



# **Geosciences Graduate Student Handbook 2023-2024**

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## I. Introduction

### I.1 Purpose and Scope of this Handbook

This Handbook provides graduate students in the Department of Geosciences with information about departmental policies, academics, support, and resources. It supplements the official policies of the Graduate School that apply to all Virginia Tech graduate students, as outlined in the **Graduate School Policies and Procedures (GSPP)** found in the Graduate catalog:

[https://secure.graduateschool.vt.edu/graduate\\_catalog/](https://secure.graduateschool.vt.edu/graduate_catalog/)

Graduate students are responsible for knowing and observing the policies outlined in this Handbook and the GSPP. Successful completion of degree requirements is solely the responsibility of the student, and each student is advised to read these documents and verify how specific regulations may apply to their particular situation.

### I.2 Graduate Program Governance

Graduate student policies and procedures are created and administered by the Department's Graduate Student Affairs Committee (GSAC) with supervision and approval by the Department Head. Questions about the policies described in this Handbook should be referred to the Chair of GSAC, any member of the GSAC, or the Graduate Coordinator. The Graduate Student Liaison Committee is another avenue of communication between the graduate student body and faculty and administration. This committee consists of ~6 graduate students that meet several times a year and routinely communicate issues to the Chair of GSAC. Relevant contacts for the 2023-2024 academic year are:

- Graduate Program Director (GPD) and Chair of GSAC: **Dr. Brian Romans** (note: [Dr. Jim Spotila](#) will serve as interim GPD and Chair of GSAC from June 1—December 31, 2023 while Dr. Romans is on leave)
- GSAC Administrative Contact and Graduate Coordinator: **Ms. April Newcomer**
- GSAC Members: **Dr. Sean Bemis, Dr. Tina Dura, Dr. Scott King, Dr. Ying Zhou**
  - subject to change
- Graduate Student Liaison Committee:
  - Chair: **Carmen Atkins**
    - Six members TBD
- Faculty Meeting Graduate Student Representative: **TBD**
- Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) Representative: **TBD**
- Graduate and Professional Student Senate Representatives: **Tarisa Ross and Alina Valop**
- Department Head: **Dr. W. Steven Holbrook**
- Associate Department Head: **Dr. Madeline Schreiber**

## II. Academics

### II.1 Start Date for Graduate Students

Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTA) and Graduate Research Assistantship (GRA) are on payroll as of August 10. In Fall 2023, new and returning students are expected to arrive on campus by August 14, unless otherwise instructed. GRAs should stay in contact with their faculty advisors for any alterations to this return date. GTAs should contact their assistantship supervisor for training and

set-up dates. Students who are not on support are required to be on campus for any orientations or meetings that have been scheduled. In Spring 2024, new and returning students are expected to arrive by January 10 unless otherwise instructed, similar to the fall instructions.

Special circumstances may warrant a late start date; for example, if a student is on a GRA or fellowship and is conducting research abroad, accommodations can be made. The student must contact April Newcomer and the Chair of GSAC to request a late start date. **Vacations and other activities that are not related to a student's research do not fall under the category of special circumstances.** If a student is on a GTA, there is little flexibility with the start date, as GTAs are expected to attend all necessary orientations and/or workshops. Under no circumstances are GTAs to return to campus after classes have started. This is a violation of policy and may incur a stop payment on salary.

The purpose of returning prior to the start of classes is so that students have time to get organized prior to classes starting. This is particularly important for GTAs, as there are course-related tasks to accomplish at the start of a new semester. Returning on time is important so that many logistical details can be accomplished so that the student may jump right into classes, teaching, and research when the semester starts. There may also be important paperwork to complete or workshops held during the week before classes.

Numerous orientation activities occur prior to the start of classes in the fall semester. New students are required to attend the new graduate student orientation within the Department, as well as orientations presented by the Graduate School. All new graduate students, regardless of support status in their first semester, are required to attend the GTA training both in the Graduate School and in the Department. The Department also has a general meeting required for *all* (including continuing) graduate students, held the week before school starts. A new student field trip is also run prior to the start of classes. Other useful information for new students may be obtained from the Graduate School's website at this link <http://graduateschool.vt.edu/>.

## ***II.2 University Requirements for MS and PhD Degrees***

The Graduate School course requirements summarized in the tables below are given in detail in the [GSPP](#). Courses numbered 4000 or lower are undergraduate courses. Courses numbered 5000 or above are graduate-level courses. MS Research and Thesis (5994) and PhD Research and Dissertation (7994) carry no grade. A student on support must be registered for at least 12 credits (including research and dissertation) per semester during the academic year to be considered full-time. This includes at least 3 hours of the appropriate research CRN. An overall GPA of at least 3.0 is required to retain graduate-student status. Please note: ICTAS students are required to register for 18 hours per ICTAS guidelines.

### **Requirements for Master's Degree**

Semester Credit Hours		
	Minimum	Maximum
<b>Total Graduate Credits</b>	<b>30</b>	_____
Graded Credit Hours (i.e. from courses)	20	_____
• Courses numbered 5000 or higher	12	_____
• Courses numbered 5974, 5984, and 6984	_____	6
• Seminars (subject matter unstructured)	_____	3
Research Credit Hours (5994)	6	10

### **Requirements for PhD Degree**

Semester Credit Hours		
	Minimum	Maximum
<b>Total Graduate Credits</b>	<b>90</b>	_____
Graded Credit Hours (i.e. from courses)	27	_____
• Courses numbered 5000 or higher	15	_____
• Courses numbered 5974, 5984, and 6984	_____	18
• Seminars (subject matter unstructured)	_____	4
Research and Dissertation (7994)	30	_____

#### Notes:

Students should sign up for a minimum of 12 credits per semester to maintain full-time status. (ICTAS doctoral fellows may be required to be registered for 18 credits.) If a large proportion of credits is coming from coursework (e.g. 2 or more courses), it is recommended to still sign up for

adequate research credits (5994 or 7994) to cover what research is being completed during the term. In general, this is likely a minimum of 3 credits of research per semester, but if need be, a student may take more than 12 credits per semester to ensure that they adequately cover their research activities with credit. If students need to register for more than 12 credits of research, please contact April Newcomer to request an exception.

Independent studies (GEOS 5974) may be taken, but require submission of the Request for Independent Study form available in the [Graduate Student Forms Google folder](#). They may only be taken pass/fail. Contact April Newcomer with questions.

Seminars may be taken on a pass/fail basis (if that is the only grade mode offered) and may be used towards meeting the minimum requirements in courses numbered 5000 or higher (for PhD only).

Graduate students who were undergraduates at Virginia Tech can use 5000 level VT courses toward the graduate degree if 1) it was taken while enrolled as a dual or BS/MS student and 2) it wasn't used to satisfy the undergraduate degree.

For information on transferring credit from other schools and/or from other degree programs at Virginia Tech see the [GSPP](#).

Students interested in applying for a Start of Semester Defense Exception Request (SSDE), which requires one credit hour of enrollment, should discuss this with April Newcomer several months in advance. Students do not need to register for the one credit hour. If approved, the Graduate School will register the student when processing the exception approval. SSDE is only available the first three weeks of each semester.

### ***II.3 Continuous Enrollment Policy***

Continuous enrollment means that any student working on their degree (including working with their advisor on the thesis, dissertation, or project report) should be registered for the minimum of 3 credit hours/semester of the appropriate "research" course. Summer registration is not required unless the student is taking the preliminary exam or defense during a summer session.

If the student has completed their thesis/dissertation by the beginning of the fall or spring semester and is defending early (i.e. within the first three weeks of the semester), they can request a [Start of Semester Defense Exception](#) (SSDE; 1 cr). SSDE enrollment can be used by students defending at any time during the summer sessions. Students must be enrolled during the semester in which they graduate. The only instance in which a student would be allowed to defend in between semesters is if the student is enrolled during the following semester. See additional policy details at: <https://graduateschool.vt.edu/academics/graduate-catalog-policies-procedures.html>.

### ***II.4 Audits***

Graduate students can audit graduate courses with approval from the instructor. Because each instructor may have different expectations for requirements of auditing students, it is the responsibility of the student to discuss the expectations (i.e., attendance, completion of homework, and exams) at the beginning of the semester with the instructor and to have written documentation of these expectations if they are not outlined in the syllabus. Audited courses do not count on the Plan of Study.

## ***II.5 Courses, Calendars, and Enrollment***

**Classes are selected and enrolled in via Hokie SPA.** Continuing students are required to register during the course request period; deadlines for this are made available each semester and provided in the academic calendar. **New students are automatically enrolled with 12 research credits prior to the beginning of the semester, so that their payroll may start.** These credits may be dropped and replaced by classes in the first week of the semester by the posted deadline.

Departmental graduate courses offered in a given semester will vary depending on resources and demand. Many courses are offered every other year. Students may review the [GEOS Graduate Course Projections](#) to see when courses are expected to be tentatively offered. Graduate courses are generally required to maintain enrollment of a minimum of 5 students. A lower enrollment may result in the course being canceled at the start of a semester. Students are encouraged to directly contact faculty instructors regarding the availability and status of a specific course. Students may request that a GEOS Graduate Class be offered by completing the [Graduate Class Request Form](#). The deadline for submitting the form is at least one month prior to the start of the semester the course will be offered.

As indicated in the department offer letter and in the assistantship contract, all incoming GEOS graduate students will be registered for the 1-credit (P/F) courses entitled: GRAD 5004 “GTA Training Workshop” during their first semester and GEOS 5024 “Professional Development and Ethics in Geosciences” during their first fall semester. In GEOS 5024 students are provided an overview of the department and what it means to be a graduate student in the Department of Geosciences. Approximately 40 percent of the course will be devoted to Professional Ethics. During the spring semester, completion of Ethics Part II, an online ethics training in Canvas, will be required. These modules will need to be completed by the last day of spring semester classes. Both of these components must be completed before the student’s Plan of Study will be approved. Beginning in the 23-24 academic year, students in their first year in GEOS will also be registered for additional courses that are designed for all graduate students and are strongly recommended by the GEOS faculty. These courses include GEOS 5984 “Seminars in the Geosciences” (1-credit, P/F) in Fall 2023 as well as GEOS 5044 “Writing and Communication in the Geosciences (2-credits, A-F) and GEOS 5984 “Seminars in the Geosciences” (1-credit, P/F) in Spring 2024.

Graduate students may participate in the Graduate Cooperative Education Program after completing at least one semester of academic work in the student’s program of study. If students are approved to participate, students will be enrolled in 1-credit of GRAD 7944. For more information about eligibility, how to apply, and frequently asked questions, visit the [Graduate Cooperative Education Program website](#).

- Registrar's current Timetable and Academic Calendar:  
[https://banweb.banner.vt.edu/ssb/prod/HZSKVTSC.P\\_DispRequest](https://banweb.banner.vt.edu/ssb/prod/HZSKVTSC.P_DispRequest)

## ***II.6 Special Notes for International Students***

International students (unless they are native English speakers or have gotten previous degrees from U.S. universities) must score 25 or greater on the TOEFL Speaking subtest. Students who are below the minimum must retake the TOEFL.

## ***II.7 Advisory Committee***

For each MS and PhD candidate, there is a resident faculty member who acts as the student’s



advisor and chair of the student's Advisory Committee. (Incoming students who have no advisor will have a temporary advisor appointed by the GSAC.) The Advisory Committee serves three purposes.

First, the committee serves the purpose of quality control, evaluating progress and scholarship, and ensuring that graduates and degree-holders meet departmental standards. Second, the committee acts as a resource to aid in research by providing relevant expertise and guidance. Finally, the committee serves to protect the student. The committee may act as a mediating body between the student and advisor when miscommunications or misunderstandings arise related to expectations or timetables for meeting research goals.

The committee serves to ensure that the student receives adequate guidance in their academic program and to monitor student progress. Committees can be an effective sounding board if conflicts arise and should be viewed first and foremost as a resource for the student.

**Graduate students should choose an Advisory Committee within their first semester**, prior to completion of the Plan of Study and the Annual Report (see subsections II.8 and II.9). Selection of the Advisory Committee is the joint responsibility of the student and primary advisor. The Advisory Committee is composed of at least three members for MS candidates and four members for PhD candidates (at least two-thirds must be from VT, in both cases). The primary research advisor counts as one of these members and serves as the committee chair. Post-doctoral researchers can be additional members of committees, but cannot count as one of the required three or four members for MS and PhD committees, respectively.

There is no upper limit for the size of committees, and committees as large as five or six members are common for PhD candidates. Committees can include external (non-VT) committee members or VT-affiliated members. Please note that **all** committee members must be accounted for at the defense. If the student has an external committee member request, the student will need to complete the [External Committee Member Approval form](#). The student will need the requested committee member's birthdate as well as a copy of their CV to refer to while filling out the form. Students should check with April Newcomer if they have questions.

Committee members may be changed at any time, pending approval of all members, new and old, and the Department Head by completing the [Change of Committee/Advisor form](#). Once the form is filled out and signed, the student will submit it to the GEOS File Submission form: <https://tinyurl.com/GEOSUpload>.

**All MS candidates and PhD candidates in their first three years of residence are required to have at least one meeting with their Advisory Committee each year.** Pending advisor's approval, PhD candidates that have been in residence for more than three years may conduct their meeting via email. Committee meetings should take place in fall or early spring term, prior to completion of the Annual Report (see subsection II.9).

**For 2<sup>nd</sup> year MS students:** The Department asks that all 2<sup>nd</sup> year MS students have a committee meeting during the fall semester. The purpose of this is to ensure that the students are on track to finish their MS program during the spring semester or summer of their 2<sup>nd</sup> year. After the meeting, the advisor should prepare a letter of evaluation to be shared with the student and submitted via the [GEOS File Submission](#) form for GSAC review. It is up to the student, advisor, and committee to decide if the student should have a follow-up meeting in the spring before the MS defense. The Annual Report for 2<sup>nd</sup> year MS students is due at the same deadline as all other students.

It is the responsibility of the student to schedule the committee meeting according to the schedules of the committee members and to [reserve a room](#). Committee meetings should include all

local members of the Advisory Committee; external (non-VT) committee members need not be physically present but are expected to participate virtually.

The purpose of the annual committee meeting is to update the committee on student progress and for the committee to provide direction, feedback, and guidance to the student and advisor. Prior to the committee meeting, the students should prepare a draft of the Annual Report (see subsection II.9) to show to the committee. At the committee meeting, the student should present an overview of the research question, goals, and progress to date, followed by a discussion between and amongst the student and committee members. The meeting should include a discussion of future plans and timetable for completion of goals. At the end of the meeting, the student will leave the room and the committee will discuss and evaluate the student's progress. GSRS or other public presentations may not be used as substitutes for the annual committee meeting, although it may be convenient to schedule the committee meeting directly following the student's GSRS presentation.

Special committee meetings may also be called at any time if issues arise; for example, in the case of conflict or misunderstanding between advisor and student, the student's first response should be to call for a special committee meeting to discuss the issue.

## **II.8 Plan of Study**

**MS and PhD candidates must file a Plan of Study before completing 15 course credit hours in their program.** For students entering the program in fall semester, a target date for completing and submitting the Plan of Study is at the same time as the Annual Report. The Plan of Study is a requirement of the Graduate School and must be completed to maintain satisfactory graduate student status. The Plan of Study only needs to be submitted once unless changes are made (see below).

The Plan of Study should be completed after consultation with the research advisor and the student's Advisory Committee. Instructions and format details will be sent to new students in early spring. The minimum number of course credits should be compiled, which fulfills the requirements summarized in subsection II.2. A PhD candidate's Plan of Study must indicate the semester (or summer session) during which the preliminary exam will be taken.

After the proposed Plan of Study is filled out and signed, the student will submit it to the GEOS File Submission form: <https://tinyurl.com/GEOSUpload>. Please obtain electronic signatures from all committee members. If unable to obtain electronic signatures, be sure that the committee chair uses the appropriate phrasing in the advisor's evaluation letter:

- *"The student's existing Plan of Study as it appears in Hokie SPA was discussed by the Advisory Committee. The committee agrees that no changes are required at this time."*
- *"The Advisory Committee discussed the student's proposed (**choose one**: new or revised) Plan of Study and Plan Change form (if applicable), which has been submitted with the Annual Report. All committee members agree that this Plan of Study is acceptable."*

April Newcomer will enter the contents electronically and send it to the Graduate School for approval. Graduating students are required to review their Plan of Study one semester *before* graduation in order for changes to be approved by the department. Changes may be made by completing the Request for Plan of Study Changes form on the Graduate School's [website](#). After the form is filled out and signed, the student will submit it to the GEOS File Submission form: <https://tinyurl.com/GEOSUpload>.

**Students must obtain a 3.0 GPA both overall and for courses listed on the Plan of Study.** If a student gets less than a C- in a course that is on the Plan of Study, it must be retaken and both grades are included in the calculation of the Plan of Study GPA. Courses taken five or more years prior to the completion of the MS degree or seven years for the PhD will not be counted toward fulfilling the degree requirements unless revalidated by the student's Advisory Committee.

## ***II.9 Annual Reports***

**The Graduate School requires all graduate students to complete an Annual Report each spring.** All continuing students, including those about to defend, are required to complete this report. The Department's format for the Annual Report may vary from year to year, but it is made available during the fall semester. **Reports are typically due in early to mid-April. If a student defends in the fall, the Annual Report will be due in December.** Students who begin during the spring will not be required to submit an Annual Report during their first semester.

The Annual Report requests information regarding research (e.g. papers, presentations, and grants), teaching, and classes taken in the past year, as well as a statement of plans for the future and the student's current CV. For the purpose of reporting, the one year timeframe is considered to be the year since completing the previous Annual Report (or, for new students, everything done up to that point). As such, the Annual Report may cover the April through April timeframe (or roughly the current spring semester, preceding fall semester, and preceding summer), rather than the Calendar Year or Academic Year. Once completed, the report is shared with the advisor and committee members, and the Advisory Committee meeting is held.

During the meeting, members of the committee provide feedback to the advisor and will rate the progress of the student in accordance with directions set forth in the Annual Report. Following the meeting, the advisor writes a letter to the student (cc'd to the committee) that summarizes the evaluation of the committee regarding their progress and any recommendations for the future. This letter is a requirement for all advisors of their students.

The Annual Report should be filled out electronically and submitted to the GEOS File Submission form along with the advisor's letter by the due date: <https://tinyurl.com/GEOSUpload>. Please obtain electronic signatures from all committee members. If unable to obtain electronic signatures, be sure that your committee chair uses the appropriate phrasing in the advisor's evaluation letter:

- *“The Advisory Committee discussed the student’s research and coursework and achieved consensus for the ratings given above. All committee members had the opportunity to comment on this letter prior to sharing it with the student and agree with its contents.”*

Reports turned in without all signatures or appropriate phrasing will be returned to the student.

Once complete, the Chair of GSAC will read each Annual Report to review the progress of each student. In the event of any potential issues, the Chair of GSAC will meet with the student. The Annual Reports will then be sent to the Graduate School for evaluation (a requirement of the Graduate School).

Ratings from the reports will not have an automatic impact on stipend, TA assignments, or graduate student status, but are simply documentation of the student's progress. Ratings could be used as supporting information when reviewing applications for special awards and grants made at the Department level. Ratings may also be appealed by the graduate student or advisor by written communication to the GSAC.

**Late Annual Reports will not be accepted.** If they are not turned in on time, an unsatisfactory rating will be given by default. If a student cannot complete the report on time due to extenuating circumstances, this should be communicated and cleared with the GSAC in advance of the due date.

As stated above, **students receiving a ranking of unsatisfactory on their Annual Report will meet with the Chair of GSAC to discuss the Advisory Committee's letter and specific issues regarding the student's progress.** If needed, the Chair of GSAC will communicate with the advisor/Advisory Committee for specific information. The student will be required to hold an additional committee meeting during the following semester; the committee members will then discuss whether necessary improvements have been made. If they have been made, then no action needs to be taken. If the committee decides that necessary improvements have not been made, the Chair of GSAC will meet with the advisor and the Department Head to discuss the range of possible actions that should be taken. Note that students making unsatisfactory progress may be ineligible to attend special department functions, such as the spring banquet and graduation.

### ***II.10 Conversions from MS to PhD Program***

Prior to the end of the third semester of residency, MS candidates may apply for conversion to the PhD program without completion of the MS degree. Students cannot convert after completing the third semester of residence as an MS student. Any student converting from an MS degree program to a PhD program or wishing to enter the PhD program after having completed an MS degree program at Virginia Tech must submit a formal application to the GSAC. The application for conversion includes the [Change of Degree form](#), a letter from the student, and a letter from the advisor.

Deadline for Submission:

- Fall Semester: January 10
- Spring Semester: October 1

For the letters, the following information should be included:

- The faculty letter should provide some reasons/justification for the switch, including how the student is progressing with research, motivation, and how professional goals have evolved in the PhD direction. It should include a review of the student's performance so far in the program, possibly including learning outcomes and/or goals from the PhD rubric. The letter should include comments on work ethic, independence, creativity, etc. An updated funding plan and a description of the project the student will be working on as well as grants that may be available should be included.
- The student letter should contain similar details confirming what the advisor has mentioned. The student should explain their goals, why they originally pursued MS, and what has changed to lead them to want to complete a PhD.

Once the student has everything ready, the form and letters should be uploaded to [www.tinyurl.com/GEOSUpload](http://www.tinyurl.com/GEOSUpload) for processing. The student will receive a notification when the documents have been processed.

### ***II.11 PhD Preliminary Exam***

**Content:** The Department does not give a standardized Preliminary Examination for PhD candidates (referred to as Qualifying Examination in some departments). Subject to the regulations of the Graduate School and the general departmental requirements listed below, **each PhD advisory committee shall have responsibility for the make-up and administration of the Preliminary**

**Examination.** Each research group in the Department has developed their own written guidelines. These guidelines can be obtained from faculty and are available in the [Graduate Student Google folder](#). It is critically important that students preparing for their ‘prelims’ (Preliminary Examination) meet with their advisor and committee members to discuss the format, as they differ from research group to research group.

**Timing:** The Department requires that **students take their PhD preliminary exam by the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> semester of their academic program**. This is true for direct PhD students, as well as students with MS degrees from VT or other institutions.

**Note: committee meetings cannot be a replacement for a preliminary exam.**

- The intent of the committee meeting is to monitor the annual progress of a student.
- The preliminary exam determines if a student is prepared to pursue a doctorate degree.

These two meetings are separate.

**Scheduling:** A Navigate campaign will be sent out each semester for students to schedule an appointment to discuss the Preliminary Examination process and to review the student’s records for possible delays. The student should first identify a date/time for prelims that works for the committee. However, this is just the first step. Once a date/time is agreed upon by the committee, the student must send the schedule to April Newcomer for department approval. After receiving approval, the student can reserve a [department room](#), if needed. Finally, the preliminary exam request is a Graduate School requirement and is done via this site: <https://ess.graduateschool.vt.edu/pages/login.php>. This request must be submitted **at least four weeks in advance of the exam date**.

Students and faculty should inform April Newcomer **as soon as they identify the timing of the exam**, such as at the start of the semester in which the exam will be held. There are numerous steps that must be taken to ensure that the exam can be held, and the date must receive department approval prior to any additional steps, such as requesting a room reservation. Any delays may result in unnecessary work or even preclude the exam from happening on the desired date. No Preliminary Exams or defenses may be held at the same time, so **confirming the Preliminary Exam time with April first is imperative**. Otherwise, you may run into timing or room availability issues that result in you having to start the process over once department approval has been obtained.

The exam notice is emailed by the Graduate School to the student, advisor, and committee. It is the student’s responsibility to make sure all members sign off on the electronic exam approval within three business days.

After the exam:

1. The advisor enters the committee’s decision online.
2. All committee members, including the advisor, approve the exam outcome.

Graduate school regulations that apply to the Preliminary Exam are:

1. The examination must be taken at least six months before the thesis/dissertation defense. Failure to take the Preliminary Exam on time can be construed as a lack of satisfactory progress toward the student’s degree and can result in the loss of support or dismissal from the graduate program.

2. The Preliminary Examination shall include both an oral and a written portion.
3. Other faculty members may attend the exam, but only the members of the Advisory Committee will vote on the results.
4. To pass any of the required examinations, a graduate student is allowed at most one unsatisfactory vote. If a student fails an examination, one full semester (a minimum of 15 weeks) must elapse before the second examination is scheduled. Not more than two opportunities to pass any one examination are allowed. A student failing any of the examinations required by Graduate Policies two times will be dismissed from graduate studies by the Graduate School.
5. The student must be enrolled for a minimum of 3 credit hours to sit for the Preliminary Exam including summer sessions.

### ***II.12 Thesis/Dissertation Defense***

Because the MS and PhD degrees are professional degrees, the faculty expects that theses or dissertations will be prepared and presented in a format appropriate for submission/publication in a recognized journal in the field of study. Data, protocols, and other information not appropriate for publication can be put in appendices at the end of the document.

As a partial requirement for completion, the student must defend their thesis or dissertation before the Advisory Committee. The presentation component of the defense is open to the public, and all faculty and graduate students of the Department are encouraged to attend. This is followed by a closed-door session with the Advisory Committee, in which more detailed questions will be asked of the student.

When a student is deemed ready to defend their thesis or dissertation by the chair of their Advisory Committee, the student should:

1. Schedule an appointment with April Newcomer at the beginning of the anticipated semester of defense to discuss the process and timeline. A Navigate campaign will be sent out each semester for students to schedule an appointment to discuss scheduling their defense. There are numerous steps that must be taken to ensure that the defense can be held, and any delay may result in unnecessary work or even preclude the defense from happening at the desired date.
2. Once the student has confirmed a date with their Advisory Committee, the student must contact April Newcomer to confirm the date with the department. A defense cannot overlap with other GEOS events; the student should first check with the [GEOS Events calendar](#) for conflicts. The date will be added as a tentative date to the department calendar. No preliminary exams or defenses may be held at the same time, so confirming defense timing with April Newcomer is imperative.
3. The student is required to submit the online defense request to the Graduate School **at least four weeks in advance of the defense date**. April Newcomer will send appropriate departmental notices.
4. Prior to approving the defense date request, the written thesis/dissertation draft must also be approved not later than **4 weeks prior to the defense**. A thesis/dissertation draft must be uploaded to the Graduate School for iThenticate approval (for plagiarism check; see subsection II.13 for more information) **4 weeks prior to the defense**. At the same time, the draft should be submitted to the Advisory Committee for approval. **The defense date cannot**



**be set until the committee signs off that the student is ready to defend based on the status of the thesis/dissertation draft and the iThenticate report.**

5. A complete version of the thesis or dissertation (less any modifications and editing required after the defense) must be made available to each committee member **at least two weeks** prior to the defense. Students should check with committee members as to their preference of reading hard copy vs. electronic drafts.
6. Any outstanding student fees must be paid at the Bursar's Office prior to the defense.
7. The student is responsible for confirming and arranging the time and room with April Newcomer. Please see the [Derring Room Reservations and Room Calendars](#) for reservation instructions as well as the room availability. At this time, Derring 4069 and Derring 2062 are the only spaces approved for defenses in Derring.
8. The defense notice is emailed by the Graduate School to the student, advisor, and committee. It is the student's responsibility to make sure all members sign off on the electronic defense approval **within three business days**. If a member is unable to attend the defense (either in-person or remotely/virtually):
  - a. make sure the thesis/dissertation document is provided to them in advance
  - b. advisor must solicit comments on the thesis/dissertation from the member
  - c. advisor must solicit any questions that the member wants to ask regarding the thesis/dissertation
  - d. a proxy must be arranged to attend the defense on the member's behalf
  - e. the proxy must communicate with the member about the defense results and, if the member is in agreement with the results as communicated, they must submit their approval within three business days. If this is not an option, the proxy can provide their approval to April Newcomer via email, copying the faculty advisor, indicating that they approve the results as reflected in ESS.

After the defense:

1. The advisor enters the committee's decision online.
2. All committee members, including the advisor, approve the original outcome for the defense, as well as, the Electronic Thesis or Dissertation (ETD).
3. The final ETD approval must be acted on by the two week deadline. There are NO exceptions.
4. Although the defense may be scheduled for any part of a semester, the student is expected to remain in residence after the defense if they are being paid on a GTA or GRA or fellowship contract. That is, they must still perform their duties so long as they are receiving a stipend from the department.

Dissertation Printing:

Professional Services can print and bind dissertations. The student will need to contact them and provide additional details for pricing as it depends upon the type of paper, number of pages, etc. Contact info is below:

*210 Prices Fork Rd  
Blacksburg, VA 24060  
(540) 953-2223*

### **II.13 iThenticate Check**

Per Graduate School policy, all written theses and dissertations must be checked for plagiarism and self-plagiarism using the iThenticate platform. This must be completed prior to scheduling the defense. The software generates a report on the similarity of the text to other sources. The report is reviewed by the student and committee chair for plagiarism and changes made if deemed necessary (no other penalty results in the draft stage). Once the review has occurred and the document is deemed appropriate, the defense can be scheduled. A copy of the iThenticate report must accompany the submission of the final examination scheduling form.

Instructions for using iThenticate may be found from the links below. The Graduate School requires the “Similarity Index” to be 14% or less, and “Sources” need to be 4% or less. When running the iThenticate report, save the “Text Only” report as a PDF. When uploading the document to iThenticate, exclude the title page and bibliography/works cited references. Set the folder filters to exclude quotes, small matches and sources to be “word count=9 words”, and to include Academic Abstract through the end of the document body, appendices, and all repositories.

<https://graduateschool.vt.edu/faculty-and-staff-resources/ithenticate.html>

<https://graduateschool.vt.edu/academics/what-you-need-to-graduate/ithenticate-for-students.html>

### **II.14 Graduate Program Assessment**

To assess and improve the MS and PhD programs, the department conducts standardized assessment of key learning outcomes. These assessments are performed during final defenses following the evaluation rubrics provided via the website. The committee evaluates and assigns a consensus score for each learning outcome on a 1-4 scale. These scores are shared and discussed with the student, signed, and submitted to the Graduate Coordinator following the defense. (Rubrics must be submitted via the [GEOS document portal](#).)

These evaluations are strictly confidential and are not shared outside of the committee or used in conjunction with the student’s name for any further specific assessment of the student, advisor, or research group. Forms will be placed in the student’s file and available to the student, advisor, Advisory Committee, Department Head, or Graduate Program Director upon request, but will not be made available to any other party and will not be turned into the Graduate School with the Annual Report. These rubrics are designed to make evaluations more structured, while also to convey more organized feedback to the student. Completed rubrics ideally inform and reflect the committee’s overall evaluation. However, specific scores on rubrics have no formal bearing on the overall result of the final defense; there is no automatic implication of receiving low scores in any or all of the learning outcomes. Similarly, there is no specific formula that translates scores into whether student annual performance is regarded as satisfactory.

Once turned in, a copy of the evaluation rubric card is rendered anonymous and results of all cards are synthesized annually for the purpose of tracking how well students do across the entire department. These results are used anonymously on a comparative basis to track improvements over time as changes are made to the program. This self-assessment is required by the Virginia Tech Office of Assessment and Evaluation. The Department has set and must report on specific targets of what percentage of students will score at a certain level for each learning outcome. Changes to the program and to the rubric itself will be made as data are accumulated.



The MS and PhD rubrics are provided in the [Graduate Student Google folder](#). These were first used in 2018-2019, revised slightly for 2019-2020, with the most recent version used since.

### **II.15 Electronic Thesis or Dissertation (ETD) Submissions**

It is critical that students check the formatting requirements of the ETD (see link in subsection II.13) before submission. There are often training workshops about ETD preparation during the semester. As requirements change, it is not advisable to look at an old thesis or dissertation to get information about requirements, although it may be useful to look at a recent one (within the previous month or two) to see what an approved ETD looks like. Additionally, the student will always want to check with their faculty advisor, but ultimately, the student will need to follow the guidelines required by the University.

- Here is formatting information from the Graduate Catalog:  
[https://secure.graduateschool.vt.edu/graduate\\_catalog/policies.htm?policy=002d14432c654287012c6542e3720025](https://secure.graduateschool.vt.edu/graduate_catalog/policies.htm?policy=002d14432c654287012c6542e3720025)
- Here is information from the Library:  
<https://guides.lib.vt.edu/c.php?g=547528&p=3756998>

Once submitted, the ETD is checked by the Graduate School for various forms of compliance related to style and copyrighted material. Students must monitor their VT email until final ETD approval is received. Corrections to the ETD may be required; typically, there is a one week time limit to make corrections and resubmit the ETD. Missing this correction deadline could result in changing of the graduation date and/or additional charges.

The Graduate School also processes Doctoral ETDs and monitors the availability status of ETDs. Within that context, the Graduate School is charged with ensuring that ETDs conform to the Copyright laws. These laws direct that if an ETD includes an item taken from another source it can only be used under certain circumstances: if copyright permissions have been secured or if the item is in the public domain. More information on Copyright Issues can be found on the ETD website (<http://etd.vt.edu>). ETDs containing copyright protected material cannot be approved without the written permission of the author quoted.

### **II.16 Application Dates for Graduation**

<u>Completing degree requirements in:</u>	<u>Apply on or Before:</u>
August (summer session)	August 1
December (fall semester)	November 1
May (spring semester)	April 1

If participating in the Graduate School ceremony, the Graduate School has additional deadlines for Master's and PhD students regarding the completion of theses/dissertations. It is important to review these deadlines prior to the semester the student plans to graduate as failure to meet these deadlines may prevent a student from participating in the Graduate School ceremony.

See

<https://graduateschool.vt.edu/academics/what-you-need-to-graduate/deadlines-for-academic-progre.html>

### ***II.17 Administrative “Good Standing”***

There are numerous administrative obligations that graduate students must fulfill for both the university and the department. This includes replying to emails, adhering to deadlines, filling out forms and reports, attending meetings and training workshops, and more that students must complete as a part of their program. If a student does not fulfill these obligations, significant work is created for department and university staff. Delinquency reduces the overall efficiency of administrative entities and, ultimately, can negatively affect the student’s standing. As a result, it is critical that students complete these obligations following all directions and deadlines.

To enforce the timely completion of these obligations, the department maintains a policy of administrative “good standing”. A student is considered in good standing when first joining the program and retains this status so long as obligations are met. If a student repeatedly fails to meet these obligations, good standing may be temporarily revoked, in which case the student is considered not-in-good standing. Revocation of good standing status requires 3 or more instances of failure to meet obligations and is determined by a majority vote by the GSAC based on information synthesized by the Graduate Coordinator. This determination may be appealed to the Graduate Program Director or directly to the Department Head at any time. Revocation of good standing status is temporary, with a first-time duration of 3 months and second-time duration of 6 months. After the term, good-standing status is returned, assuming the student has subsequently been meeting requirements. When a student is considered not-in-good-standing, they are no longer eligible for numerous benefits provided by the department, including funding provided to attend meetings, departmental grants and scholarships, and participation in official functions (committees, field trips, panels, etc.).

### ***II.18 Leave of Absence***

If a student wishes to take a leave of absence from Virginia Tech for one or more academic semesters, they must notify April Newcomer and the Chair of GSAC in writing. Although leaves of absence are generally approved, once a student leaves there is no guarantee that the financial resources will be available to provide the assistantships that were originally offered; financial support upon return will be pending the availability of resources at that time. An approved leave of absence does not guarantee readmission and may result in a new application fee.

Note that to return from the leave, the student must contact the Graduate Coordinator well in advance so that the proper paperwork can be submitted to the Graduate School prior to the semester the student plans to return.

### ***II.19 In Absentia Status Request***

Graduate students in good standing who, for academic reasons, need to spend an entire fall or spring semester away from campus should apply for in absentia status. In absentia status is granted for work that is directly related to the student’s academic course of study and that is integral to the degree.

The form can be found at this web page: <https://graduateschool.vt.edu/forms.html>

### ***II.20 Resigning from the Program***

In rare cases students may find that they have enrolled in a degree or research program that does not suit them, or they experience changes in life priorities that create a need to leave the program. While some of these situations may be for the best, or may be unavoidable, it is important that students not resign without exploring all options. Before resigning from the program, students are

strongly encouraged to talk at length with their advisor to see if solutions can be worked out. It is strongly advised that students hold a committee meeting prior to making a decision to leave the program, as the committee may be able to assist in developing solutions. Students should also seek the counsel of the Graduate Program Director to explore options that may include switching advisors or transferring to a different program. The student may also wish to meet with the Department Head or the Graduate Ombudsperson prior to making a decision.

If after thorough discussion, a student finds that resigning is the best solution, there are still practical considerations that should be heeded. Resigning mid-term can lead to financial penalties that could be avoided. For example, if a student is supported on a GRA and resigns from that project, they may be responsible for a tuition bill for the remainder of the semester. Other ramifications may include loss of insurance or effect on taxes or loans. It is recommended that a student resign from the program only at the end (or between) terms, to avoid these types of issues. It is strongly advised that a student not resign before being counseled by the Graduate Coordinator, Graduate Program Director, and representative of the Graduate School about these practical considerations.

If a student decides to leave the program, they should inform the Graduate Coordinator immediately, so that the proper paperwork can be filed with the Graduate School and so that they are not penalized financially.

### ***II.21 Checklist for Departing from the Program***

Upon successful completion of the degree and/or departure from the program, various administrative and archival obligations must be met for the department (in addition to any specific instructions for the research group). These include steps such as returning keys and all university property, archiving data and samples, and more. The required steps are outlined in a checklist that can be found in the [Graduate Materials - Share folder](#). Students are required to complete all steps prior to departure and may not receive the diploma until all obligations have been met.

An optional exit interview will be offered as part of the graduation process. The exit interview is an opportunity to discuss the student's experiences in VT Geosciences or to discuss ways to continue to be involved.

### ***II.22 Electronic Form Submission***

In addition to the Annual Report and Plan of Study, forms may be completed and submitted electronically to the GEOS File Submission form: <http://www.tinyurl.com/GEOSUpload>. When submitting forms electronically, include the student's last name as the first name of the file name (e.g., StudentsLastName\_22-23\_Annual Report). Note: Forms that require the Graduate Coordinator and/or Graduate Program Director signatures only need to be signed by the student and/or advisor prior to submission. Once submitted, the Graduate Coordinator and/or Graduate Program Director will review and sign the form. If applicable, students will receive an email notification once the form has been submitted to the Graduate School for final approval and processing.

## **III. Financial Support**

### ***III.1 General Policies***

It is the Department's intent to provide adequate financial support (semester stipend and tuition) for all graduate students actively pursuing a degree, but limited and changing resources sometimes necessitate adjustments in the number of students supported, the level of support and the duration

of support. Support decisions are based upon availability of funds and upon the progress and qualifications of the student. Unsupported students wishing to be considered for support should apply in writing to the GSAC.

### **III.2 Eligibility for Support**

1. Financial support for students with regular student status is offered for durations listed below, which is also communicated on the initial contract that students signed when accepting their offers of admission. Students may be eligible for support beyond these terms, pending the availability of resources at the time.
  - a. MS students – 4 semesters of support.
  - b. PhD students without prior MS degree – 10 semesters of support.
  - c. PhD students who have previously completed a MS degree not at Virginia Tech – 8 semesters of support
  - d. PhD students who have completed a MS degree at Virginia Tech – 10 semesters of support (4 semesters for MS, plus 6 semesters for PhD)
  - e. PHD students who have completed a MS degree at Virginia Tech and change projects – 12 semesters of support (4 semesters for MS, plus 8 semesters for PhD)
2. After eligibility has expired, if a student would still like additional support, they must complete an extension request. (The extension request form is available in the [Graduate Student Forms Google folder](#).) As part of this request, the student and the primary advisor must each write a letter to GSAC requesting support and providing reasons why additional support is needed. **This extension request must be submitted every semester after eligibility has expired.** GSAC will consider the requests and will inform the student and advisor if the request can be granted.

Deadline for Submission:

  - For fall semester: January 10
  - For spring semester: October 1
3. Only students with regular or provisional graduate student status may be supported. Currently, support includes payment of the student's tuition equal to the student's assistantship offer (i.e., full-time offer/full-time tuition, half-time offer/half-time tuition).
4. Students must continue to make satisfactory progress toward their degree. This includes maintaining their GPA above 3.0. A one-semester grace period is allowed for a student whose GPA falls below 3.0 if the student can reasonably be expected to raise their GPA above the 3.0 by the end of that semester.
5. GTAs are required to maintain a satisfactory level of performance in their teaching duties. Teaching performance is evaluated on the basis of faculty observation and student teaching evaluations (which must be submitted for every course taught). Uncovered absences, lack of preparation, disregard for students, and any other unprofessional behavior are grounds for immediate termination of a GTA appointment.
6. GTAs are required to notify the Chair of GSAC and April Newcomer in writing at least two weeks in advance if they need to be off campus for more than 1 week during the academic semester. The Chair of GSAC will notify, in writing, if approved or otherwise.

**NOTE: Don't make travel plans before receiving written approval.**

7. International students (unless a native English speaker or previous degrees were awarded from U.S. universities) must score 25 or greater on the TOEFL Speaking subtest. Students who are below the minimum must retake the TOEFL.

NOTE: There is a Graduate School policy on additional employment for domestic students only while on a full time (20hrs/week) assistantship contract. See assistantship contract for details.

### ***III.3 Support Levels***

During the 2023-2024 academic year, the current stipend levels in the Department are as follows: MS candidates (1st and 2nd year) and PhD candidates who do not have an MS degree (called Direct PhDs) are paid at \$2,580.00/month; PhD candidates with MS degrees or who have passed their preliminary examination or have completed two years of residency in the program are paid at \$2,640.00/month. These are the base pay rates for GTAs and GRAs.

Any student on GRA or GTA may receive additional stipend amounts added on to the base pay rate if the research advisor supplements the pay using research funds. Note that these stipend supplements are administered on a semester-by-semester basis and are not permanent changes to the base pay rate. If not renewed by the advisor, supplements terminate at the end of the semester and the pay rate returns to the department's base pay rate. Any university-wide percentage increases in pay rate are also applied to the base pay rate, not to a supplemented (i.e., higher) rate of pay from a prior semester.

Several special GRAs may pay at higher rates according to the rules of the support, including NSF Graduate Fellowships, MAOP, ICTAS, and IGERT fellowships. These stipend rates are determined by the source of the funding, not the Department. These higher stipend rates are also temporary and last only as long as supported by the special funding source. After discontinuation of the special GRA, the stipend rate will return to the department's base pay rate unless further supplemented by the advisor using research funds.

### ***III.4 Graduate Teaching Assistantships (GTA) and Research Assistantships (GRA)***

The major source of financial support for graduate students during the academic year (4.5 months per semester, 9 months total – August 10 to May 9, including winter break, but not including 3 summer months) is teaching assistantships in undergraduate laboratories/courses. Full-time GTAs require 20 hours per week, and half-time positions require 10 hours per week, and GTAs should work with faculty instructors to find a mutually acceptable workload that accomplishes teaching goals while also enabling the GTA to meet other academic responsibilities. Generally, it is the GTA's responsibility to teach the laboratory sections, to grade assignments, and to maintain scheduled office hours. However, the specific GTA duties and expectations vary depending on the course.

If the student plans to be away from campus for more than one week during the Fall or Spring semester, permission must be requested from the student's advisor and the Chair of GSAC at least two weeks in advance of the student's departure to assist the department in making GTA assignments. If the student has to be out of town, it is the student's responsibility to find someone to teach their lab(s). Specific instructions for GTAs are provided by laboratory coordinators or the faculty instructors of the course.

GTA assignments are made by the Chair of GSAC with input from the Graduate Coordinator, but closely follow the requests of faculty instructors, the areas of expertise of the graduate students, and the desires and interests of the graduate students. Requests for specific GTA assignments should be sent to April Newcomer when solicited each semester. Effort is made to give each student their desired GTA, if available, and to maintain consistency so that GTAs do not have to teach different laboratory courses each semester. Questions related to GTA assignments should be directed to the Chair of GSAC.

In some cases, GTA assignments may open up from other related departments, such as Biological Sciences or Chemistry. If the student is scheduled to be a Geosciences GTA, but has interest in applying for a GTA in another department, please notify April Newcomer and the Chair of GSAC. Even if final decisions from other departments come shortly before a semester starts, communication will help GSAC coordinate and come up with plans for how to react and fill Geosciences GTA slots if a TA drops out for another assignment at the last minute.

GTA student perceptions of teaching (SPOT) scores are submitted by the classroom students online when they are notified by the university a few weeks before the end of each semester. These evaluations are reviewed by the Chair of GSAC. Satisfactory evaluations are required for continued support as a GTA. Ideally, most GTAs will receive a score for overall teaching effectiveness of 5 or higher (out of 6), but scores above 4 are considered acceptable. A score lower than 4, particularly if repeated, may trigger a review of the GTA's teaching.

All incoming graduate students are required to take the Graduate School's Workshop on GTA Training the week before classes of the semester they arrive. Additional information will be provided by the Graduate School. GTAs must also attend Departmental training the week before the start of fall classes (information will be provided by April Newcomer).

The other primary way in which a student is supported is through a Graduate Research Assistantship (GRA). A GRA is provided by individual faculty advisors to their students using external research funding. Depending on availability of grants, GRAs may not be available. Full-time GRAs require 20 hours per week, and half-time positions require 10 hours per week. GRAs carry no additional duties beyond the research as indicated by the advisor.

Summer graduate student funding is also generally provided by the research advisor using external research funds. Assistantship semester appointments are 4.5 months each, or 9 months per year, and do not cover summer stipend. If a research advisor does not provide full summer funding (3 months), a student may apply for funding from special department awards.

### ***III.5 Maintaining Satisfactory Student Status***

Continued financial support is contingent upon meeting the expectations of satisfactory progress towards research and classwork, as well as special expectations of GTAs. **Students must maintain a GPA of at least 3.0 and meet deadlines for submission of Plans of Study and Annual Reports in order to maintain their status as continuing students.** Each student must also meet the expectations for research progress as defined by their research advisor and the Advisory Committee. Students who do not demonstrate satisfactory progress toward their degree can be dropped from their graduate student status by GSAC with the approval of the Department Head.

### ***III.6 Student Fees***

**Departmental support for stipend and tuition does not cover the student comprehensive fees that are required by the university.** The university charges all graduate students an annual fee to cover expenses that tuition is not legally appropriate for given state regulations, such as athletics fees. Each student is responsible for paying these fees prior to the start of each semester (deadlines are communicated each year). The cost of the fees varies from year to year. Current fees can be found at:

<https://www.bursar.vt.edu/tuition-fee-rates/tuition-fees.html>

### ***III.7 Payment Plan for Comprehensive and Capital Fees for Graduate Assistants***

Graduate students on assistantship appointment may pay their comprehensive and capital fees (CFE) through a [payment plan](#) during the fall and spring semesters. Enrollment is managed through Hokie SPA and students must sign up each semester in which they wish to take advantage of this opportunity. Enrollment is not available for the summer terms. The payment plan allows students to pay their comprehensive and CFE fees over the course of the semester. Fully integrated with the students account system, the plan debits coincide with university payroll dates and adjust seamlessly with changes to the student account balance.

Enrollment periods:

- Fall Semester: 15 July –30 September
- Spring Semester: 15 December –14 February

Students may enroll in the plan only after they have registered for classes and after their tuition remission has been entered in the Banner system by the hiring department. The projected debit amount and remaining debit dates will be displayed during the enrollment process. There is no cost to participate. Once enrolled in the program, students cannot cancel unless the balance is paid in full.

Payment deadlines can be found on the [Bursar's Office website](#). More details about the payment plan can be found here: [Payment Plan for Comprehensive and CFE Fees](#).

### ***III.8 Payroll Procedures***

Students are paid on the first and sixteenth of each month. **Students must make arrangements in Hokie SPA to have their checks deposited directly into their bank account.** For information on graduate stipend payroll procedures see April Newcomer or Bera Cuskovic. For information on wage procedures see Sharon Collins or Mary Jane Smith.

The first payday for fall is September 1. If a student enters in spring term, the first payday is February 1. Students receiving hourly wages must submit hours online through TimeClock Plus every two weeks on the first and sixteenth of each month.

### ***III.9 Departmental Awards and Special Funding***

The Department offers special funding for students to attend conferences and meetings related to their studies. Currently, each graduate student that is presenting at a national meeting as first author is eligible for up to **\$500** from the Department for one meeting per year. This should be requested when filling out travel approval paperwork in the main office prior to travel. A copy of the abstract for the meeting should be provided. Note that this policy is subject to change due to availability of



funding. Students should discuss with their advisor well in advance regarding expectations to present at meetings and additional grant funds for supporting these activities.

The Department has numerous endowed accounts that are used for scholarships for partial summer funding and research funding each year. This is done primarily on a proposal basis. Each fall semester (typically in November), a request for proposals is sent to graduate students from GSAC. This request for proposals includes detailed information about the funding opportunities for that year and instructions for applying. Because this can change from year-to-year, it's the student's responsibility to follow the request-for-proposals each year.

Proposals are due **by the end of fall semester** and are reviewed by the GSAC. Awards are typically announced **by the middle of the spring semester**. GRAs and summer stipends are paid directly to the student as normal salary, whereas the scholarship awards for research support are typically deposited directly to the student's Hokie Spa account. In some cases, research support may come from other, non-scholarship funds, in which case the award may be made either as a spendable research account in the department, payment via hourly wages, or payment to offset comprehensive fees. In all cases, students should be proactive in balancing the expected research-support funding with other sources of stipend support. Scholarships and other awards are sometimes delayed due to administrative steps, which can result in research support not arriving in time for necessary expenditures. To avoid financial complications, it is thus important to be proactive in monitoring when these funds will be transmitted and to arrange for other stipend support to arrive as soon as possible in the summer.

The Department also has several special awards for outstanding performance. Tillman Teaching Awards are given to GTAs for excellence in lower-level and upper-level laboratory instruction (typically 2 awards per year). The Outstanding Service award is given to a student for going above and beyond the call of duty and being a great Departmental citizen. The awards above are decided by the faculty, using the student perceptions of teaching (SPOT) scores as well as other pertinent information.

There are also numerous grant opportunities through professional societies, such as GSA, Sigma Xi, AAPG, and many others. Information related to these funding opportunities may be obtained through professional society webpages and our [Scholarships and Internships](#) shared Google folder.

Students, who are US Citizens or eligible noncitizens, are strongly encouraged to complete a [FAFSA](#) every year to ensure they are eligible for all funding opportunities.

### ***III.10 Candidacy Status Tuition Reduction Requests***

Starting Fall 2021, PhD students who have passed their preliminary exam and completed all the required coursework on their Plan of Study are eligible for the candidacy status tuition reduction when they meet certain conditions. Requests are to be submitted by the graduate student and **must be submitted each semester prior to the last day to add classes**. The application form and details about eligibility requirements are available on the Graduate School's website at:

[https://graduateschool.vt.edu/academics/graduate-catalog-policies-procedures/Candidacy\\_Status.html](https://graduateschool.vt.edu/academics/graduate-catalog-policies-procedures/Candidacy_Status.html). Students may not request the discount in more than four (4) fall and spring semesters (not necessarily consecutive) within a period of up to three academic years (six (6) fall and spring semesters) per the Graduate School's website. It is the wish of the department that each student supported on GRA will submit this tuition reduction request each semester that they are eligible, in order to conserve research or fellowship funds and enable support of other activities



### **III.11 Satisfactory Academic Progress**

The federal government requires the University to have a financial aid satisfactory academic progress policy for the purpose of continuous financial aid eligibility. Being sensitive to the language of the university's satisfactory academic progress policy and to alleviate potential public confusion, the Office of University Scholarships and Financial Aid (USFA) chose to title its financial aid satisfactory academic policy, Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP).

The federal government requires the institution to assess a student's satisfactory academic progress toward timely program completion through the student's pace, the evaluation of the cumulative grade point average, and the maximum time frame for program completion. In compliance with federal regulations, University Scholarships and Financial Aid (USFA) manages the assessment of students' academic progress, the notification to students of failure to meet the policy, and the student appeal process as defined in the Satisfactory Academic Progress Policy. Details concerning SAP are available at this link <https://finaid.vt.edu/graduate-students/appeals-.html>

## **IV. Facilities and Resources**

### **IV.1 Departmental Staff**

Department staff are available to assist graduate students for various activities. Administrative staff are generally available for help with travel forms, reimbursements, placing orders, copier use, and other paperwork. If a student has a question and needs assistance, please check with the relevant staff member as listed below. Note that the administrative staff do not perform general secretarial duties (e.g. typing, photocopying) for faculty, staff, or students, but rather each serve specific administrative duties as listed below. (Contact information for each may be found on the department's phone list.)

In addition, undergraduate work study students are often on duty in the main office and may also assist with basic office functions, including assistance with copiers. If a student has questions or issues, please contact the Department Head, Dr. W. Steven Holbrook.

**April Newcomer:** Advising & Enrollment Manager; Graduate Coordinator (academics, payroll issues, general assistance for all graduate activities)

**Lacie Kmetz:** Student Program Coordinator (general assistance for academics and graduate forms)

**Bera Cuskovic:** Business Manager (finances, purchase orders, reimbursements, grant activity, overall responsibility for coordination of office management)

**Sharon Collins:** Program Support Tech. (some aspects of human resources management, social function coordinator, travel, general assistance and backup when Bera Cuskovic or Mary Jane Smith are not available)

**Mary Jane Smith:** Program Support Tech. (mail services, copiers, travel reimbursements, wage payroll, time clock, keys, purchasing)

**Mariah Green:** Museum and Collections Manager

Technical staff is available for specialized needs related to computing, printing, and teaching and research equipment maintenance. Each staff member has specific responsibilities, but each area is generally met by more than one staff member. The areas of responsibility are listed below. If a student

needs assistance, please contact the staff member directly. If a student has questions or issues, please contact Jim Langridge. For contact information, please see the department's phone list.

**James Dunson:** Unix Systems Administrator (Unix systems administration, Geophysics computer lab and server room, research computing/high performance computing, department websites, specially licensed software [MATLAB, Geographix, etc.], computer programming support, Mac support [backup])

**Jim Langridge:** Electronics Tech. (PC support, Mac support [primary], computer purchasing [primary], software installation, specially licensed software [backup], SEM/microprobe lab support, classroom computers and projectors [backup], poster printing [backup])

**Mark Lemon:** Electronics Tech. (PC support, classroom computers and projectors [primary], software installation, computer purchasing [backup], poster printing [primary], field equipment maintenance/support, dept. vehicle maintenance, surplus property)

**Greg Norris:** Electronics Tech. (lab instrument maintenance/support, thin section lab maintenance/support, furniture, wall hangings and misc. repairs, Safety Officer, Crystallography Lab tech. support, storage facilities manager)

**Jing Zhao:** Lab Tech. (maintenance and use of research equipment in Dr. Bodnar's group, including the ICP-MS and RAMAN instruments)

## ***IV.2 Office Functions***

Copy Machines: Two copy machines are available in 4042/4043 (the mail room). The copier against the wall is for general use by graduate students. **Copying related to teaching and classes can be made using the TA access PIN, which is obtained from Mary Jane Smith. Each graduate student may also use their individual PIN number to make copies related to their research. 1000 copies per year are provided for free.** Additional copies may be purchased using research accounts from Mary Jane (\$40/1000). The copier in the center of the room is generally for use by faculty and staff, but may be used by graduate students if the other copier is broken or in emergencies; please check with Mary Jane to gain access to this copier. Both copiers are also capable of scanning documents, including double sided collated documents, and emailing the resulting scans as PDF files to a VT email address. Check with Mary Jane Smith or one of the student office workers for help on how to scan documents.

Fax machine: The fax machine in the main office (540-231-3386) is available for use for research and teaching related activities. Fill out the log when sending a fax. The student will not be charged if the fax is being sent for official purposes.

Office Supplies: The department does not provide free office supplies. The student may obtain office supplies from the department's stock only through their research advisor, who will have to pay for them using research funds. Students should not hesitate to ask their advisor about this. In general, only faculty and staff can order office supplies through the main office. The department does provide letterhead stationery and departmental envelopes, which are available for use by graduate students for official mailings related to research. These may be found in the mail room.

Mail: U.S. and campus mail addressed to graduate students is deposited in mailboxes in the fourth floor copy/mail room. Students should check these boxes on a regular basis. Students who expect to be out of town for long periods should tell Mary Jane Smith how they could be contacted in an emergency, and whether they want first class mail forwarded. Outgoing mail may be placed in the mailroom for pick-up by the VT mail service. Students generally will need to pay for their own

postage, although research-related mail may be paid for using research funds (students should check with their advisor). It is also possible to send express postage via UPS for research-related activity; please check with Sharon Collins or Mary Jane Smith when the student needs to use this service, and place the postage on a research account (students should check with their advisor).

**Travel and reimbursements: All forms of travel must be pre-approved by the department. See Sharon Collins or Mary Jane Smith for the necessary procedure.** To be eligible for reimbursement, travel receipts must be returned to the office staff no later than three days after returning, and all State guidelines must be met. **If travel forms are not submitted correctly, they will be returned.**

For reimbursements of personal expenses related to research activity, students should consult with their advisor and see Bera Cuskovic (and save all receipts).

### ***IV.3 Graduate Student Offices***

**Offices: Each graduate student is assigned an office area for their use related to research, teaching, and classwork.** Students should each receive a desk, bookshelf, chair, and file cabinet as standard issue office furniture. Office assignments are made by Dr. W. Steven Holbrook, Department Head, and should be discussed directly with him or April Newcomer if problems arise. Many research groups have their own office space that they coordinate and maintain, while others have offices in common graduate student office space (e.g. rooms 1070, 5050). The department's goal is to provide adequate office space for each graduate student, so please communicate issues or complaints freely with the Graduate Coordinator if the office assignment is not meeting the student's needs.

**Keys:** Keys for offices, the outer door to Derring, and classrooms may be obtained from Mary Jane Smith. Each key must be signed out. If a key is lost, see Mary Jane Smith for a replacement; note that the student may be responsible for the cost of re-keying locks and obtaining replacement keys. All keys must be returned to Mary Jane Smith upon graduation.

**Computers:** The department does not provide computers to each graduate student, unless it has a surplus of computers at a particular time. Computers may be provided to students by their research advisors. If a student has an emergency and needs to borrow a computer for a short period of time (e.g., waiting for a new laptop to arrive), please contact Jim Langridge to ask if there are any surplus computers available.

**Other notes:**

*Pets* are not permitted in university buildings except in cases of special need.

*Bicycles* must be parked outside of the building and may not be brought into offices unless special permission is given by the Department Head.

Students should keep their office area as *clean* as possible, and avoid accumulating old materials or equipment (e.g. old computer monitors). Excess, old equipment may be *surplused* through the university via the technical staff (contact Jim Langridge).

Please do not *hammer* or *drill* into office walls; if students need assistance in this way, or with moving or acquiring new furniture, please contact technical staff members Jim Langridge or Mark Lemon.

Custodial staff empty trash cans of basic waste, but specialized *waste disposal* (e.g. rocks) is the individual's responsibility.

*Recycling bins* are available in the mailroom and in other locations around Derring.

*Cardboard boxes* may be placed in the hallways for removal by custodial staff.

*Broken glass* should be wrapped and sealed with tape, placed in a box, labeled, and placed in trash cans for disposal by custodial staff.

*Disposal of chemicals* should be done under the supervision of the faculty member who supervises the laboratory or via Environmental Health and Safety Services (EHSS). If students have any questions regarding proper disposal of waste, contact the Chair of the Safety Committee.

#### ***IV.4 Communication and Computing***

Email and listservs: All entering students are assigned a personal identification (PID), which is their email identifier on the Virginia Tech email server. Before one can use this address for email, the account must be activated. To activate the PID, view the web page <https://vt.edu/admissions/undergraduate/apply/pid.html> and then follow the directions. There is no cost associated with this service.

After checking into the department, students will be subscribed to the departmental listserv *gs-gradst-g* (full address *gs-gradst-g@vt.edu*), which in turn is subscribed to the list *gs-all* (full address *gs-all-g@vt.edu*). Announcements of seminars, job interviews, etc. are transmitted within the department via the listservs. As a graduate student, they may also send messages to the graduate student listserv, but please be cautious and send only emails that pertain to all students and that are business-related. Note that these messages are also received by the Graduate Coordinator, the Chair of GSAC, and the Department Head.

Students will also be added to the GEOS Graduate Advising Canvas site. This site includes information that will be helpful as students move through their degree program. If students have comments or suggestions, please contact [geosciences@vt.edu](mailto:geosciences@vt.edu).

Internet: Internet access is provided to all students by the university. Graduate students are expected to use wireless internet, which is provided as part of their student fees. Access to wireless internet may be obtained by going to <https://www.nis.vt.edu/ServicePortfolio/Network/Wireless.html> or checking with Jim Langridge or Mark Lemon. Any graduate student computer that does not have wireless capability will be upgraded for free by the department to enable wireless access. The use of wired ethernet connections is discouraged as each active line costs the department to maintain it as an active port.

Telephones: Students may use departmental telephones in their offices for local calls only. Students who wish to make long distance calls on departmental telephones must have the specific approval of a faculty member to whom the call is being charged. Long distance calls for personal reasons are not allowed on departmental telephones. Please use telephones/cell phones in graduate student offices conscientiously as prolonged use of phones may inconvenience other graduate students in that office.

Computing: Computers are not provided by the department for all students, but may be provided to graduate students by the faculty advisor. Software is also the responsibility of the faculty advisor to provide. Most faculty provide their students with licensed access to operating systems and Microsoft Office applications as well as specialized software including Adobe Illustrator or Photoshop. Licenses for these software products may be purchased through VT IT Procurement and Licensing Solutions (ITPALS). License agreements typically stipulate that software purchased with university funds may only be installed on university owned computers. If students desire software for their personally owned computer, the software must be purchased with personal funds.

The university and department provide access to some software without user paid licensing fees for use on university owned computers, including ArcGIS and MATLAB. For information on software licensing, availability, or to obtain software installation CDs, check with technical staff (Mark Lemon, Jim Langridge) or on the university computer requirements page <https://www.compreg.vt.edu/>. All graduate student computers are required to conform to university policies regarding the fair and appropriate use of computers; information on this policy may be found at <http://www.vt.edu/about/acceptable-use.html>.

Of special note, all computers are required by the university to maintain active firewalls, to be routinely backed up, and to have the latest virus protection installed. All software in use must also have a valid license, and information on this license must be retained in case it is requested by the university. Unlawful copying and installation of software, or downloading media from the internet that is not related to research, are strictly prohibited. The ultimate authoritative documentation of what is legal and illegal for a particular piece of software is found on the copyright information with each individual package. It is the student's responsibility to abide by the copyright policy.

#### ***IV.5 Classrooms and Projectors***

Classrooms and the conference room (room 4052) may be arranged for special department-related activities, such as geology club meetings, group meetings, or special seminars. Geosciences Derring Hall classrooms can be reserved by [submitting a reservation request](#). Classrooms are often used for classes and other reserved activities in the evening or on weekends, so please check the [Derring room calendars](#) and reserve a room even if it is for after-hours. It is against departmental policy to use classrooms for non-departmental activity (e.g. watching movies in 4069 is not allowed).

Classrooms generally contain overhead projectors, laptop hookups, and other audio/visual equipment. Problems with these projectors should immediately be communicated to technical staff (Mark Lemon and Jim Langridge for all classrooms including 4069). Please consult with technical staff if students have requests and/or questions about special audiovisual equipment (Lemon/Langridge).

Thefts of classroom equipment have occurred in the past, so it is critical that students ensure that they leave rooms locked when leaving. Please lock each classroom after use, even if during the middle of the day; students should not assume someone will use the room after them.

#### ***IV.6 Research Support Facilities***

Research facilities are generally provided by each individual research group; more information can be obtained by the faculty, students, and post-docs already working in these labs. Other research groups may also have equipment that may be useful to students in their research. Lists of major instrumentation are available on the Department's webpage and on webpages for each individual research group. Additional information may be obtained by talking to existing Departmental personnel.

There are also several facilities open to the Department, listed below. Contact the supervisor for access to these:

<b>FACILITY</b>	<b>ROOM</b>	<b>SUPERVISOR</b>
Geosciences Museum	2nd floor	Mariah Green
Classrooms	4052, 4069, 5071, etc.	April Newcomer

Electron Microprobe	5067	Dr. Moore
Thin Section Lab	1085	Greg Norris
Mineral Separation Labs	Prices Fork	Dr. Spotila
Rock Storage	Prices Fork, Wave tank	Dr. Spotila
Scanners, photography	varies	
Large poster printer, printers	1047/1066	Mark Lemon
Computer Classroom	1071	Mark Lemon/April Newcomer
Geophysics field equipment	1047	Mark Lemon
Trimble GPS	4060B	Mark Lemon
X-ray Diffraction	5103	Dr. Johnson
X-ray Fluorescence	5069	Dr. Moore
Particle size analyser	1089B	Dr. Romans
Stable isotope laboratory	1089D	Dr. Reid

#### ***IV.7 Geosciences Library and Information Resources***

All geoscience library materials are integrated with the main collection of the University Libraries. Books and journals in the geosciences that are not digitally accessible via the University Library can be found on the 4th floor (QE call numbers) and 5th floor (TN call numbers) of Newman Library. Geological maps and air photos are located on the 1st and 2nd floor. Library maps showing the layout of each floor are available at <https://lib.vt.edu/about-us/libraries/newman.html>.

Online resources include GeoRef, GeoScience World, Web of Science, and many more. A web page listing resources for the discipline is available under "Subject Guides" on the library home page. The library also offers training workshops on using many of these databases. Contact the science reference librarian, Edward Lener [lener@vt.edu](mailto:lener@vt.edu), for assistance in locating materials or using online resources. For general information and access to electronic journals, go to <http://www.lib.vt.edu>.

#### ***IV.8 Departmental Safety***

Departmental safety policies and procedures are described in a separate document, the Departmental Safety Manual, which is available via electronic copy to all students and exists in paper form in the main office. Safety policies are managed on several tiers; university safety policies are created and administered by Environmental Health and Safety Services, which maintains extensive safety documents online.

Department safety is further managed by the Departmental Safety Committee and administered by the Safety Officer, Greg Norris. Laboratory safety for each research group is further administered by the faculty member that is responsible for each lab. Each lab should have relevant safety manuals, chemical hygiene plans, operating procedures, chemical inventories, and waste disposal procedures that lab workers are required to learn and follow. Some labs may also require specialized safety training, such as for radiation safety. Please refer to the Department's Safety Manual for additional information on lab, field, and office safety. Safety information is available in the [Graduate Student Forms Google folder](#).

## **IV.9 Parking**

To park in the commuter lots, students need to display a hang tag permit, which they can purchase from Parking Services at this link <http://parking.vt.edu/> Students should make themselves familiar with the parking rules.

## **V. Professional Development and Activities**

### **V.1 Graduate Student Liaison Committee (GSLC)**

The Graduate Student Liaison Committee (GSLC) serves as a mechanism for graduate students to communicate issues and ideas to the faculty and departmental administration as well as for the faculty to learn more about what the needs are and how to improve the graduate experience at VT. If there is a problem with a departmental procedure or a complaint that has not been expressed to the faculty, the GSLC is the appropriate mechanism for communicating. The administration and faculty may not be able to resolve every problem, but communication is the first step.

The responsibilities of the GSLC are to be well-informed regarding what is important to graduate students and to communicate these to the GSAC and department leadership. The student Chair of the GSLC meets at least twice a year with the Chair of GSAC to relay issues and suggestions. The committee may approach the Chair of GSAC at any time to point out issues, ask questions, etc. Graduate students communicate to members of the GSLC, who will then pass this information on to the Chair of GSAC and departmental leadership anonymously.

Membership on the GSLC is selected each year from volunteers among the graduate student body. Typically at the start of fall semester, a call will go out via the listserv for volunteers, and the committee chair (a returning member from the previous year) will then work to make sure the committee consists of a broad range of students from different backgrounds that represent the diversity of the student body and different core research areas of the department.

### **V.2 Geosciences Student Research Symposium (GSRS)**

The Geosciences Student Research Symposium is produced and organized by the students with guidance from faculty of the department. The symposium is held on campus (typically in the early part of the spring semester) and provides an opportunity for students, the faculty, and the public to learn more about research topics currently being investigated in the geosciences by graduate and undergraduate students. It also provides students with an opportunity to prepare and present professional talks in a friendly and supportive atmosphere.

GSRS is a student-run activity. The GSRS committee is made up and chaired by graduate students, who organize the program and schedule each year. The GSRS committee is encouraged to confer with the Graduate Program Director/Chair of GSAC for advice and suggestions.

**Participation in GSRS is not required of all students, but is strongly encouraged. Many research advisors require their students to present.** Most faculty expect (without formally requiring) that first-year and second-year students, including both MS and PhD candidates, present. First-year students are not generally expected to have research results or data to present, but rather should focus their presentation on their research questions/hypotheses and the approach they plan to pursue. Presentation of a research topic and methodology is preferred to presenting research that was conducted at a previous institution for a different degree. New graduate students arriving in the



spring semester should not feel obliged to present at GSRS. Advanced PhD candidates in the 4th or 5th years are generally expected to not present at GSRS unless they were unable to present in previous years.

Based on experience, participation in GSRS is an opportunity for students to develop their skills for public presentation, which will be useful for them in any professional position they may go on to take after graduation. Public presentation of their research is also an excellent vehicle to help organize their research. Many first-year students find that participating in GSRS is the most instrumental in defining their research projects and putting them on a path to success.

Although presenting at GSRS is not required, all students are expected to attend GSRS talks/posters and participate in the social functions. GSRS is the most important graduate student function in the department each year, and all students should enthusiastically participate.

### ***V.3 Seminars***

Departmental seminars are held on most Fridays from 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. in Derring 4069 (or via Zoom in certain circumstances) with refreshments provided after. Most speakers are from other universities, industry, or governmental organizations. **Graduate students are expected to attend all seminars.** Graduate students are encouraged to suggest names of potential speakers and are also encouraged to host speakers during their visits. This is a great way to network; the connections could be very helpful to student research and in students' career preparation. There is usually an opportunity for students to meet with visiting speakers for lunch as well (watch for emails). Students may register for GEOS 5984 "Seminars in the Geosciences" (1-credit, P/F) to receive credit for attending the seminars.

### ***V.4 Career Planning***

There are currently three faculty that can provide specific advice regarding careers: Brian Romans, John Chermak, and Ryan Pollyea are available to provide guidance to graduate students across a range of geoscience sectors. Dr. Romans provides mentoring for jobs in the petroleum industry. Dr. Chermak works with students on jobs in environmental consulting and mining. Dr. Pollyea has experience in engineering geology (including knowledge about professional certifications) as well as jobs in hydrogeology and carbon management. Although these three specific faculty are listed here, please note that most of the faculty have experience with career mentoring; please ask and seek out additional information from other faculty.

The department is sometimes visited by industry representatives who are interested in talking to students in relation to specific internships or permanent jobs. **Students who are even remotely interested in industrial employment, regardless of the specific sector, or who may want to gain insight into industrial employment opportunities are encouraged to attend presentations and/or sign up for interviews.** April Newcomer coordinates these industry visits and the scheduling of interviews. Announcements related to these recruiting activities are electronically sent to all students.

The university has several [career fairs](#) during the academic year, starting with the Engineering Expo in mid-September. Many of the companies and federal agencies represented at the fairs may also employ geologists (e.g. mining, energy, environmental). We strongly recommend that students attend these fairs starting early on in their graduate careers, so that they have a sense of what types of jobs are available. To prepare for the fairs, students will need an updated resume. Students should research companies beforehand to find out what they do, and we also recommend that students practice their "elevator pitch" before attending. Career Services and the Graduate Life Center have



sessions on career fair prep. In addition, Career Services, located in the Smith Career Center, is an excellent source of information on career planning. [Career and Professional Development](#) provides guidance on career options, developing a CV, preparing for interviews, as well as other topics related to career and professional development.

### ***V.5 Professional Societies and Departmental Organizations***

Being a member of professional societies should be considered standard for most graduate students, particularly those interested in going into academics or who are seeking jobs. The primary organizations are AGU, GSA, AAPG, SEG, MSA, and AGI. More information on these is available online. Some organizations often offer free membership to graduate students; information will be made available regarding this as needed. Many professional societies also offer reduced journal subscription rates for students.

Other organizations that are active in the Department include the Geology Club, Black Students in STEM at VT (BSS), Sigma Gamma Epsilon (SGE), Widening Inclusivity in the Geosciences (WINGS), Society of Exploration Geophysicists (SEG), and the American Association of Petroleum Geologists. More information on these clubs and societies may be found below as well as online.

#### Graduate Student Welcome & Hospitality

The Graduate Student Welcome & Hospitality Committee is a graduate student-led initiative to include incoming graduate students in the department family and build community among all graduate students in the Department of Geosciences. We send materials to help incoming students move to Blacksburg and organize informal social get-togethers for the graduate students to build community. All students interested in helping to welcome our incoming graduate students and who wish to help build fellowship among the graduate students are encouraged to join. For more information, please contact Rose McGroarty ([mcgroartyfc@vt.edu](mailto:mcgroartyfc@vt.edu)).

#### Geosciences Graduate Student Organization (GGSO)

The purpose of the Geosciences Graduate Student Organization (GGSO) is to represent geosciences graduate students and facilitate communication with the Graduate Student Assembly (GSA), the Department of Geosciences, and the greater university community. Furthermore, the GGSO aims to create a united, cohesive, collaborative, and friendly community among our cohort, despite our diverse research sub-disciplines. For more information, please contact Amy Hagen, Asenath Kwagalakwe, or Alina Valop ([alinavalop@vt.edu](mailto:alinavalop@vt.edu)).

#### Geology Club

This society, managed by undergraduates, organizes several functions each year for geology students and faculty. The club sponsors several seminars and information programs each semester, including discussion sessions on interviewing, professional standards, and career development. The club also runs field trips to selected localities and schedules topical lectures during the academic year, including a field camp informational evening each year. For more information, please contact Laura Nesor ([neser@vt.edu](mailto:neser@vt.edu)).

#### Black Students in STEM at VT (BSS)

The mission of Black Students in STEM is to provide students of African descent within Virginia Tech's College of Science with academic, professional and entertaining opportunities, resources, and activities that will be beneficial within both their undergraduate and postgraduate careers. Black Students in STEM strive to create a safe space for club members that will foster a sense of community and togetherness as well as achieve significant personal and professional development. For more information, please contact [blackstemvt@gmail.com](mailto:blackstemvt@gmail.com) or Jess Hoopengardner ([jessh@vt.edu](mailto:jessh@vt.edu)), College of Science Director for Inclusion & Diversity.

### Sigma Gamma Epsilon

This organization is an honor society for the earth scientist. Members must have an interest in the earth sciences, have taken at least 10 semester hours of earth science courses, maintain a 3.00 GPA in the earth sciences, and maintain a 2.67 GPA overall. The group activities include hikes, field trips, community service, and an educational outreach program. For more information, please contact Laura Nesor ([neser@vt.edu](mailto:neser@vt.edu)).

### Widening Inclusivity in the Geosciences (WInGS)

This discussion group was founded to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion in geosciences, and in all science, by providing a venue to discuss career development, mentoring, and diversity, and the inevitable challenges faced at every level of academia and professional careers in science. For more information, please contact Michelle Stocker ([stockerm@vt.edu](mailto:stockerm@vt.edu)) or visit the [WInGS website](#).

### Society of Exploration Geophysicists (SEG) VT Student Chapter

This organization's goals are to promote the use of geophysical tools for the earth scientist and assist students at Virginia Tech in their research that involves geophysics. The society has sponsored lunchtime seminars, raised funds for the purchase of geophysical software and hardware, and sponsored students at geophysical conferences. All students with an interest in geophysics are encouraged to join. For more information, please contact Matt Tascione ([mtascione@vt.edu](mailto:mtascione@vt.edu)) or Dr. John Hole ([hole@vt.edu](mailto:hole@vt.edu)), faculty advisor.

### American Association of Petroleum Geologists

The American Association of Petroleum Geologists (AAPG) Student Chapter is a student-led and student-organized group for those interested in learning about geosciences careers in the petroleum industry. The chapter serves as a focal point for developing leadership skills and a professional identity as well as interacting with others interested in this career path. For more information, please contact Lars Koehn ([larsk@vt.edu](mailto:larsk@vt.edu)) or Dr. Brian Romans ([romans@vt.edu](mailto:romans@vt.edu)), faculty advisor.

## ***V.6 Expectations of Professional Behavior***

Graduate students are considered junior colleagues to the faculty: professionals in training. MS candidates will develop into a professional that is not just a technical employee, but someone that can manage complex projects and take a leadership role that includes analysis and interpretation and communication of results. PhD candidates will become an expert and scholar in their field: an independent scientist that can lead others in creative research, mentor and teach, and meet all scholarly challenges.

As junior colleagues, graduate students have important responsibilities regarding professional behavior. First and foremost, never take unfair advantage of another person, be it a professional colleague, student, or coworker. The Department strives to be a fair, collegial, and welcoming environment, and students' considerations at maintaining this are very much appreciated. As developing scientists, students also have responsibilities related to academic and scientific ethics and integrity. All graduate students are expected to uphold the Virginia Tech Principles of Community and the Graduate School's Expectations for Graduate Study as well as the scholarly integrity and research ethics standards of their disciplines. Towards this end, graduate students are required to participate in ethics and integrity activities as part of their graduate studies. The Department of Geosciences will offer opportunities for graduate students to engage in activities that promote and strengthen their academic and professional integrity while studying at Virginia Tech. Specific topics that will be addressed are:

1. Plagiarism and other violations of the Graduate Honor Code
2. Proper use of professional conventions in citation of existing research and scholarship, accurate reporting and ownership of findings, and acknowledgement of contributions to the work
3. Ethical standards in teaching, mentoring, and professional activities
4. Appropriate lab procedures and maintenance of lab notebooks and other research documentation
5. Fair use of publications, software, and equipment
6. Guidelines for maintenance of confidentiality (and, where relevant, anonymity) in research
7. Guidelines for determination of authorship
8. Appropriate grant and contract management, including appropriately asserting personnel or program capacities and competencies when applying for grants and contracts
9. Available avenues for reporting alleged misconduct

Graduate students are implicitly trusted, so a high level of honor and personal ethics are now demanded of them. This includes areas of academics and honesty in data collection and communication. As graduate students, there is also a high level of expectation with regards to performance and effort. In addition to working hard and being motivated, students are strongly encouraged to be as active as possible in the activities (social and academic) within the Department.

The Graduate School website provides university expectations for graduate students and has links to more information on expectations for graduate study, the Graduate Honor System (see below), Principles of Community, Code of Student Conduct, and the Office of the Graduate Ombudsperson.

<https://graduateschool.vt.edu/academics/expectations.html>

The Graduate Honor Code establishes a standard of academic integrity for all graduate students at Virginia Tech. The code is founded on the concept of honesty with respect to the intellectual efforts of oneself and others. Compliance with the Graduate Honor Code requires that all graduate students exercise honesty and ethical behavior in all their academic pursuits at Virginia Tech, whether these undertakings pertain to study, course work, research, extension, or teaching. Graduate students, in accepting admission, indicate their willingness to subscribe to and be governed by the Graduate Honor Code and acknowledge the right of the university to establish policies and procedures and to take disciplinary action (including suspension or expulsion) when such action is warranted. The home page for the Graduate Honor Code is

<https://graduateschool.vt.edu/academics/expectations/graduate-honor-system.html>. If students are

a GTA, it is useful to know about the undergraduate honor system as well. Its home page is <http://www.honorsystem.vt.edu/>.

Sexual harassment is considered to be a form of discrimination based on sex and falls within the statutory prohibitions against sex discrimination. The university is committed to maintaining a working and a study environment free of sexual harassment. Accordingly, in compliance with Section 703 of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, it is the university's policy not to tolerate any verbal, nonverbal, or physical behavior, which constitutes sexual harassment. Personnel with supervisory responsibilities are required to take immediate and appropriate action when incidents of alleged sexual harassment are brought to their attention. Violations of the policy prohibiting sexual harassment may lead to disciplinary actions, including reprimand, suspension, or termination of employment or academic status. Sexual harassment is defined as unwelcome sexual advances, request for sexual favors, and other verbal, nonverbal, or physical conduct of a sexual nature when: 1) submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment or academic decisions, or 2) submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment or academic decisions; or 3) such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work or academic performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working or academic environment. Faculty, staff, students, and applicants for employment or admission with complaints of sexual harassment should contact the University Office of Equity and Inclusion on a confidential basis and request an informal investigation.

Faculty, staff, and students may file formal complaints outside the university. Students may file formal complaints with the Office of Civil Rights of the Department of Education. Faculty may file formal complaints with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. Staff may contact the State EEO Office or the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

Each student is expected to comply with the alcohol regulations of the Commonwealth of Virginia and the university. Virginia Tech recognizes that the misuse and abuse of alcohol is a persistent social and health problem of major proportion in our society and that it interferes with the goals and objectives of any educational institution. Accordingly, Virginia Tech does not encourage the use of alcoholic beverages and strongly discourages illegal or otherwise irresponsible use of alcohol. Members of the university community are accountable for their decisions regarding their use of alcohol as well as their behavior, which occurs as a result of these decisions. Virginia Tech fully complies with the alcohol regulations of the Commonwealth of Virginia. All state laws apply to Virginia Tech students.

Sometimes conflicts arise between students and advisors, as well as between students. We encourage that individual's first try to resolve differences on their own, but realize that some issues may be complex and may require additional assistance. We have several people in the department who can help resolve conflicts. April Newcomer has years of experience working with students and is a confidante of many of our students. The GSAC is also available for assistance and/or advice regarding conflicts. If conflicts cannot be resolved with the help of April Newcomer and/or GSAC, students should feel free to contact the Department Head for additional conversation and assistance. If a student would prefer to talk to someone outside of the Department, they should feel free to contact the Graduate Student Ombudsperson. The Ombudsperson helps graduate students resolve issues and address concerns, provide a resource for and information about institutional policies, and acts as a facilitator to work towards resolutions of graduate students' concerns. More information can be found at: <http://www.graduate.ombudsman.vt.edu/>.

### ***V.7 FERPA – Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974***

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99) is a Federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. The law applies to all schools that receive funds under an applicable program of the U.S. Department of Education. For more details click this web page: <https://www.registrar.vt.edu/FERPA.html>

### ***V.8 Title IX and the Violence Against Women***

Maintaining a campus free of sex discrimination or sexual harassment, including sexual violence is important for all students and employees.

### ***V.9 Title IX of the Education Amendments (1972)***

prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in any educational program or activity that receives federal financial assistance (20 U.S.C. § 1681(a)). Title IX prohibits sexual harassment, including sexual violence.

### ***V.10 The Violence Against Women (VAWA) Reauthorization Act (2013)***

also prohibits sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. This federal legislation is sometimes referred to as the Campus Sexual Violence Elimination (SaVE) Act.

Virginia Tech [Policy 1025](#) is consistent with the federal law in prohibiting discrimination on the basis of gender, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Policy 1025 also prohibits discrimination based on gender expression. For more details click this web page <https://oea.vt.edu/title-ix-vawa.html>

### ***V.11 Sexual Assault Prevention***

is an online educational program for adults on the important issues of sexual harassment, sexual assault, relationship violence, and stalking. Graduate students are required to take this online program as part of Virginia Tech's new comprehensive prevention strategy and in response to federal guidelines under the [Campus Save Act](#).

*Sexual Assault Prevention is NOT optional* <https://students.vt.edu/onlineprograms.html>

### ***V.12 Diversity.edu***

All incoming graduate students (as well as incoming undergraduates) will be asked to complete the module during their first semester on campus. Diversity.edu will provide a common language and knowledge base for extending diversity and inclusion discussions across campus. In August, the Graduate School will send correspondence to all incoming graduate students about the Diversity.edu module.

## **Appendix A: Graduate Student Forms**

This list of forms requires student and advisor/committee signatures. After acquiring student and advisor/committee signatures, upload the form to [www.tinyurl.com/GEOSUpload](http://www.tinyurl.com/GEOSUpload). The Office of Advising and Enrollment will acquire the remaining signatures and submit the form to the Graduate School. Students will receive an email notification once the form has been submitted to the Graduate School for final approval and processing. (Note: This is not an exhaustive list of graduate student forms. Additional student forms are located in the [Graduate Student Materials share folder](#), [Graduate Advising Canvas](#), and the [Graduate School Forms website](#).)

- [Start of Semester Defense Exception Request](#)
- [Change of Degree Level Request](#)
- [Change of Committee/Advisor Request](#)
- [Plan of Study Change Request](#)
- [Extension Request for Stipend Support](#)
- [Leave of Absence](#)

## Appendix B: Important Dates

Be sure to check the [Academic Calendar](#) as well as the [Graduate School Deadlines for Academic Progress](#) to verify deadlines. Dates are subject to change.

<b>August</b>	10	<a href="#">Fall 2023 Payment Deadline (Bursar)</a>
	14	Start Date for Graduate Students (unless advisor requires earlier arrival)
	—	PhD student must complete preliminary examination by end of their 5th semester
	21	<a href="#">First Day of Classes</a>
	25	<a href="#">Last Day to Add Classes</a>
<b>September</b>	4	<a href="#">Labor Day (No Classes - University Offices Closed)</a>
<b>October</b>	1	Conversion from MS to PHD (complete prior to completion of 3rd semester if applicable)
	1	Extension Request for Spring Semester Due (if applicable)
	6	<a href="#">Fall Break (No Classes - University Offices Open)</a>
	17	<a href="#">Course Request Opens (tentative)</a>
	31	<a href="#">Course Request Closes (tentative)</a>

<b>November</b>	18	<a href="#">Thanksgiving Holiday Begins</a>
	24	<a href="#">Web Drop/Add Begins for Spring 2024 at 8:00pm</a> (tentative)
	26	<a href="#">Thanksgiving Holiday Ends</a>
<b>December</b>	6	<a href="#">Last Day of Classes</a>
	7	<a href="#">Reading Day</a>
	8	Annual Report Due (if defend Fall 23)
	14	<a href="#">Degree Conferral Date</a>
<b>January</b>	10	<a href="#">Spring 2024 Payment Deadline (Bursar)</a>
	10	<a href="#">Start Date for Graduate Students</a>
	10	Conversion from MS to PHD (complete prior to completion of 3rd semester if applicable)
	10	Extension Request for Fall Semester Due (if applicable)
	—	PhD student must complete preliminary examination by end of their 5th semester
	15	<a href="#">Martin Luther King Holiday (No Classes - University Offices Closed)</a>
	16	<a href="#">First Day of Classes</a>
	22	<a href="#">Last Day to Add Classes (tentative)</a>
	TBD	<a href="#">GSRs Abstract Submission Deadline</a>
<b>March</b>	2	<a href="#">Spring Break Begins</a>
	10	<a href="#">Spring Break Ends</a>
	19	<a href="#">Course Request Opens</a> (tentative)
<b>April</b>	2	<a href="#">Course Request Closes</a> (tentative)
	5	Annual Report Due
	19	<a href="#">Web Drop/Add begins for Fall 2024 at 8pm</a> (tentative)
<b>May</b>	1	<a href="#">Last Day of Classes</a>
	2	<a href="#">Reading Day</a>
	8	<a href="#">Degree Conferral Date</a>