



**Oregon State**  
University

**Marine Mammal Institute**  
Oregon State University  
2030 SE Marine Science Drive  
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## **Letter from the Principal Investigator at LABIRINTO to prospective lab members**

Thank you for your interest in the work we do at our lab located within the Marine Mammal Institute, Department of Fisheries, Wildlife and Conservation Sciences, Oregon State University. Pursuing higher education is a substantial commitment. It not only revolves around the academic achievements but also involves significant personal development—often co-occurring with major life events. We appreciate your willingness to discuss opportunities for taking up this challenge with us, as a graduate student or a postdoctoral researcher.

### **About us**

At the LABIRINTO, our main goal is to learn and help each other to succeed in our scientific pursuits to make the world a better place. Assuming you are familiar with our research and education interests, we shall focus here on our values. We strive to make our lab an inclusive working environment where we can all feel supported and encouraged to grow intellectually and personally. We believe that everyone deserves a chance to contemplate the wonders of our natural world, and has the right to do so safely, regardless of colour, creed, national origin, political affiliation, sexual orientation, gender identity or transgender status, disability. We are a diverse bunch, and our lab culture is founded on kindness, critical thinking, clear communication, collaboration, and active engagement in academic life.

At the LABIRINTO, students and postdoctoral researchers are regarded as mentees and collaborators, not employees. It is our role to help you excel in science, maximize your experience as a budding scientist, and achieve your long-term aspirations. Before you join our lab, we will discuss your plans for post graduate school or postdoc appointments—these are stepping stones. Crucially, we will openly discuss how to align our expectations. We will do so by (i) agreeing on the most suitable mentoring strategy for you along the hands-on/hands off spectrum; (ii) co-creating a mentoring plan outlining your short- and long-term goals and the products we will deliver; (iii) identifying how involved you need to be to succeed—and working round the clock is not the solution; (v) revisiting these plans periodically to ensure we remain on the right track; and (v) meeting regularly one-on-one and with the entire lab to share progress and challenges.

Throughout your stay, we will equip you with the necessary resources, offer opportunities for professional development and hone your technical skills, while connecting you with valuable support networks. At the LABIRINTO, we are highly invested in helping you to succeed while ensuring you have a rewarding experience along the way.

### **About you**

We place significant investment on our lab members, understanding that effective mentoring requires time and effort. Thus, we look carefully for new members to ensure alignment with



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our lab's goals, culture, and values. The applicant we seek to recruit should exhibit critical and goal-oriented thinking, responsibility in meeting task deadlines, good time management skills, ability to work both independently and within groups, and strong communication skills. Additional key soft skills include willingness to learn, openness to different opinions and cultures, and a genuine desire to work as part of a team and foster a welcoming and collaborative environment. Kindness and respect are a given.

Competitive prospective lab members should also possess key technical skills. At LABIRINTO, we highly value a robust quantitative background, as many of our projects involve advanced data processing and analyses, statistical modelling, and computer simulations. Proficiency in data analyses, quantitative and coding skills, particularly in R, are highly desirable. Effective communication, both written and oral, is a valuable asset, not only for expert academic audiences but also for the general public. We prefer candidates with a track record of peer-reviewed publication—successfully concluding projects are as important as starting new ones. Finally, we do empirical research in the marine environment within US and overseas, thus field work experiences (particular aboard of research vessels) are critical.

That being said, we acknowledge that experience in these areas may not be accessible to all due to the different barriers each individual may face. We firmly believe that everyone deserves an opportunity, and this could be yours. We value your potential and eagerness to acquire these skills—we are all here to learn—and are committed to invest on applicants who are dedicated to seizing opportunities with determination. Passion for learning and improvement is a given.

### **Finance matters**

Financing graduate studies or postdoctoral appointments is an essential consideration. Postdoctoral researchers will require resources to cover salary, indirect benefits, plus the associated costs of the research, travel, and publication. These funds can come from various sources, and typically from individual external fellowships. For postdoctoral scholars (i.e., hired with funds administered by the Oregon State University), the salary is commensurate with years of experience and should follow the minimum stipend and benefits guidelines detailed [here](#). For postdoctoral fellows, salary and benefits will vary according to the guidelines of your external funding source. There are many external funding opportunities for US postdocs available in the USA, and considerably fewer to international postdocs (examples [here](#)). Both domestic and international scholars are more than welcome to contact us and discuss the suitability of their target external sources.

Graduate school at Oregon State University requires both mentor and mentee to cover tuition and fees, a stipend for living expenses and indirect benefits. At the LABIRINTO we primarily advise students at the master's and PhD program in Fisheries or Wildlife Sciences, and sometimes at Management Graduate Certificate and Professional Science Master's in Fisheries and Wildlife Administration. You can find all necessary information about admission, financing, and application to these programs [here](#). Please do take the time to peruse this guide, especially the section concerning avenues for financing your studies.

What sets our graduate program apart is the application process; students do not apply to the department, but instead they identify a faculty member to sponsor the application and serve as



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their Major Professor and adviser. It is this Professor who will ultimately be responsible for extending an offer of acceptance, but all applicants must meet the admission requirements of the Departmental and OSU Graduate School. A key requirement is preparing a funding plan for your graduate studies, which requires at least 1 year of secured funding for master's and at least 2 years of secured funds for PhD students. We can only admit graduate students when such funding plans are in place, which clearly imposes constraints our capacity to grow.

These funds can come from various sources, most commonly from external fellowships (e.g. the applicant applies and is awarded a [NSF GRFP](#), a NOAA [Nancy Foster](#) Scholarship, or similar), or research assistantships (based on existing grants we have at the lab, but their availability varies a lot). Other options include internal fellowships and teaching assistantships (Oregon State University offer [some options](#), such as [Promising Scholar](#), [Prestigious Diversity Fellow](#), [Provost's Distinguished Graduate Fellow/Scholar](#), HMSC [Graduate Awards](#)) but these should be considered short-term complements to an existing funding plan, as they are typically awarded to graduate students already enrolled in the program. International students with a [Fullbright](#) or a scholarship from their country are more than welcome to contact us to determine the suitability of their funding source to the OSU Graduate School's [admission requirements](#). If you secure one of these fellowships, we are open to discussing a plan for collaboration, which could also mean a research visit or temporary stay at our lab. Finally, we are also open to co-developing proposals with exceptional students whose interests align closely with our lab's goals, culture, and values.

In any case, a well-established funding plan for graduate studies is imperative before we consider your start at the LABIRINTO. This will not only make our work feasible, but will also allow the student to fully focus on their graduate work, reducing our anxieties associated with financing insecurity and unpredictability.

### **Our current situation — Fall 2025 to Fall 2026**

Our lab is new—and growing fast to its carrying capacity. Nevertheless, we are always looking for postdocs who can expand our scientific horizon and co-mentoring capabilities. Prospective postdocs with clear ideas for collaborative research are encouraged to contact the lab PI directly to discuss funding opportunities. These will involve collaborating on writing fellowships and grant proposals, which takes time and effort and is not guaranteed. So please plan ahead and contact us well before your desired starting date.

The situation is different for graduate students. As much as I want to create opportunities for more students, funding and time are the current limiting factors: we currently reached our capacity for funding and mentoring graduate students. But there are always future opportunities on the horizon as we (anxiously) wait to hear back from funding proposals. When resources become available to fund more field and theoretical work, as well as to cover tuition and stipend for more grad students, they will be posted on our website and advertised widely. Should you be interested, please contact the PI directly and we will let you know—and hope that the opportunity will fit your profile, ambitions, and schedule. Additionally, we can host visiting PhD students from other institutions who join our lab temporarily on their own external funds, and sometimes international master's students looking for a research placement or internship as part of their degree requirements in their home institution.



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Undergraduate and certificate students looking for volunteering opportunities and ideas for capstone projects are welcome to contact us directly. Our multiple ongoing projects eventually need extra short-term help and could provide learning experiences. For OSU students, opportunities in the [Research Experiences for Undergraduates \(REU\)](#) program and the [undergraduate internship](#) at the FWCS Department will be advertised in our However, please bear in mind that these opportunities typically come as lab and office work, data processing and theoretical or conceptual work. Field work opportunities are expensive and very limited thus typically restricted to existing members of the lab.

### **Where do we go from here?**

If you believe your aspirations align closely with our lab goals, culture and values, please email the lab PI Mauricio Cantor at [mauricio.cantor@oregonstate.edu](mailto:mauricio.cantor@oregonstate.edu) with 'Prospective Student' or 'Prospective Postdoc' as the email subject. Please, briefly (i) outline how your experiences, interests, skills and goals align with ours, (ii) highlight the research questions that interests you the most, and (iii) be specific about project proposals you have in mind, as well as funding sources that you have secured, applied, or will target. We will appreciate if you attach a CV and a writing sample (e.g., a class essay, a project or proposal, a published or submitted manuscript) or a link to a webpage containing these. We will respond promptly if there is good match, then go from there.

Thank you very much for your interest. We look forward to learning with you.

Mauricio Cantor, PhD

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