



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

---

**2024-2025 GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK  
MASTER OF SCIENCE IN HNFE**

**[Department of Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise](#)**

338 Wallace Hall  
295 West Campus Drive  
Blacksburg, VA 24061  
540-231-4672

Instagram: [@VTHNFE](#)

Facebook: [VTHNFE](#)

Twitter: [@VTHNFE](#)

# 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/GraduateHandbookMS.pdf](http://hnfe.vt.edu/content/dam/hnfe_vt_edu/graduate/documents/GraduateHandbookMS.pdf)

**Rodney Gaines, PhD**  
Graduate Program Director  
[rgaines@vt.edu](mailto:rgaines@vt.edu)

**Curtis Cox**  
Graduate Program Coordinator  
[ccurtis8@vt.edu](mailto:ccurtis8@vt.edu)  
540-231-3877

**HNFE and other important contacts:**

- **HNFE Department Head:** Stella Volpe, PhD, RDN, ACSM-CEP, FACSM, [stellalv@vt.edu](mailto:stellalv@vt.edu)
- **HNFE Office Manager:** Angela Worrell, [atawney@vt.edu](mailto:atawney@vt.edu), 540-231-4640
- **HNFE Receptionist:** vacant, [hnfeinfo@vt.edu](mailto:hnfeinfo@vt.edu), 540-231-4247
- **Cooks Counseling Center:** 540-231-6557
- **Graduate School:** [grads@vt.edu](mailto:grads@vt.edu), 540-231-9561
- **Services for Students with Disabilities:** [ssd@vt.edu](mailto:ssd@vt.edu), 540-231-3232

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABOUT HNFE</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Background</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>General Degree Information</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Graduate Academic Tracks</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>HNFE Core Competencies:</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>Degree Requirements: Master of Science</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>General Degree Requirements</b> .....	<b>6</b>
Scholarly Ethics and Integrity Requirement.....	6
Required Courses .....	6
<b>Master of Science in Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise</b> .....	<b>7</b>
Sample Timeline Progression Through the Master’s Program .....	7
Summary of Graduate Milestones.....	7
Advisory Committee.....	8
Plan of Study (POS).....	8
Annual Progress Report .....	9
Proposal Exam.....	9
Final Exam .....	10
Electronic Thesis Dissertation (ETD).....	11
Additional Expectations and Requirements of HNFE Master’s Students .....	11
<b>Graduation</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>B.S./M.S. Accelerated Undergraduate/Graduate Degree</b> .....	<b>12</b>
Guidelines Specific to the B.S./M.S. Program.....	14
Sample Timeline Potential Progression Through the B.S./M.S. Program.....	14
<b>General Graduate Program Information</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>Department and Graduate School Policies and Procedures</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>Continuous Enrollment</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>Full Time Enrollment</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>Leave of Absence</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>Academic Progress</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>Expectations for Research Credit Hours</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>Honest and Ethical Behavior</b> .....	<b>15</b>
<b>Conflicts and Separations</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>Financial Assistance</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>Graduate Assistantships</b> .....	<b>16</b>
<b>International Students</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>Contact Information</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>Graduate Life</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>Graduate Student Facilities and Services</b> .....	<b>17</b>
Graduate Student Offices.....	17
Keys .....	17
Communications .....	18
Graduate Student Assembly.....	18
Graduate Honor Code.....	18
The Graduate Life Center .....	18

<b>Additional Support Services for Students .....</b>	<b>18</b>
Statistical and Graphic Services .....	18
The Writing Center at Virginia Tech .....	18
University Cook Counseling Center.....	18
Virginia Tech Recovery Community .....	18
Food Access for Students.....	18
Schiffert Health Services.....	18
Services for Students with Disabilities .....	18
Virginia Tech Police Department and Safety Tips .....	18
Campus Life and Resources.....	18
Living in Blacksburg .....	18

## 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.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

## 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: Master of Science

### 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 Curtis Cox, [ccurtis8@vt.edu](mailto:ccurtis8@vt.edu).
  - [Human subjects](#)
  - [IACUC training](#)
- ALS 5324 Research Ethics in Ag and Life Sciences (1 cr) (Fall ONLY) In-person Course
- GRAD 5014 Academic Integrity & Plagiarism (2 cr) (BOTH SEM) Online Course

#### Required Courses

ALS 5024: Building Multicultural Competence in Agriculture and Life Sciences

College of Agriculture and Life Sciences | Virginia Tech ([vt.edu](http://vt.edu)) (1 cr) (Both Semesters on-line only)

Note: The Effective Term on record at the Graduate School for the required DEI component for HNFE is Spring 2022. Any graduate student enrolled before the effective date is NOT required to enroll in the college diversity course.

HNFE 5204 Translational Science (4 cr) (Fall ONLY)

Statistics course (3 cr) choose from courses offered across the university

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

## Master of Science in Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise

HNFE's M.S. degree is a thesis-based degree requiring a minimum of 30 total credits.

Requirement	Hours
<b>Total Credits</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Course Credits</b> <sup>1, 2, 3</sup> <i>This includes Translational Science (4cr), Statistics (3cr), and ethics and integrity and diversity inclusion training requirements (4 cr)</i>	20 (minimal)
<b>Research Credits</b> <sup>4</sup>	6 (minimal)
<p><sup>1</sup> Maximum of 50 percent of credits can transfer from M.S. degree and/or graduate courses from other universities.</p> <p><sup>2</sup> Course credits may include a max of 6 credits of 4000-level courses (not including 4974 or 4994). Additional 4000-level courses or courses numbered lower than 4000 can be included on the POS as supporting courses.</p> <p><sup>3</sup> Course credits may include a maximum 6 credits total in 5974, 5984, and 6984 courses and 3 total credits of seminar.</p> <p><sup>4</sup> No transfers from other degrees allowed.</p> <p>Audited courses may not be included on the POS.</p> <p>All courses offered A/F must be taken A/F (and not P/F) if they are to appear on the POS.</p> <p>All courses on the POS must be completed with a grade of C- or better (or must be retaken).</p>	

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 Master's Program

	FALL Semester	SPRING Semester	SUMMER
<b>Year 1</b>	Begin course work Initiate lab or field work	Continue course work, lab, or field work Identify/convene advisory committee Submit POS	Continue lab or field work
<b>Year 2</b>	Complete course work Take proposal exam Initiate thesis	Finish thesis and Take final exam	

### Summary of Graduate Milestones

During the course of their graduate degree, all M.S. 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 proposal exam (due semester 3).
  6. Take and pass a final exam/ thesis defense (due semester 4).
  7. Submit an electronic version of your thesis to the Graduate School.
- See next page for more information on each. The plan of study, proposal exam, and final exam must be completed in the order above and by the time described below.

## Advisory Committee ([Link to the Policy for Graduate 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 thesis research, and serve as chair of the student's graduate advisory committee. Together, the student and faculty advisor will select an **advisory committee** that can lend support to the research being planned.

### 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 M.S. students must consist of a minimum of three faculty members. HNFE requires that two 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 HNFE graduate program faculty members must maintain a majority on the committee.**

**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 includes the courses and requirements a student must meet in order to complete the M.S. 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 M.S. 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 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.

### Proposal Exam

**Purpose:** The purpose of the proposal exam is for the student to propose their thesis research project and for the committee to evaluate the student's ability to demonstrate critical thinking, conduct a comprehensive or systematic literature review, and design one or more research studies (including study design, methodology, etc.) in a coherent document presented to the student's advisory committee.

**Format:** The student will develop a thesis 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 "proposal 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. This is established during the first in-person meeting during the student's first year of the M.S. program.

#### The minimum requirements include:

- Title page;
- ≤250-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 **by no later than the third semester** of the M.S. degree program and not within the same semester as the final exam. The exam should be scheduled with the HNFE office Curtis Cox ([ccurtis8@vt.edu](mailto:ccurtis8@vt.edu)) at **least two or more weeks in advance of the proposal exam**, as required by the department. The student will contact the graduate program coordinator via email to request the exam by providing the following information:

- 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).

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 a maximum of 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 required by Graduate Policies 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.

### Final Exam

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

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

**Format:** A thesis 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. **Note: At the conclusion of the oral portion of the defense, the faculty advisor and the advisory committee members should complete the assessment rubric for the student. The rubrics should be sent to Curtis Cox ([ccurtis8@vt.edu](mailto:ccurtis8@vt.edu)) when completed.**

**Process:** The student is responsible for scheduling the final exam with the graduate school through the [electronic signature system](#) two or more weeks in advance of the exam date, 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. Students should go over the similarity report with their advisors and send it to all of the committee members to ensure that the document is properly cited and free of plagiarism. 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. 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.

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

1. Make sure 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's 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 by the student 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.** Deadlines that must be met in order to graduate in specified semesters may be viewed at the [Graduate School's commencement website](#).
4. Contact the HNFE main office to reserve a room for the final exam oral presentation.
5. Contact the graduate program coordinator Curtis Cox ([ccurtis8@vt.edu](mailto:ccurtis8@vt.edu)) 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).

***If a student fails to implement these actions and does not meet the specified deadlines, the student will not be able to participate in the Virginia Tech graduation ceremony.***

**Electronic Thesis Dissertation (ETD)**

The student submits the M.S. thesis document electronically. The Graduate School provides [detailed information about the ETD](#) process. The ETD submission must occur within two weeks of the oral final exam defense and pay an archiving fee of \$20.

**Additional Expectations and Requirements of HNFE Master's Students**

- Each student will organize a meeting with their advisory committee **annually**. This includes the 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 graduate school each spring.

- The student is expected to develop and present a detailed 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 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 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 M.S. research program.
- Completing milestones are **minimum** requirements. HNFE 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.

## **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.

### **2024-25 Deadlines**

#### **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 \(SSDE\)](#).*

#### **B.S./M.S. Accelerated Undergraduate/Graduate Degree**

Exceptional HNFE seniors with a GPA of 3.4 or higher may be eligible to complete both their B.S. degree and their M.S. degree in five years by applying for dual status and completing and double counting up to 12 course credits during their senior year to both their undergraduate and graduate degrees. To do this, students must apply to the Graduate School for a M.S. degree and submit the [Accelerated Undergraduate/Graduate Degree and Course Designation Form](#) to the Graduate School before the start of their senior year or before the start of their final semester of their senior year. No student will be accepted to the B.S./M.S. program without a confirmed faculty advisor who has committed to work with them throughout the program duration.

**ALL DEGREE REQUIREMENTS ARE THE SAME FOR THE B.S./M.S. PROGRAM AS THE M.S. PROGRAM.**  
*Please refer to the M.S. degree requirements for more information.*

### Guidelines Specific to the B.S./M.S. Program

- Students must be accepted into the program prior to the beginning of the semester in which they would enroll in courses to be double counted and used in the accelerated program.
- Students qualifying for the program must be in the last 12 months of their undergraduate degree.
- A maximum of 12 credits of graded coursework may be double-counted in the program.
- No more than six of the double-counted credits may be at the 4000 level; all others must be offered for graduate credit.
- A grade of B or higher must be earned in each course to be double counted.
- Courses must not be taken pass-fail if a graded option is available.
- Students are held to the same research and course expectations and guidelines as other HNFE M.S. students.

### Sample Timeline Potential Progression Through the B.S./M.S. Program

	FALL Semester	SPRING Semester	SUMMER
<b>Senior Year</b>	Continue undergraduate course work, double count up to 12 credits toward both B.S. and M.S. degrees Identify and convene graduate advisory committee Submit POS Initiate lab or field work		Continue lab or field work
<b>Year 2</b>	Complete course work Take proposal exam Initiate thesis	Finish thesis Take final exam	

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

## 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

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

## 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. They 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/ or 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.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

## 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 amount 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-time 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 2024-25 (based on 9+ credit hours), comprehensive fees are \$1342/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.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

## 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

**Cranwell International Center:** <https://international.vt.edu/Immigration-Services/new-students.html>

Immigration advisors and CIC team: <https://international.vt.edu/about/cranwellteam.html>

Harper Hall

540-231-6527 or [international@vt.edu](mailto:international@vt.edu)

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

## 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**

**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**

[Return to Table of Contents](#)



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

Human Nutrition, Foods, and Exercise  
*Advancing health through discovery and learning*  
338 Wallace Hall  
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061  
P: (540) 231-4672 F: (540) 231-3916  
[www.hnfe.vt.edu](http://www.hnfe.vt.edu)

### HNFE Master of Science Student Handbook 2024-25 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's name (please print)

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Graduate Program Director signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date