

UNIVERSITÉ DE FRIBOURG SUISSE
FACULTÉ DES SCIENCES

UNIVERSITÄT FREIBURG SCHWEIZ
MATHEMATISCH-NATURWISSENSCHAFTLICHE FAKULTÄT

Curriculum for the award of the Degree of

**Master of Science
in Biology**

options:

- **Biochemistry**
- **Neuro- and Developmental Biology**
- **Ecology and Evolution**
- **Plant-Microbe Interactions**

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Master of Science (MSc)

1 Introduction

The University of Fribourg offers a multidisciplinary study programme leading to the degree of Master of Science in Biology, with the four options **Biochemistry**, **Neuro- and Developmental Biology**, **Ecology and Evolution**, **Plant-Microbe Interactions**. The programme consists of 90 ECTS¹ credits and corresponds to 18 months of full-time study. English is the official language for all activities. However, the students may choose the language of the examinations (English, French or German).

A special emphasis is placed on the development of the student's scientific capabilities (independent thinking, problem-solving skills, critical evaluation of data, oral and written communication skills, ability to work in a team). The student will deepen her/his knowledge of a selected area of biological sciences and acquire techniques needed in basic research as well as in practical applications such as biomedical and pharmacological research, biotechnology, public health, crop protection, sustainable agriculture, environmental protection, wildlife management, etc. Courses are accompanied by discussions, student presentations and writing exercises in order to stimulate an active participation of students. Students are integrated in one of the research teams and have the opportunity to experience all aspects of the daily life of a research scientist. They will obtain extensive experience with academic research in biology and learn to plan, carry out, analyze and present research. The Master also paves the way to a potential PhD and an academic career in biology and related fields.

2 Overview

The programme consists of three modules:

- Master courses: 30 ECTS credits
- Master thesis-related activities: 15 ECTS credits
- Master thesis: 45 ECTS credits

Four options (specialisations) are offered:

- Biochemistry
- Neuro- and Developmental Biology
- Ecology and Evolution
- Plant-Microbe Interactions

3 Acquired skills

The aim of the studies leading to the award of an MSc in Biology is to deepen knowledge and perfect competence in the chosen field and at the same time develop skills in scientific English. Thus, at the end of the course, a student will have shown that he/she can apply their knowledge to accomplish a research project and will have learned how to work independently and how to integrate into an interdisciplinary research team. The award of the degree requires creative and self-critical talents as well as the ability to communicate ideas and work both in English and in the student's native language.

¹ ECTS: *European Credit Transfer System*. One ECTS corresponds to 30 hours of effective work of the student

4 Master courses

For each option the University of Fribourg offers a number of obligatory and elective² Master courses. Elective courses can also be chosen among Master level courses at the Universities of Berne and Neuchâtel (BENEFRI convention) or among activities of the “III^e Cycle Romand en Sciences Biologiques”. An individual programme of elective courses according to the study programme is established by each student. The study advisor of the student’s Master option may help in case of difficulties. An elective course not listed in the study programme of the four options (list below) may also be taken. In this case, the student must consult the study advisor. Completing the Master programme requires a minimum of 30 ECTS credits for Master courses.

The mode of assessment of the courses is described in an appendix available at www.unifr.ch/science/current/plans_f.php.

Courses are evaluated with a grade between 6 (best mark) and 1 (worst mark) or with passed/failed, based on an oral or a written examination, or some other performance of the student. Although students are allowed to attend Master courses before admission to a Master programme, it is not possible to acquire any ECTS credits.

The following table provides an overview of the Master courses offered in the four options. “O” indicates a course that is obligatory for a given option. All other courses listed in the table can be taken as elective (E); “R” indicates a course recommended for a given option. A detailed course programme for each option is described in section 1.9 of this study plan.

Code	Course	ECTS	BC ¹	N&D ²	E&E ³	PMI ⁴
BC.41xx	Blocks of 8-10 lectures = 1.0 ECTS on topical research issues: These topics may change with time, but are usually repeated regularly every 2.5 years.	1 per block	O	E	E	E
BC.4403	Conceptualisation of the master thesis report	4.5	O	-	-	-
BL.0114	Experimental genetics	1	E	O	E	E
BL.0115	The RNA world	1.5	R	O	E	E
BL.0116	DNA damage response pathways	1	R	O	E	E
BL.0117	Neurogenetics	3	E	O	E	E
BL.0118	BENEFRI workshop “Frontiers in neurosciences”	1.5	E	O	E	E
BL.0119	Molecular genetics of model organism development	3	E	O	E	E
BL.0120	Topics in developmental biology	3	E	O	E	E
BL.0121	BeFri colloquium on development I (ABCD I)	1.5	E	O	E	E
BL.0122	BeFri colloquium on development II (ABCD II)	2.5	E	O	E	E
BL.0123	Cellular and genetic networks (BeFri)	3	E	E	E	E
BL.0124	Marine biology workshop	4	-	E	-	-
BL.0201	Advanced topics in evolutionary genetics and ecology	4	E	E	O	E
BL.0202	Biological invasions and trophic interactions	4	E	E	O	E
BL.0203	Workshop in statistics and experimental design	3	E	E	O	E
BL.0205	Ecological field course	5	E	E	O	E
BL.0206	Evolutionary biology workshop “Guarda”	4	E	E	R	E
BL.0213	Ecological networks	2	E	E	O	E
BL.0214	Speciation	2	E	E	O	E
GG.0408	Conservation biogeography	3	E	E	R	E

² elective: student choice

LA_BL.0207	Molecular genetics for ecologists	4	E	E	R	E
AF_BL.0210	Tropical biology (TBA field course)	10	E	E	R	E
BL.0302	Plant biotechnology	1.5	E	E	E	O
BL.0307	Symbiosis: how plants and microbes communicate	1.5	E	E	E	O
BL.0308	Plant development: the life of a sessile organism	1.5	E	E	E	O
BL.0315	Plant secondary metabolites: biosynthesis and function	1.5	E	E	E	O
BL.0316	Recent highlights in plant biology	1.5	E	E	E	R
BL.0317	Molecular bases of innate immunity: theoretical and practical aspects	3	E	E	E	O
BL.0318	Drugs and phytochemical analysis	1.5	O	E	E	O
BL.0319	Exploring protein functionality	1.5	E	E	E	O
BL.0321	Special topics in plant biology	3	E	E	E	O
MA.6001	Modelling	3	E	E	O	O
	– <i>English for Master's students of science I</i>	3	E	E	R	E
	– <i>English for Master's students of science II</i>	3	E	E	R	E
BL.0410	Scientific writing	3	-	O	O	O

¹ option Biochemistry, ² option Neuro- and Developmental Biology, ³ option Ecology and Evolution, ⁴ option Plant-Microbe Interactions

5 Master thesis-related activities

As members of a research team the Master students take part in various activities such as research group meetings, seminars, literature study/Journal club etc. Students are expected to participate in those activities throughout the duration of the study. The credits for these activities amount to 15 ETCS points. A detailed list of the activities required from students following a given option is given in section 9 (see below).

6 Master thesis description and assessment

The Master thesis is a scientific project carried out by a student under the supervision of a group leader within a research group of the Department of Biology or the Division of Biochemistry. The details vary with the option and research group, but in general the student is expected to establish a research strategy, plan the project, carry out the research, analyse the results, present them in a formal seminar, and write them up in the form of a scientific paper. The written report in the form of a scientific paper, the oral presentation of the work and the practical work will be the objects of the final assessment of the Master thesis. A Master thesis is evaluated with a grade and corresponds to 45 ECTS points.

Each student should have chosen and have been accepted by her/his thesis supervisor at the latest by the 4th week (option Biochemistry) or 8th week (all other options) of the first semester of her/his Master studies.

To facilitate this choice, students are encouraged to familiarise themselves with the research carried out in the different research groups either before starting their studies or during the first weeks of their Master study, e.g., by taking part in their research group meetings. The student informs the student advisor of her/his choice.

If a thesis is evaluated as insufficient (less than 4.0), the student has the option to begin a new Master thesis in another research group. In this case, the student has to continue to attend and participate to the Master thesis-related activities.

7 Validation

The teaching units of the Master programme can only be examined after the student has completed all requirements for her/his Bachelor degree.

The **Validation Package MScBL1** comprises the Master courses and the Master thesis-related activities. **Validation Package MScBL2** comprises the Master thesis.

With the validation of the **MScBL1 and MScBL2** packages the student obtains the degree of Master of Science in Biology, option Biochemistry, Neuro- and Developmental Biology, Ecology and Evolution or Plant-Microbe Interactions.

8 Conditions of admission

The acceptance to a Master programme in Biology requires fulfilling both of the following conditions:

- being registered at the University of Fribourg (as defined in the “Règlement concernant l’admission à l’Université de Fribourg / Zulassungsreglement der Universität Freiburg)
- having completed the requirements for a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology or in Biochemistry at the University of Fribourg, or a similar degree acknowledged by the Faculty of Science.

The Faculty of Science establishes a list of recognized degrees. Candidates that hold a degree mentioned on this list are automatically accepted. Candidates holding a title not listed can be admitted by a decision of the Faculty of Science upon submission of an application to the *Committee of student requests (Commission des requêtes des étudiant-es)* of the Faculty of Science (address: Committee of student request, Dean’s Office, Faculty of Science, Musée 8, CH-1700 Fribourg, Switzerland). The Faculty may also request that a candidate takes additional courses or other complements. If the imposed courses amount to less than about 30 ECTS, the student may attend them during any of the 3 semesters of the Master programme. If the imposed courses amount to more than about 30 ECTS, the student will only be able to begin her/his studies once the prescribed conditions have been met.

9 Ethics and science

Ethical principles are an integral part of a scientific education. Accepted international conventions must be respected during research and while documenting all scientific work whether it be a project, a lecture, a thesis, or a report. In particular, every external source of information (articles, lectures, web pages, etc.) must be correctly cited. Every student of the Faculty of Science has signed a formal commitment to restrain herself/himself from doing “plagiarism”.

10 Detailed programmes of the options

10.1 Option Biochemistry

[Version 2012, validation packages: MSc1-BL.0404, MSc2-BL.5000]

10.1.1 Study programme

Code		Semester, year	tot. h.	ECTS
Obligatory courses				
BC.4101	Topical research issues, see table under 1.4 *	3 sem	3x8	3x3
	to			
BC.4199				
ME.3001	Neurobiology seminars (only molecular topics)	AS	7	0.5
	or	or		
ME.4001		SS		
BL.0318	Drugs and Phytochemical Analysis	SS	21	1.5
BC.4020	Biochemistry lunch seminars	3 sem	3x14	3x1
BL.0400	Seminars in biology	3 sem	3x10	3x0.5
Total ECTS credits in obligatory courses				15.5
Elective courses				
	– Courses chosen from the table in section 1.4, or from the programs of other Master options, or, with approval of the study advisor, other suitable courses given within or outside the University of Fribourg.**	All		
Minimum ECTS credits in elective courses				14.5
Thesis-related activities				
BC.4401	Literature reading and presentation (in relationship to the master's thesis)	All	–	3x2
BC.4402	Lab meetings (also takes place during semester breaks)	All	3x14	3x1.5
BC.4403	Conceptualisation of the Master thesis report	All	–	3x1.5
Total ECTS points in thesis-related activities				15
BL.5000	Master thesis		–	45
TOTAL				90

* Three blocks are given each semester. Any block is not presented more than once in 2.5 years. After each block the students will have to further explore a particular aspect by reading the relevant literature and writing a report, which will be assessed by passed or failed. At the end of her/his Master studies, the student will have to pass an oral exam (15 min) that evaluates her/his ability to respond to, question and put into perspective new findings related to the blocks she/he attended.

** BENEFRRI or other MSc programmes can be chosen upon approval by the study advisor.

10.1.2 Description of the courses of the option Biochemistry

The course *Topical research issues* (BC.4101-BC.4199) consists of block courses of 1.0 ECTS (8-10 hours). They intend to give an overview on current research topics in molecular medicine, cell- and molecular biology, in which major advances are made and new concepts and technologies are emerging. Courses are given by teachers who do research on the same or a related topic, and in every semester at least one block is given by an invited scientist from outside Fribourg. These topics may change with time but are usually repeated regularly at ca. 2.5 year intervals. After each block the students will have to further explore a particular aspect by reading the relevant literature and writing a report, which will be assessed by passed or failed criterion. At the end of her/his Master studies, the student will have to pass an oral exam (15 min.) that evaluates her/his ability to respond to, question and put into perspective new findings related to the blocks she/he attended.

The *Seminars in biology* (BL.0400) and *Neurobiology seminars* (only molecular topics) (ME.3001, ME.4001) are given by invited speakers and give an overview on recent developments. Students will have to attend and document their participation by submitting in writing what they think are relevant questions or criticisms after each seminar. This usually requires that they read a small review or some publication abstracts on the presented topic beforehand.

The course *Drugs and Phytochemical Analysis* (BL.0318) is a theoretical and practical introduction to the accurate quantification of compounds such as vitamins, drugs and nutrients from complex matrices (cell samples, plant extracts, food, beverage and drugs). It covers extraction methods, the use of internal standards, techniques of purification and chromatography, detection procedures and the analysis of data. The course includes a practical part on Gas Chromatography and Ultra High Performance Liquid Chromatography.

The *Biochemistry lunch seminars* (BC.4020) consist of journal clubs on important research articles and of talks by invited speakers. They also take place during semester breaks. During her/his Master studies, each student is required to give two journal club presentations on topics outside the realm of her/his own master thesis work.

The *Master thesis related activities* (BC.4401, BC.4402, BC.4403) are as follows: Through *Literature reading and presentation* (BC.4401) the student will familiarize herself/himself with her/his research topic in order to acquire sufficient knowledge on the theoretical background and the available technology for the intended research. She/he will report about this activity during *Lab meetings* (BC.4402) and through writing the introduction and discussion parts of her/his Master thesis. Master students fully participate in the *Lab meetings* (BC.4402), where all students (PhD, postdocs and master students) regularly share their research progress and comment upon recent advances in their field. *Conceptualisation of the Master thesis report* (BC.4403) requires the student to write a project related to her/his thesis work, following the logical outlines of a scientific research project, i.e. containing an abstract, introduction, methods and hypothesis section. He is helped in this by the thesis supervisor who will correct her/his drafts and give advice.

During the *Master thesis* (BL.5000) the student familiarizes herself/himself with modern techniques and executes a research project under the guidance of a qualified investigator within a research group of the Biochemistry Unit or, upon approval by the study advisor, within another research group of the Department of Medicine or of Biology. Generally, the lab work starts during the first weeks of the MSc studies and extends over 3 semesters. This work requires designing and carrying a research strategy, keeping a clear lab journal and data analysis. The results will be written in the form of a scientific article.

10.2 Option Neuro- and Developmental Biology

[Version 2008, validation packages: MSc1-BL.0104, MSc2-BL.5000]

10.2.1 Study programme

Code		Semester, year	tot. h.	ECTS
Obligatory courses				
BL.0114	Experimental genetics	AS 1 st	8	1
BL.0115	The RNA world	AS 1 st	12	1.5
BL.0116	DNA damage response pathways	AS 1 st	8	1
BL.0117	Neurogenetics	SS 1 st	28	3
BL.0118	BENEFRI workshop “Frontiers in neurosciences”	AS, block course	18	1.5
BL.0119	Molecular genetics of model organism development (BeFri lecture)	AS 1 st	28	3
BL.0120	Topics in developmental biology	SS	28	3
BL.0121	A BeFri colloquium on development I (ABCD I) (BeFri)	AS	12	1.5
BL.0122	A BeFri colloquium on development II (ABCD II) (BeFri)	SS	20	2.5
BL.0410	Scientific writing	AS 1 st	28	3
Total ECTS credits in obligatory courses				21.0
Elective courses				
	– Courses chosen from the table in section 1.4 or from BeFri, BeNeFri or other MSc programmes	AS or SS		-
BL.0124	Marine biology workshop *	AS, block course	40	4
	– <i>English for Master's Students of Science I</i>	AS	–	3
	– <i>English for Master's Students of Science II</i>	SS	–	3
Minimum ECTS credits in elective courses				9.0
Thesis-related activities				
BL.0400	Seminars in biology	3 sem	3x10	3x0.5
BL.0111	Research seminars and seminars in zoology	3 sem	3x14	3x1
ME.5001 [§]	Neurobiology seminars	3 sem	3x5	3x0.5
ME.6001				
ME.7001				
BL.0401	Research group meetings	3 sem	3x14	4.5
BL.0402	Literature study/Journal club	3 sem	3x14	4.5
Total ECTS points in thesis-related activities				15
* This course is offered once every 2 years				
§ If this course has been taken in a bachelor programme, it should be replaced by 0.5 ECTS credits of elective courses.				
BL.5000	Master thesis		-	45
TOTAL				90

10.2.2 Description of the courses of the option Neuro- and Developmental Biology

The course *Molecular genetics of model organism development* (BL.0119) is an introduction into some of the most popular model systems used for the study of development. These include

Xenopus, Mouse, *C. elegans*, *Drosophila* and Zebrafish. The value of different technical approaches will be discussed. Further emphasis will be on presenting key experiments and the most recent findings for each system. Topics may vary from year to year but are likely to include transcriptional, translational, post-translational and epigenetic control of gene expression.

The course "*Topics in Developmental Biology*" (BL.0120) reviews specific topics in developmental biology, a central organizing discipline in biology that relates cell and molecular biology, anatomy, ecology, evolution and medicine to each other. The course provides the basic conceptual background of the anatomical, experimental, genetic, cellular, molecular and biotechnical approaches to modern developmental biology. Current topics are among others: limb formation, metamorphosis, aging, regeneration, germ line formation and sex determination, fertilization and implications of developmental biology on human medicine.

The RNA world (BL.0115): The flow of genetic information goes from DNA to RNA, and from RNA to proteins. Then how could the first proteins be made if they are needed for transcription and translation? The hypothesis of the RNA world suggests that catalytic RNAs (ribozymes) may have preceded proteins. This lecture will briefly describe the origins of life and emphasize the importance of ribozymes, their mode of action and their roles in today's world. The mechanism of RNAi interference, the importance of non coding RNAs and the implications of RNA technology will be discussed.

The lecture course *Experimental genetics* (BL.0114) gives the theoretical background of the main techniques used in modern genetics. Students will learn how to localise genes using deletions, polymorphisms, recombination frequencies and the candidate gene approach. Furthermore, this course presents the design of forward genetic screens, reverse genetics, how to construct strains and the use of sequence databases. This lecture is intended for students who are interested in pursuing their education on genetic model organisms such as *S. cerevisiae*, *Drosophila*, *C. elegans*, Zebrafish and *Arabidopsis*.

The course *DNA damage response pathways* (BL.0116) will focus on the elements of the DNA damage-induced responses, as components of the cell cycle control machinery or the repairing process. It will mainly describe the signalling network of these responses in the nematode *C. elegans*, as well as in yeast and humans and the important links to cancer and other genetic abnormalities. Since double-strand breaks occur not only following genotoxic stress, but also during meiotic prophase, the course will also include mechanisms underlying the meiotic recombination process.

The course *Neurogenetics* (BL.0117) consists of an introduction into developmental genetics of *Drosophila* followed by a comprehensive coverage of neurogenetics, the key discipline of developmental neurobiology. The neurogenetic part begins with an overview of modern genetic and neurobiological methods in *Drosophila* and then focuses on the major highlights of neurogenetic research in *Drosophila*, *C. elegans* and vertebrates. Topics include: early neurogenesis, nervous system regionalization, tissue specification, axonal pathfinding, neuromuscular specificity, biological rhythms, learning and memory, mechanosensation, and olfaction. The topics are covered by an up-to-date script. This lecture is also accessible to MSc students from Berne

The BENEFRI workshop *Frontiers in Neurosciences* (BL.0118) is intended to make students familiar with current frontiers in neurobiological research. The course is given by national and international experts working in very diverse fields of neuroscience. Previous block courses included topics such as brain mapping, hypothalamus, motor systems, neurogenetic model systems, neuroinformatics, olfaction, sensory systems, synaptic function, and visual cortex.

ABCD; A BeFri Colloquium on Development I and II (Bl.0121, BL.0122) consist in monthly meetings during both terms with 2 presentations by PhD students or junior post-docs of participating groups from the Universities of Fribourg and Bern. MSc students are requested to attend

the meetings, to participate to discussions and to provide a short summary of each presentation. The meetings will alternatively be held in Fribourg and Bern. During the Spring term, a two-day retreat gives the opportunity to MSc students to present their projects or related topics.

The course *Cellular and genetic networks* (BL.0123) describes how genes and cells function in a complex web of networks to regulate any biological system. Opposite to the reductionist approach to understand life sciences, the systems level approach is much needed and has been emphasized in recent years. In this course, we will cover the cutting-edge topics including transcriptional regulatory networks, neuronal networks, interactions between environment and cellular metabolisms, as well as mathematical modelling. The goal of this course is to learn and discuss how to approach systems-level biological problems by integrating different experimental methods.

Marine biology workshop (BL.0124). The scientific themes will cover an initial general introduction to the marine environment and its diverse ecosystems followed by theoretical and practical introductions to plankton, oceanic nekton, intertidal organisms, and subtidal benthic animals. In subsequent practical comparative work, the morphology and diversity of major invertebrate phyla, including sponges, cnidarians, arthropods, echinoderms and tunicates, and of teleost fish will be explored. Experimental benchwork will focus on fundamental aspects of developmental biology and neurobiology of marine animals. Developmental processes such as fertilization, cell lineage, cell differentiation, organogenesis and larval development will be analysed in representative marine organisms (echinoderms, ascidians, annelids). Comparative neurobiological experiments will elucidate major sense organ types, central nervous system organization and behavioural control systems in marine organisms. Developmental evolutionary (EvoDevo) aspects will be emphasized in both experimental areas by demonstrations and theoretical presentations. Independent practical work and literature reports by the participating students will be encouraged. This two weeks course will be credited with 4 ECTS.

Scientific writing (BL.0410): In a first part consisting of a few lectures the student will be introduced to the art of writing scientific articles. In a second part, she/he will practice writing a publication.

English for Master's students of science I: this elective course aims to help Master's students in scientific disciplines develop the English language skills relevant to their studies and future careers. The emphasis will be placed on oral presentation skills, academic writing, strategies for reading comprehension and analysis of texts, and academic listening skills. Target level is B2. Code R.022.0017

English for Master's students of science II: this elective course is a follow-up to English for Master's Students of Science I. As such, it will focus more heavily on issues surrounding the writing and oral defence of the Master's thesis. Target level is B2. Code R.022.0018

Master thesis-related activities (BL.0400; BL.0111, BL.0112, BL.0401, BL.0402): these consist of different activities comprising seminars with national and international speakers presenting their research and seminars organized by the different groups in relation to their research activities. Literature study/Journal Club are meetings where researchers and students report and debate recently published articles. Research group meetings allow members of a research group to expose and discuss their current work.

During the *Master thesis* (BL.5000) the student familiarizes herself/himself with modern techniques and executes a research project under the guidance of a group leader within a research group of the domain Neuro- and Developmental Biology or, upon approval by the study advisor within a research group of the Department of Medicine. This work requires designing and carrying a research strategy, keeping a clear lab journal and data analysis. The Master thesis also includes a report written like a scientific article (summary, introduction, methods, results, discussion).

10.3 Option Ecology and Evolution

[Version 2008, validation packages: MSc1-BL.0203, MSc2-BL.5000]

10.3.1 Study programme

Code		Semester, year	tot. h.	ECTS
Obligatory courses				
BL.0201	Advanced topics in evolutionary genetics and ecology	AS 1 st	42	4
BL.0202	Biological invasions and trophic interactions	AS 1 st	33	4
BL.0203	Workshop in statistics and experimental design	SS 1 st	28	3
BL.0205	Ecological field course	Block SS	80	5
BL.0213	Ecological networks	SS	20	2
BL.0214	Speciation	SS	12	2
MA.6001	Modelling	SS	28	3
BL.0410	Scientific writing	AS	28	3
Total ECTS credits in obligatory courses				26
Recommended elective courses				
LA_BL.0207	Molecular genetics for ecologists (Uni Lausanne)	AS, block course	–	4
GG.0408	Conservation biogeography	AS	28	3
BL.0206	Evolutionary biology workshop <i>Guarda</i>	Block SS	56	4
AF_BL.0210	Tropical biology (field course, Tropical biology association) *	Block Summer	28 days	10
	– <i>English for Master's students of science I</i>	AS	–	3
	– <i>English for Master's students of science II</i>	SS	–	3
	– Other elective courses chosen from the table in section 1.4 or from BENEFRRI or other Master programmes	AS or SS		
Minimum ECTS credits in elective courses				4
Thesis-related activities				
BL.0400	Seminars in biology	3 sem	3x10	3x0.5
BL.0211	Seminars in ecology and evolution	3 sem	3x14	1.5
BL.0212	Research seminars in ecology and evolution	3 sem	3x14	3
BL.0401	Research group meetings	All	3x14	4.5
BL.0402	Literature study/Journal club	All	3x14	4.5
Total ECTS points in thesis-related activities				15
* This course can be used as a replacement for BL.0205 (5 ECTS)				
BL.5000	Master research and thesis		-	45
TOTAL				90

10.3.2 Description of the courses of the option Ecology and Evolution

Advanced topics in evolutionary genetics and ecology (BL.0201): the course will cover selected topics, including evolutionary demography, life history evolution, quantitative genetics, meta-population genetics, and genetic analysis of adaptation. It will be largely based on original literature and analysis of data.

The course *Biological invasions and trophic interactions* (BL.0202) builds on knowledge in population biology and plant-insect interactions. We will discuss both ecological and evolutionary explanation of plant invasions and review recent theory and practical applications for their control. The topic will also be highlighted in the context of future climate change conditions.

In the *Workshop in statistics and experimental design* (BL.0203) students will learn basic and advanced techniques in statistical data analysis and they will perform exercises with data from ecological experiments. In addition, they will propose various experimental designs and discuss their advantages and disadvantages.

Ecological field course (BL.0205): a project-oriented field course taking place at a research field station. With the support of the teachers, the students learn to develop their own research projects, carry them out, and present and write up the results.

Evolutionary biology workshop Guarda (BL.0206) is an extramural block course (1 week) involving Swiss and foreign graduate students, as well as invited professors. In groups centered on a common scientific interest, and in interaction with the teachers, the students design research projects, and write and present grant proposals. The goal is to learn to discuss science, develop criticism and arguments, interact in a scientific team, and write research proposals.

Modelling (MA.6001): the use of simple models to describe the behaviour of biological phenomena has been of great help for their understanding and has often driven researchers to new ideas. Here we will show how to go from the phenomenon to a model and what can be learned using this process. The course is illustrated with exercises.

Ecological networks (BL.0213): The course will give an introduction to graph theory and to the historical development of the research on ecological networks. It will tackle key studies on the structure and dynamics of ecological networks, with a special focus on food webs.

Speciation (BL.0214): The course will give an introduction into current concepts and methods used to study the process of speciation, i.e. the origin of biological diversity. It will explore theoretical aspects, experimental evidence from speciation genetics, and evidence from nature.

Tropical ecology (AF_BL.0210) is a project-oriented international field course in tropical Africa, organised by the Tropical Biology Association.

The course with laboratory work *Molecular genetics for ecologists* (LA_BL.0207) is an intensive, practical course on molecular methods.

Scientific writing (BL.0410): In a first part consisting of a few lectures the student will be introduced to the art of writing scientific articles. In a second part, she/he will practice writing a publication.

English for Master's students of science I: this elective course aims to help Master's students in scientific disciplines develop the English language skills relevant to their studies and future careers. The emphasis will be placed on oral presentation skills, academic writing, strategies for reading comprehension and analysis of texts, and academic listening skills. Target level is B2. Code R.022.0017

English for Master's students of science II: this elective course is a follow-up to *English for Master's students of science I*. As such, it will focus more heavily on issues surrounding the writing and oral defence of the Master's thesis. Target level is B2. Code R.022.0018

Master thesis-related activities (BL.0400; BL.0211, BL.0212, BL.0401, BL.0402): these courses consist of different activities comprising seminars where national and international speakers present their research, Literature study/Journal Club where researchers and students report and debate recently published articles, and research group meetings where the members of the research group expose and discuss their current work.

During the *Master thesis* (BL.5000) the student familiarizes herself/himself with modern techniques and executes a research project under the guidance of a group leader within a research group of the unit Ecology and Evolution. This work requires designing and carrying a research strategy, keeping a clear lab journal and data analysis. The results will be written in the form of a scientific article.

10.4 Option Plant-Microbe Interactions

[Version 2012, validation packages: MSc1-BL.0305, MSc2-BL.5000]

10.4.1 Study programme

Code		Semester, year	tot. h.	ECTS
Obligatory courses				
BL.0302	Plant biotechnology	AS 1 st	12	1.5
BL.0307	Symbiosis: how plants and microbes communicate	AS 1 st	12	1.5
BL.0308	Plant development: the life of a sessile organism	AS 1 st	12	1.5
BL.0315	Plant secondary metabolites: biosynthesis and function	AS 1 st	12	1.5
BL.0317	Molecular basis of innate immunity: theoretical and practical aspects	SS	28	3
BL.0318	Drugs and phytochemical analysis	SS	21	1.5
BL.0319	Exploring protein functionality	AS 1 st	12	1.5
BL.0321	Special topics in plant biology	AS	28	3
MA.6001	Modelling	SS	28	3
BL.0410	Scientific writing	AS 1 st	28	3
Total ECTS credits in obligatory courses				21
Elective courses				
	– Elective courses chosen from the table in section 1.4 or from BENEFRI or other Master programmes	AS or SS		–
BL.0316	Recent highlights in plant biology	AS 1 st	12	1.5
	– <i>English for Master's students of science I</i>	AS	–	3
	– <i>English for Master's students of science II</i>	SS	–	3
Minimum ECTS credits in elective courses				9
Thesis-related activities				
BL.0400	Seminars in biology	3 sem	3x10	3x0.5
BL.0320	Current topics in plant biology	All	3x14	4.5
BL.0401	Research group meetings	All	3x14	4.5
BL.0402	Literature study/Journal club	All	3x14	4.5
Total ECTS points in thesis-related activities				15
BL.5000	Master research and thesis		-	45
TOTAL				90

10.4.2 Description of the courses in the option Plant-Microbe Interactions

In the lecture *Plant biotechnology* (BL.0302) your memory of the basic methods and associated problems of plant transformation will be refreshed followed by a discussion of various examples of plant biotechnology.

The course *Symbiosis: how plants and microbes communicate* (BL.0307) deals with the mutual recognition between the plant and the microbial partner, and with the coordination of their development. In general, the course consists of short introductory lectures followed by critical examination of the recent literature on the topic. The goal is to show how scientific knowledge is generated and interpreted.

The course *Plant development: the life of a sessile organism* (BL.0308) describes central issues of developmental programmes involved in embryogenesis, root, shoot, and flower development. The emphasis will be on hormonal control of morphogenesis and pattern formation, and on the determinants of organ identity.

Plant secondary metabolites: biosynthesis and function (BL.0315): Although many of the molecules produced by plants have been attributed roles *in planta*, these molecules are also significant to our own life style. The biogenesis and role of these molecules in plants and the significance to man of some of the more important will be discussed.

The lecture *Recent highlights in plant biology* (BL.0316) articles will be discussed that highlight recent advances in plant biology in selected areas. For each article, the historical background and the methodological aspects will be underlined. The goal is to provide students an opportunity to familiarize with and gain insight into the contemporary workings of basic research.

In the course *Molecular bases of innate immunity: theoretical and practical aspects* (BL.0317), a series of articles will be read, presented and discussed by the participants. The selected articles are major contributions that have shaped our current concepts on the defence of plants to pathogens.

The course *Drugs and Phytochemical Analysis* (BL.0318) is a theoretical and practical introduction to the accurate quantification of compounds such as vitamins, drugs and nutrients from complex matrices (cell samples, plant extracts, food, beverage and drugs). It covers extraction methods, the use of internal standards, techniques of purification and chromatography, detection procedures and the analysis of data. The course includes a practical part on Gas Chromatography and Ultra High Performance Liquid Chromatography.

In the lecture *Exploring protein functionality* (BL.0319) we aim at exploring state-of-the-art tools needed to conduct a timely investigation of protein functionality using transporter proteins as example. Beside a critical evaluation on these technical tools given by myself and the students (via a presentation of technical publications), the course will also offer a practical part that deals with database mining.

The lecture series *Special topics in plant biology* (BL.0321) is presented by invited speakers. Students are exposed to knowledge in fields that are currently the object of intense research. They have the opportunity to read and discuss recently published articles and to interact with the speaker.

Modelling (MA.6001): the use of simple models to describe the behaviour of biological phenomena has been of great help for their understanding and has often driven researchers to new ideas. Here we will show how to go from the phenomenon to a model and what can be learned using this process. The course is illustrated with exercises.

Scientific writing (BL.0410): In a first part consisting of a few lectures the student will be introduced to the art of writing scientific articles. In a second part, she/he will practice writing a publication.

English for Master's students of science I: this elective course aims to help Master's students in scientific disciplines develop the English language skills relevant to their studies and future careers. The emphasis will be placed on oral presentation skills, academic writing, strategies for reading comprehension and analysis of texts, and academic listening skills. Target level is B2. Code R.022.0017

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During the *Master thesis* (BL.5000) the student familiarizes herself/himself with modern techniques and executes a research project under the guidance of a group leader within a research group of the unit Plant-Microbe Interactions or, upon approval by the study advisor within another research group. This work requires designing and carrying a research strategy, keeping a clear lab journal and data analysis. The results will be written in the form of a scientific article.