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## USFSP TO OFFER NEW GRADUATE CONSERVATION BIOLOGY DEGREE PROGRAM IN FALL 2017



*From right: Dr. Melanie Riedinger-Whitmore and biology major Christine Leonard study samples in a lab in the Science & Technology building. Riedinger-Whitmore, associate professor and chair of the Biology department, will teach some of the classes when the program launches.*

USF St. Petersburg has announced the new Master of Science in Conservation Biology degree program, which will launch in Fall 2017. The addition of the new graduate program—the only M.S. thesis-based degree of its kind in the State University System—will complement the institution's thriving undergraduate degree program in biology, which has grown to include more than 760 enrolled students since its Fall 2012 inception. The increase in biology majors aligns with the state's goals to prepare more graduates for fields in the areas of science, technology, engineering and math, or STEM.

"This new program, and others like it at USF St. Petersburg, are preparing students to become leaders in creating and leading community, state, national and international efforts in conservation and sustainability," said Martin Tadlock, regional vice chancellor of Academic Affairs at USFSP. "We have tremendous faculty members engaged in this work, and highly supportive community partnerships to help us in that preparation."

The program aims to address regional needs for biologists with training in conservation, ecology, organismal biology, and

taxonomy. Students who successfully complete the degree will be eligible for jobs in conservation biology at government agencies, at non-profit agencies that protect natural resources, at environmental consulting firms, and at aquaria, and zoological and botanical gardens. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and O\*Net OnLine, the median salary for careers in conservation biology range from \$59,000 to \$75,000 with an anticipated job growth rate of 2-13 percent between 2014 to 2024.

"This hands-on program fits our priorities as a university concerned about the future of our planet," said Tadlock. "We are dedicated to engaging the citizens of St. Petersburg and Pinellas County to address environmental challenges critical to our neighborhoods."

In mid-March, USFSP will open the doors to new biology and chemistry labs, which will host many of the university's science classes. The facility, which totals more than 10,500-square-feet, will include four labs, two prep rooms and mechanical spaces. Additional space will be converted into offices at a later date. The facility is anticipated to achieve a minimum of LEED Gold certification. The university has two LEED Gold certified buildings with a third in the final steps of the certification process.

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