VOL. 9| FALL 2026

BIOLOGY (NUCLEO)TIDINGS

News from the Biology Department at Northeastern Illinois University

NEIU | NORTHEASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

Biology

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

A Message from the (New) Chair



I wanted to take a moment to introduce myself in my new role as Chair of the Department. I'm excited to get to interact with all of you. Don't hesitate to say hi to me on the BBH hallways, drop me an email (p-geddes@neiu.edu), or stop by my office (BBH 358F) to get some candy. We are proud of how our Biology Department community has developed and we cannot have that community without you.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Slate for her dedication and leadership as prior Chair of our department for the last 6 years. Among other things, she steered us through a pandemic, led the development of the new Accelerated Programs (BS-MS in Biology and BS-MAT in Teaching Biology), collaborated with David Nissim-Sabat to develop two Certificates (Post-Baccalaureate Certificate in Pre-Health and the Certificate in Pre-Nursing), and collaborated with the Psychology Department to develop the new Neuroscience Minor. We are grateful for her contributions and we wish her a productive educational leave!

I invite you to check out our Fall newsletter. We offer highlights of our students and alumni, as well as opportunities to mingle with students, staff, and faculty. Wishing you a happy fall!
-Dr. Pam Geddes, Biology Department Chair

CERTIFICATE IN PRE-NURSING



Thinking about a career in health? Declare a certificate in pre-nursing in addition to your major!

The **Pre-Nursing Certificate** can prepare you with the foundational knowledge and prerequisites necessary to apply for NEIU's forthcoming Master of Science in Nursing - Entry to Practice (MSN-EP) program.

This comprehensive certificate offers a **structured curriculum of 39-40 credit hours**, which can be combined with any major at NEIU. Contact our dedicated Pre-Health Advisor, David Nissim-Sabat at dnissimsabat@neiu.edu!

Undergraduate Student Spotlight



Jailene Leyva is a double major in Biology and Geography and Environmental Studies, with a GIS minor.

What made you choose Biology as a major?

Working in the field of restoration ecology relies on practical knowledge. But I also felt like choosing biology would help me understand the functions behind everything I'm working with. How different plants grow in different soils, learning plant species and how they relate within their family, why taxonomists rename plants, and what kind of inputs might be needed when creating or restoring an ecosystem. I love that I learned about parasitic plants this year and knew enough about symbiosis to understand the relationship.

What do you hope to do after graduation?

I hope to continue in restoration ecology and eventually become a managing ecologist in the Chicago area. I love Chicago and the midwest and would love to stay and help take care of our natural areas. I am also curious about ecology research so a master's degree isn't entirely out of the question. I'm currently a restoration tech and I hope the next two years of work and completing my undergraduate education will open doors to more roles. Outside of professional aspirations, I hope to have some real guitar and piano skills by the time I graduate. I thrive when I can express myself creatively and music has been a new and fun avenue!

What is your favorite thing about being in science?

I've really liked learning about what people are researching and how they are applying that research to help with ecology issues. Recently, I learned about scientists at the Chicago Botanic Garden collecting data on the distribution of native bee species in Chicago. This type of ongoing research was exciting to me because the findings can eventually be used to strengthen the native bee populations and help endangered bees, too. And it's already challenging ideas about what can be found in an urban setting--native bees are definitely living in the city! Another thing I enjoy about science is how important scientific findings are to ecosystem

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Alumni Spotlight

Isaiah Thomas is an NEIU Biology alum who is currently a PhD Candidate in Biophysical Sciences at University of Chicago.

What was your favorite class at NEIU?

My favorite Biology classes were Dr. Stojkovic's BIO 362 Biochemistry class and Dr. Booms BIO 341 General Microbiology class. Dr. Stojkovic's class was one of the toughest I took at NEIU and Dr. Booms class taught me sterile technique. Both were great instructors and their classes gave me great preparation for my PhD.

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

I think the most important skill I took from NEIU was learning to maintain a good lab notebook. My motto in grad school: Write everything down and throw nothing away! I used to complain about writing down procedures for labs that were digitally provided, but no protocol goes

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Undergraduate Spotlight (cont.):

management--this is a field where science is valued and contributes to making our work better!

What class are you most enjoying this semester?
Currently, I am working on my BIO 391: Internship in Biology credit, which I can talk so much about! But another class I've been pleasantly surprised with is GES 309: Principles and Methods of Environmental Interpretation. It has been really valuable for me to learn how to reflect on accumulated knowledge and create connections with public audiences at the forefront. Storytelling is a skill, science communication is a skill, and I'm combining these concepts with my imagination!

Follow Jailene on LinkedIn and check out their website at jaileneleyva.com!

Gensburg-Markham Prairie Update

NEIU works with The Nature Conservancy to jointly manage Gensburg-Markham Prairie, part of the Markham Shkode Prairies south of Chicago .



Welcome, Kat!
We are so lucky to have Kat Holecek join our department as the Prairie Steward. Kat has been volunteering at Gensburg-Markham Prairie for years now and brings their passion and extensive horticultural work experience to the prairie. They started the job off strong by helping to orchestrate our seasonal burn. Burning is essential for prairie ecosystems to support healthy plant growth and deter woody encroachment!





Photo credits: Kat Holecek

Positive Feedback Loops

Biology students gave excellent talks and posters at the 18th Annual SCSE Student Research Symposium this September!

John Kasmer, a long-time biology faculty and ecologist, retired at the end of summer. Congrats, Dr. Kasmer!

Biology faculty **Elyse Bolterstein and Aaron Schirmer** received Excellence Awards for Research for the 2024 -2025 school year!

Cristina Paz (Class of 2013) finished her PhD thesis at University of Wisconsin-Madison!

Krishna Parikh (Class of 2025) started a Podiatric Medicine program at Rosalind Franklin University!

Kage Guare (current Biology minor) received the Environmental Scholarship from the Friends of Volo Bog!

Andres Jimenez (Class of 2026) traveled with other biology students and the SCSE to present his research at the SACNAS Annual Conference in Long Beach, CA!

We said goodbye to **Emina Stojkovic** after more than 17 years in the department; we thank her for her service and wish her the best in her new position!

The Judith Baron Scholarship

A new scholarship for Graduate Students!

The Judith Baron Biology Graduate Scholarship honors a remarkable alumna who earned her B.S. and M.S. degrees in Biology from NEIU while working and teaching in radiography as a dedicated mother. Established through her generosity, this scholarship provides tuition assistance to support current Master's degree students as they pursue their academic and professional aspirations.

SCAN HERE TO ACCESS THE APPLICATION FORM:

Applications are due November 23rd, 2026

Alumni Spotlight (cont.) from page 2:

100% to plan and those small details matter at the bench.

What do you think is the most exciting thing about learning Biology?

I think the intricateness of Biology is really cool! There is an exception to every rule, and biology is just what stuck around long enough for us to observe it. This can be quite frustrating to parse as a biologist, but it never gets boring.

Is there anything you wish you'd known when you were preparing to graduate from NEIU Biology?

Developing a good network that you can share your achievements with is probably more important than the achievements themselves. Let NEIU faculty and mentors enjoy your wins. It's a win for them and they care!

Northeastern Illinois University Biology

FALL PLANT SALE

Indoor Plants for Home and Office!

Open on Thursday
November 19th, 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 2025
Bani Baker, Zahara
Chellson, Renee
Crow, Sara
Goyal, Prajal
Kazimi, Medina
Lopez, Leslei
Menendez, David

May 2026
Henderer, Joseph

BIOLOGY MAJORS

December 2025
Abu-Shalbak, Hamzah
Castillo, Cindhy
Charriez, Marie
Garcia Acosta, Paulina
Godoy, Natalia
Gringras, Katarzyna
Hasan, Maha
Jaimes-Rocha, Samantha
Mohrdieck, Rylie
Montes-Abonce, Yessica
Nazari, Sorayya
Parikh, Krishna
Reynolds, Chad
Salameh, Azem
Tubera, Charles

May 2026
Abdalla, Sami
Abuhashish, Rotan
Acosta, Christina
Ahmed, Ayesha
Alvarado, Isabela
Andrici, Sergiu
Aref, Mamoon
Bania, Edyta
Blanco, Wendy
Cortez Lopez, Pedro
Hassan, Sumiya
Hazama, Talee
Issa, Iman
Katsman, Te Amarie
Patel, Shefali
Rodriguez, Escarleth
Salamah, Omar
Szponder, Natalia
Torlakovic, Anida

BIOLOGY MINORS

December 2025
Erazo, Emily
Feliciano, Adrian
Hines, Makayla
Le, Minh
Winters, Shauntrell
Zehren, Addison

May 2026
Bender, Shermariah
Gentile, Sarah
Velez, Janice

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