus on when teaching your students.
5. In class, there is going to be a lot of conversation while experiments take place. This is a great way to ask them questions about the current lab that may help their understanding. Also, some students may ask about your experience as to why you chose to go to graduate school, how graduate school works, and possibly ask you about lab experience. I always encourage undergraduate participation or research since this can play an important role in their acceptance into post-secondary education. You may even provide them with resources or give them a few faculty members to reach out to.
6. Lectures and lab will not always line up, so some classes may require more instruction, but you are not expected to provide an entire lecture. The students should be provided enough material that they are still able to keep up and learn from lab.
7. It is natural to be nervous in your first few classes, but this should go away with experience. It may help to have your students talk more in the beginning. Know their names, ask them questions, and get to know what they want to do with their future. These things will allow you to tailor the class and class work accordingly.
8. It is important to set time aside to meet with your students. Your students really benefit from 1 on 1 time or even small group discussions.
9. Take the time to develop your teaching style and portfolio, especially if you want to continue in academia or research. This is the start of your career, and you will always be presenting your research or teaching a lecture.
10. You are responsible for maintaining clear expectations within the lab, but you should also hold yourself accountable. When grading lab reports, read them thoroughly and genuinely try to improve their writing. Give them tips and suggestions that can improve their scientific writing skill. It is also important to give these back in a timely manner. If you give your students suggestions for their next lab report, they should have time to review the feedback and ask questions before they start writing the lab report.