

# Western Illinois University Graduate Certificate in Zoo and Aquarium Studies ~ Frequently Requested Information ~

## About the Program

This program is also known as the Post-baccalaureate Certificate in Zoo and Aquarium Studies.

The program requires 18 semester hours of graduate work and is a non-thesis program.

The program must be completed within three years of acceptance and typically takes 1 to 1.5 years to complete. Length of studies frequently depends on the date the student starts and the order in which the student takes offered courses.

All credits for this certificate apply to a Master's Degree in Biology or to the Master's in Liberal Arts and Sciences through Western Illinois University.

The program may be completed on or near Western Illinois University-Quad Cities (located near Niabi Zoo). It may also be completed through Chicago's Shedd Aquarium (near Lincoln Park Zoo and Brookfield Zoo). Western Illinois University in Macomb does not have a nearby zoo. The required courses for the certificate are not taught in Macomb.

Four courses are required in order to complete the program:

**ZOOL578:** Zoo / Aquarium Practicum **ZOOL583:** Bioacoustics  
**ZOOL553:** Animal Behavior or **ZOOL585:** Animal Training and  
**BIOL 583:** Organizational Management of Zoos and Aquaria

Students take two electives. Those courses may be selected from a variety of approved graduate courses in biology, anthropology, educational technology, and agriculture. (See program catalog description for a full list.)

Most classes are condensed into 8-week sessions (first eight weeks or last eight weeks of the semester). To minimize travel costs and allow students to maintain a full time job, courses are often presented on Fridays or Saturdays.

## Travel Information

Travel from the Quad Cities to Shedd Aquarium is either by carpool organized by students or by Amtrak using the Illinois Zephyr. Dr. Thomas takes Amtrak from Princeton, IL to Union Station in Chicago and will help students travel from Union Station to and from the Aquarium by either taxi or bus. Students should purchase train tickets in advance because the train is sometimes booked. Advance ticket purchase can also lower the ticket price. Students can order tickets online at Amtrak.com or by calling 1-800-USA-RAIL and the tickets will be mailed. Students with a Student Advantage Card or a AAA membership can obtain a discount on Amtrak tickets. If the student drives to class, there is metered parking along Solidarity Drive near the aquarium (bring quarters), or at Soldier Field Parking Lot. Another option is the Field Museum Parking Lot. Please allow extra time for downtown traffic, especially during the summer when several events take place in downtown Chicago.

Another travel option is to take the Metra from Chicago suburbs to downtown Union or Ogelsby Station and either walk, take a bus, or take a taxi to the aquarium. Because Aurora is the farthest Metra station, some QC students drive to the Aurora station, park their car, and then take Metra to Chicago. For travel options, look at the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) website.

## Course Information

For classes that Dr. Thomas teaches, the lecture notes, exams, and grade book will be on WebCT. (Accessed through Western online, WebCT Vista version). The username is the student's ecom name. The first time using the system, the student will use their birthday or student ID number as the password. Thereafter, the password can be changed. Dr. Thomas will give each student a CD with lecture notes so they are available to use on a laptop's hard drive during class.

## Technology

At the Quad Cities campus, laptops can be checked out through the library and the building has wireless Internet. At the Shedd Aquarium, classes are in the ETC (Electronic Technology Classroom) and laptops are available, along with cables for a LAN connection at each student's desk.

## Food

At Western Illinois University-Quad Cities, there are vending machines in the basement student lounge. A microwave is also available. There are several nearby fast-food restaurants as well. At the Niabi Zoo, there is a concession stand when the zoo is open (April to October). At the Shedd Aquarium, there are vending machines and the Bubble Net Food Court, a cafeteria-style restaurant. Union Train Station has a food court and Amtrak trains have a dining car.

## Zoo Practicum

The student arranges the zoo practicum directly with the facility. Work of 120 hours is required. The supervisor provides a letter and a brief statement of the work to Dr. Rick Anderson, Chairman of Biology, who verifies the student worked at least 120 hours. Dr. Thomas can provide a list of Midwestern facilities or make recommendations of possibilities. Think broadly, credit can be given for working at an animal shelter, dog training facility, rehabilitation facility, rescue facility, veterinary office, in addition to zoos and aquaria.

## Animal Training VS. Animal Behavior

Ken Ramirez, Head of the Training Department at Shedd Aquarium, teaches the Animal Training course. This course is highly recommended and only taught at the Aquarium on Saturday afternoons. If a student also wants to take Animal Behavior, it can be used as an elective.

## Management Course

This course is team-taught by staff at the Shedd Aquarium and must be taken at Shedd Aquarium. Since this is a business course, it is different from other courses biology students have taken. Students design a zoo, develop a business plan and present their plan to the class.

## Biological Studies in Zoos and Aquaria

This course emphasizes the types of research conducted in a zoo or aquarium, the legal issues, ethical issues, and experimental designs. Students design a zoo using *Zoo Tycoon* software and present to classmates.

## Applying Credits to a Master's Degree

Students interested in a master's degree in Biology or Liberal Arts & Sciences should discuss options with Dr. Thomas.

## Two Campus Options

The campus a student chooses to attend depends on several factors and students can take courses at both campuses, depending on their circumstances.

### Western Illinois University – Quad Cities

Dr. Thomas' office is at the Moline campus of Western Illinois University-Quad Cities and the Niabi Zoo is about a 10-minute drive from campus. The Niabi Zoo is an AZA-accredited facility run by Rock Island County Forest Preserve. There are 230 acres of natural forest, of which 23 acres is the zoo. The zoo has an approved new design, has raised capital, and is building a new facility in stages. Check their website for details. Volunteer positions are available at the zoo and hours can be used for the Zoo Practicum credits.

#### Niabi Zoo fees:

\$100/year, which includes free admission to Niabi Zoo plus discounted admission to all AZA-accredited zoos

The cost of living is less expensive in the Quad Cities. Apartment housing is available close to campus. Black Hawk Community College is two blocks from Western Illinois University-Quad Cities and provides a place to take any deficiency courses at a reasonable price. Several Western Illinois University master's level students teach at Black Hawk College, providing great job experience. For housing and jobs, consult QOnline.com and QCemploye.com, the Quad City Times, or Rock Island Argus newspapers. The Reader (a weekly local newspaper) is also helpful for housing and activities in the QC area.

### Chicago

Although the cost of living is relatively high in Chicago, the pay rate for jobs is correspondingly higher. The mass transit systems, such as the Metra and the CTA bus, are great. CTA buses to the Aquarium include 14, 28, 127, and 146. There is a taxi stand at the Aquarium, but it is difficult to get a taxi on a Friday evening. Students should plan on taking the bus or walking after class. Students can find housing by contacting other students in the program (Dr. Thomas can give some advice here) or by using apartmentfinders.com or Craigslist.com.

#### Shedd Aquarium fees:

\$100 for on-site classes at Shedd (i.e. Animal Training, Ichthyology, Management)

\$150 for distance learning classes (i.e. biometrics, biostatistics, etc.)

### Contact Information

For program specific information, contact Dr. Jeanette Thomas ([J-Thomas@wiu.edu](mailto:J-Thomas@wiu.edu)).



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