



COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE AND LIFE SCIENCES  
HUMAN NUTRITION,  
FOODS, AND EXERCISE  
VIRGINIA TECH™

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**2021-22 GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN HNFE DEGREE PROGRAM**

**Department of Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise**

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# Virginia Tech Principles of Community

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

**We affirm** the inherent dignity and value of every person and strive to maintain a climate for work and learning based on mutual respect and understanding.

**We affirm** the right of each person to express thoughts and opinions freely. We encourage open expression within a climate of civility, sensitivity, and mutual respect.

**We affirm** the value of human diversity because it enriches our lives and the University. We acknowledge and respect our differences while affirming our common humanity.

**We reject** all forms of prejudice and discrimination, including those based on age, color, disability, gender, gender identity, gender expression, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, and veteran status. We take individual and collective responsibility for helping to eliminate bias and discrimination and for increasing our own understanding of these issues through education, training, and interaction with others.

**We pledge** our collective commitment to these principles in the spirit of the Virginia Tech motto of *Ut Prosim* (That I May Serve).

  
Rector, Board of Visitors

  
President, Virginia Tech

  
President, Faculty Senate

  
President, Staff Senate

  
President, Student Government Association

  
President, Graduate Student Assembly

  
President, Alumni Association

  
Chair, Commission on Equal Opportunity and Diversity



**Our graduate program is designed to be challenging and intellectually stimulating while providing the flexibility to meet the specific needs and goals of our students.**

HNFE faculty represent a range of academic interests and all are dedicated to providing you with an outstanding graduate education. However, the ultimate success of your education depends on how diligently you apply yourself and take advantage of opportunities at Virginia Tech.

The **HNFE GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK** provides you with a description of the department, degree requirements, policies and procedures, student expectations, and more.

This handbook is to be used in conjunction with information provided by the [Virginia Tech Graduate School](#) and [Graduate Catalog](#). **It is the responsibility of each student entering the graduate program in HNFE to read and understand all policies and procedures in this handbook as well as those cited by the Graduate School.** Any questions regarding this document or on the Graduate School website should be addressed to the graduate program director or graduate program coordinator.

Please also reference the [Resources and Forms](#) page from the [HNFE graduate program website](#).

**NOTE:**

If you print this handbook, please access the online version for website addresses:  
[hnfe.vt.edu/content/dam/hnfe\\_vt\\_edu/graduate/documents/GraduateHandbookPhD.pdf](http://hnfe.vt.edu/content/dam/hnfe_vt_edu/graduate/documents/GraduateHandbookPhD.pdf)

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## ABOUT HNFE

### Background

Our mission is to discover, translate, and disseminate health-related advances in the nutrition, food, and exercise sciences. The work of the faculty and graduate students in HNFE contributes significantly to scientific progress through molecular and clinical advances leading to prevention and improved treatment of obesity and chronic diseases; behavioral discoveries that lead to effective intervention programs for youth and adults; interdisciplinary research teams who speed the translation of scientific discoveries to effective therapeutic and public health interventions and policies that will benefit Virginians and the nation. We provide exceptional training for our students focusing on the preparation of future professionals who are knowledgeable, committed to life-long learning, ethical, culturally sensitive, and able to work collaboratively and independently.

Training in the use of rigorous scientific inquiry is a cornerstone of the HNFE graduate program. We also foster innovation across all three Virginia Tech mission areas of teaching, research, and outreach by:

1. supporting programs that promote sustainability and community viability and encouraging student participation in research and extension,
2. designing, developing, and implementing programs and policies through a participatory and shared effort between the HNFE research and teaching community,
3. Utilizing our teaching and research expertise to improve the health across diverse populations.

Finally, the department's primary focus is on addressing health promotion and prevention and treatment of chronic disease, one of the most critical public health challenges.

## General Degree Information

### Graduate Academic Tracks

- Behavioral and Community Science
- Clinical Physiology and Metabolism
- Molecular and Cellular Science

*While the tracks differ significantly in the type of scientific inquiry, they share a set of core competencies:*

### HNFE Core Competencies

- All students will be able to identify the basic elements of the scientific method.
- All students will acquire a fundamental understanding of food, nutrition, and exercise sciences.
- All students will be able to demonstrate specialized knowledge in food, nutrition, and/or exercise sciences as dictated by the student's graduate option (track) and degree (M.S. or Ph.D.).
- All students will demonstrate an understanding of the translational research spectrum.

## Degree Requirements: Doctor of Philosophy

### General Degree Requirements

#### Scholarly Ethics and Integrity Requirement

All graduate students are required to complete ethics and integrity training that are outlined in the [Scholarly Ethics and Integrity section of Graduate Catalog](#).

To meet this requirement, students must complete the following:

- Human Subjects or Animal Care Training (choose which is more appropriate); please submit completion certificate to Lisa Jones, [lijones@vt.edu](mailto:lijones@vt.edu).
  - [Human subjects](#)
  - [IACUC training](#)
- ALS 5324 Research Ethics in Ag and Life Sciences (1 cr) (Fall ONLY)
- GRAD 5014 Academic Integrity & Plagiarism (2 cr) (BOTH SEM)

#### Required Courses

HNFE 5204 Translational Science (4cr)

Statistics course (6 cr) choose from courses offered across the university

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## Doctor of Philosophy in Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise

HNFE's PhD degree is a dissertation-based degree requiring a minimum of 90 total credits.

Requirement	Hours
<b>Total Credits</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>Course Credits</b> <sup>1, 2, 3</sup> NOTE: This includes Translational Science (4cr), Statistics (6cr), and ethics and integrity and diversity inclusion training requirements (variable cr)	27 (minimal)
<b>Research Credits (7984)</b> <sup>4</sup>	30 (minimal)
<sup>1</sup> Maximum of 50 percent of credits can transfer from M.S. degree and/or graduate courses from other universities <sup>2</sup> Course credits may include a max of 6 credits of 4000-level courses (not including 4974 or 4994) <sup>3</sup> Course credits may include a maximum 18 credits total in 5974, 5984, and 6984 courses and 4 total credits of seminar. <sup>4</sup> No transfers from other degrees allowed. Audited courses may not be included on the POS. All courses offered A/F must be taken A/F (and not P/F) if they are to appear on the POS. All courses on the plan of study (POS) must be completed with a grade of C- or better (or must be retaken).	

Please see the website for additional information on the [degree requirements](#) and [course offerings](#) pages and the [Graduate Catalog](#) for a complete HNFE graduate course offering list.

### Sample Timeline Progression Through the Doctoral Program

	FALL Semester	SPRING Semester	SUMMER
<b>Year 1</b>	Semester 1 Begin course work Initiate lab work	Semester 2 Continue course work Continue lab work Identify and convene graduate advisory committee Submit POS Take qualifying exam	Continue lab or field work
<b>Year 2</b>	Semester 3 Continue course work Continue lab or field work	Semester 4 Continue course work Continue lab or field work	Continue lab or field work
<b>Year 3</b>	Semester 5 Continue lab or field work Finish up any coursework Take the preliminary exam Initiate dissertation	Semester 6 Finish up any coursework Continue to work on dissertation	Continue to work on dissertation
<b>Year 4</b>	Semester 7 Continue to work on dissertation	Semester 8 Finish dissertation Take the final exam	

### Summary of Graduate Milestones

During the course of their graduate degree, all doctoral students must:

1. Convene an advisory committee.
2. Submit a plan of study (due by the end of the second semester).
3. Complete all coursework listed on the plan of study.
4. Complete an annual progress report with your advisory committee (due every spring).
5. Take and pass a qualifying exam (due semester 4).

6. Take and pass a preliminary exam (due semester 6).
7. Take and pass a final exam/dissertation defense (due semester 8-10).
8. Submit an electronic version of your dissertation to the Graduate School.

*The POS, qualifying exam, preliminary exam, and final exam must be completed in the order above and by the time described below. The milestones may be completed before the listed deadline. All students are expected to complete the milestone by no later than the semester listed below to be identified as making satisfactory progress toward degree requirements. Students failing to make satisfactory progress will not be eligible for assistantships. Students not making satisfactory progress must formally request an extension and must complete the milestone in the following semester. See below for more information on each.*

### **Advisory Committee**

All students admitted to the HNFE graduate program must secure a faculty advisor or mentor from the HNFE's graduate program faculty **prior to admission**. The faculty advisor will provide direction and guidance, mentoring for professional development, direct the student's Ph.D. dissertation research, and serve as chair of the student's graduate advisory committee. Together, the student and faculty advisor will select an advisory committee whose expertise will support the planned research.

#### **Advisory committee purpose:**

- Approves the student's POS
- Assesses the student's progress and accomplishments
- Provides guidance and assistance to thesis research

**Format:** The advisory committee for Ph.D. students must consist of a minimum of four faculty members. The HNFE Department requires that three faculty members must be HNFE graduate program faculty (including the committee chair/faculty advisor) and at least one external committee member who may be a faculty member from another department or an external member not affiliated with Virginia Tech who brings unique expertise. Individuals who are not tenure-track faculty or have not already been approved to serve on graduate committees should submit a request to the graduate program director (see process and timing below). **The graduate program faculty members must maintain a majority on the committee, and HNFE graduate program faculty must comprise at least 50 percent of the committee membership.**

**Process and Timing:** The student lists the names of the advisory committee members when submitting the POS described below. Individuals not already approved to serve on advisory committees are submitted to the HNFE Graduate Program Director using the [Graduate Committee Service Approval Form](#) for approval along with the POS.

**Changes in a student's advisory committee:** If it is necessary to change the composition of an established advisory committee, including the chair, the [change of committee-advisor form](#) is used for this purpose.

### **Plan of Study (POS)**

**Purpose:** The POS sets out the courses and requirements a student must meet in order to be eligible to complete their degree. The POS must meet requirements of both the department of HNFE and the Graduate School and be approved by the faculty advisor, advisory committee, the department, and the graduate school.



**Format:** The POS is submitted online at [HNFE POS](#). The [Plan of Study Worksheet](#) can be used to draft out the POS before submission.

**Process and timing:** The POS is submitted by the student no later than the second semester of the Ph.D. program following written approval from the student's advisory committee with their electronic or written signatures on the POS form. Once the plan is submitted, it is reviewed by the HNFE graduate program coordinator and is then submitted to the graduate school for approval. After final approval, students and their faculty advisors will receive a PDF of the approved POS. The approved POS can also be accessed with an up-to-date transcript and GPA in [Hokie Spa](#).

**A student who has failed to file a POS at the appropriate time may be blocked from registration until the POS has been filed and all financial assistance may be terminated until the POS has been filed.**

Students may need to change the POS after submission and can submit a [Plan of Study Change form](#) that must be approved and signed by the advisory committee, graduate program director, and the Graduate School.

**Transfer credits on the POS:** Up to 50 percent of the graded credit hours (course credits) taken to satisfy requirements for a Virginia Tech graduate degree may be transferred in from another accredited institution or other Virginia Tech graduate program *if the advisory committee considers these credits appropriate for the degree*. Please see more information on transfer requirements in the [Graduate Catalog](#).

### **Annual Progress Report**

All graduate students must participate in an annual review of their academic progress toward their degree program. This review should be submitted to the graduate program coordinator ([Annual Progress Report](#)) by the last day of spring semester classes each year (usually by early May). Please plan ahead since the progress reports require a review, comments, and signatures of the faculty advisor and all advisory committee members. *It is recommended that the student convenes a meeting of the advisory committee to go over the annual progress report.*

### **Qualifying Exam**

**Please refer to the Appendix at the end of this document for more information about the qualifying exam.** [Appendix: HNFE Qualifying Exam](#)

**Purpose:** The purpose of the qualifying exam is to assess the extent to which each HNFE Ph.D. student has achieved mastery of core departmental content, as related to track and specialization, and to gauge students' readiness for future doctoral study development and implementation. The examination should cover subject matter included in the graduate program and any other materials which the committee considers to be pertinent to the student's specific area of research.

**Format:** The qualifying exam is a written exam developed by the student's advisory committee based on content knowledge from HNFE 5204: Translational Science in Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise and specialized knowledge from the student's area of research. The examination should cover subject matter included in the graduate program and any other materials which the committee considers to be pertinent to the student's specific area of research. This qualifying exam is a closed/private meeting with committee members and the student. The meeting, the content, and comments are all confidential. Students independently complete the examination according to the guidelines to demonstrate critical thinking and

independent thought, knowledge, and skills. Students are expected to adhere to the [honor policy as stated by Virginia Tech](#). The student is held accountable for the policy.

**Process and Timing:** The qualifying exam can be completed as early as the end of the second semester but no later than the fourth semester of the Ph.D. program. HNFE 5204 Translational Science in HNFE (and potentially other core courses) should be completed before students can sit for the qualifying exam. The student is given a reading list provided by their advisory committee. The student is given sufficient time (no less than one month) to go over the material which is then followed by an oral and written exam.

Qualifying examinations are administered during regular academic semesters or sessions, between the first day of classes for a given semester and ending with the last official day for examinations. Notification of approval of the examination scheduling will be sent electronically to the student and all members of the advisory committee. For the student to pass the exam, no more than one unsatisfactory vote is permitted. If a student fails an examination (receives more than one unsatisfactory vote), 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 two times will be dismissed from graduate studies by the Graduate School. Students who have been deemed to have failed the examination will be given a summary of the committee's feedback and areas of deficiencies written by the advisor for the student to improve upon for the second attempt of the exam. The student and advisor must develop a remediation plan, which will also need the approval of the committee, based on the feedback from the committee. Failure to demonstrate proficiency in the respective discipline (defined by an overall fail committee vote) can constitute grounds for dismissal from the HNFE graduate program.

### **Preliminary Exam**

**Purpose:** The purpose of the preliminary exam is to evaluate the student's ability to demonstrate critical thinking, conduct a comprehensive or systematic literature review, design and implement one or more studies that comprise a body of scholarly work, analyze the results, and summarize the findings in a coherent document presented to the student's advisory committee.

**Format:** The student will develop a dissertation research proposal document and give an oral public presentation, followed by questions from their advisory committee in a closed-door session. This oral presentation will constitute the "exam." The graduate advisor is expected to provide constructive feedback to the student on the written document as it is being developed. The specific format and level of detail required will be determined by the advisor with input from the committee members that is established during the first in-person meeting during the student's first year of the Ph.D. program. The minimum requirement includes:

- Title page;
- ≤350-word abstract;
- Chapter 1: introduction and background with a clear statement of the research questions or objectives, hypotheses, and timeline for completion;
- Chapter 2: review of literature; and
- Chapter 3: a detailed methodology for each research question, including the statistical analysis or mixed-methods and analytic tools proposed to answer the research question.

*For more information on ETD guidelines, please refer to the [ETD Guidelines](#) on the University Libraries website.*

**Process and Timing:** The exam will be scheduled with the graduate school **no later than the sixth semester** of the Ph.D. program using the [electronic signature system](#) **two or more weeks in advance of the preliminary exam**, as required by the graduate school. **Exams should be approved by faculty at least two business days before the exam.** Students can check approval of the scheduling of the preliminary exam via [Hokie Spa](#). The Graduate School will not allow an examination to proceed without at least two weeks' notice. A written proposal document will be sent to all committee members at least two weeks in advance of the scheduled exam meeting. The student should also submit the project abstract along with the day, time, and location of the meeting to the graduate program coordinator. The written document and presentation will be evaluated by the student's advisory committee members. A pass/fail exam grade will be entered into the graduate school's online system, by each committee member, following the meeting.

Preliminary examinations are administered during regular academic semesters or sessions, between the first day of classes for a given semester and ending with the last official day for examinations. Notification of approval of the examination scheduling will be sent electronically to the student and all members of the advisory committee. For the student to pass the exam, no more than one unsatisfactory vote is permitted. If a student fails an examination (receives more than one unsatisfactory vote), 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 two times will be dismissed from graduate studies by the Graduate School. Students who have been deemed to have failed the examination will be given a summary of the committee's feedback and areas of deficiencies written by the advisor for the student to improve upon for the second attempt of the exam. The student and advisor must develop a remediation plan, which will also need the approval of the committee, based on the feedback from the committee. Failure to demonstrate proficiency in the respective discipline (defined by an overall failure committee vote) can constitute grounds for dismissal from the HNFE graduate program.

### **Final Exam**

**Note:** *The Graduate School uses the terms "defense" and "final exam" interchangeably.*

**Purpose:** To evaluate the student's ability to defend their dissertation project by demonstrating support for the claims, procedures, and results of the dissertation. All students are required to complete a final written and oral exam of the dissertation project (complete dissertation document) following the completion of research and preparation of the dissertation document (under the direction of the faculty advisor and the advisory committee).

**Format:** A dissertation in the form of a written document that adheres to the Virginia Tech Graduate School [Electronic Thesis and Dissertation formatting guidelines](#). The defense meeting is open to the public and typically includes presenting a seminar that describes the research and the results, although the committee may question the candidate on any material relevant to the field of study. The advisory committee will meet with the student independently in a closed session at the conclusion of the defense.

**Process:** The exam will be scheduled with the graduate school using the [electronic signature system](#) two or more weeks in advance of the final exam, as required by the graduate school. Prior to scheduling the exam, students must run their ETD through [iThenticate](#), and the similarity report must be reviewed by the student and advisor prior to scheduling the final examination. **An iThenticate score of less than 15 percent is considered acceptable.** The final similarity report must be included in the submission of the ETD to the Graduate School. This report will be archived separately from the ETD. The written dissertation

document will be sent to all committee members with the final similarity report at least two weeks in advance of the scheduled exam meeting. Students should go over the similarity report with their advisors to ensure that the document is properly cited and free of plagiarism. Students can check approval of the scheduling of the final exam via [Hokie Spa](#). The written document and presentation will be evaluated by the student's advisory committee members. The exam will be graded (pass/fail) by the student's advisory committee members. For the student to pass the exam, no more than one unsatisfactory vote is permitted. 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 two times will be dismissed from graduate studies by the Graduate School. Students who have been deemed to have failed the examination will be given a summary of the committee's feedback and areas of deficiencies written by the advisor for the student to improve upon for the second attempt of the exam. The student and advisor must develop a remediation plan, which will also need the approval of the committee, based on the feedback from the committee.

**Timing:** To be administered in the final semester of the program (usually semester 8 -10).

**Note:** *There must be a six-month timeframe between the preliminary exam and the defense/final exam.*

**Prior to the defense/final exam, the following steps must be taken:**

1. Make sure the POS is up to date.
2. An application for degree must be submitted in [Hokie Spa](#). This starts the process of generating a diploma. The Graduate School will charge a \$25 fee to the student account. The Graduate School also assesses the student's POS to be sure there are no discrepancies or problems at this time. The application for degree must be submitted at least two weeks prior to the defense date. The Graduate School strictly enforces this deadline.
3. The defense/final exam must be scheduled with the Graduate School's [electronic signature system](#) as a Request to Admit to Final Exam. Requests must be made at least two weeks prior to the Defense date. Requests not approved by committee members within three days will be cancelled by the Graduate School. **Exams must be approved by faculty within 48 hours of the student scheduling the exam.**
4. Deadlines that must be met in order to graduate in specified semesters may be viewed at the [Graduate School's commencement website](#). Please note: These deadlines are not modifiable.
5. Contact the HNFE main office for assistance in reserving a room for the seminar.
6. Contact the graduate program coordinator for assistance in announcing the seminar **at least two weeks in advance**. All HNFE faculty and graduate students are invited to attend. The announcement should include:
  - Student's name;
  - Names of the student's advisor and members of the advisory committee;
  - Title of the research project;
  - Abstract ( $\leq 250$  words); and
  - Date, time, and the location of the meeting (contact the HNFE office for room availability).

### Electronic Thesis Dissertation (ETD)

Theses and dissertations are submitted electronically. [Detailed information about the ETD](#) process is provided by the Graduate School. ETD submission must occur within two weeks of the defense. An archiving fee \$45 for Ph.D. students is assessed.

### Additional Expectations and Requirements of HNFЕ Doctoral Students

- Each student will organize a meeting with their advisory committee **annually**. This includes the preliminary/proposal meeting as well as the defense meeting. If neither of these milestone meetings occur within a 12-month period, it is expected that a committee meeting will be scheduled. The Graduate School expects that the student's progress is assessed annually and that this is documented via the progress report which must be submitted to the Graduate School each spring.
- The student is required to develop and present a timeline (beyond the POS) for their degree program to the advisory committee at the first scheduled committee meeting. The details of the timeline should be specified by the advisor; however, it should include general information related to the timing of the completion of the coursework, and the scheduling of the qualifying exam, preliminary/proposal, and final exam. This timeline should also be documented and reviewed at the student's annual progress evaluation.
- The student should meet in-person (including Zoom) or via electronic communications with their entire advisory committee by the second or third semester in order to clarify and establish the expectations of the student and committee members. This meeting should clarify the research questions or study objectives, proposed methods, discuss a timeline, and any other logistical issues related to the student's Ph.D. research program.
- Completing milestones are **minimum** requirements. HNFЕ recommends its graduate students take advantage of other scholarly development opportunities. In addition to mentor and committee feedback, students are highly encouraged to participate in departmental, college/university, and professional opportunities that enrich their training. These can include but are not limited to: participation in track-specific interest groups, regular attendance at departmental seminars and activities, presentation of research at university-wide symposia, submission of pre-doctoral fellowship applications, and attendance at regional or national conferences where feasible/appropriate. Students are expected to submit their work as an abstract for at least one external society conference.

### Residency Requirement for Doctoral Students

At least 24 graduate-level credit hours, including no less than 15 hours of course work (not including research) must be completed while in residence at the Virginia Tech Blacksburg campus. Students may receive residence credits during the summer sessions, but not during any academic year semester in which they are enrolled for fewer than six credits or if they are employed more than one-half time (that is, a maximum obligation external to their academic program of 20 hours per week).

### Graduation

The Graduate School establishes requirements and deadlines to ensure that students can complete degree requirements, participate in commencement, have their name printed in the commencement bulletin, and receive their diploma in a timely manner.

**2021-2022 Deadlines for completing your degree are [here](#)**

### **Registration at time of preliminary exam and/or for degree completion**

Graduate students must be registered for the minimum of three credit hours in the semester or summer session when they take their preliminary examination and when a degree is completed, unless they qualify for Start of Semester Defense Exception, which is an enrollment category for students who have met all degree requirements, except defending prior to the start of the semester.

Under certain circumstances, students may apply for [Start of Semester Defense Exception](#).

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## **General Graduate Program Information**

[Getting Started as a Student](#) contains many useful links and tips for new students.

### **Department and Graduate School Policies and Procedures**

Students are expected to be familiar with all graduate school policies and regulations. Students are responsible for knowing which forms need to be completed and submitted when. There are a number of key steps that must be taken along your journey to graduation, and it is essential that you be fully informed of the steps, forms that need to be completed, and essential time lines. The graduate program coordinator is available to help!

If you have any questions, please refer to the [HNFE Graduate Program website](#), the [Graduate School website](#), and the [Graduate Catalog](#). Forms are located on the [HNFE website](#) and the [Graduate School](#).

### **Continuous Enrollment**

Graduate students must be registered continuously during the academic year (fall and spring semesters) and pay prescribed tuition and fees unless on an approved leave of absence.

*More information:* [Continuous Enrollment](#)

### **Full Time Enrollment**

For the purposes of tuition and fees, full time enrollment consists of a minimum of nine credit hours and a maximum of 18 credit hours per semester during the academic year. HOWEVER, graduate assistants (GAs, GTAs, and GRAs) must enroll for at least 12 credit hours per semester.

*More information:* [Full time enrollment](#)

### **Leave of Absence**

Graduate students should inform their faculty advisor of any periods of absence that may be needed as well as the expected date of return to their program of study. Readmission to the program is not guaranteed after absence of more than one year.

*More information:* [Leave of Absence](#)

### **Academic Progress**

Graduate students must maintain satisfactory academic progress.

*More information:* [Academic Progress](#)

## Expectations for Research Credit Hours

To fulfill their research requirements, HNFE graduate students register for research and thesis/dissertation credit hours (HNFE 5994, 7994) in addition to graded course credits. Research credit hours may be spent engaged in, but are not limited to, the following types of research activities: reading the scientific literature; field or laboratory work; data collection and management; statistical analyses; thesis or dissertation writing; manuscript development and publication; and development/delivery of scientific presentations. Graduate students should work with their faculty advisor to develop goals for completion of research expectations each semester.

### Examples of weekly hours devoted to research credits are as follows:

- 1 credit hr = 3+ hours/week (e.g., for a 15-week semester = 45+ hours)
- 2 credits = 6+ hours/week
- 3 credits = 9+ hours/week
- 4 credits = 12+ hours/week
- 5 credits = 15+ hours/week
- 6 credits = 18+ hours/week

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## Honest and Ethical Behavior

Graduate students should exercise honest and ethical behavior in all their academic pursuits, whether these undertakings pertain to study, course work, research, extension, or teaching.

- Graduate students should know and practice ethical behavior as outlined in the [Graduate Honor Code](#).
- Graduate students should know and practice the code of ethical conduct for their academic discipline or profession ([Student Honor Code](#)).
- Graduate students are expected to uphold ethical standards while employed as a GRA on a sponsored project.

## Conflicts and Separations

An important aspect of HNFE's graduate program is its reliance on effective advisor/student relationships. Graduate students are only accepted into HNFE if they meet application requirements and if there is a HNFE graduate program faculty member willing to serve as a student's graduate advisor (mentor). Therefore, maintenance of a positive advisor/ student relationship is critical to the success of both the student and the faculty advisor. The following steps are recommended to promote a positive advisor/student relationship:

- **Discuss advisor/ student expectations and develop a relationship of trust:** The student and the advisor meet early on in the student's program (first semester) to discuss expectations regarding program goals, timeline, communication plan and feedback, work style, and conflict.
- **Define roles and responsibilities:** The student and advisor should clearly define the roles and responsibilities of the mentor and the mentee. Should also discuss appropriate mentoring styles.
- **Establish short and long-term goals:** Advisors and students should work together to develop mutually agreed upon goals. These goals become the basis for the advising activities.

- **Discuss any issues or concerns immediately:** it is recommended that the student and the advisor discuss any issues or concerns as soon as they come up. A plan for handling issues should be discussed in the initial meeting. This can include involving the graduate program director, department head, or graduate school ombudsperson, if necessary and appropriate.

It is possible that in some cases after a student begins the graduate program, it may be in the best interest of an advisor and student to separate. However, this process is not intended to allow students to try out different advisors. Reasons for separation could include underperformance by the student (e.g., failing to meet teaching/research assistantship expectations), a mismatch between a faculty advisor's and student's research interests, a lack of funding for the student, or other reasons. For problems related to underperformance, the student should be made aware of expectations and specific problems that exist through mechanisms such as the annual progress report (completed by the student, advisor, and advisory committee each spring), and be given the opportunity to bring performance up to the expected level within an agreed-upon time frame.

As stated above, changing to a new advisor is *strongly* discouraged unless the issue cannot be resolved. However, if the issue cannot be resolved, it is the responsibility of the student find a new advisor. If a separation is necessary and the student cannot find a new advisor within the department, the student would have to leave the department.

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## Financial Assistance

Please refer to the [Graduate School](#) and the HNFE website for information about [Assistantships](#) and [Scholarships](#).

### Graduate Assistantships

The department offers financial assistance in the form of graduate assistantships, although all students are not guaranteed these. Funding is guaranteed on an annual basis and stipend amounts may vary among students and from year to year.

A student must be enrolled as a full-time graduate student (12 credits) to be eligible for an assistantship. Graduate Teaching Assistantships (GTAs) are awarded for the academic year (mid-August thru mid-May). Graduate Research Assistantships (GRAs) are available on a limited basis and **may** be awarded year-round; however, if a GRA is awarded in the summer, a tuition waiver is **not** included. Other assistantships are available throughout the university and may therefore have different requirements and procedures.

A full graduate assistantship includes a monthly stipend, tuition waiver, library and technology fees, and eligibility for subsidized health insurance through the university. Unless otherwise specified, students are required to pay their own comprehensive fees and Commonwealth fees. For 2020-21 (based on 9+ credit hours), comprehensive fees are \$1077/semester, and Commonwealth fees are \$302/semester. *Students on assistantships are not required to pay the CALS fee.* Fees are subject to change with tuition increases. Out-of-state students holding a graduate assistantship (teaching or research) become eligible for in-state tuition rates. Stipend rates may depend upon the student's degree level (M.S. or Ph.D.) and are determined by funding source and expectations of the assistantship.

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## International Students

The following is information for international graduate students to help with the transition of moving to Virginia Tech and to assist them throughout their graduate career.

### Contact Information

**International Graduate Student Services:** 540-231-8486

**Director of Graduate Student Services, Alternate Responsible Office, PDSO:** Monika Gibson

**Immigration Specialists, ARO, DSO:** Kim Cossey or Karen Wills

**SEVIS Compliance Coordinator, Immigration Specialist, ARO, DSO:** Tina Lapel

155 Otey Street, Graduate Life Center at Donaldson Brown

540-231-8486 or [igss@vt.edu](mailto:igss@vt.edu)

*More information:* [Graduate Student Immigration Services](#)

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## Graduate Life

### Graduate Student Facilities and Services

#### Graduate Student Offices

The department has desk space available for many graduate students. If your faculty is located in the Integrated Life Sciences Building, contact them about available space. Students whose faculty advisors are housed in Wallace Hall or War Memorial Hall should contact Lisa Shires ([lshires@vt.edu](mailto:lshires@vt.edu)) regarding availability. Unfortunately, not every student will have a private desk each year, but space will be made available for meeting with students or addressing other needs.

#### Keys

Graduate students may need one or more keys to access the buildings after hours and to be able to open specific laboratories. Lisa Shires in Wallace 338 has keys for Wallace Hall. You will need to sign out each and be responsible for its return when you are finished at Virginia Tech. Please check with your faculty advisor to direct you to the individual responsible for key control in your building if it is not Wallace Hall.

#### Communications

It is important to notify the HNFE department office concerning a change of address, telephone number, email address, or any other change we should be aware of so we can keep in touch. Please make the Graduate Program Coordinator aware of such changes. Since the main office telephone is usually answered directly by a staff member, you may wish to give the department number (540-231-4672) rather than a graduate student office number to family or friends who may need to reach you in an emergency.

#### Graduate Student Assembly

About one fifth of all students at Virginia Tech are graduate students; they are organized in a governing body named the [Graduate Student Assembly](#) (GSA).

### **Graduate Honor Code**

The [Graduate Honor System](#) establishes the standards of academic integrity.

### **The Graduate Life Center**

Conveniently located near the library, Squires Student Center, academic buildings, and downtown, the [Graduate Life Center](#) (GLC) provides space and venues that meet the unique needs of graduate and professional students.

### **Additional Support Services for Students (*click on each for more information*)**

**Statistical and Graphic Services**

**The Writing Center at Virginia Tech**

**University Cook Counseling Center**

**Virginia Tech Recovery Community**

**Food Access for Students**

**Schiffert Health Services**

**Services for Students with Disabilities**

**Virginia Tech Police Department and Safety Tips**

**Campus Life and Resources**

**Living in Blacksburg**

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## HNFE Graduate Student Handbook 2021-22 confirmation

- By signing my name below, I certify that I have read the handbook.
- Any questions concerning these policies have been discussed, and my signature certifies my understanding and agreement with these policies.
- A photocopy of this document is as valid as the original.
- I have received a copy of this document.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student name (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Interim Asst. Graduate Program Director signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix: HNFE Qualifying Exam

*Finalized January 23, 2019 and updated June 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020*

**Purpose:** The main purpose of the qualifying exam is to assess the extent to which each HNFE Ph.D. student has achieved mastery of core Departmental content, as related to track and specialization, and to gauge students' readiness for future doctoral study development and implementation. The examination should cover subject matter included in the graduate program and any other materials which the committee considers to be pertinent to the student's specific area of research.

The qualifying examination is a requirement for the doctoral degree. You should confer with your advisor so that proper arrangements can be made to take the qualifying examination by no earlier than the second semester and no later than the end of the fourth semester.

This qualifying exam is a closed/private meeting with committee members and the student. The meeting, the contents, and comments are all confidential.

The examination should cover subject matter included in the graduate program and any other materials which the committee considers to be pertinent to the student's specific area of research. Students independently complete the examination according to the guidelines to demonstrate critical thinking and independent thought, knowledge, and skills. Students are expected to adhere to the [honor policy as stated by Virginia Tech](#). You are held accountable for the policy.

**Process:** The student's **advisory committee members** will provide a list of relevant readings pertaining to Translational Science and the student's relevant discipline and field of study. Relevant readings may capture higher level, dogmatic principles or be specific to committee members expertise. It is suggested that the reading list and expectations (expertise of committee members) would be established with the student in advance at a committee meeting. The reading list should be provided well ahead of time (no less than one month before the exam). This list should be more than 10 but no more than 60 additional papers, total. For example, if a student's doctoral work requires expertise in group dynamics, physical activity promotion, and cost effectiveness, there may be 20 papers per topic for 60 total papers.

- 60-70 percent discipline specific (questions designed by track and/or advisory committee); specifics TBD.
- 30-40 percent translational science content/other core courses; specifics TBD by members of the graduate committee.

**Exam Type:** These readings will be used to guide a written and oral exam.

**Scope of Questions:** Questions will be predetermined and approved by the committee members. General guidelines will be for two to three questions from the translational science course and approximately one question provided per committee member. These questions can be multifaceted and will focus on application and critical thinking rather than rote memorization.

**Written Component:** Committee members and the student will select the written exam type based on the below models or a combination thereof.

- **In person, closed book:** Students will have approximately four hours to complete a closed-book, written response.
- **One week, open-book:** Students will have one week (five business days) to complete, no more than 10 pages (double spaced) for each question.

**Oral Component:** The student will then orally defend the written document within 2 weeks of their written exam. This gives the students and committee members time to reflect on the written document.

**The following criteria should be considered by the student's committee when developing examination questions and assessing the quality of a student's responses:**

1. Appropriate knowledge of the field or fields of study for that student (breadth and depth are defined by the student's Qualifying Examination Committee).
2. Ability to integrate information from various disciplines.
3. Ability to critically evaluate the literature in terms of both substance and methodology.
4. Ability to solve problems creatively.
5. Ability to articulate the significance of the chosen area of inquiry.

**While the student's advisory committee has discretion as to the form the examination takes, it is expected to rigorously adhere to the following standards:**

1. The examination will be graded by all members of the advisory committee. The advisory committee will work with the Translational Science instructor for that portion of the exam.
2. All students will orally defend the written component of their examination before the entire advisory committee.
3. The advisory committee has three potential evaluation options that include pass, fail, or conditional pass. Conditional Pass may be used when the Committee members believe that one or more elements of the examination were not adequate to earn a Pass, but the sense of the Committee is that this may be remedied with additional work (e.g., re-writing a portion of the exam, reading and reviewing additional books or papers to address deficiencies in knowledge, or other actions the Committee feels are in the best interests of the student).
4. Students who have been deemed to have failed the examination will be given a summary of the committee's feedback and areas of deficiencies written by the advisor for the student to improve upon for the second attempt of the exam. The student will have a second opportunity to pass it (minimum of 15 weeks later). A student who fails to pass the Qualifying Examination the second time will be formally dismissed from the HNFE Doctoral program.

**Evaluation:** The student and committee members will discuss performance, guided by the pass/fail guidelines below. The student will then leave the room for committee members to discuss strengths and areas for growth. Each committee member votes pass/fail/conditional pass for the student. For a student to pass their exam, no more than one committee member can vote "fail." For example, a student must receive a 3/4 pass score in order for the exam to be given a "pass."

If two or more committee members score a "fail," then the student and the Graduate Program Director will be informed that the qualifying exam has not been successfully completed. Students who fail the qualifying exam may take the exam for second time the following semester and undergo the same examination procedure. Students are expected to provide a new and fresh set of responses to the exam. If a student fails to successfully complete the qualifying exam for a second time, then he or she will be dismissed from the HNFE department and the Graduate School without receiving a graduate degree. The exam will be evaluated according to the following scale:

**Pass:** A score of pass will be assigned (based upon the general grading rubric in Appendix A) when, in the professional judgment of the advisory committee members:

- All questions are thoroughly addressed and the information included is correct and well referenced.
- The student demonstrates breadth and depth of content as well as a high degree of integration and conceptual understanding of each question.
- The student must demonstrate clear, organized thinking, synthesis and analysis of material, good writing skills, and accurate referencing.

**Fail:** A score of fail will be assigned (based upon the general grading rubric in Appendix A) when in the professional judgment of the advisory committee members:

- The major points of the question are either incorrectly presented or absent from the answer.
- The student fails to demonstrate both breadth and depth of content nor does the student demonstrate integration or conceptual understanding of each question.
- Although some of the response is correct, important information has not been included or has been incorrectly stated.

**Role of faculty advisor in qualifying examinations:** Faculty advisors must take an active role in helping their students choose appropriate advisory committee members. Faculty advisors must assist the committee members in structuring the expectations for student performance and by ensuring adequate contact between committee members and their students. Further, faculty advisors should help students by ensuring that they are aware of these expectations. As students prepare for their qualifying examinations, faculty advisors should help guarantee that the content (e.g., reading lists prepared by the committee) represents neither too narrow nor too broad of a focus.

### **Student Preparation for the Exam**

1. The qualifying exam is intended to assess students' knowledge attained through their graduate studies. The best preparation for the exam is careful study in each of the graduate courses taken prior to the exam. Review of notes and readings from prior course work should be done several weeks prior to the exam to refresh your awareness of the material. Material from any or all courses in the graduate curriculum will be applicable in preparing for answering exam questions. You are urged to organize study groups to share materials, quiz each other, and offer emotional support during this period.
2. Most of the problems found in exam answers are not the result of students' lack of knowledge, but the failure of students to communicate their knowledge and understanding in the writing of the exam. Listed below are suggested guidelines for writing practice answers and writing answers during the exam.
  - a. **Treat the exam as an essay.** Write an introduction, a body and a conclusion. In the introduction, state the exam question you will address in the body of your essay. The single most prevalent problem in students' responses to exam questions is that they do not answer the question that was asked. Given the pressure of an exam situation, students may present what they know even if the information was not requested in the question. While this information may be accurate or even profound, if it does not answer what was asked, readers will be unable to assess if the student knew the information that was requested and will consistently lower their evaluation of the answer.
  - b. **Outline the question.** Another major problem with answers to questions concerns when a section or sections of an answer have been neglected or omitted. This may occur because students become over invested in the first part of their answer and either fail to save time for, or forget altogether, later parts of the answer. A rough outline will make clear all the parts that need to be addressed. It allows organization of which information fits best in which parts, reducing the likelihood of redundancy. Outlines free students to concentrate on the part of the question they are working on because the other parts are listed on paper rather than having to be carried in their minds. If some information relevant to a later part of the answer comes to awareness while working on an early part, it can be noted in the outline and recalled when appropriate. Outlining allows allotting a certain amount of space for each part of the question, helping to prevent overemphasis in one area.
  - c. **Provide accurate information.** While this may seem obvious, it is sometimes overlooked. The evaluation of an answer is typically more severely damaged by presentation of inaccurate information than failure to present accurate information. Students are urged to concentrate their answers on what they are confident is accurate; omitting information which they are unsure is

accurate.

- d. **Reference key points.** Referencing demonstrates that information provided in an answer is derived from the common knowledge base of the profession as represented in published literature. Referencing allows readers to verify statements made in answers. If a reader disagrees with a point in an answer, referencing it redirects the argument from the reader and the student to the reader and the reference. Referencing must follow a format accepted within the field, with the author's name and date of publication essential.
  - e. **Write clear, short, simple sentences.** Introductory, transition, and summary statements may help ensure that major points will be clear to the reader. Ensure that your reader will know what it is you are saying.
  - f. **Write a conclusion.** The conclusion will readdress the exam question and briefly note how it was handled. This serves to integrate and close the exam question. At times, writing the conclusion helps a student identify missing or weak areas. Thus, the student can rectify this problem before turning in the exam.
  - g. **Reread the answer.** This may be the third most important guideline. The unique situation of the qualifying exam can generate remarkable misstatements, omissions, and contradictions in students' writing. The student, when rereading the answer prior to submitting it, will identify most of these problems. When rereading, students should correct errors they identify.
3. The above recommendations regarding the preparation for and writing of qualifying exams are guidelines for students. The qualifying exam is an essential part of the academic experience and provides students with the opportunity to review and integrate what they have learned during their first two years of the doctoral degree program. Please keep in mind that those who will evaluate the student's responses have often taken a similar qualifying exam and bring insight into and empathy for this experience.

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