

FAST Interview

My name is Emily Weigel. I am current third year PhD student in the departments of Zoology and Ecology Evolutionary Biology and Behavior at Michigan State University.

So, this choice for graduate school was a little bit difficult for me as it is for most people because you have a lot of different choices to choose from, and when I came here I heard about my program and that it was really great and that it was being supplemented by something called BEACON. BEACON is a National Center for the Study of Evolution in Action and it's really awesome and that pretty much sold me on MSU.

I do research in a subfield of zoology called sexual selection. It's a part of evolution, trying to understand why females choose the mates that they do; so what makes the male sexy and what factors go into female choice. So I took a course on behavior when I was studying abroad as an undergrad and I really, really loved behavior, and it was right after I took a course in evolution that I realized I could pair evolution and behavior together and study evolutionary and behavior ecology. So, once I figured that out it was pretty much history from there.

So, sexual selection is a pretty big field and I'm hoping that my research on investment (how males and females invest in either signaling or receiving those signals and making choices based on them) will then, somehow, give us more information on how the process of sexual selection operates in general.

The name of the fellowship that I have is the Future Academic Scholars in Teaching and what this is is a fellowship that's given to Michigan State students and basically, the goal of it is to understand teaching and learning the same way you understand your own research. So, applying scientific processes to teaching and learning. So my particular project is on understanding how students apply concepts in genetics to how they understand things in evolution. So, these overarching topics in evolution have a lot to do with how one understands genetics in the first place and if the students can apply concepts they've learned in genetics within an evolutionary framework, they'll have a better understanding in general of biology.

So, the FAST program is a really interesting one because it brings a lot of different graduate students from different programs together and we get to actually discuss teaching pedagogy together. And it's really hard when you're in a scientific discipline to get the training you need toward teaching and the FAST program provides that. And it doesn't just do that by giving you books or by doing special seminars but it's dedicated time every single week that you spend to think about *how am I teaching? How are my students learning things? How have I set up the lesson so my students are getting out of it what I intend to? Do my objectives match the assessment and, in the end, are the students getting out of the course what they need in life?*