

# Welcome to ECo!

## *Helpful Information for New ECo Grad Students*



**Welcome!** Environmental Conservation (ECo) is an interdisciplinary department at UMass Amherst committed to the stewardship of healthy and sustainable ecosystems. The ECo Department houses several graduate programs, including ECo, MS3, and GIST. We're housed within the College of Natural Sciences, and we're a part of the School of Earth and Sustainability. People within ECo study a diversity of topics, including sharks in the Bahamas, salamanders in Massachusetts, energy conservation on campus, attitudes towards climate change, and much more. We're excited that you're joining our community!

### **Contents**

- [1. ECo Grad Council \(EGC\)](#)
- [2. Graduate Employee Organization \(GEO\)](#)
- [3. Health Insurance and GEO Benefits](#)
- [4. Graduate Student Senate \(GSS\)](#)
- [5. ECo Affinity Groups](#)
- [6. UMass Center for Counseling and Psychological Help \(CCPH\)](#)
- [7. The "Don't Forget!" List](#)

## 1. ECo Grad Council (EGC)

The ECo Grad Council is the official Graduate Student Organization (GSO) for the ECo department. The EGC hosts regular socials and professional development events, and is also a liaison between students and the department. The EGC receives an annual budget from the [Grad Student Senate](#), and membership can include anyone affiliated with the ECo department or program. [Visit our page on Campus Pulse](#).

Join the EGC and the rest of your department for regularly scheduled events that include...

- **EGC Meetings:** The EGC connects with ECo grads throughout the semester to gather feedback about what we can do to improve the ECo graduate student experience. If you're interested in becoming more involved with your department or have ideas to share, be sure to attend.
- **Graduate Program Meetings:** These meetings cover topics of interest to our graduate students, with food and refreshments provided. In the past we've hosted speakers from other departments as well as local organizations and state/federal agency representatives, and we've discussed subjects from job placement to science writing and communication. Bring your ideas to the EGC meetings and consider organizing a program meeting that fits your interests!
- **Coffee Socials:** Take a break from the week and enjoy coffee, tea, and treats with ECo.
- **Happy Hours:** Unwind with your ECo friends at one of our local spots for food and drink.
- **Social Events:** Keep an eye out for ad hoc social events. These are typically posted on the Facebook group ("[Friends of OEB / ECO / MS3](#)") or sent via email. You're welcome to put together an event of your own to share with the group!

## 2. Graduate Employee Organization (GEO)

GEO is the union for graduate student employees. For more information visit the [GEO website](#) or email GEO representatives at [geo@umass.edu](mailto:geo@umass.edu). *On campus:* 911 Campus Center, 413-545-0705

*ECo GEO steward:* GEO stewards serve as contact points between the union and the students of their department. They attend union meetings and report back to GEO members with updates. Do you have questions about GEO, or are you interested in being a GEO steward? Reach out to our ECo GEO steward! [Find the current ECo GEO steward here](#).

**IMPORTANT!** If you are interested in becoming a GEO member...

1. [Fill out a membership form](#). This form will enroll you as a GEO member and authorize payroll deduction of a one-time \$20 initiation fee and biweekly 2% membership dues.
2. Sign up for other GEO-eligible benefits (see Section 3 below).

### 3. Health Insurance and GEO Benefits

*Student Health Benefit Plan:* Students taking 5 or more credits are automatically enrolled in the University's Student Health Benefit Plan (SHBP), or health insurance. For those who are not automatically enrolled, enrollment forms must be filled out each semester. Forms can be found online at <https://www.umass.edu/uhs/insurance/shbp> and must be delivered to University Health Services, where they can also be filled out in-person.

*Enrollment in Dental & Vision Benefits:* All GEO-eligible graduate student employees must re-enroll each year to maintain these benefits. Enroll online at <https://hwtrust.geouaw.org/>. Be sure to adhere to the application deadline for these benefits!

*Childcare & Wellness Reimbursement:* All graduate student employees must re-enroll each year to receive reimbursements for childcare and gym memberships or fitness programs. Enroll online at <https://hwtrust.geouaw.org/>.

- [Childcare reimbursement and how to submit receipts](#)
- [Wellness reimbursement and how to submit receipts](#)

**IMPORTANT!** If you would like to accept the University's Student Health Benefit Plan and GEO insurance cost reduction, which will be reflected in your Bursar bill:

1. Log onto SPIRE and navigate to "GEO Insurance Cost Reduction" under "Graduate Student Employment" on the Student Home page.
2. Select "Yes" to be covered and have the cost deferred to GEO (covers 95%).
3. Select "CONSENT" to complete the request.

**IMPORTANT!** If you would like to pay your Bursar bill via payroll deduction, which will allow you to pay your Bursar bill over 5 paychecks, issued biweekly:

1. Log onto SPIRE and navigate to "GEO Payroll Deduction" under "Graduate Student Employment" on the Student Home page.
2. Enter the total amount to be deducted from your paycheck for the semester.
3. Select "CONSENT" to complete the request and then "CONTINUE" to confirm.

## 4. Graduate Student Senate (GSS)

The Graduate Student Senate (GSS) is a student-run and elected governance body composed of graduate students from each campus program. GSS works with other university organizations to provide resources and programming for students, but also to ensure the needs of graduate students are heard and met at UMass. Each year, each program in the ECo department votes to elect their senators. The role of the senators is to vote on behalf of the students in their program, attend senate meetings, and participate on working groups to advocate for the interests of ECo students within the graduate student body.

*Interested in the GSS? [Please visit the GSS website.](#)*

## 5. ECo Affinity Groups

There are several affinity groups in and adjacent to ECo that serve to bring ECo together for discussions, presentations, and seminars about our research and our community climate.

**ECo Graduate Student Symposium (ECoGSS):** ECoGSS is an annual student-led symposium that serves to engage graduate students in science communication, develop networking skills across diverse career paths, and showcase the diversity of conservation science research at UMass. ECoGSS also serves as a platform to discuss departmental diversity, equity, and inclusion matters. Any graduate student can present their research or develop an idea for group discussion. *Interested in ECoGSS? Visit the [ECoGSS website](#) or contact [ecogss@umass.edu](mailto:ecogss@umass.edu).*

**ECo Climate, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee:** The ECo Climate, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee includes members who are undergraduates, faculty, professional staff, graduate students, and postdocs. Our primary goal is to support efforts to make our department a safe and supportive space for everyone. This includes facilitating discussions across the many and diverse sectors of our community. Membership comes with potential opportunities for leadership, since the chair-ship of the committee rotates among its members. *Interested in the ECo Climate, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee? Contact [diverseEco@umass.edu](mailto:diverseEco@umass.edu).*

**BRIDGE:** BRIDGE is a graduate student group composed of students from across the School of Earth and Sustainability (SES) and the Interdepartmental Graduate Programs (IDGP). BRIDGE aims to increase the representation and visibility of early career scientists from underrepresented groups to combat attrition of underrepresented graduate students. BRIDGE strives to increase the diversity of invited speakers on campus while providing a space for open and constructive conversations between current graduate students and early career researchers on the obstacles faced by underrepresented groups in STEM. In addition to highlighting the contributions of underrepresented scientists, BRIDGE provides invited early career researchers with a platform for sharing their research and establishing collaborations at a leading research university. *Interested in BRIDGE? Visit the [BRIDGE website](#) or contact [bridge@umass.edu](mailto:bridge@umass.edu).*

## 6. UMass Center for Counseling and Psychological Help (CCPH)

CCPH is here for you if you need help navigating stress, relationships, or any mental health questions or issues. Your insurance through GEO will cover appointments at CCPH (several free appointments, and then you will pay the copay), and the front desk can help you find the right service fit for you. [Find more information on the CCPH website.](#)

## 7. The “Don’t Forget!” List

1. Get your UCard! This is your University ID card that you will need for almost everything. Visit the [UCard website](#) for more information.
2. Get your parking permit! If you want to park in a lot on campus, you will need a parking permit. Visit the [Parking Services website](#) to purchase a UMass parking permit or talk to someone in-person at their trailer in Lot 25 (the lot with solar panels along Governors Drive, west of Holdsworth).
3. Sign your [GEO membership form](#).
4. Accept (i.e., check your Bursar bill for automatic enrollment) or waive the University’s Student Health Benefit Plan.
5. If you are a GEO member, sign up for the insurance cost reduction in SPIRE.
6. If you are a GEO member, accept or decline your GEO member benefits administered through the [UAW/UMass Health & Wellness Trust Fund](#) (i.e., vision and dental insurance, childcare reimbursement, and wellness reimbursement).
7. If you are a GEO member, sign up for payroll deduction for your Bursar bill in SPIRE.