Department of Cell and Systems Biology

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the Department of Cell and Systems Biology at the University of Toronto looking for in a successful candidate?

The department looks for applicants who are balanced in their academic preparedness, which includes (but is not limited to) transcripts, lab experience, and related work experiences. An applicant with a non-traditional academic experience that could include exploring other majors, working, or delaying graduation does not necessarily put that particular applicant at a disadvantage.

The department does require a minimum B+ average in the final year of a B.Sc., and at least a mid-B average in the second last year of undergraduate studies. For entry to the Ph.D. program, an applicant must have achieved a minimum A-minus average in their M.Sc., or have an A-minus average in the final year of a B.Sc. (for Direct Entry to the Ph.D. program). International applicants from non-English speaking universities must have a minimum overall score of 7.0 on the IELTS (with a minimum score of 6.5 in each component of the test), or an overall score of at least 93 on the TOEFL IBT, with minimum scores of 22 in each of the Writing and Speaking sections (the TOEFL Institution Code for the University of Toronto is 0982). English proficiency scores are also required from most English speaking universities located in predominantly non-English speaking countries, so please check with the CSB Graduate Office if you are uncertain.

2. I do not have the minimum required English proficiency test score. Can I be granted an exception and be offered admission? And if not, can I be offered admission on the condition that I complete English language courses once I arrive at the University of Toronto?

No. All applicants must have a passing score prior to being registered at the university.

3. How many students apply, and how many are accepted?

While the number changes from year to year, we receive an average of 150 completed applications. Between 50 and 60 applications will typically receive an offer of admission. The department has limits on the number of international applicants that can be accepted, making admissions very competitive for international students.

4. Whom should I ask to write reference letters?

At least two of the three reference letters should provide input from people in responsible positions who can comment on your academic and/or laboratory performance, character and career goals. For undergraduates this often means professors or laboratory supervisors (including Postdoctoral Fellows). A third letter could come from someone who is not in a university or laboratory environment, but that letter should still be able to comment on your academic potential, work ethic, and motivation to join the graduate program. We would prefer to have applicants avoid using Teaching Assistants for one of their reference letters.

Reference letters are completed by the referees using a web-based form, and the referees will be sent an email requesting that they complete the form as soon as you have paid the application fee and entered their personal information. While separate letters can be mailed directly to the department, we strongly encourage referees to use the web-based form. It is very easy to fill out, and does not require any documents to be downloaded and/or uploaded.

5. What should be included in my statement of interest?

We want to know about what you have studied in the past, what you want to study as a graduate student, and why. Your *curriculum vitae* will provide a guide to your academic and employment timeline, so the statement of interest offers an opportunity for you to tell us about your experiences and your goals. This is your chance to let potential supervisors really learn more about who you are.

Be sure to name potential supervisors in your statement. You can do this in one of two possible formats: In the middle of your statement, you can name specific supervisors and mention what aspects of their research appeal to you; or provide a list at the end of your statement.

It is a good idea to have someone with an academic or professional background proofread your statement, to ensure that you are making your points clear and concise.

The statement should only be one page in length. Please avoid two or three page statements, because reviewers will want to see that you can abide by the rules, and summarize your past achievements and future goals in a brief but effective manner.

6. How are my transcripts evaluated?

While grades are certainly an important aspect of any application, they are not the only determining factor. Potential supervisors will want to see what specialization/majors that you are taking/have taken, and the specific upper level courses that were successfully completed. Some lab-based courses are beneficial, but there are successful applicants who do not have a great deal of lab experience.

7. Are there interviews included in the application process?

Although interviews are not officially part of the application process, potential supervisors will often want to speak to an applicant in person or over the phone. Applicants often arrange to meet in the supervisors' office to discuss the applicants' experiences and possible future projects. If you do speak to a supervisor, do not be reluctant to ask any questions that you may have about the research being conducted in the lab, and the lab personnel. Enter a meeting well prepared.

8. How do I apply to a collaborative program?

You need to have been admitted to an individual department before you can apply to a collaborative program. The department of Cell and Systems Biology participates in three collaborative programs, with details found on the following webpage:

http://csb.utoronto.ca/graduate-studies/prospective-students/collaborative-programs/

If your application to the department is successful, you can apply to a collaborative program after you begin your program in CSB.

9. When will I find out if my application was successful?

Although there is no set date where all responses are mailed out, most offers of admission are sent in March or April. All applicants will receive a letter no later than May 2017.

10. Does the Department of Cell and Systems Biology have rolling admissions?

No. All applications should be completed by February 13th, 2017, and applicants can choose to begin their program in September 2017 or January 2018. There is one admissions cycle for the 2017-2018 academic year, meaning the department cannot accept applications in the summer or fall of 2017 for admission in September 2017 or January 2018.

11. Is the residency status of an applicant considered in the admissions process?

Yes. The department has a set number of offers that can be made to international applicants. That being said, we certainly encourage strong international applicants to apply.

12. Are there additional tips that could strengthen my application?

Most successful applicants have contacted supervisors at the time that they submit their application online, if not earlier. All professors in the department can review any completed application, but faculty that you contact will make a concerted effort to take a close look at your application. Make sure to include any professors that you contact in your list of potential supervisors that should be incorporated into your statement of interest. The names that you list are not the only faculty members who can accept you to the program, but those that you mention will be most likely to seriously consider your application. Also, when naming potential supervisors, avoid listing ten (or more) faculty members. By listing an excessive number of potential supervisors, you can give the impression that you do not have any kind of specific research areas that interest you. Mentioning between three and five potential supervisors is ideal.

Please keep in mind that individual supervisors cannot promise admission to any applicant, because final admissions decisions need to be granted by the CSB Graduate Studies Committee after they verify that all admissions requirements have been met.