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

2023-24 Graduate Student Handbook
Doctor of Philosophy in HNFE

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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

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HNFE and other important contacts:

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- **Graduate School:** grads@vt.edu, 540-231-9561
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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 Mr. Curtis Cox, ccurtis8@vt.edu.
    - Human subjects
    - IACUC training
- ALS 5324 Research Ethics in Ag and Life Sciences (1 cr) (Fall ONLY) In-Person
- GRAD 5014 Academic Integrity & Plagiarism (2 cr) (BOTH SEM) On-Line

Required Courses

ALS 5024: Building Multicultural Competence in Agriculture and Life Sciences | College of Agriculture and Life Sciences | Virginia Tech (vt.edu) (1 cr)
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 (4cr) (Spring ONLY)
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
Total Credits	**90**
Course Credits[1, 2, 3] NOTE: This includes Translational Science (4cr), Statistics (6cr), and ethics and integrity and diversity inclusion training requirements (4 cr)	27 (minimal)
Research Credits (7984)[4]	30 (minimal)

[1] Maximum of 50 percent of credits can transfer from M.S. degree and/or graduate courses from other universities
[2] Course credits may include a max of 6 credits of 4000-level courses (not including 4974 or 4994)
[3] Course credits may include a maximum 18 credits total in 5974, 5984, and 6984 courses and 4 total credits of seminar.
[4] 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
Year 1	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
Year 2	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
Year 3	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
Year 4	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 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 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 of 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 all the details for 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, **please see details of the qualifying exam below**. The student is given a reading list provided by theihttps://twitter.com/i/flow/login?redirect_after_login=%2FVTHNFEr 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. **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 rubric should be sent to Mr. Curtis Cox (ccurtis8@vt.edu) when completed. The completion of the rubric is essential for the Graduate Program Director to submit an annual assessment report to the Office of Institutional Effectiveness.**

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 $20 for Ph.D. students is assessed.

Additional Expectations and Requirements of HNFE 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. 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.

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.

2022-23 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.

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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 waver 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 2023-24(based on 9+ credit hours), comprehensive fees are $1292.5/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

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

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) 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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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

HNFE PhD 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 Graduate Program Director signature Date

Appendix: HNFE Qualifying Exam

Policy and Procedures for the HNFE Qualifying Exam

Finalized, September 22, 2022

Overview

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 exam should cover subject matter included in the HNFE graduate program and any other materials that the student's advisory committee considers pertinent to a student's specific area of research.

The qualifying exam is a requirement for a doctoral degree from HNFE. Students should confer with their faculty advisors so that proper arrangements can be made to take the qualifying exam as early as the second semester and by the end of the fourth semester. It is recommended that the qualifying exam be taken during the fall or spring semesters. The exam, however, may be taken outside of the academic year (e.g. over the summer or winter break) at the discretion of the student's advisory committee. Registration for summer credits to take the qualifying exam is not required.

The qualifying exam consists of both written and oral components. The written component has two potential formats as described below (choice of format for the written component is at the student's and advisory committee's discretion). This approach provides flexibility for the student and committee, but to provide consistency for the exam format, all committee members will follow the same format. The oral component is a closed/private meeting with advisory committee members and the student. The meeting, the contents, and comments are all confidential.

Students will independently complete the qualifying exam according to the guidelines to demonstrate critical thinking and independent thought, knowledge, and skills. Students are expected to adhere to the Virginia Tech Graduate Honor Code at all times during their doctoral program, including the qualifying exam:

https://graduateschool.vt.edu/academics/expectations/graduate-honor-system/ghs-introduction.html

Process

Timeline: The qualifying exam should be administered as early as the second semester but no later than the end of the fourth semester of the doctoral program. HNFE 5204 Translational Science must be completed before students can sit for the qualifying exam.

The advisory committee, directed by the chair, will implement the qualifying exam based on the following suggested timeline:

- Reading list and expectations for quality of work, timeframe, and exam process, including determination of written exam format: Provided to the student a minimum of four weeks before the start of the written exam.
- Questions for the written exam:
    - Closed book format: Provided on the day of written exam.
    - Open book format: Provided seven days before written exam is due.
- Oral exam: Two weeks after submission of written exam.

Role of Faculty Advisor (Advisory Committee Chair) and Committee: A faculty advisor, as the committee chair, must take an active role in helping their students choose appropriate advisory committee members. The student's plan of study, along with committee member selection, must be approved by the Graduate School before the qualifying exam can commence. The committee chair must facilitate adequate contact between committee members and their students and assist the committee members in structuring the expectations for student performance. Further, the committee chair should help students by ensuring they are aware of the expectations in this document.

The student's advisory committee members will provide a list of relevant readings. These readings may be any the committee deems acceptable and can include journal articles, textbook chapters, government documents and guidelines, etc. In addition, the HNFE Graduate Curriculum Committee will provide a list of Translational Science readings. The student's advisory committee chair should email the Graduate Program Director six weeks before the student exam to request the Translational Science readings and a one, two-part question.

The Translational Science readings and questions will be provided to the advisory committee chair four weeks before the exam. All relevant readings may capture higher level scientific principles or be specific to committee members' expertise. The reading list should be at least 10 but no more than 60 papers, in total (including the Translational Science readings). As students prepare for their qualifying exams, the committee chair should help guarantee that the content (e.g., reading lists prepared by the committee) represents neither too narrow nor too broad a focus. The student can find alternative sources to those provided by the committee members, if the format is open book.

- Approximately 80% of the readings should be discipline-specific and be provided by members of the student's advisory committee.
- Approximately 20% of the readings should be related to Translational Science content/other core courses and be provided by the HNFE Graduate Committee.

While the student and the student's advisory committee has discretion for the format of the written exam as described below, it is expected to rigorously adhere to the following standards:

1. The exam will be evaluated by all members of the advisory committee.

2. All students will orally defend the written exam in front of the entire advisory committee in a closed-door session.

3. The advisory committee has three potential evaluation options that include pass, fail, or conditional pass, as outlined below in the Evaluation section.

Scope of Questions: Questions will be determined and approved by the student's advisory committee to be appropriate for the specific chosen written exam format, as detailed below. The intent of the qualifying exam is to ask: does the student have the broad and specific knowledge in HNFE appropriate to conduct a research study and earn a PhD in the department? The broad/specific areas required are determined by the committee guided by the committee chair. The written exam will consist of one to two questions per advisory committee member and one, two-part question provided by the Graduate Program Director related to the Translational Science content. The questions developed by the student's committee members can be multi-part questions and should focus on application and critical thinking rather than rote memorization. The advisory committee chair should take into consideration the number of advisory committee members when soliciting questions from the committee, to assure a manageable and equitable workload for the student. The length of the student's total response per committee member for their question(s), however structured, is limited to a maximum of 10 pages. The translational questions have a similar 10-page limit. The questions for the exam are due to the advisory committee chair one week before the exam.

The following criteria should be considered by the student's advisory committee when developing questions for the exam and to assess 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 advisory committee members)

2. Ability to integrate information from various disciplines

3. Ability to critically evaluate the literature for both substance and methodology

4. Ability to solve problems creatively

5. Ability to articulate the significance of the chosen area of inquiry

Written Component: Advisory committee members and the student will select one of two written exam formats as described below**.** The exam can be scheduled at any time during the calendar year with the agreement of the committee and student. In either format, students are expected to uphold the Virginia Tech Graduate Honor Code:

https://graduateschool.vt.edu/academics/expectations/graduate-honor-system/ghs-introduction.html

1. One day, closed-book: Students will have up to five hours in a single session to write their closed-book responses to all of the questions (see formatting requirements below). The chair of the

committee and the student will reserve a room for the exam. Students may not access the readings or use resources beyond their own recollection from the assigned readings and other authoritative/credible sources from their studies. Citations are not required. The student will write the exam on paper or on a computer under their own recognizance; strict adherence to the Graduate Honor Code is expected.

2. One week (seven consecutive days), open-book: Students will have one week to write no more than 10 pages for each committee member, regardless of the number of questions from a committee member (see formatting requirements below). Further, the 2-part translational science question should be addressed within its own 10-page limit. The chair of the committee and the student will agree on where the exam will be written (e.g., home, on-campus, combination, etc.). Students may access the readings or other papers and course materials, but must work alone. References must be cited but are not included in the 10-page maximum limit. A citation manager may be used and references other than those provided by the committee should be cited appropriately. The exam should be emailed to the advisory committee chair by 11:59 PM on the 7th day of the written exam.

   Format of written exam for both closed- and open-book format

   - Double-spaced
   - 11-12 point font
   - 1 inch page margins
   - Font style at the discretion of the committee
   - Citation style at the discretion of the committee (open-book format only)

Oral Component: The student will orally defend the written document approximately two weeks after their written exam is completed. This period gives the students and advisory committee members time to reflect on the written document. The oral exam is the same regardless of the written exam format chosen (i.e., closed- vs. open-book) and is a closed/private two-hour meeting with the advisory committee members and the student.

Example of a Proposed Timeline for Student to Complete the Qualifying Exam in one week

1. Reading list and expectations from the advisory committee are provided to the student 4 weeks before the written exam by the chair.
2. Questions for the written exam are provided to the student on the first day of the exam.
3. At the end of the exam period, the student sends their written exam responses to the chair and advisory committee members to review. Up to 10 pages per committee member plus translational science responses = 50-page document (not including formatted references). The number of total pages may be greater if there are more than 4 committee members.
4. The student defends the written responses in a closed roundtable discussion with the advisory committee members only. Committee members may join either in person or by Zoom video

conference. Committee members will deliberate after the student's oral defense to determine whether they pass or fail the exam.

Evaluation

After the oral component of the exam, the student will leave the room for advisory committee members to discuss the student's performance. Each committee member will use the rubric provided in Appendix A to score the student's response (i.e., satisfactory, needs improvement, unsatisfactory) to only the question(s) asked by that particular member. The advisory committee chair will also score the student's response to the translational science question, with input from committee members. Each committee member will then vote on the overall exam as pass, conditional pass, or fail. For a student to pass the exam, no more than one committee member can vote "fail." For example, a student must receive a "pass" from three of four committee members to "pass" the exam. After the committee votes, the student will return to the room to discuss the results. For a "conditional pass", a student must receive no more than one fail and one unsatisfactory rating from committee members, or no fails and two unsatisfactory ratings from committee members. For a "fail", a student would receive at least two fail ratings from committee members.

The student's advisory committee chair will email the results of the qualifying exam to the Graduate Program Director and Graduate Program Coordinator, who will record the results.

The exam, as a whole, will be evaluated according to the following guidelines:

Pass

A score of pass will be assigned based upon the rubric in Appendix A when, in the professional judgment of the advisory committee members:

1. The student thoroughly addressed the questions and included accurate, well-justified information.

2. The student demonstrated breadth and depth of content as well as a high degree of integration and conceptual understanding of each question.

3. The student demonstrated clear, organized thinking, synthesis and analysis of material, sufficient writing skills, satisfactory oral communication, and accurate referencing.

Conditional Pass

A score of conditional pass will be assigned based upon the rubric in Appendix A when, in the professional judgment of the advisory committee members, one or more elements of the written and/or oral exam was/were not adequate to earn a pass; but the sense of the committee is that the inadequacy can 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 written knowledge or oral communication, or other actions the committee feels are in the best interests of the student). If the committee feels that the student can remediate their responses adequately within one week, then a conditional pass may be given. If the committee feels that the student requires more time to review and reflect to demonstrate both breadth and depth of content to satisfy the qualifying exam requirements, then a score of fail should be given (see next section: *Fail*).

With the conditional pass, the student will have one opportunity to correct the unsatisfactory answers following the same format as the initial exam. Revised written responses should be provided to the

committee within one week (seven consecutive days) following the initial oral exam date. If the closed book option was used for the format of the initial written exam, the student will work with the committee chair to re-schedule the follow-up closed book five-hour exam. If deemed appropriate, a second oral exam for the student can be scheduled by the committee chair within two weeks of receipt of the student's revised answers. A conditional pass is only allowed for the first attempt at the exam. As such, a conditional pass may not be assigned for the second attempt at the exam, and the only score options are pass or fail.

Fail

A score of fail will be assigned based upon the rubric in Appendix A when, in the professional judgment of the advisory committee members:

1. The student failed to address major points of the question and/or provided incorrect information.

2. The student failed to demonstrate both breadth and depth of content nor did the student demonstrate integration or conceptual understanding of each question.

3. Although some of the response(s) to one or more questions were correct, the student failed to include important or accurate information.

Each committee member will vote on the overall exam. For a student to pass the exam, no more than one committee member can vote "fail." For a "fail", a student would receive at least two fail ratings from committee members. A student who fails the exam will be given a summary of the committee's feedback and areas of deficiencies written by the advisor. This information is intended to help the student prepare for the second attempt of the exam. The student will have a second attempt at the exam a minimum of 15 weeks after the first attempt. The student will undergo the same exam format (i.e., closed or open), be provided with updated readings as appropriate, and revised questions. The questions should be different from the initial exam, but should be written to allow the student to demonstrate competency in previously failed content areas. Thus, the student is expected to provide a revised set of responses. A student who fails the qualifying exam a second time will be formally dismissed from the HNFE Doctoral program. A conditional pass may not be assigned for the second attempt at the exam.

Student Preparation for the Exam

1. The qualifying exam is intended to assess knowledge that students have attained through their graduate studies. Review of notes and readings from prior course work should be completed several weeks prior to the exam. Material from any or all courses in the graduate curriculum will be applicable in preparing to answer exam questions.

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 writing. Strategies for completing the written component of the exam include the following:

   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. The most prevalent problem in students' responses 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 lower their evaluation of the answer.

b. *Outline the question.* Another major problem with exam responses is an incomplete answer. This problem may occur because students become overinvested in the first part of their answer and either fail to save time for, or forget altogether, later parts of the question. Outlining is a strategy for allotting a certain amount of space for each part of the question, helping to address all aspects of the question and preventing redundancy. The outline should include all aspects of the question that need to be addressed. If you remember information relevant to address a later part of the question while working on an earlier part, note that information in the outline and integrate it into the essay where appropriate.

c. *Provide accurate information.* Concentrate your answers on what you believe is accurate. Omit information if you are not confident it is accurate. Inaccurate information is typically evaluated more negatively than failure to fully address the question.

d. *Reference key points.* Follow the citation style specified by the advisory committee. 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 redirects the argument from the reader and the student to the reader and the reference. References other than those provided by the committee can and should be used as appropriate.

e. *Write clear, short, simple sentences.* Avoid extraneous words and phrases. Use introductory, transition, and summary statements to guide readers through your main points. Strive for clarity in diction and syntax.

f. *Write a conclusion.* Readdress the exam question; review the approach in answering the question; and summarize your main points. Concisely integrate what you wrote in the body of the essay. Writing the conclusion can help identify missing or weak areas that can be corrected before submitting the exam.

g. *Reread the answer.* Leave time to proofread carefully. The unique situation of the qualifying exam can generate remarkable misstatements, omissions, and contradictions in students' writing. One strategy for proofreading is to read your answer out loud.

3. The above recommendations are **guidelines** for students to prepare for and write the qualifying exam. The advisory committee chair should share the above recommendations with 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 PhD degree program. Please keep in mind that those who will evaluate the student’s responses have often taken a similar qualifying exam and can bring insight into and empathy for this experience.

Appendix A: Qualifying Exam Rubric and Evaluation Form

Each advisory committee member will use this rubric and evaluation form to score the student's response to only the question(s) that he/she/they provided. The chair will also score the translational science question, with input from committee members. The rubric can be used to guide discussion of the student's performance with the entire committee and then with the student. The chair of the advisory committee will provide each committee member's completed evaluation form to the student after the oral exam.

Rubric

Criteria	Satisfactory	Needs Improvement	Unsatisfactory
Accuracy	The student provided accurate information.	The student included minor inaccuracies, but most of the response was correct.	The student provided inaccurate information.
Thoroughness in addressing each aspect of the question	The student thoroughly addressed each aspect of the question.	The student lacked thoroughness in responding to every aspect of the question.	The student failed to address major points of the question.
Breadth and depth of content knowledge	The student demonstrated sufficient breadth and depth of content knowledge.	The student demonstrated fair content knowledge with minor gaps in depth or breadth.	The student failed to demonstrate sufficient breadth and depth of content knowledge.
Synthesis and application of concepts	The student incisively synthesized and applied concepts.	The student presented multiple concepts but did not incisively synthesize or apply them.	The student did not synthesize or apply concepts beyond basic description.

Written communication skills	The student demonstrated strong written communication skills.	The student demonstrated minor weaknesses in written communication skills.	The student lacked clarity and organization in written communication skills.
Oral Communication Skills	The student demonstrated strong oral communication skills.	The student demonstrated minor weaknesses in oral communication skills.	The student lacked clarity and organization in oral communication skills.

Evaluation Form

The chair of the advisory committee will provide each committee member's evaluation form to the student. The comments on this form should address specific aspects of the student's exam performance and facilitate the student's continued growth as a scholar and researcher.

Student Name:

Advisory Committee Member Name:

Question:

Component	**Indicate the score: Pass, Conditional Pass, Fail***
Written response	
Oral response	

*See rubric on previous page. To receive a score of Pass for the overall exam both the written and oral responses should receive a score of Pass. A Conditional Pass or Fail on either one of the exam components prevents an overall score of Pass.

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