Advice for prospective students
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I am a member of the Biology faculty at Amherst College in Amherst, MA. Amherst is a liberal arts college entirely devoted to outstanding undergraduate education. Like many of my colleagues at Amherst College, however, I maintain an active research program that can benefit from the continuity provided by graduate students. Thus, I am a member of the graduate faculty in the Organismic and Evolutionary Biology (OEB) program at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst (UMass), which is located approximately one mile away.

I am currently engaged in research on a number of questions related to behavioral ecology and physiology of vertebrates, particularly fishes and birds. Students interested in questions related to reproductive biology, sexual selection, social behavior (particularly aggression), and environmental physiology are encouraged to read some of my recent papers and/or visit my web site (www.amherst.edu/~edclotfelter) to learn more about my research. Students interested in conducting graduate research in my laboratory should be aware of several things:

First, the actual application process is conducted through the OEB graduate office. Much of the information you will need is on the OEB web site (http://www.bio.umass.edu/oeb/) or can be obtained from the program manager, Penny Jaques (pjaques@bio.umass.edu). You will need to list one or more prospective advisors on your application, and I ask that you discuss this with me before listing my name. In addition, I will be asked at a later date to write a letter in support of your application. To this end, you will need to supply me with a biographical sketch, resumé or curriculum vitae as well as a description of your research interests and your motivation for pursuing a graduate degree.

Second, at this time (fall 2005) I do not have grant funding to support graduate students as research assistants. Thus, students in my laboratory must support themselves as teaching assistants at UMass during the academic year or through fellowships, such as NSF Predoctoral Fellowships, which (ideally) should be applied for in the fall before matriculating in graduate school. For students working on projects closely allied with my current research interests, I can offer some summer salary, as well as funding for most research expenses, contingent upon students making a sincere effort to acquire some of their own research funding through NSF Doctoral Dissertation Improvement Grants (http://www.nsf.gov/funding/pgm_summ.jsp?pims_id=5234&org=BIO&from=home) or from smaller sources such as Sigma Xi grants-in-aid of research (http://www.sigmaxi.org/programs/giar/index.shtml).

Third, prospective students in my laboratory are advised that they will lead a bit of a double life during their time here in Amherst. Students are first and foremost graduate students at UMass, so it is imperative that they spend a significant amount of time each week engaged in the life of the OEB community. There are weekly seminars, lunch discussion groups, and numerous other opportunities for intellectual exchange and professional growth. Depending on whether the student’s research is lab- or field-based,
however, the student may also spend a significant amount of time in my research laboratory here at Amherst College. There is free bus service that connects Amherst College, UMass and the other members of the Five Colleges (Smith, Mt. Holyoke and Hampshire Colleges).

Finally, because of this spatial separation and because of the significant amount of time I spend with my undergraduate students, prospective students should apply only if they are able to manage their time efficiently and to work well independently. Students with these attributes and a genuine interest for animal behavior will find working in my laboratory to be a very rewarding experience. Thanks for your interest in my research and in the OEB program at the University of Massachusetts.