

Department of Agricultural and Extension Education Graduate Guide and Procedures

Introduction

The Department of Agricultural and Extension Education recognizes the significant contributions made by graduate students to departmental research, teaching, and extension programs and is committed to providing the best possible opportunity for students to learn and develop as professionals in their areas of interest.

The primary purpose of this guide is to outline policies specific to the Department of Agricultural and Extension Education at Virginia Tech. Policies of the Graduate School are documented in the Graduate Catalog available from the Graduate School (<http://www.grads.vt.edu>).

Admission Requirements

The GRE exam is helpful for all applicants but is not required. It is expected that applicants should be near completion of a B.S. or M.S. degree in agricultural and extension education, rural sociology, agricultural and/or applied economics, or an agricultural field closely associated with a graduate degree in this discipline.

Students should have a 3.0 GPA or greater and strong scientific writing and communication skills.

The department strongly recommends that **international students** submit results for completed GRE examination. The results of the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is also required for applicants who did not receive their bachelor's degrees from an Anglophone university and whose first language is not English. A minimum TOEFL score of 550 (paper based test) or 213 (computer based test) is required. Students are strongly encouraged to apply online. Applying online streamlines the application process and reduces processing time. Applicants must pay a non-refundable fee ~ \$45.

Terms of Employment

Many graduate students in Agricultural and Extension Education receive financial support in the form of a graduate research assistantship or graduate teaching assistantship. Since all students conduct research as a part of degree requirements and most students assist in some way with the teaching classes and/or assisting with non-formal teaching in extension programs, the Department of Agricultural and Extension Education makes no distinction between graduate research and teaching assistantships. Some students are recipients of fellowships awarded through the College, University, or Graduate School, and a few are supported by their own funds or funds from their home country. Regardless of the source or amount of support, all graduate students are considered to be half-time employees of the department. As such, graduate students are expected to work 20 hours per week in support of departmental research, teaching, and/or extension programs. Graduate students are expected to contribute to departmental research projects, assist in classroom teaching, and participate in extension programs as requested by their faculty supervisors, to whom they are directly

responsible. Participation in departmental research, teaching and extension activities serves to prepare students in areas important to their career success.

Graduate Assistantships

Graduate assistantships are paid at one of four steps.

- Step 8 (\$1,524/mo for 2007-08) applies to beginning MS students;
- Step 9 (\$1,571/mo for 2007-08) to second year MS students (specifically, students having completed 24 credit hours);
- Step 10 (\$1,616/mo for 2007-08) to beginning Ph.D. students or following successful defense of the MS thesis for continuing students;
- Step 11 (\$1,662/mo for 2007-08) to Ph.D. students after successful completion of the preliminary examination.

In most instances, appropriate changes in pay steps occur automatically. However, students who feel that an increase has been overlooked should see the department office manager in the departmental main office.

Payment of Tuition and Fees

The Department pays **Virginia resident** tuition (\$3,680.50 per semester for 2007-08) and academic fee (\$175.00 per semester) for students receiving departmental assistantships and occasionally for others as allowed by available departmental funding. Students are responsible for the University Comprehensive Fee in Fall and Spring semesters (\$637.50 for full time students 2007-08), and for tuition and fees during Summer sessions in which they are registered.

Full time students receiving assistantships of \$4,000 or more per year are eligible for in-state tuition regardless of their state of residence. However, there are many circumstances in which establishing Virginia domicile is financially advantageous, both to the student and department. Eligible students are strongly encouraged to apply for Virginia residency through the Graduate School following their first year of residency. (International students on J and F visas are not eligible).

Registration for Summer term is not required to hold assistantship and fellowship appointments. Students must be registered full time (12 hours) during Fall and Spring terms. **Tuition is paid by the student for any formal classes taken during Summer terms, and students must be registered during any term in which preliminary or defense examinations are taken.**

Defending students (completing students "defending" their M.S. or Ph.D. research work) may request registration for one hour of GRAD 6864 (M.S.) or 7864 (Ph.D.) when the defense exam occurs during the first 20 class days of any term (see "Credit Hour Loads", below). Students on assistantship and not registered during the Summer are subject to FICA and FICA Medicare withholding which are not withheld during periods when they are registered. (Certain international students are not subject to FICA or FICA Medicare withholding at anytime.) Eligibility for benefits normally covered in the

Comprehensive Fee (e.g., Health Service Fee, Bus Fee, etc.) **may** be a factor to consider if you elect not to register as a full time student

Graduate Advisory Committee

All students are assigned a faculty advisor (major professor) prior to, or immediately after, initial enrollment. Assignments should be mutually agreeable to both student and faculty member. A primary consideration for matching students with advisors is that the students research interest match well with the advisors research expertise.

Within the first two semesters of enrollment, each student should work with his/her faculty advisor to establish an advisory committee. A Masters committee should consist of three members; two of which should be from the department, one being their faculty advisor. A Doctoral committee should consist of four members; two of which should be from the department, one being their faculty advisor. The committee will assist in the development of a program of study and completion of the thesis or dissertation research project.

Advisory Committee members are expected to provide appropriate and timely input to the academic and research programs of the student. Conversely, both students and faculty advisors are expected to assure appropriate involvement of the advisory committee in each student's program. Students should discuss any problems related to their advisory committee with their faculty advisor and, if needed, with the department head.

Credit Hour Loads

Full-time credit hour loads are 12 hours in Fall and Spring semesters (in addition to courses audited). Typically, students will register for 6 to 9 hours of formal course work (2 to 3 classes) during Fall and Spring terms (or less during the latter stages of a graduate program), and for **sufficient hours of Research and Thesis (M.S.) or Research and Dissertation (Ph.D.) credits to complete the 12-hour, full-time load**. Note that this is required for payment of assistantships and for progression from assistantship step 1 to step 2, since step 2 requires the completion of 24 credit hours.

Prior to the beginning of a semester, students who have 1) fulfilled all residency and course requirements and 2) scheduled their final exam to take place within the first 20 class days of the term, are eligible to request registration for 1 hour as a Defending Student (exceptions to the 20 day rule may be granted by the Graduate School).

A certification form, available from the departmental office, must be submitted to the Graduate School in order to be registered as a Defending Student. Registration as a Defending Student may affect eligibility for assistantships and certain student benefits and/or loans since students so registered do not pay the comprehensive fee and are not classified as full-time students.

Time Limits for Degree Programs

Guidelines for time to complete graduate degree programs are established as departmental policy in the interest of both the department and student. As a general guideline, it is expected that:

- Full-time students in the Masters programs will be completed within **two years**.
 - Full-time students in the Doctoral programs will require no more than **three years**.
- Students receiving financial assistance are assured of continuing support (two years for a Masters student and three years for a Doctoral student) if they are making satisfactory progress toward their degree and they are fulfilling assistantship responsibilities at a level that is satisfactory to the funding faculty member. In the event that circumstances prevent completion of a degree within the prescribed time limit, it is the responsibility of the student's faculty supervisor to request or provide an extension of financial support.

Evaluation of Performance and Progress toward Degree

In an effort to foster communication between graduate students, their faculty advisor, and advisory committees, the Department of Agricultural and Extension Education and the graduate school requires an **annual evaluation** and communication of graduate student performance and progress toward either the M.S. or Ph.D. degree. The process is initiated with a written report, from each graduate student to his/her faculty advisor, which appropriately details the graduate student's academic and research program progress during the preceding year.

The form of the report is the prerogative of the faculty advisor and due by **February 1st** of each year or earlier as designated by the faculty advisor. In response, faculty advisors will, by **March 1st** of each year, write a letter which details the advisors evaluation of each graduate student's performance and progress toward a degree.

Graduate students and faculty advisors should meet at an appropriate and convenient time to discuss the student's report and advisor's evaluation, concentrating most especially on any differences in expectations or evaluation between the student and advisor. Both the student's report and advisor's letter will become a part of the student's file. It is expected that advisory committee members will be used appropriately to develop each student's academic program, in the planning and execution of the research project, and in contributing to the evaluation letter. To assist you and your advisor, the department has created a **Graduate Student Check List** and the **Annual Graduate Student Evaluation Form**. These are included at the end of this document.

Annual Evaluation Guidelines

There are two forms that will become part of your student record in the department. The first is an **AEE Graduate Student Check List** and the second is an **AEE Annual Student Evaluation Form**. So you will know what is expected, copies of these forms are also included at the end of this document. Copies of the forms (saved as Word documents) have also been sent to your major professor and to you, and are available from the department office manager as well. The annual evaluation of graduate students provides an opportunity to insure that appropriate progress toward degree requirements is occurring and to allow for adjustments in the program of study, teaching activities, or research efforts. Clearly, it is also important to keep the advisory committees informed.

Remember your advisory committee is not likely to seek you out. It is your responsibility to use your advisory committee effectively. These members can provide excellent insight, perspective, and encouragement, but only if you engage them. Since the evaluations occur in the Spring semester (see above) – to meet pending graduate school requirements -- your first evaluation may well be rather brief. However, the

following elements are expected to be part of your evaluation documentation as appropriate.

- Signatures of the Major Advisor and Committee Members (likely not applicable during your first evaluation cycle).
 - Milestones accomplished – for example, filing of the plan of study or scheduling of the preliminary exam (for a Ph.D. student).
 - Documentation indicating that a regular meeting of the student advisory committee was held and a brief written summary of major conclusions from the meeting (may not apply with initial evaluations).
 - List of publications.
 - List of professional presentations.
 - Documentation of teaching activities.
 - Listing of service activities.
 - Awards and other honors.
 - General academic progress – i.e. satisfactory progress in class work as well as research activities.
 - Comments by the student
 - Signature of Student – to indicate that he or she read and understands the document.
- In addition, an annual professional development plan (see attached) will be developed by the student and advisor and included with the annual evaluation.

Student Hints and Advice!

To assist you and your major professor in staying on track with your program, some major milestones you need to keep in mind are listed below. Remember that your advisor has several advisees. It is a good idea to re-cap where you are and what stage you want to discuss. Ultimately it's your career and your future that is at stake – take the responsibility to keep on top of the details and keep a copy of your records.

- Form an advisory committee and complete your plan of study by the end of 12 credit hours.
- A thesis or dissertation proposal should be submitted and approved by your Advisory Committee as soon as practical (e.g. no later than the end of the second semester for the M.S. or end of the first year for Ph.D. students). [Clearly, this depends on close communication with your major professor].
- The M.S. thesis should be completed – defended, approved, and turned into the graduate school no later than 5 semesters into your program [see previous regarding support expectations]. If you go beyond the two year guide line you may be without financial support during the semester that you defend your thesis (see defending student status).
- It is fully anticipated that Ph.D. candidates should complete their program in three years. To be successful requires planning and careful attention to details. This also means that your research problems will likely be part of ongoing research by your major professor.
- New Ph.D. students who have not initiated research projects should strongly consider taking a full load of courses (probably 4 per semester) during the first and/or second semester.
- Ph.D. students should take their preliminary exam by the end of their second year.

- Publications of research findings in professional journals is critically important to the department, your major professor, and for your professional development. Keep this in mind as you prepare your thesis or dissertation.
- Take advantage of opportunities to teach class, give presentations, and make reports to hone your written and oral communication skills.

Graduate Seminar

Scholarly writing and public speaking are critically important skills in many careers, and one which can be perfected through practice. The primary objective of the graduate seminar in Agricultural and Extension Education is to give students the opportunity to make group presentations with instructive evaluation of their performance. A secondary objective is to provide both speaker and audience with a learning experience which broadens their base of knowledge. Requirements for graduate degrees in Agricultural and Extension Education include **two** seminars for the Masters Degree and **three** for the Doctoral Degree, given for academic credit.

Attendance at Graduate Seminar is required for students taking seminar for credit during a given semester. Attendance for other graduate students is expected, as it is for faculty, except where unavoidable conflicts occur.

Defense Seminar and Completing Student Interview

Students completing degree requirements are normally expected to present a concise (30 minutes or less; 20-25 minute presentation with 5-10 minutes for discussion), non-credit seminar on their thesis or dissertation research, immediately preceding their defense examination. This seminar is intended to replace the traditional opening statement to the graduate committee during the defense and to keep faculty and graduate students informed regarding departmental research programs. All graduate students are requested to complete a graduate program evaluation and to schedule a completing student interview with the department head prior to leaving the university. Information provided by students, which is confidential with respect to source, contributes significantly to the evolution and improvement of departmental graduate programs.

Publication Expectations

Specifically, all graduate students will submit a minimum of one draft of a paper for submission for publication **PRIOR** to graduation or completion of degree requirements. It is expected that your research activities will lead to publication of your results in a refereed scientific journal. The choice of an appropriate journal format for your draft paper is to be agreed upon between you and your major professor. For some perspective, it is anticipated that an M.S. program would lead to **at least** one publication, but depending on the specific circumstances 1-3 publications are often possible. In the case of Ph.D. programs 2-3 publications should likely be viewed as a minimum number. It is not uncommon for Ph.D. efforts to produce 5 or more full publications. Graduate students are required to submit theses and dissertations electronically. Procedural details are available on the ETD Project home page. <http://www.grads.vt.edu/current/etd.htm>. ETD workshop schedules and access to support materials are also available from the above address. Graduate students are expected to provide one bound copy of thesis and dissertation work for their committee

chair(s) and one for the department library. It is also common for students to provide a copy of their work to committee members.

Graduate Honor Code

All graduate students are expected to abide by the standards of academic integrity and ethical behavior established in the Virginia Tech Graduate Honor Code. Details of the Code, including penalties for violations are included in the on-line Graduate Catalog <http://ghs.grads.vt.edu/>. Because some aspects of appropriate conduct are course-specific (e.g., collaborative work with other students on assignments), the syllabus for each course should be examined carefully to determine instructor expectations. Particular attention is drawn to written Preliminary Examinations for admission to candidacy for the Ph.D. degree. These examinations are unique in that they generally are administered outside the traditional, in-classroom examination setting and may permit the use of various informational resources in responding to questions. During the written portion of the exam the student responds to questions submitted to the major professor by members of the advisory committee. Depending on the wishes of the committee these questions can be either open book or closed book. After the written exam (within two weeks) an oral examination follows. The format for this exam typically involves follow-up questions related to responses to the written examinations as well as widely ranging questions in the general area of the student's interest and in areas related to course work taken by the student. Students taking Preliminary Examinations are **not** allowed to seek assistance from other individuals nor should they share examination questions with other students without permission from the faculty member submitting the questions.

Use of Departmental Equipment, Facilities, and Supplies

Graduate students are afforded the use of departmental equipment, facilities, and supplies on the same basis as faculty and staff; i.e., if an activity is departmental business, use of departmental facilities and supplies in support of that activity is appropriate. This includes use of phones (long distance), university mail, and office supplies. Use of the departmental copier should be arranged initially through the student's faculty supervisor. (An access code is required to operate the copier; operational training is required to receive an access code.)

The copier should **not** be used to copy theses, dissertations, or materials related to classes taken by graduate students. Items related to the student's research or participation in teaching or extension programs may be copied at departmental expense on the main printer or printers available in student offices. Mass copying of journal articles or book chapters is **not** allowed. You should make use of electronic files to the greatest extent possible.

Copy facilities for personal materials are available at the University Library on a charge basis. Limited clerical assistance is available to graduate students through the student's faculty supervisor. Equipment assigned to clerical staff (e.g., computers) should be used only with prior permission of the clerical staff member responsible for the equipment. The departmental conference room (room 250 suitable for meetings of up to 15) is available to graduate students for meetings and should be scheduled on the calendars in the main departmental office.

Extended sessions (e.g., all day or longer study sessions) are acceptable so long as the room is not needed for meetings by faculty, staff, or other graduate students. Students should obtain keys to the building and appropriate work areas from the department

secretary in the departmental main office. Graduate students, along with faculty and staff, are responsible for the security of offices and facilities.

Travel Support

Participation in professional meetings is an integral part of graduate education. The Department encourages such participation by providing financial support to partially offset graduate student travel expenses. The level of support differs according to the ability of the department to provide transportation for students to the meeting site.

For meetings where the department provides transportation, students may receive \$150 per meeting for a maximum of **two** meetings per academic year at which they present a scientific paper or poster. Students alternately may receive \$100 to attend **one** meeting per academic year at which no presentation is made. A student therefore may receive \$100, \$150, or \$300 for meetings where transportation is provided during an academic year.

For meetings where transportation is not provided by the department, the level of support will vary with travel expense and will be awarded on a priority basis (if necessary) and based on available funds. Departmental support may be supplemented by funds from the student's faculty advisor or from the Graduate Student Assembly Travel Fund.

Applications for travel support should be submitted to the department secretary in the departmental main office. Students must complete and submit state travel vouchers in order to obtain reimbursement. Part time graduate students are not eligible for departmental travel support. Approval for, and levels of travel support for long distance meetings, will be determined during each Spring semester and awarded in the following priority (if necessitated by limited funds):

1. Finishing Ph.D.'s presenting papers
2. Finishing M.S. candidates presenting papers
3. Ph.D.'s presenting papers, by seniority
4. M.S. candidates presenting papers, by seniority
5. Ph.D.'s not presenting papers
6. M.S. candidates not presenting papers

Computing Support

The University provides computing support for graduate education and research. Access to computer workstations is remote (from Litton-Reaves Hall) via microcomputers. Graduate students are assigned user ID's which allow access to remote servers. All students should receive a PID (personal identification) at the time of initial check-in to the University. Students have access to wireless internet in Litton Reaves Hall.

The department has a limited number of computers available for students who do not have their own. Students working in assistantships, that require computer technology to complete their assignment, will be provided with access to departmental computers.

Participation in Professional Development Experiences

All qualified graduate students are given the opportunity to work with faculty members in the preparation and delivery of instructional material for departmental classes, extension programs or other opportunities. Students also may arrange to accompany extension specialists on problem solving visits or to participate in special extension programs. Participation in these activities provides extremely valuable experience for students and is regarded highly by potential employers. Students should first consult with their faculty advisor regarding opportunities to assist with formal courses and/or participate in extension programs. With approval of their faculty advisor, students should contact the appropriate instructor or extension specialist.

Professional Associations

The department strongly encourages graduate student membership in professional associations. Students should consult with their advisor to determine appropriate professional affiliations. Many professional societies are available for students and offer student membership rates.

Collegiate Student Organizations

The Department encourages students to be involved in student organizations at the department, college, and university level.

Graduate Student Check List
MS Student (Thesis Track) in Department of Agricultural and Extension Education

Student Name: _____

This check list is provided to assist in tracking progress toward the degree. The form will become a part of the student's permanent record and should be updated annually (at the time of the annual evaluation).

Date:

_____ Enrolled

_____ Formation of advisory committee

_____ Submit plan of study

_____ Advisory committee meets and submits progress report.

_____ Anticipated completion date^{1,2}

_____ Draft of manuscript completed

¹The thesis defense normally must be held during regular academic semesters or sessions and must be scheduled through the graduate school. Requests to schedule the defense must be received by the Graduate School (with a copy to the departmental graduate coordinator or your Major Professor) at least two weeks before the defense.

² Financial support is normally limited to 2 years.

Other Requirements:

Graduate Seminar (Course, semester, year):

1. _____

2. _____

Professional Development Activities

1. _____

2. _____

Provisional status is permitted for a maximum of 12 credit hours of graded course work; at this time a minimum GPA of 3.0 is required for the student to continue their graduate program.

Graduate Student Check List
Ph.D. Student in Department of Agricultural and Extension Education
(Admitted after completion of MS)

Student Name: _____

This check list is provided to assist in tracking progress toward the degree. The form will become a part of the student's permanent record and should be updated annually (at the time of the annual evaluation).

Date:

- _____ Enrolled
- _____ Form advisory committee and submit plan of study (prior to completion of 15 credits)
- _____ Advisory committee meets and submits progress report (year 1)
- _____ Advisory committee meets and submits progress report (year 2)
- _____ Completion and passing of the preliminary examination
- _____ Advisory committee meets and submits progress report (year 3)
- _____ Anticipated completion date^{1,2}
- _____ Draft of manuscript(s) completed

¹The Preliminary Examination for the Ph.D. must be taken at least 9 months before the Ph.D. defense. A minimum of 24 hours of course work and/or research must remain to be taken, including the work for which the student is enrolled at the time of the exam.

² The Preliminary Exam and the Ph.D. defense normally must be held during regular academic semesters or sessions and must be scheduled through the graduate school. Requests to schedule the defense must be received by the Graduate School (with a copy to the departmental graduate coordinator or your Major Professor) at least two weeks before the defense.

³ Financial support is normally limited to 3 years.

Other Requirements:

Graduate Seminar (Course, semester, year):

- 1. _____; 2. _____; 3. _____

Professional Development Activities

- 1. _____; 2. _____;

Annual Graduate Student Evaluation
Department of Agricultural and Extension Education

This form should be submitted annually to the Departmental Graduate Coordinator as well as copies to all members of the advisory committee and the student

Student Name: _____ Date: _____

Signatures of the Major Professor and Advisory Committee

Major Professor

Committee Member

Committee Member

Committee Member

Committee Member

Assessment of Progress toward the Degree
(Reports, Letters or other documents associated with the annual evaluation – as indicated in the Graduate Student Policies and Procedures Document – should be part of or attached to this form)

Comments by the student:

(Additional material as needed)
Student Signature:

(Indicates the student has read and understands the document but does not necessarily indicate agreement)

GRADUATE STUDENT PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Student name: _____

Student option and degree: _____

Expected graduation date (semester and year): _____

Student professional goals upon graduation:

In the area of research, if any:

In the area of teaching, if any:

In the area of extension, if any:

Proposed Thesis / Dissertation topic or project title:

Assistantship responsibilities:

Professional development goals for this academic year:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

What do you need to do or provide to accomplish these goals?

What resources, materials, or support do you need from me to assist you in accomplishing your goals?

What is a realistic timeline for accomplishing your goals?