

# Geosciences Graduate Student Handbook 2009-2010

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# I. Introduction

## *Purpose and scope of this Handbook*

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

[http://www.grads.vt.edu/graduate\\_catalog/poli/UIPo.jsp](http://www.grads.vt.edu/graduate_catalog/poli/UIPo.jsp)

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

## *Graduate Program Governance*

Graduate student policies and procedures are created and administered by the Department's Graduate Student Affairs Committee (GSAC) with supervision and approval by the Department Chair. Questions about the policies described in this Handbook should be referred to the Chair of the GSAC and Director of Graduate Studies, any member of the GSAC, or to the administrative contact and student coordinator. The graduate student Liaison Committee is another avenue of communication between the graduate student body and faculty and administration. This committee consists of ~5 graduate students that meet several times a year and routinely communicate issues to the GSAC chair. Relevant contacts for the 2009-2010 academic year are:

Director of Graduate Studies and Chair of GSAC: Dr. Madeline Schreiber

GSAC Administrative Contact and Student Coordinator: Ms. Connie Lowe

GSAC Members: Dr. Ross Angel, Dr. Fred Read, Dr. James Spotila, Dr. Ying Zhou

Graduate Student Liaison Committee: To be determined

Department Chair: Dr. Kenneth Eriksson

# II. Academics

## *Start Date for Graduate Assistantships*

In fall 2009, new and continuing students are expected to arrive on campus by August 10, as all students on support (Graduate Teaching Assistant, or GTA and Graduate Research Assistantship, or GRA) are on payroll as of August 10. In spring 2010, new and continuing students are expected to arrive on campus by January 10, as payroll starts on that date. There are special circumstances that may warrant a late start date; for example, if a student is on a GRA or fellowship and is conducting research abroad, accommodations can be made. The student must contact Connie and the Chair of GSAC to request a late start date. Vacations and other activities that are not related to a student's research do not fall under the category of special circumstances. If a student is on a GTA, there is little flexibility with start date, as GTAs are expected to attend all necessary orientations and/or workshops. Under no circumstances are GTAs to return to campus after classes have started. This is a violation of policy and may incur a stop payment on salary.

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

Numerous orientation activities occur prior to the start of classes in the fall semester. New students are required to attend the new graduate student orientation presented by the Graduate School. New GTAs are required to attend the GTA training both in the Graduate School and in the Department. The Department also has a new student orientation, as well as a general meeting required for all graduate students. A new student field trip is also run on the Saturday prior to classes. Other useful information for new students may be obtained from the Graduate School's New Student Handbook: <http://www.grads.vt.edu/admitted/index.html>.

### ***University Requirements for MS and PhD Degrees***

The Graduate School course requirements summarized below are given in detail in the GSPP. Courses numbered 4000 or lower are undergraduate courses. Courses numbered 5000 or above are graduate-level courses. MS Research and Thesis- 5994 and PhD Research and Dissertation-7994 carry no grade. A student on support must carry 12 credits (including research and dissertation) per semester during the academic year. An overall GPA of at least 3.0 is required for retaining graduate-student status.

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

	Semester Credit Hours	
	Minimum	Maximum
Total Graduate Credits	30	—
Graded Credit Hours (i.e. from courses)	20	—
Courses numbered 5000 or higher	12	—
Research Credit Hours (5994)	6	10
Courses numbered 5974, 6974, 5984, and 6984	—	6

## *Requirements for Ph.D. Degree*

	Semester Credit Hours	
	Minimum	Maximum
Total Graduate Credits	90	—
Research and Dissertation (7994)	30	—
Courses numbered 5000 or higher	27	—
Seminars (subject matter unstructured)	—	4
Courses numbered 5974, 6974, 5984, and 6984	—	18

### Notes:

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

Graduate students who were undergraduates at Virginia Tech can use 5xxx level VT courses toward the graduate degree if, 1) it was taken while enrolled as a dual or BS/MS student and 2) it wasn't used to satisfy the undergraduate degree.

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

Students interested in applying for defending student status (DSS), which is one credit hour of enrollment should discuss with Connie Lowe as soon as possible.

### *Audits*

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

Audit courses do not count on the plan of study.

### *Courses, Calendars, and Enrollment*

**Classes are selected and enrolled in via Hokie SPA.** Existing students should register during the pre-registration period; deadlines for this is made available each semester and provided in the academic calendar. **New students are automatically enrolled with 18 research credits prior to the beginning of semester, so that their payroll may start.** These credits may be dropped and replaced by classes in the first week of the semester by the posted deadline.

Departmental graduate courses offered in a given semester will vary depending on resources and demand. Many courses are offered every-other-year. Graduate courses are generally required to maintain enrollment of ~5 students. A lower enrollment may result in the course being

canceled at the start of a semester. Students are encouraged to directly contact faculty instructors regarding the availability and status of a specific course.

- Registrar's current Timetable and Academic Calendar: [http://www.registrar.vt.edu/registration/timetable\\_calendars.php](http://www.registrar.vt.edu/registration/timetable_calendars.php)

### *Advisory Committee*

For each MS and PhD candidate, there is a resident faculty member who acts as the student's advisor and chair of the student's Advisory Committee. (Incoming students who have no advisor will have a temporary advisor appointed by the GSAC.)

**Graduate students should choose an advisory committee within their first semester,** prior to completion of the Plan of Study and the Annual Report (see below). Selection of the advisory committee is the joint responsibility of the student and primary advisor. The advisory committee is comprised of at least three members for M.S. candidates and four members for Ph.D. candidates (at least two of which must be from VT, in both cases). The primary research advisor counts as one of these members and serves as the committee chair. Post-doctoral researchers can be additional members of committees, but as of Fall 2009, cannot count as one of the required three or four members for MS and PhD committees, respectively. There is no upper limit for the size of committees, and committees as large as five or six members are common for Ph.D. candidates. Although external (non-VT) committee members are encouraged, the student may find it useful to have at least three (M.S.) or four (Ph.D.) committee members, such that, in case external members are unable to travel to VT, and adequate number of members is present for meetings, the preliminary exam, and the final defense (all who are listed must be accounted for at the defense – can't be 3 or 4 of list). A special form (including curriculum vita and date of birth) is required for each external committee member and can be found using the link below.

NOTE: retired faculty and departmental adjunct faculty must complete the form and are classified as Non VT faculty.

Committee members may be changed at any time, pending approval of all members, new and old, and the Department Chair, using a form available from the link below.

The advisory committee generally serves three purposes. First, the committee serves the purpose of quality control, to evaluate progress and scholarship and ensure that graduates and degree-holders meet departmental standards. Second, the committee acts as a resource to aid in research, by providing relevant expertise and guidance. Finally, the committee serves to protect the student. The committee may act as a mediating body between the student and advisor, when miscommunications or misunderstandings arise related to expectations or timetables of meeting research goals. The committee serves to ensure that the student is not taken advantage of by the advisor and receives adequate guidance in their academic program, but also serves to protect the advisor by bearing witness to the student's progress. Committees are generally an excellent sounding-board when conflicts arise, and should be viewed first and foremost as a resource for the student.

### *Committee Meetings*

**All M.S. candidates and Ph.D. candidates in their first three years of residence are required to have at least one meeting with their advisory committee each year.** Pending advisor's approval, Ph.D. candidates that have been in residence for more than three years may

skip the annual committee meeting. Committee meetings should take place in fall or early spring term, prior to completion of the Annual Report (see below). It is the responsibility of the student to schedule the committee meeting according to the schedules of the committee members and to reserve a room with Connie Lowe. Committee meetings should include all local members of the advisory committee; external committee members need not be present, but should be communicated with before or after the meeting.

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

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

### *Plan of Study*

**M.S. and Ph.D. candidates must file a Plan of Study before completing 15 course credit hours in their program.** For students entering the program in fall semester, a target date for completing and submitting the Plan of Study is before spring break in the spring semester. The Plan of Study is a requirement of the Graduate School and must be completed to maintain satisfactory graduate student status.

The Plan of Study should be completed after consultation with the research advisor and the student's Advisory Committee. A list of courses should be compiled that the student will take during their graduate program of study, which fulfills the requirements summarized above. A Ph.D candidate's Plan of Study must indicate the semester (or summer session) during which the preliminary exam will be taken.

After the proposed Plan of Study is filled out and signed, the original signed hard copy should be given to Connie Lowe who will enter the contents electronically and send to the Graduate School for approval. Graduating students are required to review their plan of study one semester *before* graduation in order for changes to be approved by the department.

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

## *Annual Reports*

**The Graduate School requires all graduate students to complete an Annual Report each spring.** All students, including those about to defend their degrees and those that have just started that semester, are required to complete this report. The Department's format for the Annual Report may vary from year to year, but is made available by Connie Lowe at the start of the spring semester. **Reports are typically due around April 15.**

The Annual Report basically requests information regarding research (e.g. papers, presentations, and grants), teaching, and classes taken in the past year, including a statement of plans for the future and the student's CV. Once completed, the report is shared with the advisor and committee members, and the Advisory Committee meeting is held. During the meeting, members of the committee provide feedback to the advisor and will rate the progress of the student in accordance with directions set forth in the Annual Report (see above). Following the meeting, the advisor writes a letter to the student (cc'd to the committee) that summarizes the evaluation of the committee regarding their progress and any recommendations for the future. This letter is a requirement for all advisors of their students. Once the student has read the advisor's letter, they attach it to the Annual Report and sign, and then have each committee member sign the Annual Report and turn the final copy into Connie Lowe by the due date. External committee members are required to sign, but may do so via fax or by sending an e-mail stating that they read and agree to the report, which should then be printed and attached to the report. Reports turned in without all signatures will be returned to the student.

Once complete, **Annual Reports are evaluated by the GSAC.** The GSAC will read each Annual Report to review progress of each student. The Annual Reports will then be sent to the Graduate School for evaluation (a requirement of the Graduate School). Ratings from the reports will not have an automatic impact on stipend, TA assignments, or graduate student status, but are simply documentation of the student's progress. Ratings could be used as supporting information when reviewing applications for special awards and grants made at the Department level. Ratings may also be appealed by the graduate student or advisor, by written communication to the GSAC.

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

## *Conversions from MS to PhD Program*

Prior to the end of the third semester of residency, MS candidates may apply for conversion to the PhD program without completion of the MS degree. Students cannot convert after completing the third semester of residence as an MS student. Any student converting from an MS degree program to a PhD program or wishing to enter the PhD program after having completed an MS degree program at Virginia Tech must submit a formal application to the GSAC.

## *PhD Preliminary Exam*

Subject to the regulations of the Graduate School and the general departmental requirements listed below, each PhD advisory committee shall have responsibility for the make-up and administration of the Preliminary Examination. There is no standardized format for this exam,

although individual research groups have developed and require their own format (e.g. hydrogeology and geophysics). The Department does not give a standardized Qualifying Examination. Regulations that do apply for the Preliminary Exam are:

NOTE: student must be enrolled for a minimum of 3 credit hours to sit for the preliminary exam including summer sessions.

1. It is Graduate School policy that **(1) the examination must be taken at least nine months before the thesis/dissertation defense, and (2) at least 24 hours of course work and/or research must remain to be taken at the time of the examination, including work for which the student is currently enrolled.** Failure to take the Preliminary exam on time can be construed as a lack of satisfactory progress toward the student's degree and can result in the loss of support or dismissal from the graduate program.
2. The Preliminary Examination shall include both an oral and a written portion.
3. Other faculty members may attend the exam, but only the members of the Advisory Committee will vote on the results.
4. The student can pass with at most one negative vote.
5. According to Graduate School policy a student has at most two opportunities to pass the Preliminary Examination, and if the student fails the Preliminary Examination; there must be a lapse of at least one full semester (a minimum of 15 weeks) before the administration of a second examination.

### ***Thesis/Dissertation Defense***

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

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

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

1. Fill out and file the form requesting scheduling of the defense with Connie Lowe and the Graduate School **at least four weeks in advance of the defense date.** It is a departmental requirement that the Department Chair sign the form. Connie Lowe will send appropriate departmental notices.
2. A complete draft of the thesis or dissertation must be made available to each committee member **at least a week** prior to the defense. Individual committee members should have been consulted well in advance to their preferences in reading preliminary drafts.
3. Any outstanding student fees must be paid at the Bursar's Office prior to the defense. Defense card is mailed by the Graduate School to the student's advisor. The signature card should be returned to the Graduate School within 1-2 days after the Defense. (A copy of the completed card must be given to the Connie Lowe before returning it to the Graduate School.)
4. The student is responsible for arranging the time and room with Connie Lowe.

5. All Virginia Tech graduate theses and dissertations must be submitted to the Graduate School electronically – no hard copy submissions. For further information about the “ETD,” look at <https://secure.grads.vt.edu/GSITWiki/Wiki.jsp?page=GAAPSETD>. All committee members must sign the ETD approval form. Note: ETD publication restrictions are decided by the advisor and student.

Links to Graduate School completion checklists for MS and PhD degrees are;

[http://www.grads.vt.edu/academics/dates\\_deadlines/completion\\_checklist\\_masters.pdf](http://www.grads.vt.edu/academics/dates_deadlines/completion_checklist_masters.pdf)  
[http://www.grads.vt.edu/academics/dates\\_deadlines/completion\\_checklist\\_doctoral.pdf](http://www.grads.vt.edu/academics/dates_deadlines/completion_checklist_doctoral.pdf)

### ***ETD Submissions***

The Electronic Thesis or Dissertation (ETD) is submitted following the thesis or dissertation defense. ETDs are typically due within two weeks of the defense. ETDs must be approved both by the Advisory Committee and the Graduate School; a student is not cleared for graduation until both approvals are granted. ETDs must be submitted and approved prior to specific deadlines in order to graduate in a given semester. Once submitted, the ETD is checked by the Graduate School for various forms of compliance related to style and copyrighted material. Students should monitor their e-mail until final ETD approval is received. Corrections to the ETD may be required; typically there is a two week time limit to make corrections and resubmit the ETD. Missing this deadline could result in changing of the graduation date and/or additional charges. Any special requirements for the ETD process, such as students that will be traveling and without access to e-mail, should have their advisor ask for an exception by the dean.

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

### ***Application Dates for Graduation***

#### Completing degree Requirements in:

June (1<sup>st</sup> summer session)  
August (2<sup>nd</sup> summer session)  
December (fall semester)  
May (spring semester)

#### Apply on or Before:

June 1  
August 1  
October 1  
March 1

See [http://www.grads.vt.edu/academics/dates\\_deadlines/commencement\\_deadlines.html](http://www.grads.vt.edu/academics/dates_deadlines/commencement_deadlines.html)

### ***Leave of Absence***

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

### III. Financial Support

#### *General Policies*

It is the Department's intent to provide adequate financial support (semester stipend and tuition) for all graduate students actively pursuing a degree, but limited and changing resources sometimes necessitate adjustments in the number of students supported, the level of support and the duration of support. Support decisions are based upon availability of funds and upon the progress and qualifications of the student. Unsupported students wishing to be considered for support should apply in writing to the GSAC.

#### *Eligibility for Support*

1. Financial support for students with regular student status is offered for durations listed below. Students may be eligible for support beyond these terms, pending the availability of resources at the time. If a student would like additional support, he/she and the primary advisor must write letters to GSAC requesting support and giving reasons why additional support is needed.
  - a. MS students - 4 semesters of support.
  - b. PhD students without prior MS degree - 10 semesters of support.
  - c. PhD students who have previously completed an MS degree - 8 semesters of support
  - d. PhD students who have completed an MS degree at Virginia Tech – total of 10 semesters of support
2. Only students with regular or provisional graduate student status may be supported. Currently, support includes payment of your tuition equal to your assistantship offer (i.e., full-time offer/full-time tuition, half-time offer/half-time tuition)
3. Students must continue to make satisfactory progress toward their degree. This includes maintaining their GPA above 3.0. A one-semester grace period is allowed for a student whose GPA falls below 3.0 if the student can reasonably be expected to raise his/her GPA above the 3.0 by the end of that semester.
4. GTAs are required to maintain a satisfactory level of performance in their teaching duties. Teaching performance is evaluated on the basis of faculty observation and student teaching evaluations (which must be submitted for every course taught). Uncovered absences, incompetence, disregard for students, and any other unprofessional behavior are grounds for immediate termination of a GTA appointment.
5. International students must take and pass the Test of Spoken English (TSE) and the TEACH test administered by ETS and Virginia Tech before a teaching assistantship can be offered.

#### *Support Levels*

Current stipend levels in the Department are as follows. M.S. candidates (1st and 2nd year) and Ph.D. candidates who do not have an M.S. degree are paid at \$1418/month. Ph.D. candidates with M.S. degrees are paid at \$1513/month. These are the base pay rates for GTAs and GRAs.

[http://www.grads.vt.edu/financial/assistantships/2009-2010\\_stipend\\_rates.pdf](http://www.grads.vt.edu/financial/assistantships/2009-2010_stipend_rates.pdf)

Any student on GRA or GTA may receive additional stipend amounts added on to the base pay rate, if the research advisor supplements the pay using research funds. For example, an advisor may pay their students an extra \$500/month if they have available funding, as part of an original agreement with the student during their recruitment.

Several special GRAs may pay at higher rates according to the rules of the support, including NSF Graduate Fellowships, MAOP, 2010, ICTAS, and IGERT fellowships. These stipend rates are determined by the source of the funding, not the Department.

### ***Graduate Teaching Assistantships (GTA) and Research Assistantships (GRA)***

The major source of financial support for graduate students during the academic year (4.5 months per semester, 9 months total – August 10 to May 9, including winter break, but not including 3 summer months) is teaching assistantships in undergraduate laboratories. Full-time GTAs require 20 hours per week, and half-time positions require 10 hours per week. It is the GTAs responsibility to teach the laboratory sections, to grade papers, and to maintain scheduled office hours. Specific instructions for GTAs are provided by laboratory coordinators or the faculty instructors of the course.

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

GTAs are required to complete evaluations each semester. On the designated date of the semester, the TA must get teaching evaluation forms from Mary McMurray, have them filled out by the students in each section, and have a student deliver them to the main office. These evaluations are reviewed by the GSAC chair. Satisfactory evaluations are required for continued support as a GTA. All entering or new teaching assistants who may later be TAs must also take the Graduate School's Workshop on GTA Training the week before classes begin each fall. Additional information will be provided by the Graduate School. GTAs must also attend Departmental training the week before the start of fall classes (information will be provided by Connie Lowe).

A GRA is a research assistantship provided by individual faculty members to their students using research funding. It is up to faculty advisors to decide which students are covered by these funds. Depending on availability of grants, GRAs may not be available. Full-time GRAs require 20 hours per week, and half-time positions require 10 hours per week, but GRAs carry no additional duties beyond the research as indicated by the advisor.

Summer graduate student funding is also generally provided by the research advisor using research funds. GTA semester appointments are 4.5 months each, or 9 months per year, and do not cover summer stipend. If a research advisor does not provide full summer funding (3 months), a student may apply for funding from special department awards. Each summer there is also generally one or two GTA positions available for teaching summer laboratory classes (see Connie Lowe for details).

### *Maintaining Satisfactory Student Status*

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

### *Student Fees*

**Departmental support for stipend and tuition does not cover the student comprehensive fees that are required by the university.** The university charges all graduate students an annual fee to cover expenses that tuition is not legally appropriate for given state regulations, such as athletics fees. Each student is responsible for paying these fees prior to the start of each semester (deadlines are communicated each year). The cost of the fees varies from year to year, but has lately been rising. The department may offer subsidies of a portion of this fee based on the availability of funding, but this is not guaranteed. Current fees can be found at: <http://www.bursar.vt.edu/tuition/2009-2010.php#graduate>.

### *Payroll Procedures*

Students are paid on the first and sixteenth of each month. **You must make arrangements to have your checks deposited directly into your checking account.** For more information on the procedure, see Carolyn Williams. The first payday for fall is September 1st. If you enter spring term your first payday is February 1st. Students receiving hourly wages must submit hourly wage payroll sheets to Carolyn Williams every two weeks on the first and sixteenth of each month.

### *Departmental Awards and Special Funding*

The Department offers special funding for students to attend meetings. Currently (as of Fall 2009), each graduate student that is presenting at a national meeting as first author is eligible for up to \$250 from the Department for one meeting per year. This should be requested when filling out travel approval paperwork with Mary McMurray prior to travel. A copy of the abstract for the meeting should be provided. Note that this policy could change at any time due to availability of funding.

The Department has numerous endowed accounts that are used for scholarships and research funding each year. This is done primarily on a proposal basis. Each spring a request for proposals is sent to graduate students (early March). This contains details on what awards are available and how to apply. GRAs and summer stipends are paid directly to the student as normal salary and tuition, whereas the research awards are given as Departmental accounts from which the students can draw from for a fixed period. Proposals are generally only 1 page long and must be submitted separately for each award category. Proposals are typically due after spring break, and are reviewed by the GSAC. Awards are typically made by the end of April. More explanation of the format for proposals and the criteria for awards will be provided in the request for proposals sent to students each spring.

Industry scholarships are also available on case by case basis, when corporations make specific donations to the Department. These are generally awarded to students directly, without

proposal applications, based on the criteria of the scholarship and decision of the GSAC and the Department Chair.

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

There are also numerous grant opportunities through professional societies, such as GSA, Sigma Xi, and AAPG. Information related to these funding opportunities may be obtained through professional society webpages.

## IV. Facilities and Resources

### *Departmental Staff*

Department staff is available to assist graduate students for various activities. Administrative staff is generally available for help with travel forms, reimbursements, placing orders, copier use, and other paper-work. If you have a question and need assistance, please check with the relevant staff member as listed below. Note that the administrative staff do not perform general secretarial duties (e.g. typing, photocopying) for faculty, staff, or students, but rather each serve specific administrative duties as listed below (contact information for each may be found on the department's phone list). In addition, undergraduate workstudy students are often on duty in the main office and may also assist with basic office functions, including assistance with copiers. If you have questions or issues, please contact the Department Chair, Dr. Kenneth Eriksson

Linda Bland: Business Manager (keys, space issues, purchase orders, reimbursements, grant activity)

Mark Fortney: Media Specialist (scanning, specialized photography or printing issues)

Connie Lowe: Student Program Coordinator and Advisor (academics, payroll issues, general assistance for all graduate activities)

Ellen Mathena: Program Support Tech. (general assistance and backup when Linda Bland, Carolyn Williams, or Mary McMurray is not available)

Mary McMurray: Program Support Tech. (mail services, copiers, travel reimbursements)

Llyn Sharp: Outreach Program and Supervisor for Physical Geology labs

Carolyn Williams: Office Manager (human resources, social function coordinator)

Technical staff is available for specialized needs related to computing, printing, and teaching and research equipment maintenance. Each staff member has specific responsibilities, but each area is generally met by more than one staff member. The areas of responsibility are listed below. If you need assistance, please contact the staff member directly. If you have questions or issues, please contact Dr. Don Rimstidt, who is supervisor for most of the technical staff. For contact information, please see the department's phone list.

Phil Burcham: Electronics Tech. (maintenance and repair of electronics equipment, maintenance of equipment in the X-ray crystallography labs, Safety Officer, general assistance, storage facility manager)

Charles Farley: Lab Tech. (maintenance and use of research equipment in Dr. Bodnar's group,

including the ICP-MS and RAMAN instruments; also maintains computers in room 4069)

Miles Gentry: Unix and Mac System Administrator (Mac support, Unix support, manages the department website, GIS support)

Richard Godbee: Unix System Administrator: 1041C (geophysics computing, Unix support, Mac support)

Jim Langridge: Electronics Tech. (PC support, classroom computers and projection, ethernet and wireless access, equipment surplus)

Mark Lemon: Electronics Tech. (PC support, classroom computers and projection, large-format poster printing, ethernet access, geophysics field equipment)

Dan Smith: Machinist (fabricates and repairs specialized laboratory equipment and components)

### *Office Functions*

Copy Machines: Two copy machines are available in 4042/4043. The copier against the wall is for general use by graduate students. **Copying related to teaching and classes can be made using the TA access PIN. Each graduate student may also use their individual PIN number to make copies related to their research. 1000 copies per year are provided for free.**

Additional copies may be purchased using research accounts from Mary McMurray (\$40/1000). The copier in the center of the room is generally for use by faculty and staff, but may be used by graduate students if the other copier is broken or in emergencies; please check with Mary McMurray to gain access to this copier. Both copiers are also capable of scanning documents, including double sided collated documents, and e-mailing the resulting scans as PDF files to a VT e-mail address. Check with Mary McMurray or one of the student office workers for help on how to scan documents.

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

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

Mail: U.S. and campus mail addressed to graduate students is deposited in mailboxes in the fourth floor copy/mail room. Students should check these boxes on a regular basis. Students who expect to be out of town for long periods should tell Mary McMurray how they could be contacted in an emergency, and whether they want first class mail forwarded. Outgoing mail may be placed in the mailroom for pick-up by the VT mail service. Students generally will need to pay for their own postage, although research-related mail may be paid for using research funds (check with your advisor). It is also possible to send express postage via UPS for research-related activity; please check with Mary McMurray when you need to use this service, and place the postage on a research account (check with your advisor).

Travel and reimbursements: **All forms of travel must be pre-approved by the department. See Mary McMurray for the necessary procedure.** To be eligible for reimbursement, your travel receipts must be returned to Mary McMurray no later than three days after returning and all State guidelines must be met. For reimbursements of personal expenses related to research activity, please see Linda Bland (and save all receipts).

### ***Graduate Student Offices***

Offices: **Each graduate student is assigned an office area for their use related to research, teaching, and classwork.** Students should each receive a desk, shelf, chair, and file cabinet as standard issue office furniture. Office assignments are made by the GSAC chair, and should be discussed directly with him/her or Connie Lowe if problems arise. Many research groups have their own office space that they coordinate and maintain, while the remaining graduate students have offices in common graduate student office space (e.g. rooms 1070, 5050). The department's goal is to provide adequate office space for each graduate student, so please communicate issues or complaints freely with the GSAC chair or student coordinator if the office assignment is not meeting your needs.

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

Computers: The department does not provide computers to each graduate student, unless it has a surplus of computers at a particular time. Computers may be provided to students by their research advisors

#### Other notes:

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

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

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

Please do not *hammer or drill* into office walls; if you need assistance in this way, or with moving or acquiring new furniture, please contact the technical staff (Phil Burcham, Dan Smith).

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

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

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

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

*Disposal of chemicals* should be done under the supervision of the faculty member who supervises the laboratory or via Environmental Health and Safety Services (EHSS).

### ***Communication and Computing***

E-mail and listservs: All entering students are assigned a personal identification (PID), which is their e-mail identifier on the Virginia Tech e-mail server. Before one can use this address for

e-mail, the account must be activated. To activate the PID view the web page [http://www.computing.vt.edu/accounts\\_and\\_access/](http://www.computing.vt.edu/accounts_and_access/). and then follows the directions. There is no cost associated with this service. You will be subscribed to the departmental listserv gs-gradst (full address gs-gradst@listserv.vt.edu), which in turn is subscribed to the list gs-all (full address gs-all@listserv.vt.edu). Announcements of seminars, job interviews, etc., are transmitted within the department via the listservs. As a graduate student, you may also send messages to the graduate student listserv, but please be cautious and send only emails that pertain to all students and that are “business”- related. Also note that these messages are also received by the student coordinator and GSAC chair.

Internet: Internet access is provided to all students by the university. Graduate students are expected to use wireless internet, which is provided as part of their student fees and thus does not cost anything from the department. Access to wireless internet may be obtained by going to <http://www.cns.vt.edu/html/wireless/wlan/> or checking with Jim Langridge or Mark Lemon. Any graduate student computer that does not have wireless capability will be upgraded for free by the department, to enable wireless access. The use of direct ethernet lines is discouraged, as each active line costs the department \$102/yr to maintain as an active port.

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

Computing: Computers are not provided by the department for all students. If computers are available, they may be given to students to use in their offices. Otherwise, computers should be provided to graduate students by the faculty advisor. Software is also the responsibility of the faculty advisor to provide. Most faculty provide their students with licensed access to operating systems and Microsoft Office applications, as well as specialized software including Adobe Illustrator or Photoshop. Licenses for these software products may be purchased from university computing. The university does provide access to some software for free, including Arc/GIS. For information on software licensing, availability, or to obtain software installation CDs, check with technical staff (Mark Lemon, Jim Langridge) or with the university computing services center <http://computing.vt.edu/>. All graduate student computers are required to conform to university policies regarding the fair and appropriate use of computers; information on this policy may be found at <http://www.vt.edu/about/acceptable-use.html>. Of special note, all computers are required by the university to maintain active firewalls, to be routinely backed up, and to have the latest virus protection installed. All software in use must also have an active license, and information on this license must be retained in case it is requested by the university. Unlawful copying and installation of software, or downloading media from the internet that is not related to research, are strictly prohibited. The ultimate authoritative documentation of what is legal and illegal for a particular piece of software is found on the copyright information with each individual package. It is the student’s responsibility to abide by the copyright policy.

### ***Classrooms and Projectors***

Classrooms and the conference room (room 4052) may be arranged for special department-related activities, such as geology club meetings, group meetings, or special seminars. Classrooms can be reserved through Connie Lowe. Classrooms are often used for classes and

other reserved activity in the evening, so please check with Connie and reserve a room even if it is for after hours. It is against departmental policy to use classrooms for non-departmental activity (e.g. watching movies in 4069 is not allowed).

Classrooms generally contain overhead projectors, computer projectors with computers and laptop hookups, and VCRs that connect to the BoxLight projectors. Problems with these projectors should immediately be communicated to technical staff (Mark Lemon and Jim Langridge for all classrooms except 4069 - Charles Farley). Projection equipment, including portable BoxLight projectors and slide projectors, may also be requested and checked out from the technical staff (Mark Lemon, Jim Langridge).

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

### ***Research Support Facilities***

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

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

<u>FACILITY</u>	<u>ROOM</u>	<u>SUPERVISOR</u>
Geosciences Museum	2nd floor	Llyn Sharp
Classrooms	4052, 4069, etc.	Connie Lowe
Electron Microprobe	5067	Dr. Tracy
Machine Shop	1083	Dan Smith
Thin Section Lab	1085	Dr. Tracy
Mineral Separation Labs	Prices Fork	Dr. Spotila
Rock Storage	Prices Fork, Wavetank	Dr. Spotila
Scanners, photography, color printers	variable	Mark Fortney
Large poster printer	1047	Mark Lemon
Computer Classroom	3040	Mark Lemon
Geophysics field equipment	1047	Mark Lemon

### ***Geosciences Library and Information Resources***

All geoscience library materials are integrated with the main collection of the University Libraries. Most books and journals in the geosciences can be found on the 4th floor (QE call numbers) and 5th floor (TN call numbers) of Newman Library. Geological maps and air photos are located on the 1st and 2nd floor. Library maps showing the layout of each floor are available at [Geosciences Library and Information Resources](#).

Online resources include GeoRef, GeoScience World, Web of Science, and many more. A web page listing resources for the discipline is available under “Subject Guides” on the library home page or directly at <http://www.lib.vt.edu/dsp/index.php?subject=57>. The library also offers training workshops on using many of these databases. Contact the science reference librarian, Edward Lener [lener@vt.edu](mailto:lener@vt.edu), for assistance in locating materials or using online resources. For general information and access to electronic journals, go to <http://www.lib.vt.edu>

### ***Departmental Safety***

Departmental safety policies and procedures are described in a separate document, the Departmental Safety Manual, which is available via electronic copy to all students and exists in paper form in the main office. Safety policies are managed on several tiers; university safety policy are created and administered by Environmental Health and Safety Services, which maintains extensive safety documents online. Department safety is further managed by the Departmental Safety Committee, chaired by Dr. Jim Spotila and administered by the Safety Officer, Phil Burcham. Laboratory safety for each research group is further administered by the faculty member that is responsible for each lab. Each lab should have relevant safety manuals, chemical hygiene plans, operating procedures, chemical inventories, and waste disposal procedures that lab workers are required to learn and follow. Some labs may also require specialized safety training, such as for radiation safety. Please refer to the Department's Safety Manual for additional information on lab, field, and office safety.

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

### ***Graduate Student Liaison Committee***

The liaison committee serves as a way for graduate students to communicate issues and ideas to the faculty and administration, as well as for the faculty to learn more about what the needs are and how to improve the graduate experience at VT. If there is a problem with a departmental procedure, or a complaint that all graduate students have but which might never have been expressed to the faculty, the Liaison Committee is the avenue for doing something positive about it. The administration and faculty may not be able to resolve the problem, but communication is the first step and the Liaison Committee is an ideal means of communication between the graduate student body and faculty.

The responsibilities of the Liaison Committee are basically to be well informed regarding what is important to graduate students, and to communicate these to the GSAC. It keeps its ears open to know the hearts and minds of the students and can even arrange for a more formal way to gather feedback such as meetings or surveys. The Liaison Committee meets a few times a year with the departmental administration to chat about issues. The liaisons also may approach the GSAC chair at any time to point out issues, ask questions, etc. The advantage of the committee is that it is tasked with communication as its mission, so that issues can be raised without the students feeling as if they are complaining. Graduate students should tell their complaints to members of the Liaison Committee, who will then communicate that to the administration anonymously.

Membership on the Liaison Committee is selected each year from among volunteers from the graduate student body. Typically at the start of fall semester, a call will go out via the listserv for volunteers, and the committee chair (a returning member from the previous year) will then work

to make sure the committee consists of a broad range of students from different backgrounds that represent the diversity of the student body and different core research areas of the department.

### ***Geosciences Student Research Symposium (GSRS)***

The Geosciences Student Research Symposium is produced and organized by the students and faculty of the department. The symposium is held in room 4069 and provides an opportunity for your fellow students, the faculty, and the public to learn more about research topics currently being investigated in the geosciences by graduate and undergraduate students. It also provides students with an opportunity to prepare and present professional talks in a friendly atmosphere. Many student advisory committees use the GSRS presentations as a preliminary to the annual student-committee meeting. A rotating panel of faculty who critique presentations using evaluations forms evaluates student presentations.

GSRS is a student-run activity. The GSRS committee is made up and chaired by graduate students, who organize the program and schedule each year without influence of a faculty coordinator. The GSRS committee may work with the GSAC chair to help with scheduling or other arrangements.

**Participation in GSRS is not required of all students, but is strongly encouraged. Many research advisors require their students to present.** The faculty also expect (without formally requiring) that first-year and second-year students, including both MS and PhD candidates, present. First-year students are not generally expected to have research results or data to present, but rather should focus their presentation on a research question or concept, or a research approach to a certain problem that they hope to follow. Presentation of a research topic and methodology is preferred to presenting research that was conducted at another university for a different degree. New graduate students arriving in the spring semester should not feel obliged to present at GSRS. Advanced Ph.D. candidates in the 4th or 5th years are generally expected to not present at GSRS unless they feel specifically urged.

Based on experience, participation in GSRS is an excellent means of developing your skills for public presentation, which will be useful for you in any academic or industry position you may go on to take after graduation. Public presentation of your research is also an excellent vehicle to help organize your research. Many first-year students find that the GSRS exercise is the most instrumental in defining their research projects.

Although giving a GSRS presentation is not strictly required, students should be aware that GSRS is a great way to demonstrate their research progress and aptitude to the faculty. Any student that does not present at GSRS will need to work that much harder to demonstrate to faculty that their research is coming along, which could become an issue if applying for special departmental awards and grants. GSRS presentations may thus be an important consideration in the selection criteria for special funding and awards, although students who did not present at GSRS are still eligible to apply for these awards. A lack of a GSRS presentation will not be a consideration for advanced Ph.D. candidates, who are generally not expected to present.

Although presentation at GSRS is not required, all students are expected to participate in GSRS as far as going to the majority of the talks and participating in the social functions. GSRS is the most important graduate student function in the department each year, and all students should enthusiastically participate.

## *Seminars*

Departmental seminars are held on Fridays from 3:30 to 4:30 p.m. in Derring 4069, with refreshments provided after the seminar. Most speakers are from other universities, industry, or governmental organizations. **Graduate students are expected to attend all seminars.** There is usually an opportunity for students to meet with visiting speakers for lunch (watch for emails).

## *Career Services*

There are four career advisors, Professors Fred Read (1051), Tom Burbey (3053B), Don Rimstidt (5041), and Chet Weiss (4068) in the department who are available to help plan job searches and who coordinate a variety of other job and career-related activities. Dr. Read specializes in the petroleum industry, Dr. Burbey specializes in hydrology, and Dr. Rimstidt specializes in environmental consulting and Dr. Weiss specializes in geophysics.

Each year the department is visited by numerous interviewing teams from industry and receives many announcements of academic and civil service openings in geosciences. Announcements related to these recruiting activities are electronically sent to all students and information is posted on the bulletin boards in the mailroom. Some interviewers are interested in talking to students whose graduation dates are two or three years away, or who are interested in summer jobs, as well as those who will be available by the end of the school year. Students who are even remotely interested in industrial employment, whether in exploration, production, or in industrial laboratories, or who may want only to gain insight into industrial employment opportunities are encouraged to arrange for appropriate interviews. Connie Lowe coordinates these industry visits and the scheduling of interviews.

Many companies whose major effort is not geological may employ people with a geological background (e.g. chemical companies employ mineralogists and geochemists, nuclear power contractors employ structural and engineering geologists, etc.). Interviews with these companies are arranged through University Placement Services (Henderson Hall). Federal Register forms (the first step in obtaining a federal job) are also available from the University Placement Services.

## *Professional Societies*

Being a member of professional societies should be considered standard for most graduate students, particularly those interested in going into academics or who are seeking jobs. The primary organizations are AGU, GSA, GCA, AAPG, SEG, MSA, and AGI. More information on these is available online. Some organizations often offer free membership to graduate students; information will be made available regarding this as needed. Many professional societies also offer reduced journal subscription rates for students. Other organizations that are active in the Department include SGE (Sigma Gamma Epsilon), which is an honor society for geoscientist that is organized by undergraduates. The Geology Club is also managed by undergraduates and has several functions per year, including trips. The Geophysical Society of Virginia Tech promotes geophysics and coordinates seminars and functions. More information on these clubs and societies may be found on-line or by asking Connie Lowe.

## ***Expectations of Professional Behavior***

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

As junior colleagues, graduate students have high responsibilities regarding professional behavior. First and foremost, never take unfair advantage of another person, be it a professional colleague, student, or coworker. The Department is a fair, family-like environment, and your considerations at maintaining this are very much appreciated. As developing scientists, you also have responsibilities related to academic and scientific ethics and integrity. You are implicitly trusted, so a high level of honor and personal ethics are now demanded of you. This includes areas of academics and honesty in data collection and communication. As graduate students, there is also a high level of expectation with regards to performance and effort. In addition to working hard and being motivated, students are strongly encouraged to be as active as possible in the activities (social and academic) within the Department.

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

<http://www.grads.vt.edu/academics/expectations/index.html>

The Graduate Honor Code establishes a standard of academic integrity for all graduate students at Virginia Tech. The code is founded on the concept of honesty with respect to the intellectual efforts of oneself and others. Compliance with the Graduate Honor Code requires that all graduate students exercise honesty and ethical behavior in all their academic pursuits at Virginia Tech, whether these undertakings pertain to study, course work, research, extension, or teaching. Graduate students, in accepting admission, indicate their willingness to subscribe to and be governed by the Graduate Honor Code and acknowledge the right of the university to establish policies and procedures and to take disciplinary action (including suspension or expulsion) when such action is warranted. The home page for the Graduate Honor Code is <http://ghs.grads.vt.edu/> (If you are a TA, it is useful to know about the undergraduate honor system as well. Its home page is <http://www.honorsystem.vt.edu/>).

Sexual harassment is considered to be a form of discrimination based on sex and falls within the statutory prohibitions against sex discrimination. The university is committed to maintaining a working and a study environment free of sexual harassment. Accordingly, in compliance with Section 703 of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, it is the university's policy not to tolerate any verbal, nonverbal, or physical behavior, which constitutes sexual harassment. Personnel with supervisory responsibilities are required to take immediate and appropriate action when incidents of alleged sexual harassment are brought to their attention. Violations of the policy prohibiting sexual harassment may lead to disciplinary actions, including reprimand, suspension, or termination of employment or academic status.

Sexual harassment is defined as unwelcome sexual advances request for sexual favors, and other verbal, nonverbal, or physical conduct of a sexual nature when: 1.) submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment or academic decisions, or 2.) submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used

as the basis for employment or academic decisions; or 3.) such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work or academic performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working or academic environment.

Faculty, staff, students, and applicants for employment or admission with complaints of sexual harassment should contact the University EO/AA Office on a confidential basis and request an informal investigation.

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

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

Sometimes conflicts arise between students and advisors, as well as between students. We encourage that individual's first try to resolve differences on their own, but realize that some issues may be complex and may require additional assistance. We have several people in the department who can help resolve conflicts. Connie Lowe has years of experience working with students and is a confidante of many of our students. The GSAC is also available for assistance and/or advice regarding conflicts. If conflicts cannot be resolved with the help of Connie and/or GSAC, students should feel free to contact the Department Head for additional conversation and assistance.