

COLLEGE OF NATURAL RESOURCES

GRADUATE PROGRAM PROCEDURES 2006 - 2007

The information below has been prepared to assist graduate students in becoming familiar with the operating procedures and requirements of the College of Natural Resources. General university procedure can be found in the *Graduate Catalog*, available at <http://www.grads.vt.edu/academics/gcat/index.html>. This site includes information on admission, degree requirements, preparation of theses, and other important topics. Departments, major professors, and advisory committees may prescribe additional requirements depending on the student's area of study.

All graduate students are expected to be familiar with and comply with University, College, Department, and subject area requirements. In addition, graduate students must follow the *Graduate Honor Code*. Failure to comply satisfactorily with all requirements may seriously inconvenience the student and could lead to assistantship termination.

► ORIENTATION

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

Dr. Harold Burkhart, Head, Department of Forestry,
Room 313, Cheatham Hall

Dr. Eric Hallerman, Head, Department of Fisheries and Wildlife Sciences,
Room 100, Cheatham Hall

Dr. Laurence Carstensen, Head, Department of Geography,
Room 115A Major Williams Hall

Dr. Paul Winistorfer, Head, Wood Science and Forest Products,
Room 230, Cheatham Hall

The Graduate School, the College of Natural Resources' graduate students, and the departments all offer orientation events for new students. Be certain to check the appropriate web sites for dates and times or check with Arlice Banks in 324 Cheatham Hall.

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

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

Certain immunizations are required for students attending Virginia Tech. Refer to the [Schiffert Health Center's](#) website for a list of requirements. Mandatory student fees (\$US 761.50 per semester for Virginia residents; \$US 821.50 per semester for non-Virginia residents) include a charge for health services. Students who have paid these fees may use the Schiffert Health Center for certain medical needs. Services include unlimited visits, most medications, and most laboratory procedures. As not all medical situations can be treated at the Schiffert Health Center, additional medical insurance is recommended. For academic year 2006-07, assistantship packages include a \$1236.75 medical insurance benefit, covering seventy-five percent of the GM Southwest insurance premium (for a single student at the \$50,000 coverage level). Students may purchase the \$50,000 coverage plan or higher coverage levels as they wish; however, the benefit is fixed at \$1236.75. Students must meet the following criteria to receive this benefit:

- Must maintain at least a half-time graduate assistantship (10 hours per week);
- Enroll in university-sponsored health insurance plan;
- Sign up for the payroll deduction option for payment of premiums.

To Claim the Benefit:

To claim this benefit, eligible graduate assistants must sign up for the university-sponsored medical insurance plan through GM Southwest and choose the payroll deduction option. The insurance benefit will be automatically provided in a prorated amount of approximately \$68.70 each pay period.

Frequently Asked Questions about the Insurance Benefit: (taken from Graduate School's website on insurance benefits: http://www.grads.vt.edu/financial/insurance/ga_benefit/index.html)

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

Yes. Beginning Fall 2005, the expanded health insurance benefit is only available to students who have purchased the university sponsored health insurance plan.

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

No. The insurance subsidy is no longer offered.

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

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

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

If your appointment is effective August 10, the insurance office will do a multiple premium deduction and make the policy effective August 1. You will also receive the benefit beginning August 10. You still need to get your application to the Medical Insurance Office by the September 16 deadline.

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

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

Does this mean that I will not receive the full benefit?

Students who maintain assistantships for the entire academic year (August 16 through May 15) will receive the full benefit amount. If you are employed for a fraction of that time, you will receive the associated percentage of the benefit. For example, if you are on assistantship from January 1 to May 15, you are employed for one-half of the academic year. You will be eligible for one-half of the benefit and will receive approximately \$618.37, through prorated payments throughout the term of your assistantship.

► DESK, LABORATORY SPACE, AND KEYS

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

Building keys are available from Peggy Quarterman in Room 324, Cheatham Hall. **A signed key slip, available from department head secretaries or Mrs. Quarterman, and a deposit of \$5.00 per key are required for each separate key request.** Please help to keep Cheatham Hall secure by relocking entry doors at night and on weekends. Do not prop doors open for any reason.

► MAJOR PROFESSOR AND ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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

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

The College of Natural Resources requires that each student's graduate advisory committee meet with the student before the student has been in residence for one year and at least yearly thereafter. While these meetings should center on the research project and coursework, an additional function will be evaluating the student's performance and making recommendations for improvement. It is the obligation of the student to arrange these meetings, in consultation with his/her major professor, and the obligation of the department head to monitor this policy. Additional procedures of the relevant department or subject area may apply. The evaluation becomes part of the student's file.

► **PLAN OF STUDY**

Each graduate student must file a Plan of Study with the Graduate School. This program lists courses that the student plans to complete as part of his/her degree requirements. While the program documents courses a student will take during the residency period, modifications to the Plan of Study are allowed if approved by the student's committee and appropriate administrative officials.

► **RESEARCH WORK PLAN (PH.D. AND MS STUDENTS ONLY)**

Completion of graduate research is the requirement often extending the period of study. Therefore, all graduate students should give prompt attention to choosing their research topic in consultation with their major professor and their advisory committee. Choice of topic should be guided by the student's interest, the availability of faculty to direct the research, and the College's ongoing research programs. An early choice of topic will allow planning a more effective Plan of Study.

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

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

► PH.D. EXAMINATIONS

The following requirements are specific to the College:

I. Minimum Competency in Statistics

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

The statistics requirements must be satisfied before a student is allowed to take written or oral prelims. The College Student Policy and Affairs Committee recommends that this requirement be satisfied during the first year of residency.

II. Qualifying Examination

Departments or sections may require a qualifying examination for Ph.D. students. See the *Graduate Catalog*, available at <http://www.grads.vt.edu/academics/gcat/index.html>, for additional information.

III. Preliminary Examination

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

IV. Additional Coursework

Requiring additional courses remains within the purview of the graduate advisory committee department and/or section. Students are advised to consult their major professor and department head.

► THESIS/DISSERTATION

Format and procedures for submitting your thesis or dissertation are given in the *Graduate Catalog*, available at <http://www.grads.vt.edu/academics/gcat/index.html>. The individual departments or sections may prescribe additional procedures. Students are advised to consult their major professor and graduate committee concerning requirements and expectations.

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

1. Remember that the thesis/dissertation is a permanent record that will require several re-writings before submission to your advisory committee and may require additional revision afterwards.
2. During the initial stages of writing the thesis/dissertation, the major professor will be responsible to see that the material is properly organized, correctly stated and interpreted, and written in an acceptable style.
3. When the major professor is satisfied that the manuscript is ready for review, copies will be furnished to each committee member. Copies are best made on paper with numbered lines. Committee members are to be allowed a minimum of two weeks for review and comment. If a committee member has not reviewed the manuscript at the end of three weeks, the student may proceed to the final draft without that particular review.
4. At least one week before the oral examination, each member of the examining committee must be provided with a copy of the completed reviewed manuscript.
5. Each graduate student is responsible for the preparation of his/her thesis/dissertation in the required electronic form. Refer to [Electronic Thesis and Dissertation](#), available at <http://etd.vt.edu/> for information. Additional departmental requirements may apply. Please check your department's Graduate Program Procedures for details.

► PUBLICATION OF RESEARCH

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

► USE OF COLLEGE FACILITIES

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

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

► SEMINARS

A variety of seminars are sponsored on campus. Students are encouraged to attend seminars of interest arranged by other departments. All graduate students are **required** to attend departmental or section-sponsored seminars. Departments may require that students register (pass/fail option) for the departmental graduate seminar (course no. 5004) every semester they are in residence, and this does not conflict with other scheduled classes. Students are **expected to attend** those seminars organized by the College of Natural Resources, regardless of topic.

► GENERAL DUTIES

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

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

Graduate students on assistantships are expected to maintain regular hours. Each graduate research assistant is expected to work 20 hours per week (or a proportionately smaller number when employed less than half-time) over and beyond the hours required for the 5994 and 7994 credit hours for which he/she is registered during a given semester. It should be noted that this requirement does not provide for vacation time. Therefore, all graduate assistants who wish to be away from campus must make prior arrangements with their major professor concerning the fulfillment of their obligation to the University.

All questions regarding the payment of stipends and the period for which they are active should be addressed to the department head. If a stipend payment is in error the major professor should be notified.

Four graduate students (one from each department) are members of the College's Student Policy and Affairs Committee. These representatives should be encouraged to raise issues relating to graduate student procedures for consideration by the committee. Also, students may wish to discuss issues of concern with their Graduate Student Assembly (GSA) representatives.

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

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

► APPENDIX A

Research Work Plan - Example of cover page

<p>RESEARCH WORK PLAN for John C. Doe Candidate for the Degree of MASTER OF SCIENCE in FORESTRY</p>	
TITLE:	The Growth of Open-grown Virginia Pine (<u>Pinus Virginia</u>)
OBJECTIVE:	<p>(1) To examine the vertical distribution of foliage and other components in the canopy of open-grown Virginia Pine.</p> <p>(2) To investigate the relationships between several parameters of tree measurements (Dbh, height, and others) and the dry weight of the above-ground portion (bole, branches, cones, and foliage) of open-grown Virginia Pine.</p> <p>(3) To use the above relationship and stem analysis to formulate growth curves for open-grown Virginia Pine.</p>
APPROVAL:	
_____	_____
Chair	Date
_____	_____
Committee Member	Date
_____	_____
Committee Member	Date
_____	_____
Department Head	Date

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

1. Justification: The reasons for undertaking the research
 2. Literature Review: A thorough review of past work
 3. Objectives
 4. Materials & Methods
 - Data Collection: A complete description of techniques to be used
 - Methods of Analysis: An outline of the statistical methods to be used
 5. References
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► APPENDIX B¹

Requirements for Master's Degree

Virginia Tech allows for both thesis and non-thesis master's degrees. For each degree type, the student's plan of study must meet the requirements shown below. These are minimum requirements that individual departments or advisory committees may exceed. Students are encouraged to consult individual departments for particular requirements. A course required for an undergraduate degree in a given area may not be used toward a graduate degree in the same area. Any courses listed on the plan become a part of the requirements for the degree, must be completed with a grade of "C" or better, and count toward the minimum GPA of 3.0 for fulfilling degree requirements.

Requirements for Master's Degree

	Minimum Total Graduate Credits	Minimum Graded Graduate Credits	Minimum Research Hours
Thesis	30	20 ¹ (12 credits of 5000-level or higher)	6
Non-Thesis	30	24 ² (15 credits of 5000-level or higher)	

¹ A maximum of 12 credits in 4000-level courses (approved for graduate credit) and 6 credits total in 5974, 5984, and 6984 courses.

² A maximum of 9 credits in 4000-level courses (approved for graduate credit) and 9 credits total in 5974, 5984, and 6984 courses.

Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.)

Credits: Each doctoral student must complete a minimum of 90 semester hours of graduate study and a dissertation. The plan of study must meet the following requirements. These are minimum requirements and individual plans may be exceeded as required by a department or an individual's advisory committee. Courses numbered lower than 4000, or 4000-level courses other than those permitted by footnote 4 below, should be listed on the plan as supporting courses. A course required for an undergraduate degree in a given area may not be used toward a graduate degree in the same area, except through an approved departmental exception. Any courses listed on the plan become a part of the requirements for the degree, must be completed with a grade of C- or better, and count toward the minimum GPA of 3.0 for fulfilling degree requirements.

¹Taken from the *Graduate Catalog*, available at <http://www.grads.vt.edu/academics/gcat/index.html>

► **APPENDIX B (Continued)**

Doctoral Degree Requirements

	Semester Credit Hours¹	
	Minimum	Maximum
Research and Dissertation (5994 and 7994)	30	–
Courses numbered 5000 or higher ²	27 ¹	–
4000-level courses ³	0	–
Seminars (subject matter unstructured) ⁴	0	4
Courses numbered 4984, 5974, and 5984 ⁵	–	18

¹ Departments may petition the Commission on Graduate Studies and Policies for permission to reduce the minimum number of graded course credits required for a specific degree program. The petition must provide clear justification and rationale for the requested reduction in requirements.

² Courses numbered 5000 or above may not be taken on a pass/fail basis except when offered P/F only.

³ A maximum of 6 credit hours may be in 4000-level courses that are not approved for graduate credit provided that the courses are outside the student's major field and are of a level warranting graduate credit for the area in which the student is receiving the degree or if judged to be appropriate by the student's advisory committee, e.g., where significant differences in areas of concentration or departmental undergraduate requirements exist in other colleges or universities or in fields where students are likely to change majors at the time of admission to graduate school. The advisory committee must explain why the departmental exception applies to each student. Any number of 4000-level courses approved for graduate credit may be counted toward the 90 hour total, provided that all other requirements are met.

⁴ Seminars may be taken on a pass/fail basis, and may be used toward meeting the minimum requirements in courses numbered 5000 or higher.

⁵ Courses numbered 5974, 5984, and 6984 may be used in meeting minimum requirements in courses numbered 5000 or higher. Special study courses subsequently approved as regular courses do not count toward the maximum permitted special study credit hours, except through an approved departmental exception.

▶ APPENDIX C²

Credit Hour Loads

Employed Graduate Students

The Graduate School recognizes that many students depend on part-time employment (including assistantships). University policy prescribes the following upper limits on graduate academic loads for employed students. Students on full assistantship are assumed to be 50 percent employed.

Maximum Student Credit Load

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

*Maximum 12 hours of course work in both summer terms (maximum of 9 hours in any one term).

²Taken from the *Graduate Catalog*, available at <http://www.grads.vt.edu/academics/gcat/index.html>