A BME PhD Recruit’s Guide to Duke

Written by the Biomedical Engineering PhD Student Association
Introduction
Welcome to recruitment! This handbook is written by the BME PhD Student Association (BEPSA) to help you through the recruitment process. It is filled with the information we think is useful to know as a prospective student interested in coming to Duke.

Contact Information
If you have any questions during your recruitment weekend or in the weeks after, please don’t hesitate to contact the following current students:
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If you have administrative questions, direct them to either Kathy or Dr. Wax:
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Recruitment Information
The recruitment process for the Biomedical Engineering department at Duke works differently than some other programs. Here at Duke, if you are admitted to the program, you will be admitted directly into a lab – there is no formal rotation program.

PhD Program Specifics
Classes
The program requirements are fairly unique from other programs – you must take 36 credit hours of coursework, but there are only two course requirements: a Life Science credit and an Advanced Math credit. Beyond those requirements, you may tailor your course load to your interests. All courses should be confirmed by your advisor.

Funding
Implicit in an acceptance to the program at Duke is secured funding for your time here. The PIs will not extend an offer to any student they do not have sufficient funding for. Graduate students are guaranteed 5 years of funding as long as they are making satisfactory progress.
Duke graduate students are highly encouraged to apply for external fellowships including the NSF GRFP, DOE SGFP, NDSEG, Hertz, Ford Foundation, NIH Training grants, and others.

Committees and Advisors
Your committee will consist of five faculty members, one of which will be your PI/research advisor, who is almost always the chair of your committee. You should have your full committee by the end of your third year. In your first year, it is recommended that you find a departmental advisor who is not your research advisor.

Before the end of your second year, you will need to complete the “Second Year Review” with your departmental and research advisors. This is meant to be an informal meeting to ensure that you are on track with classes and your research project. It gives you the opportunity to get valuable feedback from your PI as well as other faculty members in research areas that are similar to your work.

During your third year, you will take the Preliminary Exam (Prelim) with your full committee. A student is not accepted as a candidate for the Ph.D. degree until the Prelim Exam has been passed. The Prelim Exam consists of both written and oral components to present a proposal for your thesis. As there are no core class requirements for the program, this is not meant to be a traditional “qualifying” examination. However, your committee may ask relevant questions about classes that you have taken because the exam covers both the field of BME and your research work. The diverse nature of Duke’s program requirements means that each preliminary exam may be different, and it depends on your committee and personal trajectory.

Typically, BME graduate students will stand for their thesis defense approximately 2 years following passage of the Preliminary Examination.

What is there to do at Duke and in Durham?
The Duke GPSC (Graduate and Professional Student Council) hosts frequent events, including Thirsty Thursdays, tailgating at football games, and various fun cultural events. The Engineering Student Government hosts the E-social, a weekly happy hour on Friday afternoons in CIEMAS for all engineering graduate students.

The best way to maximize your time in Durham is getting out there and doing what interests you. Durham may be a small city, but does have a lot to offer. The restaurant scene is great – there are a variety of places to eat at different price points. The food trucks around Durham are affordable and yummy, and several come to campus near the chapel. A short list of fun things to do (there are many more):

1. The Durham Farmer’s Market is year-round in Central Park, Central Park also frequently hosts food truck rodeos showcasing Durham’s food truck population
2. Bars: Rigsbee Ave area (Fullsteam Brewery, Motorco), Brightleaf Square area (the Federal, Alivia’s, James Joyce pub, Triangle Brewing Co’s Pint and Plate), American Tobacco/Downtown area (Tyler’s, Whiskey, Alley 26)
3. Trivia: Fullsteam, Doolin’s, Bull McCabe’s, and James Joyce
4. Great restaurants: Dame’s Chicken and Waffles, Guglhupf, Revolution, Geer St. Garden, Foster’s Market, Watts Grocery, Parker and Otis, Pop’s, Nana’s, Nana Taco, Nosh, Bull City Burger, Only Burger, Dos Perros, The Parlour
5. Check the Durham Performing Arts Center website for upcoming shows and performers that interest you
6. Take a picnic to the Sarah P. Duke Gardens
7. Go shopping at Southpoint, in Brightleaf Square, or on Ninth Street
8. See a vintage film at the Carolina Theatre or a blockbuster at AMC Theaters in Southpoint Mall
9. Take a hike through Duke Forest or West Point on the Eno park
10. Head down to Franklin Street in Chapel Hill for more restaurants, shopping, and bars
11. Sports: go see a Hurricanes hockey game, a Duke basketball game, a Durham Bulls baseball game

Duke is located 2.5 hours from the NC coast making day trips possible to beaches including: Wrightsville Beach, Carolina Beach, Topsail Island, and Kure Beach. We are also between 2.5-4 hours from the mountains; day trips can be made to Pilot Mountain or Hanging Rock State Park, the Blue Ridge Mountains, and the Great Smokey Mountains. Weekend trips to Boone or Asheville are also a great ways to see the leaves changing in the fall.

We hope this guide will be helpful as you make your decision on which graduate institution to attend. Please feel free to contact us if you have any questions after your visit. We hope to see you all again in the fall!