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UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY · COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES



Department of Biology



Message from the Department Chair

Hello Alumni and Friends,

To say that we are operating in unprecedented times here at UK is an understatement. Many of you are probably aware of the recent move by President Capiluto to remove academic control of curriculum from the faculty and place it with the Board of Trustees. Against this backdrop, our

Department and College continue to deal with limited budgets, leading to challenges in faculty hiring and retention, and with student support in arguably the most important College on campus for undergraduate and graduate training.

Yet, in the face of these hardships and challenges, we continue to persevere as a Department and in our student-focused mission. This year we graduated another 199 Biology majors and another 88 Neuroscience majors. Our graduates leave armed with training and skills from two of the most powerful and effective degree programs on campus for workforce readiness and preparation for subsequent graduate and professional training. Other Colleges on campus try to emulate us, but we are the model. You know this because you were *here* and you know what a UK Biology degree has done for you. Whether you graduated 50 or 5 years ago, this has been the home of dedicated and passionate faculty, specialists in research and teaching, all of whom have worked to create the next generation of Biologists and give them the opportunity to do good for themselves and for the world. Even within the tumult of this University and the world, we will continue to do so.

If this perspective resonates with you, I encourage you to take time to check out this issue of the Biology Newsletter. We have good stories to tell and people to meet. If you're moved by your time here and our continuing mission, you may consider donating to our mission. I assure you that both one-time gifts and recurring support will be put to great use. And if you've got some extra time on your hands, our Alumni Board has a lot of planning underway to mobilize and empower our amazing alumni network to further catalyze the efforts of UK Biology to be the home for life sciences training in Kentucky.

Sincerely,

Dave Weisrock, Ph.D.
Professor and Chair
Department of Biology
University of Kentucky
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Phone 859-257-2249

Madison Lapid



Graduates in Fall 2024!

Lab: Dr. Adam Bachstetter

Have you had any mentors or professors who have significantly impacted you? "I took Dr. Krupa's class as a freshman, and it was really impactful to me because his enthusiasm for the class and excitement for his research perfectly exemplified why I chose to study biology. I love being around other students and professors who share the same excitement and curiosity, and Dr. Krupa's genuine interest and care for the subject mirrored my own."

What could you have benefitted from in the department of biology, that you feel you were missing? "I think I could have benefitted from more mentorship as an underclassman, specifically from older students. It can be difficult to navigate the major as a freshman or sophomore, and I think it would have helped to have advice from an older student. I think a peer mentor program would be really helpful to freshmen starting at UK."

Kailey Cain



Graduates in Spring 2025!

Lab: Dr. Steven Estus

Have you had any mentors or professors who have significantly impacted you? "Dr. Mirabito has been both a mentor and professor to me for the past couple of years. He cares deeply about his students' learning and success and is committed to working with us toward these common goals. Dr. Estus is my research mentor, and he trained and has guided me along my research journey. He has supported me in various programs, taught me a lot about the world of research, and been an amazing mentor."

Describe any highlights or memorable moments here at UK. "A highlight of mine at UK was presenting at the end of my summer with the A.A.R.T.S. program. This program really solidified my enjoyment of research and was another source of community for me; this presentation represented the culmination of my experience."

William aka "Grant" Kelley



Graduated in May 2024!

Lab: Dr. Yosra Helmy

What motivated you to come to UK? "I was motivated to come to the University of Kentucky because Kentucky has always been my home and that's where I wanted to stay. Between UK being one of the top schools in the state, being in the beautiful city of Lexington, and offering incredible opportunities to move into their College of Medicine and subsequently UK Healthcare, my decision was easy."

What are your plans after graduation? Where do you see yourself in 5 years? 10 years? "This fall I will be studying at the University of Kentucky College of Medicine. In 5 years, I hope to have graduated from the college and be beginning my years of residency, and in 10, I hope to have completed my residencies and moving into the next steps of my career."

Undergraduate Spotlights! To read the full interviews, [click here](#).

MULTIPLE BIOLOGY AND NEUROSCIENCE STUDENTS NAMED UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH AMBASSADORS

The Office of Undergraduate Research at the University of Kentucky selected outstanding undergraduates from the College of Arts and Sciences for the Undergraduate Research Ambassador program. Click [here](#) to read more.



The University of Kentucky Lewis Honors College celebrated 304 seniors during its annual Medal Ceremony held on Thursday, May 2, at the Gatton Student Center Grand Ballroom. Click [here](#) to read more and [here](#) for more information on the Diachun Scholar Award.

BIOLOGY AND NEUROSCIENCE STUDENTS INDUCTED IN CHELLGREN CENTER STUDENT FELLOWS PROGRAM

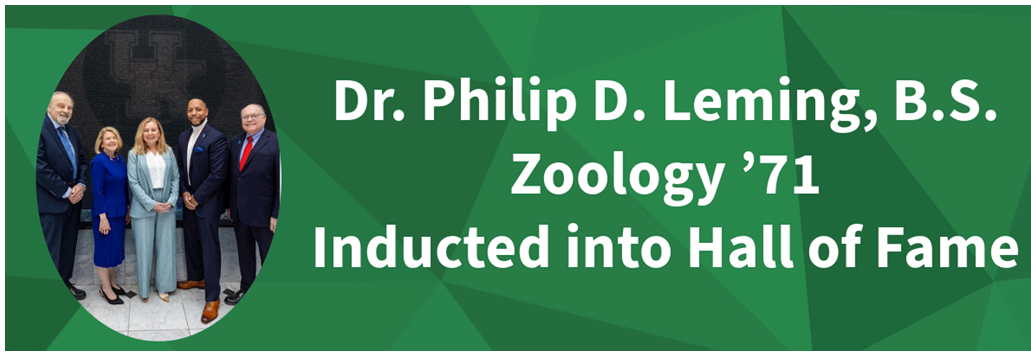
The University of Kentucky Chellgren Center for Undergraduate Excellence announces the 2024 class of Chellgren Student Fellows. Click [here](#) and [here](#) for more information.



The University of Kentucky Gaines Center for the Humanities has announced the selection of 12 outstanding undergraduate students for the Gaines Fellowship Program. Click [here](#) to read more.

Yuanxing Liao	Lab: Dr. Philip Skipwith	Graduates in 2026 with his PhD!
	<p>How do you spend your free time? "I like hiking, playing video games, and reading books."</p> <p>What are your plans after graduating? Where do you see yourself in 5 years? 10 years? "I wish to continue to do research after I graduate, and I wish I could become a professor in the future..."</p> <p>If you could give advice to an undergraduate biology student, what would that be? "Learn as much as you can. Enjoy as much as you can."</p>	
Shea Carr	Lab: Dr. Jennifer Osterhage	Graduated in Spring 2024 with her PhD!
	<p>Do you have any mentors or professors who significantly impacted your life in biology? "Jacquie Burke and Dr. Jennifer Osterhage have both been great supporters for me..."</p> <p>If you could meet one famous person, dead or alive, who would it be and why? "Steve Irwin. I grew up absolutely loving him and I feel like he would be so fun to have a conversation with. The world lost him way too soon!"</p> <p>What are your plans after graduating? Where do you see yourself in 5 years? 10 years? "This summer I plan to take a little time to relax before starting my job as a tenure-track assistant professor of biology at Centre College this fall. Over the next 5-10 years I hope to mentor many undergraduate researchers there, gain tenure, and adopt more dogs :)"</p>	

Graduate Spotlights! To read the full interviews, [click here](#).



The College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Kentucky inducted three alumni and one emeriti faculty into its Hall of Fame on Friday, April 5. Click [here](#) to read more.

<p>Amy Wilson, JD.</p>  <p>B.S. Biology, 1988 Biology Alumni Board Chair</p>	<p>Current position: Executive Director, Intellectual Property Team Lead, Biotechnology Research for Astellas US</p> <p>What are some important skills that have served you well through your career? "Intellectual curiosity, attention to detail and strong work ethic combined with leadership through empathy."</p>	<p>Any overall advice for current students? "Lean into curiosity. Ask thoughtful questions. Take on projects/jobs/roles that are outside of your comfort zone; don't be afraid to stretch. Don't be afraid to pivot to a new job or even a career."</p>
<p>Frank Allara, Ph.D.</p>  <p>B.S., Biology, 1984 Biology Alumni Board Vice-Chair</p>	<p>Current position: Chief Dental Officer for the Defense Health Agency in San Antonio, Texas.</p> <p>Any advice for students who want to work in the same field as you? "Obtain as much experience as possible in your primary field, but take time to study the humanities. Delve deeply into history; learn to speak a foreign language..."</p>	<p>What improvements or changes do you wish to see from the department and why? "I'm excited and eager to assist in establishing this biology alumni association and I encourage all students and alumni alike to actively participate in this endeavor..."</p>
<p>Meredith van der Velden, MD</p>  <p>B.S. Biology, 1998 Biology Alumni Board Secretary</p>	<p>Current position: Attending Pediatric Critical Care Physician at Boston Children's Hospital and Assistant Professor of anaesthesia and Pediatrics at Harvard Medical School</p> <p>Do you have any mentors or professors who significantly impacted your life? How so? "Absolutely. Chuck Staben and Brett Spear remain two of my most important career mentors..."</p>	<p>Describe any highlights or memorable moments here in biology/UK that most influenced you. "As part of the HHMI research program, I was able to present my first research poster as an undergraduate right on the second floor of the T.H. Morgan Biological Sciences Building..."</p>

Alumni Spotlights! To read the full interviews, [click here](#).



Carol Baskin, PhD

Dr. Baskin has been with the department for 55 years!

What's your favorite course to teach and why? "History of plants on earth. I like helping students gain a good appreciation of plants."

What do you consider to be your greatest achievement in your career? "Writing a book: "Seeds. Ecology, biogeography, and evolution of dormancy and germination" Baskin, C. C. and Baskin J.M. 2014. Academic Press/Elsevier"

If you could share one piece of advice with students, what would it be?

"Find a life's work for yourself that you enjoy so much that you forget that it is work."

If you could meet one famous person, dead or alive, who would it be and why?

"Alexander von Humbolt He saw parts of the New World before much of it was destroyed by human activities."

What do you want the public to know about your research?

"There are five kinds of seed dormancy, i.e. different reasons why seeds might not germinate when you plant them. Seed dormancy is broken in response to environmental conditions; thus, some seeds germinate in spring-early summer and other germinate in autumn."

Faculty Spotlight! To read the full interview, [click here](#).

Dr. Baskin was also named one of the top 2% world's most-cited researchers! [Click here](#) to read more.



Smith Lab and International Research Group Piece Together Hagfish Genome and Better Understand the Early Evolution of Vertebrates

Photo by Masakazu Suzuki, Ph.D., Department of Science, Graduate School of Integrated Science and Technology, Shizuoka University, Japan

A study by a group of researchers at the University of Kentucky in collaboration with scientists in four other countries has been published in the prestigious journal Nature. Click [here](#) to read more.

GIVING OPPORTUNITIES

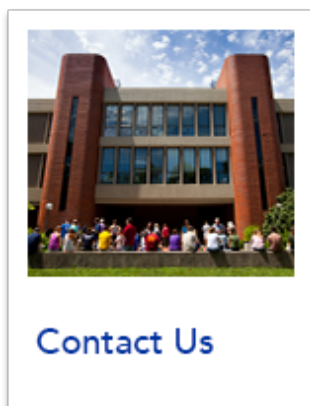
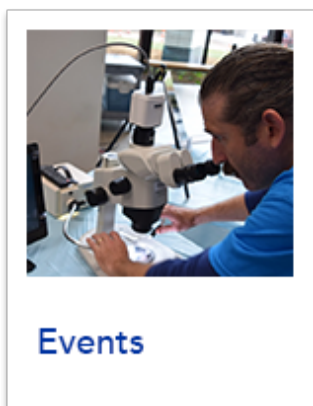
The **Department of Biology** in the College of Arts and Sciences offers students opportunities to engage in the exciting study of how living systems operate and to discover who we are in this vast living world. The study of biology tells us where we came from, and it tells us where we might go as a species. The Department of Biology is the fulcrum for these endeavors at the University of Kentucky and is committed to become an even greater part of the intellectual life of this great university.

Your gift to the **Biology Development Fund** will provide critical resources to respond to student needs, attract world-class faculty, and provide innovative opportunities to enable our students to compete in the global marketplace.

A gift to other funds that support the department can be made online at www.as.uky.edu/givetoas. By mail, please send to:

UK Philanthropy
P.O. Box 23552
Lexington, KY 40523

For assistance, please contact **Debra Gold** at **859-257-8124** or debra.gold@uky.edu.



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