UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN MILWAUKEE

Biological Sciences



Welcome from the Chair & Associate Chair

Welcome to the spring 2025 newsletter of the Department of Biological Sciences. We appreciate the continued support of everyone for the success of the department. Congratulations are to Assistant Professor Claire de la Cova who was recommended for tenure and promotion to Associate Professor. Dr. Selvakumar Ramakrishnan was awarded the UWM Academic Staff Outstanding Teaching Award. We would also like to welcome our new laboratory manager Dr. Wendy Shelton. We had a productive last year! The faculty, students, and post-docs have continued their scholarly activities, securing funding for research and teaching initiatives, publishing their work (please see the link to recent faculty publications), and training the next generation of biologists.

We encourage you to contact us biosci@uwm.edu if you have any news to share or would like to donate. We appreciate your support and look forward to hearing from you.

With best wishes!

Gyaneshwar Prasad (Chair)
Emily Latch (Associate Chair)

Events

We recently co-hosted our fourth annual Darwin Day, which was the biggest one yet! Hosted in the Thomas A. Greene Geological Museum right here in Lapham Hall, this event featured a wide variety of activities for kids and adults, lectures, and learning tables on the entire first floor of Lapham Hall and KIRC, a some parts of UWM's new Chemistry. There were 500+ guests in attendance this year. It was very fun event with lots of stuff to see and do!

It was great welcoming our admitted students to UWM and showing them around the department at the spring Admitted Students Days in February and March. It was so exciting to host prospective students and their families!

The Graduate Organization of Biological Sciences recently hosted the annual Biological Sciences Research Symposium on Friday, April 11th. This symposium highlighted groundbreaking research by students and scientists in biological sciences.

For more graduate events, check out UWM Graduate School upcoming events calendar: https://uwm.edu/graduateschool/events/.

Undergraduate News

Mackenzie Dasek is a Biological Sciences major with the Ecology, Evolution, and Behavior option. As a senior, Mackenzie is engaged in upper-level courses that have helped her understand ecology and evolution at a deeper level. She also has been doing research in the department with Dr. Rafa Rodriguez, studying how very small animals with very small brains solve problems. Mackenzie and members of the Rodriguez group are putting bowl-and-doily spiders (Frontinella communis; named for the bowl-shaped webs with 'doily' ceilings they create) in new webs to quantify how they respond to their new environment. Are they able to navigate an unfamiliar web? Can they still catch prey effectively? Are older spiders indeed wiser?



Throughout her coursework and research, Mackenzie has become increasingly fascinated by science and research and her curiosity about many aspects of our natural world is making her consider graduate school as a next step. But first, Mackenzie was recently selected to join the first cohort of students in Dr. Emily Latch's Grenada SURF-TURF program funded by the National Science Foundation, to broaden her experiences in tropical conservation biology through extended research activities in Grenada. Mackenzie will work alongside researchers from the US and Grenada to study tropical conservation biology on coral reefs and in tropical

rainforests. She will also develop and carry out an independent research project (perhaps with spiders?), and we look forward to seeing what she finds!

Biological Sciences Association Club

President: Harleen Tewatia
Vice President: Brianna Schneider
Treasurer: Alexis Jemison
Secretary: Ali Ishaq

Undergraduate Student Successes

UWM Undergraduate Harleen Tewatia won a Senior Excellence in Research Award from the Office of Undergraduate Research for her work on bacteria-phage interactions in the Burmeister Lab.
https://uwm.edu/undergraduate-research/people/tewatia-harleen/

Graduate News



Graduate Student Spotlight

Lauran Liggan is a PhD student in Dr. Alberto's Lab. She investigates the population dynamics of kelp (large brown algae of temperate rocky reefs), more specifically, their microscopic gametophyte stage. This life stage has been suggested to work as a seed bank, capable of delaying recruitment to the sporophyte stage (the large alga) and thus contributing to the resilience of kelp populations. Lauran's work involves using molecular approaches to detect gametophytes from environmental samples (eDNA) and using novel statistical methods to estimate their density. She is also a SCUBA diving professional with certifications in scientific diving, commercial diving, and SCUBA instruction. Her field research is conducted along coastal

British Columbia, Canada. Lauran has been very successful in obtaining grant funding for her projects (National Geographic, Hakai Institute, Nature Conservancy), and in 2022 was named a National Geographic Explorer.

New Graduate Student Welcome

Welcome to our new graduate students and welcome back to all returning graduate students!



Jamil Ahmed
PhD, Yang Lab



Matin Ali
MS, Dey Lab



Sagnik Das
PhD, Tran Lab



McKenzie Henkelman
PhD, Latch Lab



Angela Mish
MS, Hoebel Lab



Thi Nhat Linh Nguyen
PhD, Tran Lab



Jefferson Sosa
MS Non-Thesis



Bailey Stokke
Phd, Quinn Lab



Nathaniel Wells
PhD, Gouignard Lab



Nery Zamudio Bautista
PhD, Burmeister Lab

Graduate Organization of Biological Sciences

GOBS Team 2024-2025

President: Anish Chakraborty
Vice President: Joe Srok
Treasurer: Sonali Shedge
Secretary: Fatemeh Cheraghi

Links: Biology Sciences

Give to Biological Sciences

Make A Gift

Graduate Student Successes

2024 Graduate students who graduated and their thesis/dissertation titles:

Spring 2024

• **Madeline Opie:**, Master's Thesis - Which Vole Is Which: DNA-Based Identification for Wisconsin's Three Microtus Species.

• **Ryan Feldmann:** Master's Non-Thesis - N/A

• **Kimberly Mayer:** Master's Thesis - Understanding the Role of Protein Kinase Slt2 in Endoplasmic Reticulum Proteostasis of Saccharomyces cerevisiae

• **Olivia Feagles:** PhD - The Complexity of Female Treefrog Mate Choice: Choosiness and Preferences Are Independent Behaviors and Each Are Prone To Separate Sources of Variation

• **Kane Stratman:** PhD - Quantifying Within-Population Variation in Mate Choice; Discrimination, Mate Sampling Rules, Multivariate Preference & Consequences for Sexual Selection

• **Hannah Warner:** Master's Thesis - Walk or Swim: The Substrate for Movement Affects Mate Choice Behaviors in Females Gray Treefrogs (Hyla versicolor)

Summer 2024

• **Laura Rolfs:** PhD - The Role of Non-Muscle Myosins in Zebrafish Development and *MYH9*-Related Disease

• **Vidhya Basak:** PhD - Role of WD40 repeat proteins in the regulation of the Snf1 kinase complex during energy stress

Summer 2024

• **Wendy Shelton:** PhD - Exploring the causes and consequences of variation in flowering phenology in monkeyflower (Mimulus ringens)

• **Chong Lor:** Master's Non-Thesis - N/A

• **Nicole Confare:** Master's Non-Thesis - N/A

• **Ayosunkanmi Amoo:** Master's Thesis - Ultrastructure of the Root Hair Tip and Ovule in the Arabidopsis thaliana Fer-4 Mutant

• **Julianna Miller:** Master's Non-Thesis - N/A

Karron lab group member **Wendy Shelton**, awarded a PhD in December 2024, has joined the UWM Department of Biological Sciences as a full-time Laboratory Manager.

BioSci PhD graduate **Lauren Simmons** (Berges lab) is now on faculty at MIAD

Students from **Dr. Alita R. Burmeister's** lab (**Harleen Tewatia, Chloe Skinner, and Nery Zamudio-Bautista)** also presented at the first-ever WISER conference at MCW this past fall.

Biological Sciences Greenhouse

Fall was an exciting time at the Biological Sciences Greenhouse. Over 950 students from Biological Sciences, Geography, Art, and Film attended an instructional lab in the greenhouse. We also hosted two workshops for the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute at UWM, and we participated in the UWM's Panther Family Weekend and the city-wide Door's Open Milwaukee Event, giving a glimpse at our unique instructional plant collection and the Department's amazing research capabilities and achievements. The event was extremely well attended, with over 1080 guests attending the 2-day event! Visitors ranged from families with young children to prospective college students, to current students, to UWM graduates and retired employees, our neighbors, retired community members and even people from as far away as Chicago and Minneapolis. We displayed new research posters and links to faculty websites, a mini-movie studio, lots of microscopes and interactive displays for interested folks of all ages. Collectively, UWM Bio Sci students and staff contributed over 70 volunteer hours to help make this event a huge success.







Faculty News

Congratulations to our Faculty in the News!

Dr. Emily Latch was interviewed by the Wisconsin Examiner about biodiversity and endangered species in Wisconsin.

Research on Hawaiian monk seals in the Latch lab was featured in L&S In Focus.

All About Badgers with Prof. Emily Latch on Wisconsin Public Radio's Larry Meiller Show: https://www.wpr.org/shows/larry-meiller-show/embrace-the-winter-by-snowshoeing-all-about-badgers

Profs. John A Berges and Erica B Young have been involved in a major international study that just got some press coverage. The local work took place in Estabrook Park pond. Prof. John Berges and undergraduate Leo Bohlman bury tea bags in sediments of Estabrook Park pond to measure rates of organic matter decomposition. Also acknowledged in the paper are BioSci PhD graduate Lauren Simmons (now on faculty at MIAD), BioSci MS student Allison Driskill, and BioSci undergraduate Leo Bohlman.

Dr. Erica Young's recent paper on prey digestion in carnivorous plants was highlighted in a perspective piece, Share the meat.

Article in L&S IN Focus: UWM Biologist Prof. Erica Young helps identify how sundews collaborate to digest their prey in September 2024.

NPR local station WUWM spoke with Dr. Erica Young about Fall Senescence in trees

Faculty Kudos

Shout out to Prof. Madhu Day who was recognized for his advocacy and support of international students at UWM's Center for International Education's third annual International Advocate Recognition Ceremony!

Prof. Jeff Karron's lab group presented two talks at the national Botanical Soiety of America 2024 Annual Meeting in Grand Rapids, Michigan titled "Slow motion telephoto video: a powerful tool to study floral trait evolution and pollination dynamics" and "Herkogamy and pollination success in a buzz pollinated plant."

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