

American Museum of Natural History

Richard Gilder Graduate School

Ph.D. in Comparative Biology and Graduate Fellowships at Collaborating Institutions

PURPOSE

Ph.D. in Comparative Biology at the Richard Gilder Graduate School (RGGS)

The AMNH RGGS Ph.D. Program in Comparative Biology is training the next generation of biologists through an integrative approach that focuses on the history, evolutionary relationships, and interactions among species, utilizing the Museum's strengths and experience in research and training. The AMNH provides exceptional support facilities for student research, with collections of more than 34 million specimens and artifacts. Training and research opportunities exist across a wide array of disciplines in comparative biology, incorporating research in systematic and evolutionary biology, paleontology, conservation biology, comparative genomics, computational biology, Earth history, anthropology, and biological and cultural diversity. Global fieldwork, with AMNH faculty, student-led, or in partnership with others, provides added exceptional research opportunities. RGGS students may also take advantage of RGGS course cross-enrollment agreements with collaborating universities Columbia and the City University of New York.

Armed with a Gilder School education, graduates will not only understand the history and diversity of life on Earth, but also may contribute to advances in human health, biodiversity conservation, and other related biological research fields.

This is an accelerated program, designed for students to complete their degrees in four years. Students earn a minimum of 62 credits through a combination of coursework, teaching experiences, and individual dissertation research.

AMNH Graduate Fellowships at Collaborating Institutions

The AMNH Graduate Student Fellowship Program is an educational partnership with select universities dedicated to the training of Ph.D. candidates in the scientific disciplines practiced at the Museum. Graduate Student Fellowships are provided to students from a collaborating university which exercises educational jurisdiction over the students and awards the degree. An AMNH Museum curatorial faculty sponsor must serve as a graduate advisor to the student and must hold an adjunct or affiliate faculty appointment- or other affiliation that permits them to serve officially as a graduate advisor- at the student's collaborating university. The student benefits by having access to the staff and facilities of both the enrolling university and the Museum to carry out their training and research program.

The current joint graduate training programs include these five universities:

- **Columbia University**, in the departments of astronomy, earth and environmental sciences (including paleontology and planetary sciences), and ecology, evolutionary, and environmental biology;
- **The Graduate Center of the City University of New York (CUNY)**, in the graduate programs in anthropology, earth and environmental sciences, and biology (ecology, evolutionary biology, and behavior subprogram) (including paleontology in either program);
- **Cornell University**, in entomology;
- **New York University**, in molecular biology; and
- **Stony Brook University**, in astronomy and astrophysics.

INSTRUCTIONS

All materials submitted as part of your application must be your own work. Generative AI is not permitted for preparing any part of the intellectual content of your application submission, although its use is acceptable for proofing grammar, spelling, and formatting.

There are 8 parts to the application process; all are required and must be completed by **11:59pm Eastern Time on December 15, 2026.**

1. Personal Background
2. Academic History
3. Doctoral Programs and Fellowships: Application
4. Doctoral Programs and Fellowships: Documents to Upload [*essays 1 and 2, CV, co-funding statement if applicable, unofficial transcript(s), unofficial English proficiency test score(s), optional supplemental material*)]
5. Three (3) Letters of Recommendation
6. English Proficiency Test (*for non-native English speakers*)
7. Signature
8. Review

\$50 Application Fee [**Required for the Comparative Biology PhD Program Only; waiver available**]

For assistance with the application process, you may contact admissions-rggs@amnh.org

DOCTORAL PROGRAMS AND FELLOWSHIPS APPLICATION

APPLICATION AND DOCUMENTS TO UPLOAD AND MAIL

- Please select **all** program(s) to which you are applying. *If you are applying to the Comparative Biology PhD Program at the Richard Gilder Graduate School (RGGS), please note that there is a \$50 fee (see below for details including waiver if needed). **There is no cost to apply for the RGGS Graduate Fellowship at Collaborating Institutions, but you must also apply for admission to your intended partner institution(s), directly via their own application process.***
- Identify and contact 3 AMNH RGGS Advisors¹

¹ Applicants for an RGGS Graduate Fellowship applying to Columbia E3B should identify one or more potential faculty co-advisors in that Department, in addition to the RGGS faculty listed on your application. See below.

- Provide 3 Letters of Recommendation
- Complete all application questions
- Required Documents to upload
 - Statement of Academic Purpose (2 essays, plus any applicable co-funding statements)
 - Curriculum Vitae
 - Supplemental Material (optional)
- Documents to mail [must be mailed, emailed, or sent electronically directly to RGGGS by the school or testing company]
 - Official Transcripts
 - TOEFL or IELTS (*Required of Non-native English Speakers, taken within the past 2 years*)

RGGGS FACULTY ADVISORS

Applicants to both the RGGGS Comparative Biology PhD program and the Graduate Fellowships program must identify **three RGGGS/AMNH faculty members** who they might like to serve as their primary advisor and/or as future members of their dissertation committee. Applicants are strongly encouraged to contact any potential advisors in advance of submitting this application. Contact information for RGGGS faculty is available on the faculty listing page shown below. Applicants for the Graduate Fellowships at Collaborating Institutions are advised to also check relevant university academic department website(s) to identify which AMNH faculty members hold appointments in our partner institutions.

Criteria for selecting faculty members:

Other than as noted below, potential primary advisors, co-advisors, and committee members must be members of the RGGGS curatorial faculty (professor, associate professor, or assistant professor). At least one curatorial faculty member must be listed.

Please be aware that:

- Faculty listed as “Affiliated Faculty” are eligible to serve as co-advisors or as dissertation committee members, but not as primary advisors.
- Faculty listed as “Adjunct Faculty” are eligible to serve as dissertation committee members, but no more than one should be listed as a potential advisor.

Use our faculty listing at: <https://www.amnh.org/research/richard-gilder-graduate-school/faculty>; contact info-rggs@amnh.org if you have any questions.

SELECTION OF POTENTIAL ADVISORS FOR THE RGGGS GRADUATE FELLOWSHIPS PROGRAM FOR APPLICANTS APPLYING TO COLUMBIA E3B

Students applying for the RGGGS Graduate Fellowship program and applying to the Columbia Department of Ecology, Evolution and Environmental Biology (E3B) should ALSO contact a potential faculty co-mentor in that Department, in advance of applying, with the goal of identifying potential Columbia E3B and AMNH-RGGGS co-advisors. Details on the application process for Columbia admissions are

available [here](#) and their faculty listing is [here](#).

STATEMENT OF ACADEMIC PURPOSE - two essays

All documents should be submitted in PDF or word processing format. Other options—not preferred unless necessary to preserve information or functionality—include presentations (.ppt, .pptx, and .wdp) and image formats (bmp, .gif, .jpg, .jpeg, .png, .tif, and .tiff)

Formatting Specifications for Essays

- **Font:** A font size of 12 points is strongly preferred. A smaller font size of 10 points may be used for mathematical formulas or equations, figures, table or diagram captions and when using a Symbol font to insert Greek letters or special characters as long as all of the information is readable. Use single line spacing for the narrative text.
- **Margins:** Margins, in all directions, must be at least an inch.
- **Columns:** Use only a standard, single-column format for the text.
- **References:** When references are cited, reference information is required. Each reference must include the names of all authors (in the same sequence in which they appear in the publication), the article and journal title, book title, volume number, page numbers, and year of publication. If the document is available electronically, the website address should be included.

Academic Purpose Statement, Essay 1: Past research experience (length of up to 550 words, not including references or bibliography). Be sure to label this statement "Past Research Experience."

- In addition to other details in this statement, because scientific research increasingly relies on quantitative and computational analysis, please also explicitly describe your quantitative, statistical, and/or computational background and proficiency (e.g., coursework, workshops, coding/programming, use in projects or research, and/or other relevant exposure or experience).

Academic Purpose Statement, Essay 2: Proposed research interests. On a separate page from Essay 1, describe your proposed Ph.D. research interests (length of up to 500 words, not including references or bibliography). Be sure to label this statement "Proposed Research Interests."

For Graduate Fellowship applicants only: Co-funding short statement. If your proposed research is related to the mission of one of the following special funds, you are required to include a short statement (on a separate page), clearly labeled with the name of the fund for which your academic interests might be appropriate (up to 125 words). Include this additional statement with your Essays 1 and 2.

- **Theodore Roosevelt Memorial Fund:** For research related to any phase of wildlife conservation or related fields of North American fauna - terrestrial and freshwater (rivers, lakes, streams), extant or fossil. North America refers to the entire continental mainland and related islands, from the Arctic Ocean through the

Isthmus of Panama, including the Caribbean Islands.

- *Lerner-Gray Fund for Marine Research*: *For research related to Marine Biology/Zoology, such as systematics, evolution, ecology, zoology or paleontology of marine life and environments.*

SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL (Optional)

- You may submit any kind of additional document that you think will support your application (e.g., publications)
- You may *not* submit a 4th letter of recommendation
- There is a limit of 2 additional documents *maximum*
- *You may have to press "continue" after uploading the first item, in order to get a new prompt to upload additional material*

TRANSCRIPTS

We must receive an **official transcript directly from your school**; either a paper or certified e-transcript sent directly from the school is acceptable. However, to expedite review of your file, applicants are strongly encouraged to upload a scan of their unofficial transcript(s) with their application.

- The applicant must request an official transcript from the registrar at every undergraduate and graduate institution attended.
- Transcript request forms can be obtained from each institution's registrar.
- Official transcripts should be submitted directly by the school to the Richard Gilder Graduate School, at the address or email provided below.
- International applicants must request that registrars send original documents for all postsecondary studies.
- International documents that are not in English must be accompanied by certified English translations.

Send paper transcripts to:

Office of Admissions - Transcripts
The Richard Gilder Graduate School
American Museum of Natural History
200 Central Park West
New York, NY 10024

Certified e-transcripts can be emailed to: administrativeassistant-rggs@amnh.org

TOEFL or IELTS (Required of Non-native English Speakers only, taken within the past 2 years)

Please use CEEB code 2471 to send test scores to RGGS

TOEFL or IELTS (Academic Exam) scores are required for non-native English speakers *unless* they have earned a graduate or undergraduate degree in a program using English as its official language of instruction. TOEFL or IELTS tests must have been taken within the past 2 years.

We must receive the official scoring report directly from ETS or IELTS; however, applicants are strongly encouraged to upload a scan of their unofficial report with their application.

Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)

- Minimum Scores for Admission:
 - PBT: 600 or higher, typically with 60 or greater on each subsection
 - iBT: 100 or higher, typically with 25 or greater on each subsection
 - Taken within the past 2 years
 - Computer-based scores are no longer valid.
 - For additional information, call 1-800-GO-TOEFL or visit the ETS website at <http://www.toefl.org> or <http://www.ets.org>.

International English Language Testing System (IELTS)

- Minimum Score for Admission: 7.0
- Taken within the past 2 years
- IELTS exam administered by <http://www.ielts.org/>

For the Comparative Biology PhD program, RGGS will only consider applicants who achieve the minimum stated required score on the IELTS or TOEFL exams. However, *students applying for partner institution Graduate Fellowships should comply with the score minimums set by the partner institution* where they hope to enroll. Test score minimums may differ at each institution. You can retake the exam and submit a new score if it will be received by us by December 31.

NOTICE REGARDING THE GRE EXAMINATION AND SCORES

RGGS has eliminated the GRE test requirement for Comparative Biology PhD admissions and partner university Graduate Fellowships. GRE test scores will not be accepted or considered in the RGGS application review processes.

[Partner university Graduate Fellowship applicants: each partner university PhD program will have its own testing requirements and may or may not require GRE scores for their applications. Be sure to check and comply with their admissions requirements in your application(s) to the partner universities.]

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION (3)

Three (3) required letters of recommendation must come from three professors or other qualified evaluators (not including RGGS faculty members) who can appraise your **academic achievement and promise***.

You must enter the names of your three recommenders in the **Letters of Recommendation Section**. Please choose recommenders who can meet the deadline; if you need to make a substitution later, send an email alerting us to the change at admissions-rggs@amnh.org.

It is the applicant's responsibility to follow up with their recommenders to ensure all letters are submitted by the deadline

*If it is impossible for a third recommender from outside the RGGGS Faculty to submit a letter of recommendation on your behalf, you may have an RGGGS Faculty Member do so.

APPLICATION FEE FOR THE RGGGS COMPARATIVE BIOLOGY PROGRAM ONLY

There is a non-refundable application fee of \$50 if you are applying to the RGGGS Comparative Biology Ph.D. Program. You must pay this fee before your application will be processed. Specific directions will be provided when you reach the end of the application and are ready to submit.

*Note: Our application fee should not discourage any student from applying to RGGGS. If you feel the application fee will represent a substantial financial burden, please request a waiver by email to: directorofadministration-rggs@amnh.org as soon as possible. **If you request a waiver, you will not be able to submit your application online until after it is approved.***

REMINDERS TO ENSURE COMPLETION

Be sure you:

- Fill out all required fields, and any relevant non-required fields
- Contact and list 3 RGGGS faculty advisors
- Submit your Statement of Academic Purpose (2 essays)
- Submit an additional statement of co-funding (Graduate Fellowship Applicants)
- Submit your CV
- Request that your official transcripts to be sent to RGGGS
- Fill out the recommendation section with **3** recommenders
- Non-native English speakers: Request that your official TOEFL or IELTS scores be sent to RGGGS; use CEEB code 2471
- Pay the \$50 fee (or request waiver) *if applying for the Comparative Biology PhD Program*