

Otterbein University Zoo and Conservation Science FAQs

More info and student blogs at www.otterbein.edu/zoo

General degree questions

1. What is the difference between a B.S. degree and a B.A. degree?

A B.A. will prepare students to work in zoos or in the areas of conservation biology including biological consulting and employment by state and federal agencies. A B.S. will prepare you for these opportunities as well as graduate studies in Biology, Zoology, Veterinary Medicine, Zoo Science. The B.S. students are required to take a semester of calculus, a semester of statistics, and an additional upper division biology elective beyond what the B.A. students are required to take. The B.A. program leaves more room in a student's schedule for a second major or minor.

2. Will I be able to study abroad?

Otterbein offers a wide variety of places for students to go abroad. Even if a student isn't interested in leaving for an entire semester, there are classes offered that go abroad for our May Term or for Spring Break. In addition, there are some summer internships that students can obtain that are abroad. If you want to study abroad you will have to plan out your degree path in advance to make sure you are on track to meet all the degree criteria. You should meet with your academic advisor and the Center for Student Success to discuss opportunities and plans.

3. Could I have a minor? Or a double major?

It is very possible to obtain a minor along with the Zoo and Conservation Science major within four years. A double major is possible, although it will be easier to complete within four years if students are pursuing B.A. degrees vs. B.S. degrees, or if a student enrolls with a large amount of transfer or AP credit.

4. How long will it take to complete the Zoo and Conservation Science program?

This is a four year program. If students enroll in Otterbein University with transfer or AP credit it is possible to graduate early by a semester or two. If students are not accepted into the major after their first year, it might delay the time to graduation.

5. Do I need to take math classes?

The math courses that are required for this program are: Math 1250 Elementary functions; B.S. students also need Calculus I and Statistics. You can place out of Math 1250 if you have an ACT Math score of 27+ or SAT Math score of 660+. In order to start in Math 1250 you need to have math scores of 24-26 for the ACT, or 590-659 for the SAT. You can also take the Otterbein Math Placement exam if you think your scores aren't representative of your math knowledge.

6. Do I *really* need math?

Yes, you really do need math! Math will become an important part of almost every biology class that you will end up taking, especially when you get into upper level classes or research projects.

7. Can I play a sport while in the Zoo and Conservation Science program?

Yes, you can play a sport while in the zoo program but you might miss out on some zoo opportunities depending on when your sport season is. You must balance your time wisely and if you are to miss a class, tell the professor as soon as you can ahead of time, as this can allow

you to make up for anything missed that day. You should also talk with your coach to understand what your commitment to the sport is and how to balance it with classes.

8. Is an internship required?

An internship is not required to graduate, but having one or more is highly recommended and essential to getting a zoo job after college. Most people who are getting jobs in zoos immediately after graduation have three to four internships by the time they graduate.

Application Questions

9. What can I do in high school or in my first year of college to help me get accepted into the Zoo and Conservation Science program?

The most important thing is to excel in your science and math classes as those are foundational to your undergraduate experience in the zoo major. Getting good grades during all your classes in high school and freshman year, as well as obtaining some animal experience, can help make a student a more competitive candidate for the zoo program.

10. How competitive is admission into the Zoo and Conservation Science program?

There are only 24 spots available in the Zoo track in order to provide meaningful, hands on experiences with animals at our partner institutions. The new Aquarium track will provide an additional 10-12 spots. Students applying at the end of their first year will designate on their application whether they want their application to be reviewed for the Zoo track, the Aquarium track, or both.

11. What happens if I apply to the program at the end of my first year and I am not accepted?

There is the option to apply again the following spring, although this might delay the time to graduation. There is also the option of switching to a biology degree or environmental degree and remaining on track to graduate in four years. We encourage everyone who is not admitted into the Zoo and Conservation Science program to meet with their academic advisor and the Center for Student Success to develop the best plan for them.

Zoo focused questions

12. If I am in this program, do I have to want to be a zoo keeper?

Not at all, there are a lot of options! While quite a few Zoo and Conservation Science majors are interested in becoming zoo keepers, there are also many who are interested in other zoo and wildlife related fields, such as marine biology, zoo education, conservation research, zoo and wildlife veterinary medicine, wildlife management, animal reproduction and endocrinology, etc.

13. Will I get to handle animals?

Yes, during your sophomore year practicum. One day per week, you work a 4 hour volunteer shift at the Ohio Wildlife Center, during which you will be in direct contact with many animals. In the Introduction to Zoo and Conservation Science class in the spring semester of your first year, you will get the opportunity to conduct a scientific research project at the Columbus Zoo. You will not get to handle animals for that project, but you will get to spend a few hours at the zoo every week observing. During the junior year fall practicum, you'll have the opportunity to observe animals at the Columbus Zoo behind the scenes.

14. What makes Otterbein's program special?

There are only 5 colleges in the U.S. that offer a bachelor's degree in Zoo and Conservation Science. Otterbein's Zoo and Conservation Science Program is a degree grounded in research and scientific theory, and also has applied, hands on animal experiences, including veterinary experience with native Ohio wildlife. We partner with the Ohio Wildlife Center and the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium. This gives students the opportunity to explore the zoo and conservation fields thoroughly to determine a field of interest.

15. What is the difference between “Zoo and Conservation Science”, “Zoology” and “Animal Science”?

Zoo and Conservation Science is the study of animal care, management, and conservation. It involves observation and direct work with living animals. Zoology is the study of animals, and may not incorporate any work with living animals, but rather could focus on dissections and comparative anatomy studies. Animal Science is the study of domestic animals for the meat production industry. Otterbein offers a Zoo and Conservation Science degree. We also have a Equine Science degree, which focuses on the care and management of horses.

16. What is a “practicum”?

A practicum is a course when students are given the chance to work outside of the classroom. There are two practicums each at the Ohio Wildlife Center and Columbus Zoo and Aquarium. Here students will gain hands on experiences in different departments of each establishment.

17. What animal-focused biology electives are offered?

Otterbein offers many animal focused upper division electives, although some of them are only offered every other year. Some examples of this are animal behavior, comparative vertebrate anatomy, vertebrate biology, field biology, animal reproduction, and animal nutrition. You can always access the full classes offered list through the otterbein website.

19. How often would I get to go to the Columbus Zoo?

During your second semester of freshman year, you will get to conduct an observational research project at the zoo so you will be there for 2 hours a week for five weeks. Sophomore year, your practicums will be at the Ohio Wildlife Center for 2 hours a week the entire year, plus a 4 hour shift, and junior year they will be at the Columbus zoo for 2 hours a week the entire year.

20. Is Ohio Wildlife Center the same thing as the Wilds?

No, they are two different organizations. The Ohio Wildlife Center is a wildlife rehabilitation facility that is based in Columbus, Ohio. They work to promote wildlife health and conservation through educational programming, a wildlife hotline, the veterinary hospital, and the pre-release facility. You have the opportunity to work in all four of these areas during the sophomore practicum. The Wilds is a conservation research and safari park facility located in southeast Ohio that maintains semi-free ranging herds of animals such as rhinos, giraffes, giraffes, and oryxes. Multiple Zoo and Conservation Science majors have interned at the Wilds.

21. How can I get an internship working with animals?

There are summer animal related internships that are arranged through Otterbein University. The information for this will be provided in the fall each year from the director of the zoo program. You can also go to the website of any organization that you are interested in and apply for an internship on your own, or check aza.org/joblisting/ and select the Internships button and

click Search. You can enter keywords if you're interested in a specific state, animal, or institution.

22. Are there any paid animal internships?

There are a few, but not many, paid animal internships. They do exist and it is possible to find them, but they are a very elusive species... you should expect that the majority of internships will be on a volunteer basis. You will have the opportunity to intern with the Columbus Zoo or Ohio Wildlife Center for a semester for credit as part of the program.

Thinking to the future

23. Will I actually be able to get a job in a zoo after I graduate?

Zoo jobs are very competitive, with as many as 400 people applying to one position! This curriculum was developed in collaboration with the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium and every zoo we have talked to about our program has confirmed that this is a degree track that they find attractive for job applicants. We are confident that our majors are prepared to the best of their ability to be competitive for a job in a zoo. Our graduates to date are employed at multiple zoos as zoo keepers, work at other research centers, or are enrolled in vet or grad school.

24. Do I have to take more classes if I want to go to vet school?

Quite a few of the pre-requisite courses for vet schools are included in the Zoo and Conservation Science BS curriculum, but there are others that you will have to take that count as electives (ex: organic chemistry, microbiology, biochemistry, etc). It is a good idea to research what pre-requisites that vet schools you are interested in require (they are not identical for all vet schools!), and meet with your advisor early on to make a plan for when you will be able to take them. If you plan ahead, it is very possible to complete all of your vet school prerequisites alongside the Zoo and Conservation Science degree in four years. It is also worth noting that Otterbein does offer an Animal Nutrition course-- more vet schools are starting to require this as a prerequisite, but not all undergraduate institutions offer it.

25. How will a degree in Zoo and Conservation Science help prepare me for vet school?

The Zoo and Conservation Science major is great preparation for vet school in many ways. In addition to providing hands-on experience working with wildlife and in zoo contexts that not many vet school applicants have, you acquire a thorough understanding of animal welfare and what evaluating an animal's welfare entails. This is a very big topic in veterinary medicine, and you will likely discuss it at some point in essay prompts and/or interview questions when applying to vet school. You also gain a lot of experience with critically evaluating complex issues in all of your zoo classes. This is something that you are asked to do on the GRE, in application essay prompts, in some interviews, and in your career as a whole. In many of your zoo courses and other upper-level bio electives you will be required to design, implement, and present a research project. Experience with this is looked upon by vet schools very favorably. Presenting your findings to an audience that includes professionals in your field, as you will do in quite a few zoo major courses, is very valuable also. The Zoo and Conservation Science major also has great internship opportunities; you have the chance to gain unique experiences that will set you apart as an applicant and continue to be valuable in your veterinary career.