

FOREWORD

This document was put together by a team of graduate students, self-directed and self-organized, that recognize the inequity surrounding the application system currently in place for our department. We would like to acknowledge the Biology Department's International Student Handbook, another resource compiled by students for students, as the basis for much of the information we present here. We would also like to thank the numerous other graduate students outside of our group that provided us with feedback and resources for this document. We identified a lack of written documentation on the basics of graduate life in our department; this lack of transparency creates advantage for those already steeped in academic culture. Therefore, this document was created to provide students interested in our program with a baseline of resources, and in doing so lighten the already burdensome load that we all take on when bidding to join a graduate program. Many of us were burdened by necessities of academics, health, and personal life; by obligations to clubs, organizations, and other social groups; and by anxieties and stresses as varied as our identities during the time in which we worked on this document. Much of the information contained in this document has been sourced from graduate students who had to figure things out on their own in times of hardship. Our hope is that by compiling these resources we can alleviate or even prevent some future hardships. This is why we carved time out of our busy schedules - not because we had to, but because we recognized that the communication of crucial resources to new students is lacking. Throughout this process we were able to count on each other, and if you join our program we hope to extend that same sense of community and reliability to you when difficult obstacles arise. All we ask is that you pass it on, and try to create equity in your own spaces.

The UF Bio Grad Student A4BL 2021 TeamT

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GLOSSARY

<i>Full Term</i>	<i>Abbreviation</i>	<i>Definition</i>
<i>Principal Investigator</i>	PI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can refer to the lead on a large grant or to the leader(s) of your lab.
<i>Teaching Assistantship</i>	TA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The department pays you to assist in teaching a course that they offer.
<i>Research Assistantship</i>	RA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A researcher pays you to work on a project that they have gotten funded, usually not directly related to your dissertation.
<i>Post-doctoral researcher</i>	Postdoc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A researcher who has finished their PhD and is now working on a research project, either of their own conception and funding or as part of a project funded by the lab PI.
<i>Full Time Equivalent</i>	FTE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How many hours per week you are paid to work. The value is given in fractions of a 40-hour work week, so 0.5 FTE is equivalent to being paid to work 20 hours per week, and 0.25 FTE is equivalent to being paid to work 10 hours per week.
<i>Stipend</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The money you are paid as an employee of the University. Goes towards your living expenses, such as rent and food.
<i>Social Security Number</i>	SSN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The number assigned to you by the US government. It is used to track payments from your job, taxes, and other financial information. Be careful about who you reveal this to.
<i>Curriculum Vitae</i>	CV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A document which summarizes one's academic accomplishments. This is similar to a resumé, but is generally longer and focuses on topics and metrics important to academia, such as publications, grants, and presentations. Example from UIUC here.

PAY AND FINANCES

THE BASICS:

There are three main money pools you'll have to worry about as a graduate student:

- **Tuition and Fees:** Tuition is the cost charged to you by the University of Florida as a student taking course credit. Even if you are not taking any classes for the semester, you will be required to sign up for course credit in research to remain enrolled as a full-time graduate student. Tuition is waived by the Biology Department for all graduate students, meaning that you will not have to pay for it. However, the University also charges student fees every semester, which are not waived by the Biology Department. The cost of these fees varies depending on what the graduate student union, Graduate Assistants United (GAU), is able to bargain for the year (they've won reductions as compared to fees in the past). Student fees were about \$700 in the fall and spring semester for graduate students with 9 credit hours and about \$500 in the summer for graduate students with 6 credit hours according to GAU's last fee relief update. Student fees are usually due in the middle of the semester, so it's best to set aside a bit of money from each paycheck to pay for them.

See the Campus & Community Resources section for more information on GAU!

- **Stipend:** Your stipend is the money paid to you as an employee of the University of Florida, meant to go towards your living expenses. The value of your stipend will depend on whether you are on a fellowship and your FTE for the semester, which will be listed in the letter of appointment you receive every semester from the department. You will need to pay taxes on this money as income regardless of whether you are domestic or international.
- **Research Funding:** Research funding is the money you use to pay for the research costs of your dissertation work, such as equipment, lab reagents, travel expenses, and DNA sequencing. Funding usually comes from grants or PI support. In ideal circumstances, you should not have to pay for any part of your research project costs from your personal finances (including your stipend). However, in practice, you may be asked to pay for things like airplane tickets to conferences or field sites with your personal funds, which makes applying for grants very important. You should check with your PI on this topic, because every lab is different with regards to expectations and the lab funds available.

Different monetary awards that you are eligible for as a graduate student go towards different pools of money. For instance, fellowships may provide you with a tuition waiver and stipend money. Some will also include funds that you can use towards research. However, other awards, such as society grants, can only be used towards research funds and not towards daily living expenses.

WAGES

The stipend for both TAs and RAs starts at \$21,000 per 9 month appointment (fall and spring semester), though if you are supported by a fellowship, it may pay a different amount. Stipend support is guaranteed to you by the department for 4 to 6 years for PhD students and 1 to 2 years for Master's students. The letter of acceptance that you receive from the department should specify what your exact funding duration will be. If your pay is coming from a TA, you will be expected to teach a course. If your pay is coming from an RA, you will be expected to perform a research task for a grant project (usually unrelated to your dissertation). In either case, the amount of hours you work per week (and your pay) is determined by your FTE for the position. During fall and spring, your FTE will almost always be 0.5, which translates to 20 hours of work per week .

- **Important stipend information for international students!** 0.5 is the maximum FTE which international students can work during *the fall and spring semesters*, and you will not be permitted to take a job by any employer outside UF.
- **In addition**, you will need to be assigned a US social security number (SSN) before you can be paid for the first time by the university. *This usually means that there is a 2 month delay in pay to international students while the paperwork for getting your social security number is processed.* You will be paid all at once for every paycheck you are owed once the paperwork goes through. The Biology International Students Handbook advises that international students arrive with 3 to 4 months of funds, as getting an apartment, utilities, and internet service will all require money deposits. Please refer to the packet for more advice and talk to your PI if you have any concerns about the financial burdens of moving.

Please plan accordingly for these limitations!

UF's Graduate Student Union (Graduate Assistants United) Our union at UF, *Graduate Assistants United (GAU)*, is one of our main advocacy organizations as employees of the university. GAU bargains on behalf of the graduate students for *various issues such as stipend increases, student fee reductions, and healthcare benefits* with the university.

Membership dues for the union are 1% of the graduate stipend, automatically subtracted from your paycheck if you sign up. While you receive these benefits whether you are a part of the union or not, only members of the union are able to file grievances with the university through the GAU and receive organizational support for any grievances. Membership is very important to the union as every member who joins increases the collective bargaining power of the union to better graduate living conditions.

Summer Funding

- As you may have noticed, summer funding is not necessarily guaranteed under the standard appointment. Students can request TA support during the summer and the department will do its best to accommodate everyone's needs. Students may also be appointed as RAs during the summer by their PIs, if grant funding is available. It's important to coordinate with both your PI and the Graduate Administrative Assistant, Susan Spaulding, so that you have your financial needs covered for the summer .
- TA appointments during the summer are not always 0.5 FTE. They range from 0.25 to 0.5 FTE, but the FTE you request may not be the FTE that you are assigned, depending on how many students need summer support. What this means is that you may be working less or more hours per week than you expected, with a concomitant adjustment to pay. You can contact the department to request a higher FTE if you are assigned one that is too low. If you teach during summer for multiple years, your FTE from the previous summer will usually be carried over .

- There are also reasons for not requesting funding during the summer. For instance, if your project requires that you do summer fieldwork, you may be busy during the period you would be expected to teach. Summer is also a good time to visit other labs and do other parts of your dissertation project that would not be possible while you also need to teach or do grant work.

Extending Your Funding

- If earning your degree ends up requiring more time than what is guaranteed by your original letter of appointment, you have a few options. You can usually request a TAship on a per-semester basis from the department. You can also get RA support from your PI or apply for external fellowships that cover stipend.

HOW TO TALK TO YOUR PI ABOUT MONEY

While it can feel wrong to talk to your prospective PI about the financial side of graduate school, it is important to establish, for your own plans and well-being, what to expect from UF and your PI while you are pursuing your degree so that you can make informed decisions. If your position makes it difficult for you to ask these questions to your prospective PI directly, you can also ask the other members of your lab, such as postdocs and graduate students. However, we encourage having open conversations with your PI (if you feel able to do so) about graduate finance topics as you progress through your degree. Clear communication between you, your PI, the department on your financial needs may prevent unexpected fees, mis-appointments, or a lack of financial support when you need it. Below we've compiled some questions you may want to consider asking a potential PI as you are going through the graduate admissions process.

SOME OTHER GRAD SCHOOL FINANCE RESOURCES:

Note: Each graduate program is a little different, so some tips from these resources may or may not apply to you depending on your situation. As usual, we encourage trying to get information from PIs and labmates so you can make an informed decision.

- **Article:** *How to Become a Scientist While Poor* by Christine Liu
- **Video:** *On PhD Funding, Student Fees, Finances in a PhD Program* by The African PhD
- **Website:** *Personal Finances for PhDs* by Emily Roberts
- **Video:** *How to Pay for Grad School Without Financial Support* by Brisa Marie

QUESTIONS YOU CAN ASK:

About Your Stipend Funding Source

- *Should I expect to be assigned a TAship or an RAship when I arrive at UF? (It's likely that only the PI will be able to answer this since it varies by lab and year.)*
- *How often do students in the lab get RAs? How do you determine who gets an RA in the lab?*
- *What happens if I need to extend my time beyond the period of funding guaranteed by the department? Do students in the lab who need to extend their funding beyond the 4 to 6 years usually receive that extension?*
- *Are students in the lab usually successful at getting summer funding? What happens if they don't get the FTE that they need?*

About Funding for Research

- *Are students in the lab expected to fund their dissertation projects through grants? To what degree? What happens if they don't get the grant funding they need to finish dissertation work?*
- *What kinds of grants do students in the lab usually apply for? Do you have any suggestions for grants or opportunities I should be thinking about as I go into my first semester of graduate school?*
- *Do lab members pay for their own conference admission or travel to the conference? What do lab members usually do to travel to conferences (carpool, fly, etc.) Are graduate students expected to pay for their own dissertation-related travel?*
- *Who pays the fees for journal publications?*

GRANTS AND FELLOWSHIPS

GRANT-FINDING SERVICES

Types of Awards

- Finding financial support is an important part of the graduate student experience in this department and helps students build their CVs. Financial support from grants, awards, and fellowships usually apply to one of the pools of money discussed in the previous section. For instance, opportunities labeled as *fellowships* often provide money which can be used towards your stipend, though some also provide money to be used towards research as well. The awards for different pools of money are discussed below in more detail.

Tuition and Fees

- Since tuition is usually waived by the department, in general you will not have to apply for awards to cover it. There may be awards or financial aid options which help pay for student fees, but we're not familiar with them.

Stipend

- Your stipend is guaranteed by the department through TA and RA positions, but there are a few advantages to getting a fellowship to cover it instead. Fellowships convey prestige on a CV. Because they cover your stipend without requiring that you do work as a TA or RA, you have more time to focus on your dissertation research. Some pay more per year than the department stipend or come with opportunities to travel. In certain circumstances, you may be able to delay your department-guaranteed funding until after the fellowship is over or use the fellowship once your department-guaranteed funding is over to extend the amount of time you are financially supported while finishing your degree, though this requires coordination between you, your PI, and the department administration. Fellowships are variable in how much they pay and the duration, but typically they last for 1 to 4 years .

Research Funds

- The majority of awards will give you money for research purposes. Usually these awards are marked as grants, though fellowships and other types of awards may also give research money. Many grants are offered by professional societies; you will need to be a member of the society to apply to these grants, so it may be helpful to ask your PI if they have gift membership options or if students have their memberships paid for within the lab. Grants vary in amount, but usually pay between \$300 and \$5000. Some also come with a time limit on when you can spend the money you receive .
- The degree to which you are expected to support your own work through *grants* varies greatly from lab to lab, depending on the culture. In some labs, students work on projects that are offshoots of their PI's main grant work, so they are mostly funded by their PI's grant money. In others, students are expected to develop an independent project that has nothing to do with their PI's work, in which case they may or may not be able to rely on their PI's grant support. Therefore, it is important to have a conversation with your PI early about their expectations for you with respect to grant writing. Will you be able to rely on your PI's grant money to fund your project? Will you be expected to fund a certain amount of your project with just the grants that you win? Refer to the previous section, *How to Talk to Your PI About Money*, for a few more questions to consider .

APPLYING FOR AWARDS

About Timing...

Please keep in mind that there are only a small subset of grants that you will need to worry about applying to before you officially start your graduate program. The information in this section is presented to demystify the process, but most of this knowledge will be useful to you after you have arrived on campus and had time to confer with your lab members about this topic as well.

- **Before your program:** You will mostly need to think about applying to *fellowships* before your program starts, as these offer stipend support or a time-sensitive experience. Two examples are the [UF Board of Education Fellowship](#) (due in mid-April) and the [McKnight Fellowship](#) (due in January).
- **During your program:** This is when you will apply to the majority of awards, including research grants and the [NSF GRFP](#). (It is possible to apply to the GRFP before your program officially begins, but because it is a high-stakes grant and you can only apply once, students are generally encouraged to develop a proposal for it with their PI during their program. If you are already applying before your program starts, we assume that you know what you're doing and don't need advice on this.)

FINDING AWARDS

Ask Your Colleagues

The easiest way to find awards that may pertain to your research is to ask your lab what they have applied to in the past. Labmates at all career levels will likely have useful information for you to start compiling a list and helpful tips for applying. Also, many graduate students and postdocs will be happy to share their previous applications with you as examples or give you feedback on your own application materials.

UF Awards

The UF Department of Biology offers [a lot of different awards](#) to its students through charitable award funds. Since the pool of competition for these is usually fellow UF Biology students, they are comparatively accessible. Different awards have different eligibilities based on your year and study system. If your PI is also a member of the [Florida Museum](#) or [Biodiversity Institute](#), or if you are a part of the [Genetics Institute program](#), you may be eligible for awards through those groups as well. UF has many awards at the college and university level as well which you will be eligible for; sometimes these opportunities are forwarded to us by email, but sometimes you will have to spend time searching for them yourself.

The Application Process

Most awards require that you submit a statement explaining the project you intend to do and giving a budget of what you need the money for. Fellowships may also require personal statements about your career goals or activity and involvement outside academia. If this is starting to sound overwhelming, there are a few things to keep in mind. First, it is expected that new graduate students will take some time to settle into the new rhythm of graduate life and develop a concept for their dissertation project, so most students will not be expected to be writing and winning grants right when they get on campus. That said, your PI may encourage you to apply before you feel completely ready; at the least, you will gain experience in writing grants and you'll get helpful feedback even if you don't win an award right away. Second, there are different awards offered at different stages of graduate school and beyond. In many cases, you will be competing with other students at a similar stage of project development for an award.

Award Application Rules

There are department and university rules for applying to awards, with different paperwork depending on the amount of money given by the award. For instance, grants of a certain amount must be submitted to the [CLAS Research Office \(RO\)](#) first for approval before you can submit them to the awarding institution, and they ask that you send grants to them for approval at least two weeks in advance. Ask your PI and other graduate students what their usual process is for applying to grants so that you are not surprised by a deadline!

NOTE: [The UF Board of Education Summer Fellowship Program](#) is open to incoming PhD students and its deadline for application is April 18th, 2022, so get ready to apply as soon as possible if you are interested! This award is a good way for underrepresented students to network and get to know campus early. You can find information on this and other fellowships for incoming students at the [UF Graduate School website](#).

Outside Awards

There are a few big awards, such as the [NSF GRFP](#) which are recommended to nearly every graduate student who is a US Citizen, but outside of these big awards, it can get very overwhelming sifting through all of the different awards available. You could start with a database; [UF recommends Pivot](#), which is free and aimed towards researchers. You can find a tutorial for using Pivot [here](#). Other databases with free trials are [Grantwatch](#) and [GrantSelect](#). Another way to narrow your search is to look at awards offered by professional societies, such as the [Society of Integrative and Comparative Biology](#), the [Ecological Society of America](#), the [Botanical Society of America](#), etc. Your labmates will usually be able to suggest where to look for these. However, most society grants require that you are a member (which requires paying a fee) to apply.

HEALTHCARE

THE BASICS

- Most UF graduate students on GA, TA, or RA appointments participate in **GatorGradCare**, UF's Graduate Student health insurance program through Blue Cross Blue Shield. A broad overview of the insurance plan is summarized in [this document](#).
 - **Overview of deductibles and out-of-pocket maximums (for use in comparing insurance plans) can be found in this document.**
 - **Video About GatorGradCare**
- By signing up for GatorGradCare, students have access to the services listed below through the Student Health Care Center (SHCC). The SHCC is classified as a Tier 1 facility and thus it is usually the lowest-cost option for grad students. SHCC has two different locations on campus; one where you can access dental services (see below for more information on dental services) and another (Infirmary) where you can access all the other services offered. It is important to keep in mind that if you need to see a specialist you will be referred by one of the Primary Care or Women's Health providers.

"I have recently been referred to a dermatologist and the first available appointment is four months away!"

"If on certain RA's/ fellowships the university will not enroll you under the grad student health insurance plan, but a modified bare bones plan usually for severance packages. Additionally, your student and insurance fees will increase dramatically."

• **Scheduling an appointment with a specialist, even with a referral, can take much longer than expected, so be mindful of other options as well**

- **Dentistry**
- **Primary Care**
- **Women's Health**
- **Pharmacy**
- **Telehealth**
- **Flu shots**

• Communication with UFHealth is very easy and straightforward because of the app 'MyChart'. It enables you to message providers without having to wait in line (as often happens when making inquiries via phone). This means you can use it to schedule appointments, pay for services, see test results, ask follow-up questions after appointments, and view medication and appointment summaries. It is very convenient and easy to use.

GATORGRADCARE FAQS

What does out-of-network, or out-of-town healthcare look like with GatorGradCare?

The **Tier 1 options** are usually the lowest-cost options for grad students under GatorGradCare and can be found at:

- Student Health Care Center
- UF Health providers and hospitals
- Some community providers practices in Gainesville and Jacksonville

The **Tier 2 options**, known as Blue options, are the next lowest cost for grad students under GatorGradCare and will provide coverage but likely cost more money to receive services than Tier1 options. Blue options are offered by:

- Providers include that participate in the Florida Blue, BlueOptions Network

Tier 3 options are known as out-of-network, meaning they are likely the most expensive options because they are not covered by GatorGradCare insurance. This means most services will probably have to be paid for completely out-of-pocket, with a few exception, such as:

- Emergency room services in the event of an emergency. However, these services are cheaper at Tier 1 or Tier 2 facilities.

Can students add spouses/partners and children to their GatorGradCare plan?

Rates are automatically deducted from the paycheck of graduate students enrolled in GatorGradCare and vary according to the number of dependants added to the insurance:

- Employee only has a **\$12 monthly rate**
- Employee + spouse/partner is a **\$211.75 monthly rate**
- Employee + Child(ren) is a **\$192.70 monthly rate**
- Employee + Family (Spouse/partner + child(ren)) is **\$394.80**

Do we get dental coverage?

Dental Benefits are limited, but graduate students get **two free cleanings** at the UF Faculty Dental Practice per year.

- GatorGradCare ONLY covers these annual cleanings through the **UF Faculty Dental Practice**. However, if you require other, more expensive procedures, the **Student General Dentistry Clinic** provides discounted services, but be wary!
- Any services sought outside of the Faculty Dental Practice will not be covered by GatorGradCare. Furthermore, the Faculty Dental Practice **will not take you as a patient** if you have previously received any services from the Student Clinic. This means you will not be able to receive the free cleanings offered by GatorGradCare after going to the Student Clinic. (Like we said, our dental coverage is limited at best!)

What are the mental health care options?

Talkspace, is an online mental health service, available at no cost to graduate students, their spouses and dependents 18 years old or over. You may text, video and/or voice message using Talkspace, as well as schedule live video sessions with a therapist. Talk space is especially convenient for single-hand use, but it can also be used as an additional resource to face-to-face therapy. You may use your phone, tablet or computer and you can also avoid commuting.

Other mental health resources, such as in-person sessions, are available in the counseling and wellness center (CWC) and through Tier 1 behavioral health providers.

Resources/contact info for more personal questions regarding coverage of specific conditions and medications can be found [via this link](#).

What do I do if I need to go to the ER or get an otherwise unaffordable medical bill?

You can apply for financial assistance

"Many ER bills are high enough/grad student pay is low enough that we qualify for some medical debt forgiveness. I personally did this for a trip to the ER and, despite it being a long process, it made a huge difference!"

[GAU's GatorGradCare FAQ page](#) (which also includes some general info about how medical insurance works in the USA - especially important for International Students!)

TIMELINE

You can enroll in GatorGradCare after arriving at UF in the fall semester. The enrollment has to be completed every year if you decide to keep using GatorGradCare; there is no automatic renewal. Enrolment is entirely conducted online.

HOUSING

SPECIFIC TO GAINESVILLE & MAIN CAMPUS

Please also take a look at the International Student Handbook's section on housing, the housing resources put together by **Claudia Garnica-Díaz** (coming in fall 2022), and the **Whitney Lab's resources** (still in development, contact idea@whitney.ufl.edu for incoming students for more information on this topic.)

Finding Housing in Gainesville

Gainesville is a rapidly growing city, and this fact is reflected in increasing rent prices for apartments and small homes around town. While this may make finding affordable housing difficult, you can greatly increase your chances of finding a nice place by knowing when and where to focus your efforts. On-campus housing is currently quite limited at UF, as older dorms are being renovated and newer dorms are being built, but UF has streamlined the process for applying and securing the spaces that remain. Off-campus housing remains a reasonable option for those willing to make a commute to campus, and

the numerous bike shops and bus routes around town provide alternatives to cars and motorbikes. Being a college town, Gainesville is full of current and past faculty, students, and staff who actually prefer graduate students as tenants, and your departmental community can be an excellent resource for finding accommodations. Whatever form of living you prefer, this section will go over some general tips and resources you can use to find the right living situation for you, as well as some questions you should ask yourself, potential roommates, and landlords.

On-campus or off-campus?

Deciding whether you would prefer to live on-campus vs. off-campus can be difficult, as the two options provide different experiences of the university and the city of Gainesville. If you are planning on staying for a 2-3 year Master's degree, it may make more sense to choose a smaller, more economical dorm or apartment on or close to campus. If you intend on staying for a 5+ year PhD, you may consider choosing semi-permanent accommodations in a larger townhouse or even outright

purchasing a small home and paying a mortgage in lieu of rent! Either way, your first choice of accommodations at UF should not be a stressful experience, as most leases don't last for more than a year and most lease agreements have clauses that allow for early termination, although this may incur a fee (usually equal to rent for one month) for the leasee. The table below should help you weigh the two options against each other and decide which you may prefer.

ON-CAMPUS	OFF-CAMPUS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ \$2,336 per person per semester for a shared room in one of the older buildings to \$4,125 per person per semester for a private suite in the newer buildings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ \$721 per month for 1-person efficiency unit to \$1,700 per month for a 4-person home. One-bedroom apartments average \$1,100 per month.
Pros	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Within walking distance of bus-stops, most academic buildings, classrooms, libraries, gyms, and labs. ▪ Lots of bus routes to different parts of campus and the city. ▪ Priority car and scooter parking is typically available close to on-campus housing complexes via red and brown parking decals. ▪ Some units come pre-furnished and have flexible rent periods. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Potentially more space, including yard space. ▪ Lots of bus routes to campus and other parts of the city. ▪ Can be quieter, depending on where you are living. ▪ Opportunities to interface with the wider Gainesville community.

ON-CAMPUS	OFF-CAMPUS
Cons	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cycling on campus can be dangerous due to tight turns and high traffic during the week. ▪ Dogs and cats are generally prohibited in university housing. ▪ Grocery stores may be too far to walk to, so you'll need to take a car or the bus. ▪ Non-refundable application fee of \$25 dollars and a competitive waiting list for units. ▪ UF is planning to demolish several of the graduate housing units (as of spring 2022), decreasing the supply of available units and further increasing competition. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Car and scooter parking on campus requires a decal (\$160 per year or \$80 per semester), and can be difficult to find depending on the day and time. ▪ Affordable options may be far from campus. ▪ Rental agreements may be restrictive. ▪ Many apartments require that you have a prior credit history and may require that a guarantor with a higher income co-sign with you if your monthly income is not more than three times the monthly rent. ▪ Apartment management may require you to pay up to a month's rent up front when you first move in, as well as a deposit fee that will not be returned until you move out.

Other notes - On-Campus

Popular among graduate students with families.

Other Notes - Off-Campus

Many UF professors and staff own local property that they rent to graduate students for a lower price.

While some property managers can be very helpful, especially if they are a single owner whom you know personally, others can be extremely difficult to deal with, especially if you move into an apartment that needs repairs. Check the reviews online and with friends before you commit, if possible.

FINDING ON-CAMPUS HOUSING

As mentioned earlier, on-campus housing at UF is currently quite limited, and the only two options available to most Biology grad students are the Corry and Diamond Villages, although the latter is typically reserved only for medical students. There are also off-campus dorms that you can apply for through the same process as the on-campus dorms. Therefore, the most important factor you can influence if you are set on living on-campus is to **send your application as early as you can**; it is typically recommended that you send in your housing application **3-4 months BEFORE your anticipated move-in date**. You will most likely be competing with other newly-accepted students for spots, and UF typically sends out offers on the last Friday of February or March (depending on which round of admitted students you fall into), so there is a certain element of chance involved in getting a dorm. However, there are many benefits to on-campus living, and the application process is pretty straightforward. All on-campus graduate housing is managed by the UF Housing Office (info below).

Example of typical on-campus graduate dorm:

[UF Corry Village One Bedroom Renovated Unit Walkthrough](#)

UF Housing Office

1304 DIAMOND RD
GAINESVILLE, FL 32612

Phone: 352-392-2161
Bldg #: 0753

General email:

ContactHousing@ufsa.ufl.edu

Grad Villages email:

villages@ufsa.ufl.edu

GRADUATE HOUSING APPLICATION

Eligibility

- Must be a Graduate, professional or similar student OR must have a spouse and/or dependent children live with you
- Must have a valid Gatorlink Username and Password
- Must use a modern up-to-date browser with javascript capabilities enabled.
- Must have a Visa, MasterCard, or American Express credit card. Should you not have a credit card, you can pay in person at the Main Housing Office located at the corner of Museum Rd and SW 13th Street. You can also mail a check or money order to:
 - DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING & RESIDENCE EDUCATION
PO BOX 112100
GAINESVILLE, FLORIDA 32611
- Must have a valid email address (e.g. Hotmail, Gmail, AOL, Netscape).

Finding Off-Campus Housing

Unlike on-campus housing, off-campus housing is typically available year-round, although affordable options are typically snapped up pretty quickly and there are definite peaks in availability around the time that most leases end (e.g. end of Fall and Spring semesters, end of the year). During these peak times, you are also likely to find other students in the

Steps to apply

- **Step 1:** Look at more info on specific on-campus housing complexes (i.e. Corry and Diamond Villages) at: <https://www.housing.ufl.edu/housing/>
- **Step 2:** To submit on-campus housing application, follow link at: <https://www.housing.ufl.edu/living-options/apply/>
- **Step 3:** Under 'Application' select 'Graduate and Family Housing'
- **Step 4:** Scroll down to 'Graduate & Family Housing Application' and click 'Start Application Process'
- **Step 5:** Enter and/or update your personal information.
- **Step 6:** Make the \$25, non-refundable application fee using the campus online payment system.
- **Step 7:** Submit Application.

department that are either looking for roommates or are moving out of a place themselves and may be able to connect you with their landlord. UF also provides some off-campus dorms which follow the same application process as on-campus dorms (see On-Campus section above), as well as resources for locating non-UF off-campus housing and roommates generally:

Steps to apply

- **Step 1:** Sign in with Gatorlink
- **Step 2:** Click on 'Housing' tab at top of page
- **Step 3:** Use interactive map and search filters to see available housing
- **Step 4:** Once you've found a property you are interested in, call or email them about availability

Roommate Search

- A big help for finding roommates to help with housing costs

Going Through the Department

- Your departmental community can be a huge asset when it comes to finding affordable off-campus housing, as most of your fellow grad students are currently living in places that have reasonable rents for their salaries. Additionally, there are some faculty and staff that own properties around town and specifically rent to graduate students or other academics. Finding housing through your network typically ensures that you will be getting a good rate on rent, and you will likely be renting from a trustworthy landlord. It pays to join departmental listservs or participate in community events or activities, as these are all avenues through which you could meet folks who can help you find housing. Your advisor can also be a major resource, as they will likely already be aware of which folks in the department have properties for rent. A good advisor may also help you with security deposits or co-signing if needed. If nothing else, UF's Roommate Search tool (see above) can be a major help.

Going through local property owners and businesses

- If for any reason going through the department is not fruitful or feasible, there are several powerful tools and resources you can rely on for finding good housing through local property owners and businesses. Facebook pages, Craigslist ads, and rental listings on websites like Trulia or Zillow are all reliable methods for finding available housing. While it may take longer and not provide as much security as going through folks in your department, it doesn't take much effort to search for new listings each day, and most sites have automatic alerts that allow you to receive an email if a property is listed under certain parameters. Below are listed several resources that are worth looking at from time to time as you search.

LINKS

Facebook Pages

- UF Housing & Roommate Search
- Gainesville - Buy, Sell, Trade
- UF Off Campus Housing, Subleases, Roommates, Apartments - Gainesville

Ellie's Houses

- Craigslist
- Trulia
- Zillow

Satellite Campuses

- UF has several satellite campuses that can provide alternatives living situations depending on your particular circumstance or area of research. You can see the [full list here](#). However, for Biology majors the feasible options are going to be those campuses that are typically associated with the life sciences. These campuses are listed to the right.

- Fort Lauderdale Research & Education Center, Davie, FL
- Gulf Coast Research and Education Center, Plant City, FL
- Gulf Coast Research and Education Center, Wimauma, FL
- Indian River Research and Education Center, Fort Pierce, FL
- Mid-Florida Research and Education Center, Apopka, FL
- West Florida Research and Education Center, Milton, FL
- Whitney Laboratory for Marine Bioscience, St. Augustine, FL
- UF Marine Lab at Seahorse Key, Cedar Key, FL

Questions to ask about roommates and housing

- Try to meet roommates before committing to ensure it will be a good fit. Things to ask about your roommate and the property are:

How much is rent and how is it divided? How does the landlord receive payment?

Are utilities included? If not, how much does the cost run and how is it divided?

Is there consistent hot water, water pressure? How about air conditioning and heating?

Do you have any pets and if so, what kind? Are pets allowed? Is there an associated fee depending on species/breed?

Is there a washer/dryer in the unit? If not, where is the nearest laundromat?

Is there recycling? On what days is the trash picked up?

Will the roommates be accommodating of your medical/physical needs? Are they prepared to assist in an emergency?

What are noise levels like in the neighborhood? What are the neighbors like? Are there any restrictions on noise level, guests, outdoor furniture/gardens?

Where are the nearest bus stops, grocery stores, gyms, etc.

What is the landlord like? Do they respond to issues with the home promptly? Do they ever show up unannounced?

What do the roommates do for fun? Is it quieter hobbies like reading and knitting or louder hobbies like playing an instrument or singing? Do you have designated quiet hours?

Do any of the roommates have allergies you need to be aware of? Are any of your allergies likely to be triggered?

FAMILY SUPPORT

Having children is a big decision at any stage of life, but it can be difficult to gauge how well a graduate program can help you support a family. Below you will find resources and advice gathered from UF Biology graduate students who have experienced student parenting firsthand. We hope this information is useful to students who are considering starting a family during their time at UF or already have little ones when they begin their program.

Note that we will be covering two main considerations: finances and time. Obviously there is *so much more* that goes into the decision to start a family (and sometimes there is no decision at all!), but these are two concerns that will be directly affected by your new identity as a grad student.

DISCLAIMER: UF does not provide much support for families and partners of graduate students. This may be especially hard for international students to navigate as they would not be able to qualify for most state and federal aid programs.

CHILDCARE & INSURANCE COSTS

This is a topic that many graduate student parents converged around when asked to offer advice for this handbook. It can be difficult to find affordable childcare on a graduate student stipend. We have outlined this below to give you a sense of the monthly cost for children of different ages. Please see the Resources section below for links & more info.

Carefully consider timing and expenses: *"The financial struggle is probably one of the hardest. Flexibility is nice, but money is always lacking... We took out student loans"*

- **Cost of childcare:** at least \$1000/month for infants (c. 2021); less for older kids
- **Insurance for dependents:** \$400/month (c. 2021); if you don't have a partner with insurance, that comes out of your TA/RA salary.
- **No paid leave for TAs**

Childcare options:

- **Baby Gator:** Families can apply to BabyGator early childhood centers for children 6 weeks to 4 years old.
 - Price & waitlist: Applying costs \$100 and you will likely be placed on a waitlist (especially for older kids).
 - Apply in August if possible. Transitions usually happen in August, making this the best time to apply, especially for older kids.

"Apply when you find out you are pregnant [so you come up on the waitlist by the time you need infant care]."

"you pay \$100 to be on a waitlist ... it took us 3 years to get our older child in and the baby still has no childcare. My best advice is to get on a childcare waitlist as soon as you find out you are pregnant and plan for at least a year of wait in the case of older kids."

Outside UF

There are other options for child care in Gainesville. Check the links listed under Child Care in the Resources section below.

- **Government assistance.** There are several government programs to help secure child care, help afford nutritious food for your kids, and get started with pre-school and other educational tracks. These programs listed in Resources section below, under 'State & Federal Resources'
- Note that international grad students will not be eligible for those programs.

"Since grad students make very little money, there are things like WIC and ELC to help financially."

BALANCING TIME & ENERGY AS A PARENT AND STUDENT

There is no standard or easy way to do this, but there are approaches you can take to get through your graduate program while prioritizing yourself and your family.

- **Be realistic about timing, finances, and your physical & mental health.** Give yourself some grace when it comes to work and productivity. Having children is a LOT of work even when you aren't trying to do research, teach, and write a dissertation on top of it. You will be exhausted and that is okay! If you are feeling overwhelmed or need to talk, please see the mental health resources in the Healthcare section of this handbook
- **Talk to your advisor:** Advisors can be a huge source of support or a source of friction and stress. It's good to have a conversation with your advisor about your plans to start a family to see where they fall. Some questions to consider when having these conversations:
 - Will they be able to provide financial support via an RA position if you fall 'behind schedule' to graduate?
 - Will they have grace and adjust their expectations around your productivity?
 - Does your advisor have children? Sometimes, advisors with kids have a better understanding of the commitments of parenting than those without. They may not fully consider the recovery period for a new mother, for example. Having an honest conversation about this can help them give you what you need.

"Time and energy considerations are different for new moms vs. new dads. New moms must recover physically and can experience complications during or after pregnancy that may affect their ability to stay 'on schedule' for their graduate program"

• **Find community**

It can be difficult raising children in a university environment where most of your peers do not have kids. However, there are many graduate students at UF with kids who face similar challenges.

- **Join student groups.** There are several groups for grad student parents dedicated to forming bonds and sharing resources (linked below).
- **Reach out to faculty.** If you feel uncomfortable having conversations with your advisor about your needs as a new parent, you may consider reaching out to another faculty member who can advocate for you. Having an empathetic committee member or faculty friend in your corner who your advisor sees as a peer can be useful. Don't be afraid to strategize if you need to!

UF RESOURCES

Family Resources site

- Job options for partners
- Graduate work-life balance with children

BabyGator early childhood centers (6wk-4yrs)

Spouse Gator 1 card

A spouse can get an ID that will give access to some things on campus, such as:

- Library access
- Recreational access (for a fee)
- Relationship counseling

Graduate and Family housing

- Provides some group activities for families and children

GAU

- **Graduate Assistants United** is working towards improvements in child care and family leave for graduate students (there is nothing currently in the agreement regarding family and child care but there is a GAU committee)

STATE & FEDERAL RESOURCES

FL Head Start Program

Division of Early Learning

Food Pantry - SNAP/WIC

- **SNAP** is based off of income and number of people in a household
- **WIC is for women, infants and children and provides food cards for local groceries**
- **Fresh Access Bucks allows you to double your SNAP/ EBT balance when you shop at participating farmers markets, mobile markets, produce stands, and community-sponsored agriculture (CSAs).**

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

[Fun4GatorKids.com](#)

This website has tons of links to events, camps, childcare, family resources, healthcare, etc. around Gainesville. Here are some of their resources:

- [Community/Rec Centers](#)
- [Museums and Galleries list](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [Healthcare resources](#): links to specialists, pediatricians, OB/GYN, Special Needs Care, etc.

[Public Library System: 12 locations in Alachua County](#)

[Parks in the Area](#)

- [Interactive Google Map](#)
- [Parks and Playgrounds with Descriptions](#)

CHILD CARE (INFANT TO PRESCHOOL)

On-campus: Families can apply to [BabyGator early childhood centers \(6wk-4yrs\)](#)

Off-campus: Private childcare providers - [Unofficial List](#)

Preschool age (4yrs by Sept1) - state search engine for voluntary pre-kindergarten providers, Alachua County Public School system also has VPK (Voluntary Pre-K) programs

- [State](#)
- [UF VPK](#)
- [Alachua](#)
- [Early Learning Coalition of Alachua County](#) (ELC) for more resources

GROUPS

[PhDMoms](#) - student organization & blog

- **From their website:**

"We all work in different fields and have different daily lives, but what ties us all together is the need to connect with other PhD Moms, just to make our academic stresses a little easier, and share our cheers and challenges."

[Gainesville Moms](#) - local organization (Facebook group)

"Here you can share stories, ask advice, join conversations about parenthood and family life, share great shopping tips, find out what child-related events are happening around town and so much more."

COMMUNITY AND CAMPUS RESOURCES AND GROUPS

Campus

- UF Counseling and Wellness Center (already mentioned above)
- UF Disability Resource Center
- **Student groups**
 - Academic group examples
 - Florida Museum Association
 - Women in Science and Engineering
 - Cultural group examples
 - Black Student Union
 - Black Graduate Student Organization
 - Filipino Student Association
 - UF Cultural Alliance
 - Athletic and special interest group examples
 - Club Tennis
 - UF Data Carpentry, R Ladies
 - Examples of other groups
 - First Generation Organization

Many more academic, athletic, cultural, faith, supportive, and other groups [can be found here](#).

▪ **Organizations**

- UF Black Effort
- [UF Recsports](#)
- [UF Office of Multicultural and Diversity Affairs](#)
- Campus Multi-Faith Cooperative
- [UF Office of Graduate Professional Development](#): Links to resources based on six core skills for succeeding in graduate school and previously recorded seminars

Community and Beyond

- Black in Natural History
- Gainesville Latin Dance and Gator Salsa Club
- Alachua Audubon Society
- [Religion guide](#)
- [Alachua County Community Support Services](#)

▪ **Athletic groups**

- Gainesville Regional Soccer League
- Adult Softball
- Play Tennis Gainesville
- City of Gainesville Youth Athletics
- [List of Family, Religious, Community, and Civic Organizations](#)
- [Gainesville Parks, Recreation, and Cultural Affairs](#)