Expectations for Graduate Education

Overview

These webpages outline the expectations for graduate students, graduate program faculty, academic departments and programs, and the Graduate School at Virginia Tech across all the university's campuses. The Graduate School and all members of the university community share responsibility for ensuring that these expectations are upheld by all. In the event that these expectations are not fulfilled in a manner befitting the high standards of graduate education at Virginia Tech, a complaint/appeals process, could be used to redress the concerns of the involved parties.

The expectations are grouped under six headings: progress toward degree, research and ethics, teaching and training, professional development, assistantships and financial support, and community.

This document on the expectations for graduate education at Virginia Tech should be made available to all graduate students, faculty and administrators in all colleges, departments, and administrative units.

Definition of a Graduate Student

Graduate students are individuals seeking advanced degrees or certificates, either full- or part-time, at any of the campuses or programs of Virginia Tech. They are in the process of advancing from receiving knowledge to creating, enhancing, and taking ownership of new knowledge. Graduate students have various backgrounds, life experiences, and goals. Graduate students have diverse needs related to their multiple roles at Virginia Tech, such as student, researcher, educator, mentor, emerging and advancing professional, engaged scholar, and responsible citizen.

Working Together

At Virginia Tech, graduate students work closely with faculty to acquire the skills of academic disciplines and to create and synthesize knowledge needed to address the complex issues of society through disciplinary and interdisciplinary research and scholarship. Graduate education is a critical component in the development of new knowledge, analysis of current research, creation of new ideas, and innovation, and dissemination of scholarship within and beyond the university.

To fulfill this mission, Virginia Tech seeks to instill in each student an understanding of and capacity for scholarship, independent critical judgment, academic rigor, and intellectual integrity. It is the joint responsibility of faculty and graduate students to work together to foster these ends through relationships that encourage freedom of inquiry, demonstrate personal and professional integrity, and foster mutual respect.

Building a graduate community for quality graduate education depends upon the professional and ethical conduct of both faculty and students. Each party in the graduate process—that is, the faculty, the graduate students, the graduate department or program, and the Graduate

School—has particular responsibilities and expectations in ensuring the achievement of these primary goals.

A Note about Academic Civility

Virginia Tech is committed to sustaining a positive workplace and learning environment that respects individual dignity and is free of coercion, harassment, intimidation, fear, and exploitation (see Principles of Community). Graduate students, therefore, have a reasonable expectation of civility from faculty and staff with whom they interact. Likewise, they are expected to extend that civility toward others in the Virginia Tech community.

To maintain a culture of civility in the Graduate School, academic bullying is unacceptable. Academic bullying is belittling or intimidating behavior (verbal or non-verbal, intentional or unintentional) in a university setting that undermines, isolates, humiliates, or denigrates an individual in a manner that causes emotional distress and compromises a person's self-esteem, health, feelings of safety, and productivity. It is one of a spectrum of behaviors (e.g., sexual harassment, discrimination, and workplace violence) that contributes to a hostile work environment.

We recognize that an academic culture, which is built upon academic freedom, individual accomplishment, and, increasingly, competition for funding, may be susceptible to behaviors characterized as uncivil or disrespectful and that these behaviors can be detrimental to both individuals and the institutional climate.

Disrespect and bullying can occur in many relationships: faculty-to-student, staff-to-student, administrator-to-faculty, faculty-to-faculty, student-to-student, student-to-staff, student-to-faculty, etc. Consequently, academic disrespect is an issue of concern for the entire Virginia Tech community. However, constituencies in subordinate positions, such as graduate students, are more likely to become recipients of academic incivility. Hence, the community should be alert to this possibility and serve to resolve situations to ensure that students or other subordinates are treated with dignity. Building allies is an effective strategy to counter disrespectful and bullying behavior and can aid the coping process. Speak to those you trust when you feel subjected to bullying behaviors. Preserving the Principles of Community depends on a culture that denounces occurrences of disrespectful behavior. Active bystanders that speak out against disrespectful and bullying behavior are instrumental in diminishing the power of a bully. If you experienced or witnessed academic disrespect, know the resources available to help. (Provide a list of resources).

Expectations for Graduate Education: Graduate students

Graduate students in all programs are expected to gain expertise in a particular area of study and, especially in Ph.D. programs, to expand the knowledge of that disciplinary field or to push disciplinary boundaries through interdisciplinary/collaborative research, by discovering and pursuing a topic of scholarly inquiry and research. As junior colleagues and professionals-in-

training, graduate students will learn to impart disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge through appropriate forms of instruction and publication.

Progress Toward Degree

Graduate students are expected to:

- Work within the guidelines provided by the department to select an appropriate advisor and committee members. This selection should be free of conflicts of interest or coercive relationships among committee members and with the student that might preclude a committee member from evaluating student work by academic merit alone.
- Devote an appropriate amount of time and energy toward achieving academic excellence and earning the advanced degree or certificate. Estimated time and effort needed for success in course and research credit hours is about 4 hours of work per credit per week, including both in-class and out-of-class activities. A full-time assistantship amounts to an average of 20 hours of work per week, independent of time spent on courses or tasks related to research credits. (updated Fall 2014)
- Take primary responsibility to inform themselves of and conduct themselves in accordance with the Graduate School's policies and procedures, specific program requirements, and standards of performance established by faculty and articulated in departmental graduate student handbooks and their respective professional associations or organizations. Students should locate and review their departmental graduate student handbook.
- Take the initiative to ask questions that will promote their understanding of the academic requirements of their specific graduate program. In addition, students should understand the assistantship requirements and seek to fulfill them satisfactorily.
- Fulfill the requirements of their programs in a timely manner and participate in the annual progress review. Each department or program may have different policies regarding time limits to degrees.
- Inform the faculty advisor and the department graduate program coordinator of any leaves of absence that may be needed, as well as their date of departure and expected date of return. Note that international students have additional requirements for approved leaves of absence; consult the office of International Graduate Student Services (IGSS) for details.
- For international students, recognize that the immigration form specifies the normal length of the academic program (2 years for master's degree, 5 years for PhD). Extensions to the immigration form may be requested based on academic reasons; consult with IGSS staff for more information.

Research and Ethics

It is expected that graduate students will:

- Communicate regularly with faculty advisors and committee members, especially on matters related to research, academic progress, concerns, and problems within their graduate program.

- Request clear guidelines of expectations from the supervising faculty member on the research activities, including timetables for deliverables.
- Recognize that the faculty advisor and committee members are responsible for guiding graduate-student research but that students are responsible for conducting the independent research required for the graduate degree.
- Recognize the time constraints and other demands imposed on faculty members and program staff.
- Exercise honest and ethical behavior in all their academic pursuits, whether these undertakings pertain to study, course work, research, Cooperative Extension, engagement, or teaching, as outlined in the Graduate Honor Code, the "Ethics in Academe" page on the Graduate School's website, and on the Office of Research Integrity website. Additional resources include the AAUP's Statement on Professional Ethics, professional standards of the academic disciplines, and the Council of Graduate School's Ethics and Scholarly Integrity website.
- Contribute to the maintenance of an ethical environment by reporting any unethical actions they observe or are aware of to the Honor System.
- Acknowledge the contributions of faculty and other members of the research team in all publications and conference presentations.
- Work with faculty to agree as early as possible upon authorship positions or acknowledgements commensurate with levels of contributions to the work.
- Recognize that research results, with appropriate acknowledgement, may be incorporated into progress reports, summary documents, applications for continuation of funding, and similar documents authored by the faculty advisor, to the extent that the student's research is related to the faculty advisor's research program.
- Work with faculty to understand and follow Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects (IRB) and the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) guidelines and complete required Office of Research Compliance training when pursuing projects requiring human or animal subjects.
- Know and follow the Virginia Tech intellectual-property polices (Presidential Policy Memo # 121).
- Avoid situations that can result in conflicts of interests. See the University's conflict of interest policies and procedures for more information.

Teaching and Training
Graduate students are expected to:
- Receive appropriate training and evaluation for instructional roles they are asked to undertake.
- Pursue, to the extent possible, teaching and training opportunities that are relevant to their career expectations and that enhance teaching to diverse learners and populations.
- Devote time and commitment to instructional duties in order to provide high quality education to their students.

Professional Development

It is expected that graduate students will:

- Pursue professional training programs, seminars, and courses that will enhance their professional and personal growth and development and help them build a broad network of professional contacts. See the Graduate School's website on Professional Development.
- Seek out mentors and advisors to help them prepare for professional careers and responsibilities.
- Contribute, to the extent possible, to the discourse of the scholarly discipline through presentations, publications, collaborative projects, and other means.

Assistantships and Financial Support

If appointed to a graduate assistantship (GA, GRA or GTA), graduate students are expected to:

- Request clear guidelines for graduate assistantships from the appropriate faculty or staff member.
- Fulfill the responsibilities and requirements of the appointment as stated in the contractual agreement with the department and university. Students on full-time assistantships are expected to work an average of 20 hours/week. Note, these hours are in addition to the hours required for coursework and individual thesis/dissertation research. (updated Fall 2014)
- Act in a professional manner in all aspects of their duties as graduate assistants.
- Elect to decline tasks that are not related to or are in excess of their contractual obligations. This includes work on assigned projects that, on average over the course of a semester, are in excess of the hours for which they are being paid (for details on definitions of graduate assistantships in terms of hours of effort, see Presidential Policy Memo # 129.
- Recognize that international students are strictly limited by immigration law to 20 hours of employment per week (see IGSS website).
- Recognize that fellowships carry with them responsibilities that might be different than assistantships. Fellowship recipients are responsible for learning about and complying with all requirements associated with their appointment.
- Report any additional employment beyond the assistantship or fellowship to the Graduate School.

Community

It is expected that graduate students will:

- Abide by the student code of conduct, which applies to all students at Virginia Tech, as described in the Student Handbook.
- Uphold, in their own classrooms, research groups, and laboratories, an ethos of collegiality and collaboration.

- Behave consistently with the VT Principles of Community, as a community member who respects and celebrates diversity.
- Contribute to the department and university community to the extent that each is able.
- Contribute to the mission of Virginia Tech by providing high-quality teaching to undergraduate students, supporting the scholarly activities and fellow graduate students whenever possible, and upholding the public-service aspects of the university mission.

Expectations for Graduate Education: Faculty

Members of the graduate program faculty and others who have supervisory relationships with graduate students serve a variety of critical roles as model teachers and researchers, as well as graduate-student advisors, committee members, and mentors. Graduate program faculty provide intellectual guidance and support for graduate students' scholarly and pedagogical efforts and are responsible for the ongoing evaluation of graduate students' performance in academic, research, and scholarly activities.

As mentors and advisors, faculty are responsible for helping graduate students discover and participate in appropriate channels of scholarly, professional, and disciplinary exchange. In addition, faculty are responsible for helping graduate students develop the professional research, teaching, and networking skills required for a variety of career options, both within and outside academia. More information and guidance about mentoring is provided here**.**

Progress Toward Degree
It is expected that faculty will:
- Support the academic progress of graduate students in their program. In some cases, faculty advisors are assigned to entering graduate students to assist them in academic advising and other matters. In other cases, students select faculty advisors in accordance with the disciplinary interest or research expertise.
- Establish a meeting schedule that has been mutually agreed upon with their graduate students.
- Take reasonable measures to ensure that graduate students who initiate thesis or dissertation research do so in a timely fashion.
- Communicate their expectations of graduate students by providing clear descriptions of the requirements each student must meet, including course work, research tools, examinations, and thesis or dissertation.
- Support and respect graduate students' work–personal life balance.
- Conduct annual evaluations of each graduate student, which should be factual, specific, and based on criteria that are understood by both the faculty advisor and the student (see Presidential Policy Memos 1, 126, 229).
- Recognize that the international student immigration form specifies the normal length of the academic program (2 years for MS, 5 years for PhD). Extensions to the

immigration form may be requested based on academic reasons; consult with IGSS staff for more information.

Research and Ethics

It is expected that faculty will:

- Provide intellectual guidance on and promote rigor in students' educational programs and specific research projects.
- Provide students with knowledge of the current frontiers and opportunities in disciplinary and inter-or cross-disciplinary research.
- Provide appropriate guidelines for completion of research projects.
- Create an environment of the highest ethical standards and act as role models for ethical behavior in all professional activities.
- Treat all students fairly and assess their work in meaningful ways, consistent with the discipline. Assessment of work should be judged by academic scholarly merit alone.
- Avoid situations that might create conflict of interest for graduate students. This includes supporting the student selection of a committee that avoids conflicts of interest or coercive relationships among the committee members as well as between the student and committee members.
- Recognize graduate student participation in supervised research, and ensure that ethical standards of attribution and acknowledgment in collaborative settings are followed.
- Work with graduate students to agree as early as possible upon authorship positions and acknowledgments commensurate with levels of contributions to the work.
- Work with students to understand and follow Office of Research Compliance guidelines, when appropriate.
- Mentor and monitor students' compliance with the Graduate Honor Code, including avoiding plagiarism and other violations of academic integrity.

Teaching and Training

It is expected that faculty will:

- Encourage and assist students in developing teaching and presentation skills that meet the needs of diverse learners and populations.
- Help students develop interpretive, writing, oral, and quantitative skills, in accordance with the expectations of the discipline.
- Assist graduate students in developing grant-writing skills, where appropriate.
- Provide training for any equipment, instruments, laboratory procedures, or field skills that are necessary for the student's research and teaching program.
- Model and mentor ethical practices in teaching and training.

Professional Development

It is expected that faculty will:

- Encourage graduate students to participate in professional meetings or to display their work in public forums and exhibitions.

- Model and mentor ethical professional behavior, and engage in discussions about managing situations that would be considered as unethical.
- Encourage graduate students to pursue professional training programs, seminars, and courses that will enhance their professional and personal growth and development.
- Prepare students to be competitive for employment, which includes portraying a realistic view of the field and the job market and making use of professional contacts for the benefit of their students. See the Graduate School website on Professional Development.

Assistantships and Financial Support
It is expected that faculty will:
- Avoid assigning tasks to graduate assistants that are not related to or are in excess of their contractual obligations.
- Recognize that graduate assistants (GAs, GRAs, & GTAs) should not be expected to work on assigned projects, on average over the course of a semester, in excess of the hours for which they are being paid (e.g., average of 20 hours/week for students on full-time assistantship) (for details on definitions of graduate assistantships in terms of hours of effort, see Presidential Policy Memo 129.

Community
It is expected that faculty will:
- Demonstrate and encourage collegiality with students, faculty, and staff.
- Act fairly, impartially, professionally, and in the student's best interest in all dealings with graduate students, in accordance with university policies governing non-discrimination and harassment of all sorts, as outlined in university policy 1025.
- Behave consistently with the VT Principles of Community, as a community member who respects and celebrates diversity.
- Follow FERPA guidelines, which mandate a student's right to reasonable privacy and confidentiality in all communications among students, professors, staff, and administrators.

Expectations for Graduate Education, Departments and Programs

The graduate degree program bears primary responsibility for developing and communicating specific guidelines and procedures governing study in the discipline. It should provide all incoming and enrolled students with a clear structure of the expected stages of progress towards the degree. It should offer a curriculum and appropriate forms of instruction necessary to ensure timely completion of that degree, and it should provide specific details regarding likely career opportunities for those seeking the degree. In addition, it should encourage the development of interdisciplinary skills and, whenever possible, participation in

interdisciplinary research. The department should also provide clear information about the procedures for assessing students' satisfactory progress toward the degree.

Progress Toward Degree
It is expected that departments and programs will:
- Inform graduate students of the requirements (see Presidential Policy Memo #126) for the academic program, including the expected time-to-degrees within their program, the plan-of-study requirements, and the availability of courses required for their graduate studies.
- Provide accurate, timely, and clearly stated information concerning academic requirements and academic evaluation, as well as guidance toward establishing and maintaining acceptable academic standing.
- Provide relevant course offerings at the graduate level; these courses are listed in the Graduate Catalog.
- Provide supervision, external to the institution if necessary, if the student's dissertation or thesis advisor departs Virginia Tech after the student's work has begun.
- Ensure that graduate students receive regular evaluation and feedback throughout their academic program, including annual evaluation (see Presidential Policy Memos #1,126, 229). Written evaluations should, at a minimum, include annual progress reports.
- Provide graduate students with a fair opportunity to correct deficiencies in their academic performance before being dismissed. Dismissal of a graduate student from a graduate program for academic reasons should typically be based on annual progress reviews (see Presidential Policy Memo #229).
- Refer international students to IGSS staff to learn about requirements for international students to maintain adequate progress.

Research and Ethics
It is expected that the department or program will:
- Provide appropriate resources to allow students to complete their education and research in a timely and productive manner.
- Ensure that advisors and committees treat all students fairly and assess their work in meaningful ways, consistent with the discipline.
- Ensure the highest standards of academic quality in all aspects of the graduate program.
- Follow FERPA guidelines, which mandate a student's right to reasonable privacy and confidentiality in all communications among students, professors, staff, and administrators.
- Provide graduate students with a safe working environment (see Environmental Health and Safety Services).

Teaching and Training
It is expected that the department or program will:

- Provide training appropriate to the teaching assignment given to graduate students.
- Review teaching evaluations of graduate teaching assistants and work with them to improve their teaching skills through mentoring and participation in teaching workshops.
- Encourage graduate students with interests in teaching to participate in teaching workshops given by the Center for Instructional Development and Education Research (CIDER) or other venues, including the Graduate Education Development Institute (GEDI) and other Transformative Graduate Education initiatives.

Professional Development
It is expected that the department or program will:
- Provide information to graduate students about professional meetings, public forums, and exhibitions relevant to their research area.
- Provide information to graduate students about professional training programs, seminars, and courses that will enhance their professional growth and development. See the Graduate School website on Professional Development.
- Assist students to be competitive for employment by providing information about opportunities and, when appropriate, making use of professional contacts for the benefit of graduate students.

Assistantships and Financial Support
It is expected that the department or program will:
- Provide clear expectations to students on their responsibilities as GAs, GTAs, or GRAs.
- Inform graduate students of the requirements and qualifications necessary for academic employment, training, or financial support.
- Provide graduate students on assistantships (GA, GTA, GRA) with a written agreement, as well as the terms and conditions of any graduate-assistant appointments (see Presidential Policy Memo # 14 & 126).
- Inform graduate students that they must work an average of 20 hours/week for those individuals on full assistantship (for half time assistantship, 10 hours/week would be expected) and that these hours are in addition to the hours needed for coursework and individual research.
- Inform graduate-student assistants of academic or other institutional policies affecting their role as employees.
- Inform graduate students of available funding sources, including departmental or program of study sources of funding.
- If departmental funding is not available, assist graduate students in seeking assistantships and other funding sources outside of the home department or program. Should a funding source be terminated through no fault of the graduate student, the department should make reasonable effort to find alternative funding for that student.
- Recognize that international students are strictly limited by immigration law to 20 hours of employment per week (see IGSS website).

- Recognize that international students do not have the same financial resources available to them as domestic students (e.g., federal financial aid, loans).

Community
It is expected that the department or program will:
- Create a collegial learning environment in which faculty and students work together in mutual respect and collaboration.
- Establish an environment in which members of diverse communities feel welcome and honored.
- Provide specific mechanisms for appeal or complaint when standards of collegiality or fairness may have been violated; see the complaint/appeals process.

Expectations for Graduate Education, Graduate School

The Graduate School is responsible for the development, administration, and evaluation of graduate education throughout the university. As such, the Graduate School works in partnership with the faculty, program chairs, and department heads to maintain and further the high quality of graduate education at Virginia Tech. In addition, the IGSS staff in the Graduate School provides immigration information and support to international students.

Progress Toward Degree
It is expected that the Graduate School will:
- Review the plans of study submitted by each graduate student to ensure that the plan contains sufficient credits to obtain the desired graduate degree.
- Monitor graduate students' progress toward degrees and regularly inform students of their progress.
- Maintain comprehensive data on student completion rates, time to degree, placement in professional employment, and attrition.

Research and Ethics
It is expected that the Graduate School will:
- Develop graduate training programs which best serve the interests of both faculty and graduate students at Virginia Tech.
- Provide support to departments, programs, and units to develop high quality graduate programs that excel in research, teaching, and community service.
- Facilitate, wherever possible, development of interdisciplinary research and training programs which push the boundaries of current disciplinary fields and agendas.
- Administer the Graduate Honor Code.
- Provide guidance on ethics and scholarly integrity

Teaching and Training

Expectations for Graduate Education
Virginia Tech Graduate School, graduateschool.vt.edu
Updated May 2017

It is expected that the Graduate School will:
- Ensure that individual graduate programs offer a curriculum of graduate instruction to equip students with the knowledge and skills they need for the broad array of postgraduate careers they may wish to pursue.
- Ensure that all aspects of the graduate program conform to the highest academic standards and provide mechanisms of redress when they fall below those standards.
- Ensure that appropriate mechanisms are in place, both centrally and in individual degree programs, to aid in successful inclusion of international students to academic life in the U.S. and at Virginia Tech.

Professional Development
It is expected that the Graduate School will:
- Help develop support services in the Graduate School and communicate about services provided by other programs at Virginia Tech (e.g., Faculty Development Institute, the Center for Instructional Development and Educational Research, the Graduate Education Development Institute) that enhance the professional, academic, and scholarly interests of graduate students.
- Provide courses and opportunities for graduate students to better prepare themselves for academic and nonacademic careers (e.g., preparing the future professoriate, preparing the career professional).
- Provide education and training for graduate students who serve as GTAs.
- Assist with additional education programs and opportunities such as interdisciplinary research and education, ethics and scholarly integrity, global perspectives, civic engagement, and more.

Assistantships and Financial Support
It is expected that the Graduate School will:
- Provide guidance on financial and other mechanisms to support students in their pursuit of graduate degrees.
- Communicate opportunities for graduate students at Virginia Tech, including scholarships, assistantships, grant opportunities, employment opportunities, and nominations for graduate-student awards.

Community
It is expected that the Graduate School will:
- Promote a collegial climate for graduate education through academic, social, and community programs.
- Establish an environment in which members of diverse communities feel welcome and honored.
- Maintain a comprehensive description of the goals and expectations of individual graduate programs.

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- Provide clear and appropriate avenues of redress whenever particular faculty members' or students' experiences fall short of the expectations articulated in this document.

Expectations for Graduate Education, Complaints and Appeals

http://graduateschool.vt.edu/academics/expectations/expectations-for-graduate-education-overview/complaints-and-appeals.html

Graduate education is built upon establishing and maintaining strong, collaborative student-faculty relationships. As such, the university provides informal and formal means for graduate students to address concerns that arise in the academic setting, with the goal of resolving disputes in a fair, collegial manner. Concerns may arise in a number of areas, including academic evaluation and/or progress, assistantship requirements and/or termination, academic freedom, and professional misconduct, among others. In addition, graduate students may surface concerns about issues related to professional or scholarly expectations, such as authorship and civility. These issues involve subjectivity and, therefore, demand sensitivity and respect for all participants.

Informal Resolution
The university strongly encourages students to explore all available informal avenues for resolving concerns before filing a formal complaint/appeal. First, students are encouraged to familiarize themselves with university, Graduate-School, and department-level polices that may affect or involve issues of concern. Graduate students may consult with the Graduate Dean, who has an open-door policy, the Graduate School Ombudsperson, and other offices for advice on polices and on resolving their concerns and communicating with other involved parties.

Informal Steps and Resources
Graduate students may use one or a combination of these resources at any point in the resolution process.

Discussions with involved parties
Whenever possible, graduate students are encouraged to discuss concerns directly with the person(s) involved. The university recognizes that these conversations can be difficult and, therefore, provides resources, such as the Graduate Student Ombudsperson and other offices to help students learn how to handle these situations.

Discussions with advisor, department head, or graduate program director
Students who feel they need help finding resolution or believe that departmental policy or practice is contributing to the issue of concern may discuss the matter with their advisor, department head and/or graduate program director.

Confidential Discussion with Graduate Student Ombudsperson
The Graduate Student Ombudsperson, with an office in the Graduate Life Center, is an advocate for fairness for graduate students who acts as a source of information and referral, aids in answering individual's questions, and provides an impartial "safe place" for graduate students' voices to be heard. Confidentiality, neutrality, informality, and independence are the core principles of the ombudsperson's practice. The ombudsperson will not disclose names or other information about visitors without permission. However, the office does provide information on visitor statistics and issue trends to university administrators to foster improvements in policy, practice, and climate for graduate students. The Office of the Graduate Student Ombudsperson offers support for graduate students who want help developing options for addressing their particular concerns or who may wish to consider learning how to deal with problems on their own. The ombudsperson does not accept formal complaints or notice on behalf of the university but can provide information on how to submit them.

Discussion with Graduate School
The Graduate School, including staff, associate deans, and the dean, is a resource for graduate students for discussing any and all concerns. The graduate dean has an open-door policy and welcomes students to visit her to discuss their concerns, questions, and experiences. The dean will maintain confidentiality whenever possible.

Formal Resolution
If, after attempting to resolve a concern through informal avenues, the matter remains unreconciled, students have the option to file a formal complaint/appeal. For this process, a complaint/appeal is defined as a concern brought forward by a graduate student alleging a violation, misinterpretation, or incorrect application of a policy, procedure, or practice of the university that directly affects the student. Some examples of valid issues for filing a complaint/appeal include the following:
- Improper evaluation of work
- Excessive work requirements for assistantships
- Improper termination from assistantship
- Improper termination from academic program
- Retaliation
- Violations of academic freedom
- Professional misconduct/mistreatment by a member of the faculty or staff that violates professional behavior as outlined in the Faculty Handbook or Human Resources policies.

Issues that are not open to complaint/appeal include the following:
- Those items falling within the jurisdiction of other university policies and procedures (for example, complaints of unlawful harassment and discrimination, research or scholarly misconduct; see below for more information)
- Policies published by the university
- Routine assignment of university resources (funding, parking, etc.)

<u>Formal Steps</u>

Step One: Department-Level Complaint/Appeal

1. The graduate student must write a formal letter of complaint/appeal to the department head (the graduate program director may also be involved at this level). If the department head is a party to the grievance, the dean of the academic college will assume this responsibility.

2. The department head, in consultation with the college dean, shall take all reasonable and proper actions to resolve the question at the departmental level. The student shall be informed in writing of the results no later than one month after the appeal to the department head. In some matters, the Faculty Handbook provides additional relevant information, for example, "the assigning of grades is the responsibility of the individual instructor in every case. The basis on which grades are assigned rests on his/her judgment alone….").

Step Two: University-Level Complaint/Appeal

Should students believe that their rights were abridged at the departmental level on procedural grounds, they may file a complaint/appeal with the Dean of the Graduate School.

1. In a written statement to the dean, the aggrieved student must clearly state the substance of the complaint/appeal.

2. The dean of the Graduate School shall take all reasonable and proper actions to resolve the question or refer it directly to the Graduate Appeals Committee for its review. As a standing committee of the Commission on Graduate Studies and Policies, this committee will consist of three faculty members and one graduate student. For each case, if necessary, the dean shall appoint to the committee one additional faculty member knowledgeable in the academic area of the complaint/appeal.

3. The review by the Graduate Appeals Committee will have available to it all pertinent information in the student's record in the university and:
   - the department's policy statement concerning its degree expectations
   - a summary of the department's action on the appeal
   - copies of the student's statement to the dean of the Graduate School recording the student's view of alleged irregularities (i.e., the basis for university appeal).

4. The Graduate Appeals Committee may hold a formal hearing on complaint/appeals referred to it by the dean of the Graduate School. The hearing will be conducted with the following procedural safeguards:
   - All parties to the dispute will be notified of the time and place of the hearing at least 48 hours in advance;
   - The aggrieved student will be permitted, if the student chooses, to invite a member of the faculty or student body to represent him/her in the hearing;
   - All parties in the dispute will be given full opportunity to testify and to present such evidence or witnesses as seem relevant;
   - All matters on which the finding will be based must be introduced into evidence at the hearing.

5. The Graduate Student Appeals Committee will make a recommendation to the Dean of the Graduate School, which will be acted upon by the Dean of the Graduate School in

consultation with the provost. 6. The Dean of the Graduate School will convey the committee's recommendation and the final disposition of the matter to all concerned parties.

Other University Policies, Processes, and Procedures

Sexual Harassment or Discriminatory Harassment
- Concerns resulting from alleged sexual harassment and discriminatory harassment by a member of the faculty or staff should be addressed to the Office of Equity and Access.
- Concerns resulting from alleged sexual harassment and discriminatory harassment by a member of the student body should be addressed to the Office of Student Conduct.

Research or Scholarly Misconduct
- Concerns resulting from alleged research or scholarly misconduct by faculty, staff, or students should be referred to the Office of Research Integrity.
- Concerns resulting from alleged academic misconduct by graduate students should be referred to the Graduate Honor System.

Conflict of Interest
- Concerns about conflict of interest should be referred to each college's associate dean for research or the university's COI officer, as outlined in the university's conflict-of-interest policies and procedures.

Mentoring

Mentoring plays an integral part of the professional growth and development of graduate students at Virginia Tech. Mentoring is defined in several ways from broad based support of faculty, staff and fellow student in the university community to direct one-on-one advising by the students' academic advising committee. At the heart of the process of effective mentoring is the relationship between mentors and students. This involves assessing the current level of knowledge held by students, as well as evaluating study habits and identifying any impediments to the professional development process that may be present. Once mentors have a basic understanding of the needs of the students, it is possible to individually tailor the mentoring process.

Mentors could be anyone who show special interest in the growth of the student and their role goes far beyond simple instructions outside the classroom. Similarly, a graduate student could have multiple mentors including their academic advising faculty, staff, community leaders, and peers. Mentors should: be passionate about and show enthusiasm toward students' interests; be willing to invest time and effort in helping the student mentee; be sensitive to the needs and concerns of students; appreciate individual and cultural differences; show respect regardless of the status of the mentees; and be well rounded in their knowledge and widely receptive of new

ideas. Mentors are sensitive to mentees' needs both professionally and personally, such as finding the right balance between work and family responsibilities, coping with cultural transitions after a move from a different part of the world, developing confidence in a culture that may not be welcoming, or opposing ethnic or gender bias if it arises. Academic mentors also will make sure students are aware of any resources that may prove helpful in the professional development process. If appropriate, academic mentors may accompany students to the specific type of resources they need. Mentors could be other students enrolled at the same institution of learning. Since the relationship is more peer-to-peer, student mentees are often more open to the suggestions of the student mentors. Often, student mentors can connect and support student mentees in ways that are not possible through faculty or staff mentoring relationships.

Academic mentors serve as role models for students engaged in their learning process, providing positive examples in attitude and conflict resolution, serving as advocates and confidants to the students, and ensuring students are aware of various resources that are available that may prove helpful in their professional development process. The actions of good mentors include: being available when needed (open door policy); providing timely advice that is clear and explicit; offering inspiration and optimism; being able to balance direction and self-direction; being a good listener; and helping students navigate and secure needed resources.

Choosing Mentors
Mentors may be assigned to graduate students by the academic departments or sought out by students who sense their need for support to successfully pursue a course of study. Students should have the option of changing mentors or advisors without repercussion. In addition to seeking mentors, graduate students can also serve as mentors for undergraduate students and help them become successful professionals and future graduate students.