Hi everyone, and welcome to our live Biology Department chat with faculty and students! My name is Derek, and I'm an Admission Officer here at Whitman. In a few minutes we'll get started with introductions and Q&A. This chat will go from 2 pm to 3 pm.

Without further ado, let me introduce our faculty - Tim Parker, Associate Professor of Biology; Kate Jackson, Associate Professor of Biology; and Ginger Withers, Dr. Robert F. Welty Associate Professor of Biology, as well as some students affiliated with the department - Melia Matthews '20 and Austin Chiles '22.

Hi all! I am Melia Matthews, a senior Biology major and Classics minor. I have done research with two different Whitman professors, one on plant genetics and the other on mitochondrial physiology. I did a number of study abroad programs.

I have been a professor in the Biology Department since 2007. I teach courses in general zoology, vertebrate anatomy, and herpetology (the study of amphibians and reptiles). My research program focuses on snakes, especially African snakes and venomous snakes.

Hello! My name is Austin Chiles. I am a sophomore Biochemistry, Biophysics, and Molecular Biology (BBMB) major, and am also on the Pre-Health track. I have taken several introductory biology and chemistry courses.

Hi! Ginger here. I’m a neuroscientist. I teach in the first course in the Biology and BBMB sequence, Biological Principles (Bio111). I also teach upper level classes in neurobiology and developmental biology. My webpage is really out of date, but still tells you a little about my research interests. I study how conditions of the environment influence brain development.

I’m Tim Parker. I’ve been at Whitman since 2006. I’m the current chair of the Biology Department and I teach Ecology and related labs. My research with students involves exploring the effects of climate on changes in plant communities at Whitman.

Hello. I’ve heard from some students that it may be difficult for Biology and BBMB majors to register for the classes they need and be able to graduate in 4 years. Is this still an issue and, if not, how has Whitman addressed this?

Hi Marina, We pride ourselves in our four-year graduation rate. All bio and bbmb majors graduate in four years unless they have unusual circumstances (for instance, taking a leave of absence). Individual upper level elective classes - the classes students take as juniors or seniors - sometimes fill up before all juniors are able to register. However, most of these classes that fill up are offered every year.

Also, Marina, if intro sections fill and there is a waitlist with enough students waiting to get in, we often open additional sections.

What classes would a freshman Bio major take? Interested in molecular and neuro

Hi Sara, first years start with Gen Chem in the fall, and then typically, in the spring, or the next fall, Biological Principles (Bio111)

Is there a neuro science class?

Hi Sara, in Biology, there are 2 upper level neuro classes, Principles of Neurobiology, which has a cell/molecular focus, and Neurophysiology, which has a systems/organismal focus. Both of those classes have labs.

Hi Sara, I took Neurobiology as a sophomore and really enjoyed it!

Sara, you might also be excited to know that Whitman has recently hired a neuroscientist in the Psych department, so there are additional courses over there in Behavioral Neuroscience.

When do freshman make their schedules-choose classes?

Hi Sara, First year students register for courses during orientation, which is a 5 day program that gears students for life at Whitman. First year students meet with their pre-major advisers during that time as well to help plan for what classes to take.

Melia Matthews, how was the study abroad program? Do you think Whitman adequately prepared you to get the bio-med Ph.D.?

Austin Chiles, how are you enjoying the BBMB major and the pre-health path? What would you say the hardest parts are and the most enjoyable parts?

Hey Emily, I loved all my study abroad programs! Was there one in particular you wanted to hear about? And YES! I had so many opportunities for research that I was very well prepared for my grad school interviews!
Hi Emily! I am really enjoying the BBMB major. The courses are all very interesting, as I am in biochemistry right now. The courses are very rigorous and require a lot of hard work but they pay off and I have learned a lot. As far as pre-health goes, it is really interesting too. The pre-health adviser encourages students to take many classes outside of the sciences to prepare students for an all around experience and preparedness. I am also planning to study abroad next year (if I am still able to). There is a study-abroad program in Copenhagen called DIS-Copenhagen and there is a core course that studies biomedicine.

Emily, awesome! There are lots of different study abroad programs that you can choose from that will get you biology related credit. You can look on the Whitman Off-Campus studies website, it lists the programs, and you can search by major!

Hi, I’m interested in studying something along the lines of environmental science, and I’m really excited to get opportunities to do research in the field. I don’t know what, exactly I want to major in quite yet, but I know I will be taking some biology.

Hi Francis, That’s great that you’re interested in the environment! At Whitman, we have an Environmental Studies (ENVS) combined major. A student combines a major in a discipline (like bio) with the interdisciplinary ENVS major.

What are the main differences between taking the ES-biology route versus the regular biology major?

Hi Charlene, Tim Parker is currently answering another question, but I can give you a little info, and then I’m sure he’ll add more! Bio-ES majors still take most of the Bio requirements, with a minor adjustment or two, e.g. there is a reduced credit requirement. Bio/ES, like all bio majors complete a research based thesis, but typically that focus is tailored to your ES interests.

Hi Charlene, I don’t have a lot to add to Ginger Withers’ answer to your question - Bio-ENVS majors do not need to take genetics lab nor do they need to take a lab in the upper level ‘cell-molecular’ category. Bio-ENVS majors do need to take at least 8 credits in the Biology Department.

Hi Margaret, SEA semester is a study abroad program where you learn how to sail a tall ship. My program was focused on Oceans and Climate, and we sailed from New Zealand to Tahiti. We did oceanography research and learned how to navigate by the stars.

Are there courses offered that would sufficiently prepare me if I am interested in Biotech?

Hi, Marina, we have several faculty with strong interests in research areas that apply to biotech, and they teach courses that help give you that important background. For example Prof. Moss teaches courses in Synthetic Cell Bio, and Genetic Engineering. Our research/thesis requirement is also a good way to gain really valuable experience with those approaches. That can be done here at Whitman, or at another institution during summer!

Marina, I’ve taken both Synthetic Cell Bio and Genetic Engineering, and we got to use a ton of lab equipment and get really familiar with bio lab techniques.

Are there microbiology classes?

Hi Emily, we have a course that focuses on microbiology, and next year, we have a new professor who specializes in the field! Prof. Moussa will bring some exciting microbiology expertise to our program, and will be developing new courses in micro as well!

Hi all, I’ve asked our virtual panelists to share one of their favorite memories in the department or something that they’re looking forward to in the upcoming academic year.

I am looking forward to taking more upper level biology and bbmb courses! I’ve enjoyed the intro courses but I’m really excited to get even more in depth into molecular biology or biophysics this next fall.

One of my favorite memories was the semester when I took Neuro, Genetics, and Orgo 1 at the same time. It was really neat to go from one class to the next, all things I was interested in, and see how they complement each other.

There are so many things I’m really excited for next year! The college has revised the first year sequence to give teams of faculty the opportunity to build collaborative courses, or develop a first year seminar in an area that interests them. I also have to say, with regard to looking forward, my experiences this semester moving to online classes have given me so new ideas for how to do advance video tutorials that will enable class time to spent in deeper analyses, team work, and discussions.
WC: Kate Jackson

Something I like about teaching Whitman Biology students is their wide range of biological interests. Each time I teach my vertebrate anatomy course, I ask students why they are taking the course and get answers ranging from interest in the health professions to any other imaginable path.

Annalie

When might there be an updated course catalog for the 2020-2021 school year, especially given the revision of the first year sequence?

WC: Tim Parker

One thing I’m looking forward to heading to the field this fall with my ecology lab to work on implementing our portion of a global ‘distributed experiment’ in which researchers all over the world implant identical experimental methods to answer questions. I have to agree with Ginger as well that our new first year experience courses are exciting. I won’t get the chance to teach one this year, but in a few years when I do teach one of these first year seminars, I’m eager to design a class in which I can share my research interests.

WC: Austin Chiles ’22

It has been delayed a little bit due to COVID-19, but it should be released in the next couple of weeks given that returning students are registering for classes to take next fall in early May.

Odin

Do a lot of students minor in biology? Is a minor in bio useful?

WC: Ginger Withers

Hi Odin, some biology pairs really nicely with many other majors. I wonder what your interests are, and how you envision a minor fitting with potential majors?

Odin

I’m really interested in Psychology, but that isn't 100% set in stone. Bio has always been really interesting to me, so I’d just like to have an excuse to take a few classes.

WC: Austin Chiles ’22

Hi Odin, due to the flexibility of the curriculum at Whitman, if students come into college planning on majoring in bio, but then switch to a different discipline because they found that they enjoyed it more, they totally can.

WC: Melia Matthews ’20

I don't know precisely how many students minor in Bio, because we have many students with majors in other areas taking our classes, just for general interest, or because it helps them prepare for future professional programs. Odin, if you pursue psych, your classes in Bio help you understand the basics of pharmacology, the biological underpinnings of mental disorders, and the intersection between genes and behavior!

Charlene

This is more of a general question about majors, but what does the process of declaring a major at Whitman look like? I’m not 100% set on what I want to major in, but I'm interested in bio, so should I take bio classes my first year anyways?

WC: Ginger Withers

Hi Charlene, bio majors sometimes take bio in the spring semester, but it is pretty common for majors to take their first classes in the second year. We think it is a GREAT idea to take a diverse range of classes in your first year or two. That's what the liberal arts curriculum is all about!

WC: Austin Chiles ’22

Hi Charlene, Students meet with their pre-major advisor within the first two years of their time here and by the end of their second year, they should have enough experience in previous courses to decide and eventually declare which major they want to pursue. Right along with what Professor Withers was saying, taking a lot of courses allows your to get a wide range of experience in courses and disciplines that you might not have past knowledge in. Those experiences will foster what you will eventually decide to major in.

WC: Derek Kennedy

Hi all, we are beginning to end our time together - thank you to our panelists, who will be dropping their contact info below.

WC: Melia Matthews ’20

Thank you all for coming and asking questions! If you have any more, feel free to email me at matthem@whitman.edu.

WC: Ginger Withers

If any of you have more questions, feel free to contact us, or any other faculty in the department by email. You can reach me at: withergs@whitman.edu

WC: Tim Parker

Hi all, my email is parkerth@whitman.edu

WC: Austin Chiles ’22

I’m a sophomore student so if you have any questions or concerns about Whitman feel free to email me at chilesac@whitman.edu !