ALCE Graduate Student Handbook

Graduate Student Policies & Procedures
2018-2019

Department of Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education

College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

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Graduate Program Policies and Procedures
Department of Agricultural, Leadership and Community Education

Introduction

The Department of Agricultural, Leadership and Community Education (ALCE) recognizes the significant contributions made by graduate students to departmental research, teaching, and extension programs and is committed to providing the best possible opportunity for students to learn and develop as professionals in their areas of interest.

The primary purpose of this handbook is to outline policies specific to ALCE at Virginia Tech in accordance with the policies of the Graduate School. The Graduate School's Graduate Catalog communicates Virginia Tech graduate student policies and procedures that are in addition to departmental policies and procedures (http://graduateschool.vt.edu/graduate_catalog/index.htm).

Virginia Tech Principles of Community

Virginia Tech is a public land-grant university, committed to teaching and learning, research, and outreach to the Commonwealth of Virginia, the nation, and the world. Learning from the experiences that shape Virginia Tech as an institution, we acknowledge those aspects of our legacy that reflected bias and exclusion. Therefore, we adopt and practice the following principles as fundamental to our ongoing efforts to increase access and inclusion and to create a community that nurtures learning and growth for all of its members:

- *We affirm* the inherent dignity and value of every person and strive to maintain a climate for work and learning based on mutual respect and understanding.
- *We affirm* the right of each person to express thoughts and opinions freely. We encourage open expression within a climate of civility, sensitivity, and mutual respect.
- *We affirm* the value of human diversity because it enriches our lives and the University. We acknowledge and respect our differences while affirming our common humanity.
- *We reject* all forms of prejudice and discrimination, including those based on age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, and veteran status. We take individual and collective responsibility for helping to eliminate bias and discrimination and for increasing our own understanding of these issues through education, training, and interaction with others.
- *We pledge* our collective commitment to these principles in the spirit of the Virginia Tech motto of Ut Prosim *(That I May Serve)*.

Admission Requirements

The GRE exam is helpful for all applicants, but is not required. The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is required for applicants who did not receive their bachelor's degrees from an Anglophone university and whose first language is not English. A minimum TOEFL score of 90 (internet-based test), 233 (computer based test), 550 (paper based test) is required. More information on admissions can be found at (https://graduateschool.vt.edu/admissions/how-to-apply.html).

MS Requirements:
Applicants should have either completed or be near completion of a B.S. degree. Students should have an overall 3.0 GPA or greater.

PhD Requirements:
Applicants should have either completed or be near completion of a M.S. degree in agricultural and life sciences (or a field closely associated with a graduate degree in this discipline) or have had extensive professional experience. Students should have an overall 3.0 GPA or greater. In addition, department standards for doctoral students are:
- Minimum of 3 years of relevant professional experience,
- Strong scientific writing, and
- Strong communication skills.

Graduate Assistantships
Many graduate students in ALCE receive financial support in the form of a graduate assistantship. Since all students conduct research as a part of degree requirements and most students assist in some way with teaching classes and/or assisting with non-formal teaching in extension programs, the Department makes no distinction between graduate research and teaching assistantships. Some students are recipients of fellowships awarded through the College, University, or Graduate School, and a few are supported by their own funds or funds from their home country. Students on a full-time graduate assistantship are considered to be half-time employees and are expected to work *20 hours* per week in support of research, teaching, and/or extension programs as identified by their advisor and/or assistantship supervisor. As graduate students in the department, opportunities to participate in other projects may arise; those opportunities are in addition to assistantship duties and should complement your professional development. All funded students are expected to demonstrate departmental citizenship.
Graduate School Assistantship Policies:
- All assistantships are 20 hours per week.
- Students must be registered full time (12 hours) during fall and spring terms to be paid on assistantships.
- Registration for summer term is not required to hold assistantship and fellowship appointments.
- Assistantships begin and end on dates communicated in contracts.

Graduate Assistantship Pay-steps:
Graduate assistantships for master's students are paid at one of two steps:
- Step 9 ($1,898/mo for 2018-19) to beginning MS students
- Step 10 ($1,955/mo for 2018-19) to second year MS students (specifically, students having completed 24 credit hours).
Graduate assistantships for doctoral students are paid at one of two steps:
- Step 14 ($2,092/mo for 2017-18) to Ph.D. students prior to successful completion of the preliminary examination.
- Step 15 ($2,145/mo for 2017-18) to Ph.D. students after successful completion of the preliminary examination.

In most instances, appropriate changes in pay steps occur automatically. However, students who believe that an increase has been overlooked should see the Graduate Program Director.

Assistantship Work Location:

Students on departmental assistantship are expected to be available for work at the Blacksburg Campus. Students on grants and contracts are expected to be available for work according to the agreed needs of the faculty advisor and assistantship supervisor. Students are expected to be available during normal business hours as defined by their faculty advisor and supervisor (if different from advisor).

Additional Employment:

Individuals on a graduate assistantship are not allowed to hold additional employment during the fall and spring academic semesters without proper approval. The rationale is that the half-time work schedule and the full-time academic schedule is challenging, making it difficult to maintain effort with the burden of additional employment.   However, the Department Faculty recognize occasional professional development opportunities that some additional employment options can offer. Note: international students must follow restrictions on their visas. If a student perceives appropriate cause to seek additional employment, the following process must be followed:

1. Obtain approval from faculty advisor to move forward.
2. Obtain approval from assistantship supervisor (if different from Faculty Advisor).
3. Notify Graduate Program Director of approval via email copying Advisor, Supervisor, and Department Head.
4. Notify graduate school of additional employment approval through the electronic notification system: https://secure.graduateschool.vt.edu/aert/logon.htm.
5. Wait for Dean of the Graduate School approval before accepting additional employment. Approval will be communicated directly to the graduate student via email from the Dean.

Accountability Action:

If a student is found to hold additional employment that was not approved via the process listed above, the assistantship may be rescinded immediately by the decision of the advisor, graduate director, department head, and assistantship supervisor.

Payment of Tuition and Fees

The Department pays Virginia resident tuition and academic fees for students receiving departmental assistantships. Students are responsible for the University Comprehensive Fees in Fall and Spring semesters. Students are responsible for all tuition and fees during Summer sessions in which they are registered. Students must be registered during any term in which defense examinations are taken.

Full time students receiving assistantships of $4,000 or more per year are eligible for in-state tuition regardless of their state of residence. However, there are many circumstances in which establishing Virginia domicile is financially advantageous, both to the student and department. Eligible students are strongly encouraged to apply for Virginia residency

through the Graduate School following their first year of residency. (International students on J and F visas are not eligible.)

Registration

During departmental orientation, students will meet with their faculty advisor to confirm courses for the semester. At that time, it is the responsibility of the student to register for the agreed upon courses. If there are problems registering or course substitutions needed, the student should consult their advisor to make sure the course will be accepted toward the degree.

Graduate Advisory Committee

All students are assigned a faculty advisor prior to initial enrollment. Assignments should be mutually agreeable to both student and faculty member. A primary consideration for matching students with advisors is that the student's research interest match well with the advisor's research expertise.

Within the first two semesters of enrollment, each student should work with his/her faculty advisor to establish an advisory committee. A master's committee should consist of three members. Two members should be from the department, one being the student's faculty advisor. The remaining member should be full time, teaching/research faculty or other qualified individuals. A doctoral committee should consist of four members. Two members should be from the department, one being the student's faculty advisor. The remaining two members should be full time, teaching/research faculty or other qualified individuals. Please refer to Graduate School policies for a detailed description on the requirements and functions of the graduate advisory committee (http://graduateschool.vt.edu/graduate_catalog/policies.htm).

The committee will assist in the development of a program of study and completion of the research project. Advisory Committee members are expected to provide appropriate and timely input to the academic and research programs of the student. Both the student and faculty advisor should be proactive to assure appropriate involvement and communication of the advisory committee. Students should discuss any problems related to their advisory committee with their faculty advisor and, if needed, with the graduate program director.

Credit Hour Loads & Requirements

Full-time credit hour loads for students on assistantship are 12 hours in fall and spring semesters. Typically, students will register for 6 to 9 hours of formal coursework (2 to 3 classes) during fall and spring terms (or less during the latter stages of a graduate program), and the remaining credit hours of Research and Dissertation/Thesis to complete the 12-hour load. Full time enrollment for students not on assistantship and self-funded is 9 credit hours. Full time enrollment for part-time students is 8 or less credit hours. *Note that enrollment in 12 credit hours is required for payment of assistantships.*

To ensure all students acquire a strong foundation in agricultural, leadership, and community education, the Department requires all master's students to include a minimum of 9 graded course hours and doctoral students to include a minimum of 18 graded course hours in ALCE and/or LDRS. Note: Any credits for internship (5754), research (7994),

field study (5964 and 7964), or independent study (5974) do not count as ALCE/LDRS course hours. Included in the graded course hours is the requirement of one departmental research methodology course for MS and PhD students and the departmental seminar course requirement from the thematic seminar series (ALCE 5814). MS students are required to take 1 credit of ALCE 5814 and PhD students are required to take 2 credits of ALCE 5814.

In addition to the departmental graded course hours the Graduate School Ethics requirement is met by including the ALS 5324 Research Ethics in Agricultural & Life Sciences for both MS and PhD students. MS students must also include the College requirement, ALS 5334 Professional Communication in Agriculture and Life Sciences.
Graduate coursework 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.
All other graded coursework must be at the 5000 level or higher (i.e., graduate course work). All coursework must be approved by the student's graduate advisory committee as part of a formal plan of study.

MS Departmental Course Requirements at a Glance:

Course	Credit Hours
ALCE research methodology course	3
ALCE 5814 Topics in ALCE	1
Minimum Total ALCE/LDRS graded course hours	9
ALS 5324 Research Ethics in Ag & Life Sciences *(Ethics & College Requirement)*	1
ALS 5334 Professional Communication in Ag & Life Sciences *(College Requirement)*	1

Minimum total credits: 30 credit hours
Minimum graded credits: 20 credit hours
Minimum research credits: 6 credit hours of Master's Research (5994) taken at VT.
The 5000-level course work may include a maximum of 6 credits total in 5974, 5984, and 6984 courses and 3 credits of seminar.

PhD Departmental Course Requirements at a Glance

Course	Credit Hours
ALCE research methodology course	3

ALCE 5814 Topics in ALCE	2
Minimum Total ALCE/LDRS graded credit hours	18
ALS 5324 Research Ethics in Ag & Life Sciences *(Ethics Requirement)*	1

Minimum total credits: 90 credit hours
Minimum graded credits: 27 credit hours
Minimum research credits: 30 credit hours of Doctoral Research (7994) taken at VT.
The 5000-level course work may include a maximum 18 credits total in 5974, 5984, and 6984 courses and 4 credits of seminar.

Departmental Graduate Seminar:
Scholarly writing and the dissemination of information are critically important skills in many careers, and one that can be perfected through practice. The primary objective of the departmental graduate seminar is to give students the opportunity to explore thematic topics led by faculty within the department in order to broaden the students' base of knowledge. MS students are required to take a minimum of one departmental seminar and PhD students are required to take a minimum of two departmental seminars (ALCE 5814).

Scholarly Ethics and Integrity Requirement:
All graduate students who were accepted into the program after Summer 2014 are required to complete ethics training in accordance with the Virginia Tech Graduate School mandate. The courses that will fulfill this requirement are:
▪ ALS 5324 – Research Ethics in Agriculture and Life Sciences
▪ ALCE 5814 – Topics in ALCE departmental seminar

GTA Workshop Requirement:
All graduate students on a GTA assistantship and/or that will teach a course are required to complete the Graduate School's GRAD 5004 GTA Training Seminar.

Transfer Courses:
No more than 50% of the graded credit hours needed to satisfy the requirements for a Virginia Tech graduate degree may be transferred in from another university. All such credits must have earned grades of "B" or better, have been earned while in good standing in graduate status, and must have been graduate courses (numbered 5000 or higher) at a regionally accredited institution where the student took the courses. Grades of "S" or "P" are not acceptable for transfer credit. All transfer courses must be acceptable to the student's Advisory Committee and the Graduate Program Director or Department Head. For transfer coursework more than five years old, a Course Justification Request Form must be filed with the Plan of Study.

Credits from other universities are transferred to a Virginia Tech graduate degree at the time the Plan of Study that includes those courses is approved by the Graduate School. Transferred courses count only as credit hours and are not included in the calculation of the Virginia Tech GPA. Official transcripts are required before transfer course work can

be approved for the Plan of Study.

Research, Project and Report, Practicum or Internship credit hours may not be transferred in from another university to meet Virginia Tech graduate degree requirements (i.e. they cannot be included on the Plan of Study). Credits taken while in undergraduate status or for an undergraduate degree cannot be used as transfer credit for a graduate degree.

Continuous Enrollment Policy
Starting Fall 2015, the Virginia Tech University Council requires graduate students to be continuously enrolled in a minimum of three credit hours in all spring and fall semesters at the university, from initial enrollment through graduation (Resolution 2014-15H). Approved "in absentia" status (resolution 2014-15J) or Cooperative Education Program enrollment satisfies the continuous enrollment requirement. Graduate students who need to break their continuous enrollment may apply for a leave of absence (resolution 2014-15I) or participate in programs and activities approved by the Graduate School that require absence from the university.

Any graduate student failing to remain continuously enrolled without approved leave will be resigned from the university. Visit the Graduate Catalog to learn more about the enrollment requirements. For more information, contact the Graduate School at grads@vt.edu.

Doctoral Residency Requirement
All doctoral students are required to complete residency. Residency allows students to concentrate focused time on their degree, acquire the necessary "habits, attitudes, skills, and insights" (CGS, 2005) required for contributions to scholarship, and have opportunities to work closely with other scholars including faculty and other graduate students. These scholarly skills, attitudes, and experiences go beyond acquiring knowledge in classes and beyond experience in professional practice.
Graduate School residency requirement description:
https://secure.graduateschool.vt.edu/graduate_catalog/policies.htm?policy=002d14432c654287012c6542e363000c

Residency for the ALCE program is generally accomplished through one of two mechanisms:
▪ **Two consecutive semesters of full-time enrollment:** Programs will be expected to provide opportunities during those two semesters to cultivate immersion in scholarship and achieve the goals of residency; or
▪ **Individual alternative residency plan:** Proposals for alternative residency from individual students can be submitted for approval to the Graduate School.

Departmental Engagement:
The department is a vibrant, multi-disciplinary community in which scholarly discussions, research, and collaboration are valued as methods of furthering academic knowledge. The department faculty recognize the importance of regular interaction with members of the department community as part of the learning process. Opportunities for interaction include participation in departmental events, and collaboration with fellow graduate students and

faculty.

Students are encouraged to engage in ways similar to the following examples:
- Participate in department meetings and functions,
- Attend peers dissertation and thesis defenses,
- Discuss research in seminar opportunities,
- Participate in graduate student association events,
- Collaborate with fellow graduate students and faculty, and
- Participate in other professional development opportunities.

Progress to Degree

Time to Degree Completion:
Guidelines for time to complete graduate degree programs are established as departmental policy in the interest of both the department and student. As a general guideline, full-time students in the Master's program will require two years and full-time students in the Doctoral program will require three years. The department is committed to continuing financial assistance if the student is making satisfactory progress toward their degree, fulfilling assistantship responsibilities at a level that is satisfactory to the supervisor, and funds are available.

Evaluation of Performance and Progress toward Degree:
In an effort to foster communication between graduate students, their faculty advisor, and advisory committees, the Department and the Graduate School require an annual evaluation and communication of graduate student performance and progress toward the degree. The process is initiated in January with a brief written report, from each graduate student to his/her faculty advisor, which appropriately details the graduate student's academic and research program progress during the preceding year. Each graduate student will meet with his/her advisor to discuss progress and set goals for the next year. Faculty advisors will respond with a written letter to the student that evaluates the student's performance and progress toward degree by February 15th. Students will submit full evaluation to Graduate Program Director by March 1st. For detailed instructions see the Canvas graduate student site. The annual evaluation will become part of the student's file. Results of the evaluation of performance are reported to the Graduate School May of every year.

Participation in Professional Development Experiences
All qualified graduate students are given the opportunity to work with faculty members in the preparation and delivery of instructional material for departmental classes, Extension programs, or other educational opportunities. Students may find similar opportunities to work with teams or individuals outside of ALCE. Participation in these activities provides extremely valuable experience for students and is regarded highly by potential employers. In all cases, at the earliest possible date, graduate students are expected to disclose to their faculty advisor all professional development activities being performed. This conversation should include: the nature of the professional development activity, individuals involved, and funding that may be attached to this activity. The purpose of this conversation is to ensure professional practice, quality work, and transparency of any conflict of interests. Your advisor is your guide to good practice.

Professional Associations:

The Department strongly encourages graduate student membership in professional associations. Students should consult with their advisor to determine appropriate professional affiliations. Many professional societies are available for students and offer student membership rates.

Collegiate Student Organizations:
The department encourages students to be involved in student organizations at the department, college, and university level.

Publication Expectations:
From dissertation and thesis research students are expected to co-author at least one peer reviewed journal article with their faculty advisor prior to final exam. In addition, a well-developed manuscript will be submitted to a scholarly journal from the thesis/dissertation research activities. It is anticipated that a MS program would lead to 2 publications and a Ph.D. program would lead to 2-3 publications.

Prior to the submission process, graduate students are expected to verbally disclose to their faculty advisor any plans for publication of any academic body of work, including but not limited to: professional publications (e.g., newsletters), abstracts for posters, abstracts for presentations, abstracts for conferences, journal manuscripts, books or book chapters, and grant proposals. This includes single and co-authored work. If the aforementioned bodies of work are encouraged as part of a graduate course, students should also disclose intentions of these submissions. This is to ensure high quality work, guidance for the submission process, and transparency of any conflict of interests.

Graduate students are required to submit their thesis/dissertation electronically through the Graduate School ETD system.

Graduate Honor Code
All graduate students are expected to abide by the standards of academic integrity and ethical behavior established in the Virginia Tech Graduate Honor Code. Details of the Code, including penalties for violations are included on the website for the Graduate Honor System:
https://graduateschool.vt.edu/academics/expectations/graduate-honor-system.html.
Because some aspects of appropriate conduct are course- specific (e.g., collaborative work with other students on assignments), the syllabus for each course should be examined carefully to determine instructor expectations.

For PhD students, particular attention is drawn to written Preliminary Examinations for admission to candidacy for the Ph.D. degree. These examinations are unique in that they generally are administered outside the traditional, in-classroom examination setting and may permit the use of various informational resources in responding to questions. During the written portion of the exam, the student responds to questions submitted to the faculty advisor by members of the advisory committee. These questions are open book. After the written exam (approximately two weeks), an oral examination will occur. The format for this exam typically involves follow-up questions related to responses to the written examinations as well as widely ranging questions in the general area of the student's

research interest and in areas related to coursework taken by the student. Students taking Preliminary Examinations are **not** allowed to seek assistance from other individuals, nor should they share examination questions with other students without permission from the faculty member submitting the questions.

Travel Funding for Research Conferences

The Department encourages graduate student travel to present research at conferences and professional meetings. Where appropriate, student travel can be supported by grants and projects in which students are engaged. Students are also encouraged to seek funding from the Graduate Student Assembly (http://www.gsa.graduateschool.vt.edu/funding) and leverage other resources for travel. The Department will support student travel under the following circumstances:

- Full time graduate students in good academic standing,
- Must be presenting research (poster or oral),
- Travel expense reimbursement up to $500, if available, per fiscal year (July 1-June 30),
- Must submit travel request and research abstract/manuscript, and
- Must submit travel reimbursement within 30 days to receive funding.

Use of Departmental Equipment, Facilities, and Supplies

Graduate students are afforded the use of departmental equipment, facilities, and supplies on the same basis as faculty and staff; that is, if an activity is departmental business, use of departmental facilities and supplies in support of that activity is appropriate. This includes use of phones, university mail, and office supplies. Use of the departmental copier should be arranged initially through the student's faculty supervisor. (An access code is required to operate the copier; operational training is required to receive an access code.)

The copier should **not** be used to copy theses, dissertations, or materials related to classes taken by graduate students. Items related to the student's research or participation in teaching or Extension programs may be copied at departmental expense on the main printer or printers available in student offices. Mass copying of journal articles or book chapters is **not** allowed. You should make use of electronic files to the greatest extent possible.

Copy facilities for personal materials are available at the University Library on a charge basis. Limited clerical assistance is available to graduate students through the student's faculty supervisor. Equipment assigned to clerical staff (e.g., computers) should be used only with prior permission of the clerical staff member responsible for the equipment. The departmental conference rooms (e.g. 250 Litton-Reaves) are available to graduate students for meetings and should be scheduled on the calendars in the main departmental office.

Extended sessions (e.g., all day or longer study sessions) are acceptable so long as the room is not needed for meetings by faculty, staff, or other graduate students. Students should obtain keys to the building and appropriate work areas from the office manager in the departmental main office. Graduate students, along with faculty and staff, are responsible for the security of offices and facilities.

Computing Support

The University provides computing support for graduate education and research. Graduate students are assigned user ID's which allow access to remote servers. All students should receive a PID (personal identification) at the time of initial check-in to the University. Students also have access to wireless internet on the Blacksburg campus.

The Department has a limited number of computers available for student use on a short-term basis. Students working on assistantships that require computer technology to complete their assignment will be provided with access to departmental computers.

Exit Student Interview

All graduate students are requested to schedule an exit interview with the graduate director prior to leaving the university. Information provided by students, which is confidential with respect to source, contributes significantly to the evolution and improvement of departmental graduate programs.