

Master of Natural Resources

Diversity and Inclusion Plan

Updated October 2024

Below is a description of the ways that the Master of Natural Resources (MNR) graduate degree programs will strategically advance the Graduate School's Diversity and Inclusion goals.

The Commission on Graduate Studies and Policies Resolution 2017-18A requires that the following topics be addressed:

- A. The Virginia Tech Principles of Community as they apply to the valuing of human diversity and inclusion.
- B. The impact that personal actions and words have on self, others, and the communities – university, national, and global – in which they live; issues of privilege, bias, power, prejudice, and discrimination concepts of multiple personal, social, and cultural identities.
- C. Available avenues of redress and our shared responsibilities as active by-standers.
- D. The process of individual introspection required both to understand one's own forms of implicit or unconscious bias to create inclusive environments.

MNR graduates will meet these requirements in the following ways:

Part I: Complete Global Issues in Environmental Sustainability (NR 5114).

Part I addresses the following two topics required by the Commission on Graduate Studies and Policies Resolution 2017-18A:

- The impact that personal actions and words have on self, others, and the communities – university, national, and global – in which they live; issues of privilege, bias, power, prejudice, and discrimination concepts of multiple personal, social, and cultural identities.
- The process of individual introspection required both to understand one's own forms of implicit or unconscious bias to create inclusive environments.

The purpose of this core course is to help students develop the competencies they need to situate their professional work in a variety of cultural contexts, and to understand sustainability challenges from different perspectives and how such challenges reflect issues of privilege, bias, power, prejudice, and discrimination. The challenges and rewards of working with people of different cultures is a key focus. Students study leadership, teamwork, project management, and problem-solving relevant to working with people that have cultural backgrounds different from their own.

As part of this course, students complete an intercultural competency assessment (such as the Intercultural Development Inventory or Culture Wizard) and provide intercultural training modules, especially as relevant to engaging diverse stakeholders, environmental justice topics,

and study abroad and related international experiences. The ability to engage in effective and appropriate intercultural communication is widely recognized to be predicated on one's behavioral, affective, and cognitive skills (Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017; Bennett & Bennett, 2004). Many models attempt to operationalize intercultural competence using arrays of personal attributes associated with what are thought to be relevant cognitive, affective, and behavioral skills (Hammer, 2015). Examples of personal attributes that could be included in such models are the ability to problem-solve, empathize, and relate to others.

According to constructivist learning theory, learning occurs when individuals interact with the world around them and construct knowledge based on their perceptions of their experiences (Bennett, 2012). Likewise, an individual's culture is a result of their lived experiences. Individuals have complex cognitive structures, or mental models, for perceiving their own culture. An individual's experience with cultural differences and their need to communicate across those differences, leads to the development of cognitive structures that support increasingly complex perceptions of "otherness" (Bennett & Bennett, 2004). As one's experience of cultural difference becomes more complex, they develop increased intercultural competence (Bennett & Bennett, 2004; Bennett, 2012; Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003).

Students in the Global Issues in Environmental Sustainability course also engage in learning experiences that create disequilibrium and act as catalysts for students' critical self-reflection (Cranton, 2016; Fosnot & Perry, 1996). The opportunities are learner-centered and interactive, allowing students to learn in concert with their peers through effective discourse and group problem solving (Cranton, 2016; Mezirow, 1997).

Students also engage in reflection, which involves an active assessment and evaluation of one's assumptions, and the opportunity to engage in reflective dialog with others so that one can assess and validate their assumptions (Cranton, 2002; Mezirow, 1991). Through shared reflection, students gain the ability to understand perspectives different from their own and begin to appreciate another's reality (Senge, Hamilton, & Kania, 2015). In general, social discourse is how adults sort through their understanding of an experience, making learning a social process and an important element of transformative learning pedagogy (Mezirow, 1997).

Students who are unable to participate in the study abroad component of the Global Issues in Environmental Sustainability course (e.g., for reasons that include medical issues, physical limitations, active military service, and security clearances) will substitute a 3-credit hour Independent Study project focused on one of the locations offered in the academic term of their choice. These students will work one-on-one with a Global Issues in Environmental Sustainability instructor, who will help them to identify an appropriate project and deliverable(s), set a schedule and milestones, and provide mentoring and guidance. As part of their Independent Study, these students will also complete the intercultural competency assessment.

Part II: Master of Natural Resources students will complete training [modules](#) required by Virginia Tech's Office of Inclusion and Diversity, including the following:

- Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging

- Sexual Assault Prevention for Graduates

Part III: Upon enrollment in the Master of Natural Resources, students are also provided with the Virginia Tech Principles of Community Document as well as the following statement. The information is provided on the Online MNR orientation website and the main Executive MNR page, both accessible via Canvas.

Part III addresses the following topics required by the Commission on Graduate Studies and Policies Resolution 2017-18A:

- The Virginia Tech Principles of Community as they apply to the valuing of human diversity and inclusion.
- Available avenues of redress and our shared responsibilities as active by-standers.

The Virginia Tech Graduate School and Master of Natural Resources programs encourage graduate students to be active bystanders and to report academic bullying when they witness it. Academic bullying manifests in many ways and can include intimidation, humiliation, belittlement, embarrassment and undermining one's authority. Academic bullying also includes behaviors or comments that disregard one's concerns, ignore contributions, minimize one's efforts in the eyes of colleagues, and other means of exclusion or withholding information. Academic bullying occurs throughout the academic or professional space, in the classroom, in meetings, at conferences, in the laboratory setting, in face-to-face interactions, and of course through email and social media.

Through the Disrupting Academic Bullying Initiative, the Graduate School has created resources to help members of the VT community identify academic bullying and to report it through the [Disrupting Academic Bullying Reporting Form](#).

Part IV: Upon enrollment in the Master of Natural Resources, students are provided with the following information and appropriate channels for redress. The information is provided on the Online MNR orientation website and the main Executive MNR page, both accessible via Canvas.

Part IV addresses the following topic required by the Commission on Graduate Studies and Policies Resolution 2017-18A:

- Available avenues of redress and our shared responsibilities as active by-standers.

Complaints about professional misconduct (integrity and civility) are concerns of both the targets of those complaints and of the department. As such, they are not appropriate topics of informal discussion alone. Students giving voice to complaints of misconduct should, in a timely fashion, initiate processes in which the department and the targets of the complaints would have opportunities to respond. Students can initiate such processes by sharing complaints with departmental or university authorities, as listed below.

Center Leadership / Program Directors: Concerns about graduate student integrity and civility and faculty conduct, all of which remain in confidence other than sexual harassment/assault, mention of which must result in a phone call to Human Resources Title IX coordinators.

Emily Talley, Director, Center for Leadership in Global Sustainability

Kieran Lindsey: Program Director, Online MNR

David Robertson: Program Director, Executive MNR

Graduate Student Ombudsperson: Concerns related to treatment by others, including officials, in the university, all of which remain in confidence other than sexual harassment/assault, mention of which must result in a phone call to Human Resources, Title IX coordinators.

Student Conduct, in the Dean of Students Office: Reports of concerns about student conduct, including disruption, threats, incivility, and harassment.

Graduate Honor System: Reports of violations of academic integrity.

Human Resources, Title IX: Reports of sexual harassment / assault. Reports of sexual harassment / assault result in HR officer outreach to alleged victims, who then choose whether to authorize continued investigation.

Graduate School Appeal Process

For confidential discussions of issues of civility, students may contact:

The Women's Center: Concerns about gendered conduct, sexual assault, sexual harassment.

OR

Cook Counseling Center

Part V: Complete Scholarly Ethics and Integrity Module

The Graduate School at Virginia Tech requires that all students successfully complete basic training on Scholarly Ethics and Integrity to graduate. Therefore, modules and a quiz have been created specifically for students in the Master of Natural Resources to satisfy this requirement.

The training includes the following required topics:

1. Plagiarism and other violations of the Graduate Honor Code;
2. Proper use of citation of existing research and scholarship, accurate reporting and ownership of findings, and acknowledgement of contributions to the work;
3. Ethical standards in teaching, mentoring, and professional activities;
4. Guidelines for determination of authorship;
5. Available avenues for reporting alleged misconduct; and,

6. Appropriate research protocols involving human and animal subjects.

All MNR graduate students will have the opportunity to participate in an international experience as part of their curriculum and will therefore collaborate with professionals in different cultural contexts, where ethical standards may differ from professional standards in the United States. As such, it is essential that students be well prepared to address such occurrences. As such, the following topics will be covered by faculty in specific cultural competency modules on an as needed basis:

1. Discipline or field specific professional ethics
2. Guidelines for maintaining confidentiality (and, where relevant, anonymity) when necessary

Scholarly Ethics and Integrity illustrates the importance of a professional code of conduct, behavior, and decision-making surrounding scholarly activities including teaching, research, and mentorship that are undertaken while affiliated with the university. The idea of scholarly ethics includes the application of the rules and codes of conduct regarding the collection and reporting of data, handling of research subjects, peer review and research collaboration, intellectual property and sensitive information, and publication.

As such, our organization developed this online module as an "Ethics and Integrity Requirement" to the curriculum pursuant to the Virginia Tech Commission on Graduate Studies and Policies Resolution 2012-13B (see link below).

Commission on Graduate Studies and Policies

Resolution 2012-13B

[Resolution to Include a Scholarly Ethics and Integrity Component in Graduate Education \(links to an external site\).](#)

References

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