

COLLEGE OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT

GRADUATE PROGRAM PROCEDURES

The information contained here has been prepared to assist graduate students in becoming familiar with the operating procedures and requirements of the College of Natural Resources and Environment. General university procedure can be found in the *Graduate Catalog*, available at http://www.grads.vt.edu/graduate_catalog/, which includes information on admission, degree requirements, preparation of documents, and other important topics. Departments, major professors, and advisory committees may prescribe additional requirements.

All graduate students are expected to be familiar and comply with university, college, department, and subject area requirements. In addition, graduate students must follow the Graduate Honor Code (<http://ghs.grads.vt.edu/>). Failure to comply satisfactorily with all requirements may seriously inconvenience the student and could lead to assistantship termination and/or dismissal from the program.

► ORIENTATION

New students should report to the appropriate department head, listed below, for a briefing on procedures.

Dr. Janaki Alavalapati, Head

Department of Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation
Room 313, Cheatham Hall

Dr. Eric Hallerman, Head

Department of Fish and Wildlife Conservation
Room 100, Cheatham Hall

Dr. Laurence Carstensen, Head

Department of Geography
Room 115A, Major Williams Hall

Dr. Barry Goodell, Head

Department of Wood Science and Forest Products
Room 230, Cheatham Hall

The Graduate School, the College of Natural Resources and Environment, and the departments all offer orientation events for new students. Check the appropriate websites for dates and times or check with Arlice Banks in 324 Cheatham Hall (231-7051, arbanks@vt.edu).

Graduate students in Fisheries and Wildlife Sciences should report to Dana Keith (Room 100, Cheatham Hall); Forest Resources and Environmental Conservation students to Sue Snow (Room 313, Cheatham Hall); Wood Science and Forest Products students to Debbie Garnand (Room 230, Cheatham Hall), and Geography students to Karen Bland (Room 115, Major Williams Hall) as soon as possible after arrival on campus in order to sign the necessary payroll forms. When reporting, be prepared to show proof of citizenship or immigration status. For U.S. citizens, a current photo identification card and either an **original** Social Security card or an **original** birth certificate are required.

Dr. Dean Stauffer is the Associate Dean for Academic Programs for the College of Natural Resources and Environment. He is available to assist you with any academic issues you may encounter. Dr. Stauffer is located in 138 Cheatham Hall, and can be reached at dstauffe@vt.edu or 231-5297.

► **HEALTH SERVICES AND HEALTH INSURANCE BENEFITS FOR GRADUATE ASSISTANTS**

Certain immunizations are required for students attending Virginia Tech. Refer to the **Schiffert Health Center's** website (<http://www.healthcenter.vt.edu/>) for a list of requirements. Mandatory student fees (US \$828.50 per semester for Virginia residents; US \$1,113.00 per semester for non-Virginia residents) include a charge for health services. Students who have paid these fees may use the Schiffert Health Center for certain medical needs. Services include unlimited visits, most medications, and most laboratory procedures. As not all medical situations can be treated at the Schiffert Health Center, additional medical insurance is recommended. For academic year 2011-12, assistantship packages include a \$1,781.00 medical insurance benefit covering 90 percent of the Aetna insurance premium (for a single student at the \$50,000 coverage level). Students may purchase the \$50,000 coverage plan or higher coverage levels as they wish; however, the benefit is fixed at \$1,781.00. Students must meet the following criteria to receive this benefit:

- Must maintain at least a half-time graduate assistantship (10 hours per week)
- Must enroll in university-sponsored health insurance plan through GM Southwest
- Must sign up for the payroll deduction option for payment of premiums

The insurance benefit will be automatically provided in a prorated amount of approximately \$98.94 each pay period.

► **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE INSURANCE BENEFIT** (taken from Graduate School's website on insurance benefits: http://www.grads.vt.edu/financial/insurance/ga_benefit/index.html)

Am I required to purchase the Virginia Tech insurance plan to receive the benefit?

Yes. The health insurance benefit is only available to students who have purchased the university-sponsored health insurance plan.

Can students with alternate insurance plans still receive an insurance subsidy?

No. The insurance subsidy is not available for non-Virginia Tech-sponsored insurance plans.

I am on a fellowship or am employed as a wage employee. Am I eligible for the benefit?

No. The insurance benefit is a component of the graduate assistantship. Only graduate students employed as graduate assistants (GA), graduate teaching assistants (GTA), or graduate research assistants (GRA) who meet the criteria, are eligible.

If my appointment is entered by the department with a retroactive start date (for example, it's entered on September 15, but with an August 10 start date), will the benefit begin on August 10 or September 15?

If your appointment is effective August 10, the insurance office will do a multiple premium deduction and make the policy effective August 1. You will also receive the benefit beginning August 10. You still need to get your application to the Medical Insurance Office by the September 15 deadline.

Can I still receive the benefit if my assistantship does not begin in August?

The benefit is distributed in equal amounts each pay period. If your assistantship begins later in the year and you meet the above criteria, you will begin receiving the benefit as soon as your assistantship appointment is entered in the system. However, you will receive the benefit only for the period of your assistantship appointment.

If my assistantship is not for the entire nine months of the academic year, does it mean that I will not receive the full benefit?

Students who maintain assistantships for the entire academic year (August 16 through May 15) will receive the full benefit amount. If you are employed for a fraction of that time, you will receive a prorated percentage of the benefit. For example, if you are on assistantship from January 1 to May 15, you are employed for one-half of the academic year. You will be eligible for one-half of the benefit and will receive approximately \$917.00 through prorated payments throughout the term of your assistantship.

► **DESK, LABORATORY SPACE, AND KEYS**

Desk and laboratory space will be provided for graduate students by the appropriate department head **if** and **when** such space is available.

Building keys are available from Peggy Quarterman in Room 324, Cheatham Hall. Please help to keep Cheatham Hall secure by relocking entry doors at night and on weekends. **Do not prop doors open for any reason.** A signed key slip, available from department head secretaries or Mrs. Quarterman, and a deposit of \$5.00 per key, are required for each separate key request. Peggy will process a reimbursement request once you return your keys upon leaving Virginia Tech. This request is processed through the Virginia Tech HokieMart system and a check will be direct deposited into your account, so please don't close your account until your refund check has been deposited. Cash refunds are not allowed.

▶ MAJOR PROFESSOR AND ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The department head, in consultation with the faculty, makes major professor (also known as "advisor," "graduate advisor," or "graduate committee chair") assignments. Students are encouraged to consult with the appropriate department head if changes in major professor assignments or field of study become desirable.

Prior to initial registration, each graduate student's academic background is evaluated in accordance with department/section procedure. A temporary advisor is assigned who, along with the graduate student, will prepare a tentative plan of study. Prior to submitting the formal plan of study to the Dean of the Graduate School, an official graduate advisory committee will be formed for each student. This committee is selected by the major professor, in consultation with the individual student, and is subject to approval by the department head. Doctoral students must and master's students are advised to enlist at least one suitably qualified committee member from outside the student's department.

The College of Natural Resources and Environment requires that each student's graduate advisory committee meet with the student before the student has been in residence for one year and at least annually thereafter. While these meetings should center on the research project and coursework, an additional function will be evaluating the student's progress and making recommendations for improvement. It is the obligation of the student to arrange these meetings, in consultation with his/her major professor. Progress evaluations become part of the student's file.

▶ PLAN OF STUDY

Each graduate student must file a Plan of Study with the Graduate School. This program lists courses the student plans to complete as part of his/her degree requirements. Modifications to the Plan of Study are allowed if approved by the student's committee and appropriate administrative officials.

▶ RESEARCH WORK PLAN (PH.D. AND M.S. STUDENTS ONLY)

Completion of graduate research is the requirement that most often extends the period of residency. Therefore, all graduate students should give prompt attention to choosing their research topic in

consultation with their major professor and their advisory committee. Choice of topic should be guided by the student's interest, the availability of faculty to direct the research, research funding, and the college's ongoing research programs. An early choice of topic will allow for planning a more effective Plan of Study.

Following selection of a general research topic, the student should begin preparing a research work plan. The plan should include (at a minimum) sections related to justification, review of past research, research objectives, and the experimental design and methods to be used in the research. The plan should be prepared in accordance with the specific requirements of the department, section, and/or committee. A sample format for the work plan is attached (Appendix A).

The work plan should be provided in writing to and approved by the student's graduate advisory committee by the end of the first year in residence. A signed, approved copy of the student's plan should be filed in the student's departmental office.

► **PH.D. COURSE WORK AND EXAMINATIONS**

The following requirements are specific to the college:

I. Minimum Competency in Statistics

The minimum competency for Ph.D. students regarding statistics is to pass STAT 5606 or STAT 5616 or another course of equivalent statistics content with a grade of "B" or better.

The statistics requirements must be satisfied before a student is allowed to take preliminary examinations. The college Student Policy and Affairs Committee recommends that this requirement be satisfied during the first year of residency.

II. Qualifying Examination

Departments or sections may require a qualifying examination for Ph.D. students. See the *Graduate Catalog* (http://www.grads.vt.edu/graduate_catalog/) for additional information.

III. Preliminary Examination

A preliminary examination is required for all Ph.D. students. The student's advisory committee administers this exam and determines the format. Departmental requirements and those of individual sections or committees may prescribe additional procedures regarding administration, format, timing, and evaluation. An expected preliminary examination date must be submitted with the Plan of Study for approval by the Graduate School. In addition, (1) the examination must be scheduled during academic sessions, (2) requests to schedule the examination must be received by the Graduate School at least two weeks prior to the examination date, (3) students must be registered during the term the examination is taken, and (4) the results must be reported to the Graduate School within two weeks of the examination (all in accordance with university procedures).

IV. Additional Coursework

Requiring additional courses (beyond those included on the Plan of Study) remains within the purview of the student's graduate advisory committee. Most often, such requirements are the result of weaknesses uncovered by progress evaluations, qualifying examinations, and preliminary examinations.

► THESIS/DISSERTATION

Format and procedures for submitting your thesis or dissertation are given in the *Graduate Catalog* (http://www.grads.vt.edu/graduate_catalog/). Individual departments or sections may prescribe additional procedures. Students are advised to consult their major professor and graduate advisory committee concerning requirements and expectations.

The preparation of the thesis/dissertation is time consuming and can be expedited by giving careful attention to the following details:

1. Remember that the thesis/dissertation is a permanent record that will require several revisions before submission to your advisory committee and may require additional revision afterwards.
2. During the initial stages of writing the thesis/dissertation, the major professor will be responsible to see that the material is properly organized, correctly stated and interpreted, and written in an acceptable style.
3. When the major professor is satisfied that the manuscript is ready for review, copies will be furnished to each committee member. Copies are best made on paper with numbered lines. Committee members are to be allowed a minimum of two weeks for review and comment.
4. At least one week before the oral examination, each member of the examining committee must be provided with a copy of the reviewed manuscript.
5. Each graduate student is responsible for the preparation of his/her thesis/dissertation in the required electronic form. Refer to **Electronic Thesis and Dissertation** (<http://etd.vt.edu/>) for information. Additional departmental requirements may apply. Please check your department's Graduate Program Procedures for details.

► PUBLICATION OF RESEARCH

No research project is complete until the results are available for general use. Students are expected to publish their research promptly upon completion. In some instances it is advisable to publish research prior to the preparation of a thesis/dissertation. Publication should proceed with the cooperation of the major professor, who should be incorporated as a co-author in recognition of the faculty contribution to the overall direction of the research. Some major professors require that theses/dissertations be in a form that is easily prepared for publication. In addition, major professors may require that manuscripts for publication be submitted at the time the thesis/dissertation is defended.

► USE OF COLLEGE FACILITIES

The college laboratories and equipment are available for research and teaching. In addition, other facilities—computers, electron microscopes, and many other items—are available within the university.

Arrange for the use of equipment and/or space by consulting the faculty member or technician in charge of the facilities. This person will ensure you know, or are shown, how to use the facilities. Be especially careful to clean up after you have finished. Do not leave notebooks, samples, or other items where they may prevent others from using the equipment or space. Laboratories should be maintained in a neat and orderly fashion at all times. Adherence to safety protocol in laboratories is mandatory. Consult with your major professor regarding the handling, storage, and disposal of chemicals.

► SEMINARS

A variety of seminars are sponsored on campus. Students are encouraged to attend seminars of interest arranged by other departments. All graduate students are **required** to attend departmental or section-sponsored seminars. Departments may require that students register (pass/fail option) for the departmental graduate seminar (course no. 5004) every semester they are in residence. Students are **expected to attend** those seminars organized by the College of Natural Resources and Environment, regardless of topic.

► GENERAL DUTIES

Detailed graduate student responsibilities are the mutual concern of the student and major professor. All graduate students are expected to broaden their experience by assisting in research programs other than those specifically designated as their research topic. This is particularly true when other graduate students need assistance in fieldwork for safety or other reasons.

Graduate students are expected to obtain teaching experience by giving seminars, assisting with undergraduate laboratories, presenting formal lectures, and grading. Since teaching, in one form or another, frequently forms a part of each student's later life, thought should be given to including appropriate education coursework within the graduate Plan of Study. Also, students are expected to assist in the maintenance and operation of equipment in their area of specialization.

Graduate students on assistantships are expected to maintain regular hours. Each graduate research assistant is expected to work 20 hours per week (or a proportionately smaller number when employed less than half-time) for the assistantship and is considered to be 50 percent employed. It should be noted that this requirement does not provide for vacation time. Therefore, all graduate assistants who wish to be away from campus must make prior arrangements with their major professor concerning the fulfillment of their obligation to the university.

A summary of important degree requirements for master's and doctoral students, taken from the *Graduate Catalog* (http://www.grads.vt.edu/graduate_catalog/) are attached for your convenience (Appendix B).

Information regarding enrollment limits and credit hour loads for employed graduate students can be found in Appendix C.

► APPENDIX A

Research Work Plan - Example of cover page

RESEARCH WORK PLAN
for
John C. Doe
Candidate for the Degree of
MASTER OF SCIENCE
in
FORESTRY

TITLE: The Growth of Open-grown Virginia Pine (Pinus Virginiana)

OBJECTIVE: (1) To examine the vertical distribution of foliage and other components in the canopy of open-grown Virginia Pine.

(2) To investigate the relationships between several parameters of tree measurements (Dbh, height, and others) and the dry weight of the above-ground portion (bole, branches, cones, and foliage) of open-grown Virginia Pine.

(3) To use the above relationship and stem analysis to formulate growth curves for open-grown Virginia Pine.

APPROVAL:

Chair

Date

Committee Member

Date

Committee Member

Date

Department Head

Date

At a minimum, the Research Work Plan should contain the following sections:

1. Justification: The reasons for undertaking the research
2. Literature Review: A thorough review of past work
3. Objectives
4. Materials and Methods
 - Data Collection: A complete description of techniques to be used
 - Methods of Analysis: An outline of the statistical methods to be used
5. References

▶ APPENDIX B¹

Credit Hour Requirements for Degrees and Certificates

I. Master's Degree

Virginia Tech allows for both thesis and non-thesis master's degrees. For each degree type, the student's Plan of Study must meet the semester credit hour requirements shown below. Departments/programs may have additional requirements, and an advisory committee may add specific requirements needed for an individual student's academic development. Graded credits must be taken for an A/F grade unless the course is only offered P/F (see Grading System Requirements). See Transfer Credit for policies about the transfer of graduate credits for use on the Plan of Study. See Undergraduates Taking Graduate Courses for policies allowing students at Virginia Tech to transfer some courses from the bachelor's degree to the master's degree (also referred to as double counting courses toward both degrees).

A. Thesis Master's

Minimum total credits: 30 credit hours

Minimum graded credits: 20 credit hours

1. May include a maximum of 6 credits of Virginia Tech 4000-level undergraduate course work. These 6 credits may include Special Study (4984) courses but may not include Undergraduate Independent Study (4974) or Undergraduate Research (4994) courses.
2. All other graded course work must be 5000-level or higher (i.e., graduate course work). The graded course work may include:
 - A maximum of 9 credits total in 4984, 5974, 5984, and 6984 courses, and
 - 3 credits of seminar.

Minimum research credits: 6 credit hours of Master's Research (5994) taken at Virginia Tech

¹Taken from the *Graduate Catalog* (http://www.grads.vt.edu/graduate_catalog/)

▶ **APPENDIX B (Continued)**

B. Non-thesis Master's

Minimum total credits: 30 credit hours

Minimum graded credits: 24 credit hours

1. May include a maximum of 6 credits of Virginia Tech 4000-level undergraduate course work. These 6 credits may include Special Study (4984) courses but may not include Undergraduate Independent Study (4974) or Undergraduate Research (4994) courses.
2. All other graded course work must be 5000-level or higher (i.e., graduate course work). The graded course work may include:
 - A maximum of 9 credits total in 4984, 5974, 5984, and 6984 courses, and
 - 3 credits of seminar.

Maximum project and report or research credits: May include a maximum of 6 credits of Project and Report (5904) or Master's Research (5994) credits taken at Virginia Tech.

▶ APPENDIX B (Continued)

II. Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)

Doctoral degrees at Virginia Tech must meet the semester credit hour requirements listed below and include a dissertation that involves original research/scholarship. Departments/programs may have additional requirements, and an advisory committee may add specific requirements needed for an individual student's academic development. Graded course work on the Plan of Study must be taken for an A/F grade unless the course is only offered P/F (see Grading System Requirements). See Transfer Credit for policies about the transfer of graduate credits for use on the Plan of Study. Courses transferred from the bachelor's to the master's degree for a student in the master's program at Virginia Tech cannot be used for doctoral credit (i.e., they cannot be "triple counted").

Minimum total credits: 90 credit hours

Minimum graded credits: 30 credit hours

- A. At least 27 graded credits must be at the 5000-level or higher (i.e., graduate course work). Some departments have approval from the Commission on Graduate Studies and Policies to reduce the minimum number of graded course work credits required for a specific degree program. See departmental degree requirements to determine if a department has approval for such changes in requirements.
 - The 5000-level course work may include a maximum 18 credits total in 5974, 5984, and 6984 courses and 4 credits of seminar.
- B. The Plan of Study may include a maximum of 6 credits of Virginia Tech graded 4000-level undergraduate course work.
 - The 6 credits of Virginia Tech 4000-level course work may include Special Study (4984) courses but may not include Undergraduate Independent Study (4974) or Undergraduate Research (4994) courses.

Minimum research credits: 30 credit hours of Doctoral Research (7994) taken at Virginia Tech

▶ APPENDIX C²

Enrollment Limits and Requirements

I. Full-Time Enrollment

Full-time enrollment for graduate students, for purposes of tuition and fees, consists of a minimum of 9 credit hours during academic year semesters. However, the Commonwealth of Virginia does not count students as full time unless they are enrolled for at least 12 credits, and in most academic contexts, 12 credits is considered full time. The maximum number of credit hours is 18 during academic year semesters. Overloads (more than 18 credit hours per semester, or more than 6 per summer session) require permission from a graduate dean.

II. Graduate Student Employment/Assistantships

The Graduate School recognizes that many students depend on part-time employment (including assistantships) and are part-time graduate students.

Maximum Credit Hour Load

<u>Percent Employed</u>	<u>Academic Semester</u>	<u>Each Summer Term*</u>
100	6	3
75	9	3
50 or less	12-18	6

* Maximum of 12 credit hours in both summer terms (maximum overload to 9 credit hours in a single summer term).

Graduate Assistants (GAs, GTAs, and GRAs) must enroll for at least 12 credit hours per semester to be eligible for their assistantship. Students on full assistantship are expected to work an average of 20 hours per week for the assistantship and are considered to be 50 percent employed. Graduate students on assistantship can enroll for up to 18 credit hours of course work in academic year semesters and up to 6 credit hours during each summer session.

²Taken from the *Graduate Catalog* (http://www.grads.vt.edu/graduate_catalog/)