

VOL. 8 | FALL 2025

BIOLOGY (NUCLEO)TIDINGS

News from the Biology Department at Northeastern Illinois University



Stay in touch! Email us at biology@neiu.edu with news, updates, and stories you'd like to share!



New Academic Offerings

Two new programs, the **Neuroscience Minor** and the **Post-Baccalaureate Certificate in Pre-Health**, support students interested in growing career areas in healthcare and research. Learn more on this page, and reach out to biology@neiu.edu with any questions. I look forward to hearing from you.

-Dr. Jennifer Slate, Biology Department Chair

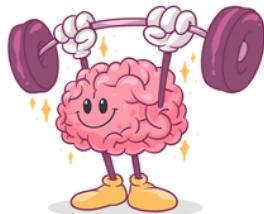
GIVING TUESDAY

We're expanding our scholarship fund for NEIU Biology students. Thanks to the generosity of alumnus Dr. Mickey Drachler, we have a matching gift! Every dollar you give helps us reach our goal of funding more \$1,000 scholarships.

Whether you contribute \$25 or \$1,000, your gift will go twice as far to break barriers by relieving financial pressure for Biology students. Stay tuned for more info, and thank you for considering NEIU Biology students when Giving Tuesday arrives this Dec. 2.

NEUROSCIENCE MINOR

Perfect for those interested in **healthcare, research, or biotechnology!** This interdisciplinary program, a blend of Biology and Psychology, explores the brain, behavior, and health. We're thrilled to welcome the first group of students this fall.



POST-BACCALAUREATE CERTIFICATE IN PRE-HEALTH

Thinking about a career in health but already have a bachelor's degree? This Post-Bacc certificate covers prerequisites for Medicine, Dentistry, Physician Assistant, Physical Therapy, Pharmacy, and more.



At NEIU, get **personalized guidance** from our dedicated Pre-Health Advisor, **small classes** with direct faculty mentorship, and **hands-on lab experience**. Build a network through Pre-Health Events and leadership opportunities, with **free test prep** for the MCAT, DAT, OAT, and GRE. Take the next step toward a rewarding health career.

Undergraduate Student Spotlight



Noelia Contreras is a freshman biology undergraduate. She took NEIU classes as a high schooler at Von Steuben and is now in the CASA success program!

Why did you choose NEIU?

As someone who attended school in Albany Park for a majority of my elementary and high school career, NEIU has been ever-present throughout. From field trips to the campus, to speakers coming to my school, to seeing it everyday on my commute. Even before that it has been a constant presence in my life. My mother, who didn't go to college straight out of high school, attended NEIU when she was pregnant with me. NEIU welcomed her with open arms and was incredibly supportive and accommodating to her circumstances. My sister would then follow in her footsteps and attend NEIU. She absolutely loved the environment and had a wonderful college experience. When it came time for me, NEIU

was among my top choices because of its diversity and familiarity.

What made you choose biology as a major?

Ever since I was a child, I loved anatomy and physiology. I often "read" anatomy books that I couldn't understand, only admire, that planted a seed that would grow for years to come. I took my first Biology class in my freshman year of high school and was immediately overwhelmed. It was hard and unlike anything I thought pertained to the discipline. I found myself studying more outside of class, changing the way I took notes, asking more questions, and pushing myself to be a better student. As much as I had initially disliked the difficulty of the course, it ended up being my favorite class. It was fulfilling and exciting, something I had not truly experienced in my education. It made me want to work harder at it so I would become better. I would then take a Biology class at NEIU in my Junior year which really solidified my decision to major and pursue a career in Biology.

Do you have any advice for other students at your stage of college?

Manage your time! I know this is told to high school seniors all the time and it might be a bit redundant, but it is very true. I have learned in the time that I have been in college that



Alumni Spotlight

Violet Mondragon-Flores is an NEIU Biology alum who is currently getting her second Bachelors in Graphic Design from NEIU.

Why did you choose NEIU? (Twice!)

I came to NEIU first in 2012 for my BA in Biology. I chose NEIU because at the time it was the only school that could accommodate my work schedule, it was affordable, and it was a safe place for undocumented students. I returned to NEIU in 2023 to obtain a BFA in graphic design because the teachers in the Biology department were so amazing and accessible, something that I attribute to NEIU being a smaller state school. I can honestly say that this still holds true in the Art & Design department, our teachers are terrific and are fully invested in their students' success.

What was your favorite class at NEIU?

My favorite class in Biology was Dr. Voisine's Developmental Biology. I found Dr. Voisine's

Undergraduate Spotlight (cont.):

managing your time is imperative for success in all aspects of your life. Take a small portion of your week and plan out how you will spend your time. Of course this might not hold up, things happen and we are human, forgive yourself and move on. But it will most definitely help you feel more organized and in control of your time. Also, treat yourself! You deserve it! Having something to look forward to at the end of the week or even day can make all the difference between burnout and keeping a steady flow.

What is your favorite thing about doing science?

This may sound silly but I think my favorite thing about doing science is using all of the fancy tools. Ever since taking my first biology class at NEIU, I have found myself partial to a P-1000. I find them so fun and satisfying to use. More recently I have been able to get an up close and personal view of the autoclave and it was magical. Once again, pretty silly but true!

What class are you most enjoying this semester?

I am most enjoying my Essential Skills for Biologist class. It is mostly practical lab skills and as mentioned before I really enjoy using lab equipment. Professor Conwell is very patient and does a great job preparing his students for what they will experience as a working biologist. The labs are engaging and a great level of difficulty that is not too hard to manage but also requires care and concentration. It is the most hands-on class I have and as a kinesthetic learner it is a welcome break from some of my lectures.

How has the CASA program helped you?

The CASA program has given me so much support in guiding me as a college student. I was able to take a class at NEIU in high school which prepared me greatly. It taught me independence and skills like time management. Although in college I feel that I am independent in a way with a higher degree. It is overwhelming and hard to navigate, but CASA has shown me what resources are available to me, who I can ask for help, and how I can manage this independence. It is so incredibly helpful to know that there is always somewhere I can ask for help navigating the college landscape. Along with that, the community developed in CASA is wonderful. I love my fellow CASA students and every advisor, even though we haven't been together long our class feels safe and everyone feels familiar. I think that is so important when starting a new chapter in your life like college.

Positive Feedback

Loops

Biology students gave excellent talks and posters at the 17th Annual SCSE Student Research Symposium this September!

Dr. Steve Frankel, a long-time biology instructor and botanist, retired this year. He will be missed!

Biology faculty and staff **Jorge Cantu, Kip Conwell, Kara Nuss, Beth Reinke, Kayla Rihani, and Cindy Voisine**, received Excellence Awards for Research, Teaching, or Service for the 2023 -2024 school year!

Allison Kish (Class of 2019) is getting her Master's in Biology at Miami University!

Karolina Kisiel (Class of 2024) got admitted into Midwestern University's PA Program!

Cesilia Aguilar (Class of 2025) received an Honorable Mention for her NSF Graduate Research Fellowship!

Deborah Onofrei (Class of 2018) graduated from the Master of Science in Nursing program at Rush University!

Alma Mendoza (Class of 2016) finished her PhD at Stanford in Microbiology and Immunology!

Jonathan Garcia (Class of 2021) accepted a med school offer at Universidad Autonoma de Guadalajara!

Jabbar Jabbari (Class of 2021) obtained a Doctor of Pharmacy degree from Roosevelt University and passed the pharmacy licensure exam!

NEIU Bio Alum **Tetyana Perchyk, Christina Rouhotas, and Jon Scott-Haines** received Dr. Bernard J. Brommel Doctoral Scholarships!

Alumni Spotlight (cont.) from page 2:

lectures were well structured and concepts were broken down to be clear and easy to understand. In general, I enjoyed learning the intricacies and process of an organism's development, it allowed me to make connections and understand concepts in future Biology classes, like Pathophysiology.

What skill or technique you learned in school is most useful to you now?

Two simple skills I learned in Biology was not to cross-contaminate and to clean your work bench, this applies well to many things/situations in life. Most importantly, I learned to be a critical thinker when learning and understanding different topics.



FALL PLANT SALE

Indoor Plants for Home and Office!

Open on Thursday
November 6th, from 10-4pm

At the Student Union across from
Café Descartes

Proceeds from the sale support activities in the
NEIU Greenhouse!



Congratulations to our recent graduates!

BIOLOGY MASTERS

December 2024

Ahmed, Sumaiya

Hernandez Aguilar, Noemi

Pedroza, Brenda

Sikora, Natalia

Zaruszak, Brittany

May 2025

Bartak, Robyn

Levites, Lauren

Nicodemus, Phillip

BIOLOGY MAJORS

December 2024

Azhar, Mohd

Elba, Velma

Hazama, Zeyad

Montgomery, Leoncio

Ocampo-Barrios, Maritza

Saenz, Nicole

Sanchez, Roxana

Thompson, Alicia

Torres, Melanie

Urbina, Gabriel

Vadineanu, Cristiana- Maria

Villegas, Christian

Zinke, Amanda

May 2025

Aguilar, Cesilia

Akwa-Philbin, Sarita

Baca, Aaliyah

Badamo, Mia

Chavarria, Nora*

Correa, Catherine

Diaz Carreon, Iriana

Famania, Jailene

Gorostienda, Litzy

Hartunian, Irene

Hernandez, Melanie

Khan, Saif

Kleit, Sara

BIOLOGY MINORS

December 2024

Bisson, Bianca

Colombo, Mary

Iniestra, Alain

Luna, Sandra

Sobociński, Nicole

Strong, Darrica

Thompson, Alicia

Varvara, Nicole

May 2024

Anderson, Angelina

Dorszcz, Mariah

Shethwala, Farheen

Sida, Jesus
Teran, Sarai

*denotes double major



Follow us to learn more about what is happening in Biology!