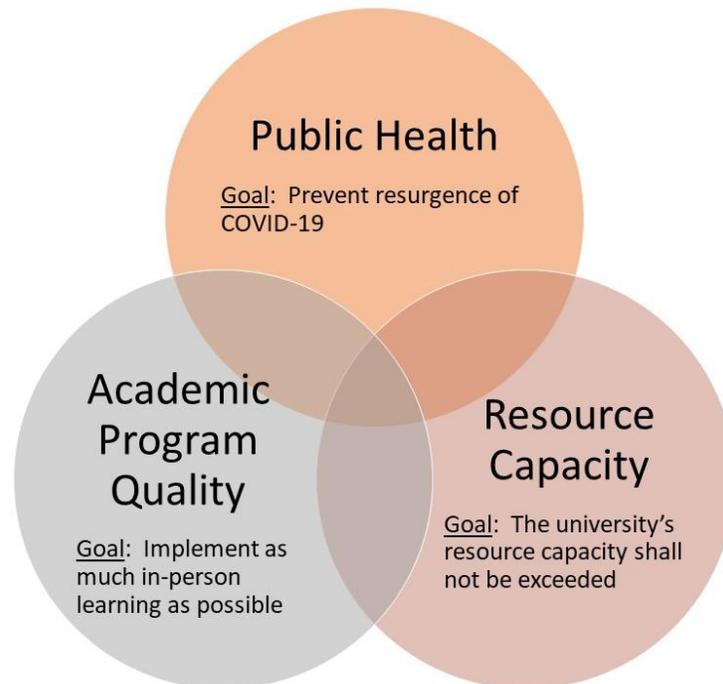


Graduate School Academic Plan for Fall 2020

Overall goal: The goal of the Graduate School in issuing this plan is to serve the needs of the graduate community, especially graduate students across university locations, in Fall Semester, 2020 while addressing the health and safety concerns associated with COVID-19. The Graduate School will operate by balancing the three goals shown in the diagram below.



Alignment:

- *Public health –*
 - The Graduate School will operate in alignment with public health guidelines for the health and safety of all Graduate School employees and members of the graduate community, especially graduate students.
 - We will work with each employee (faculty, staff, graduate assistants) regarding the options for work location and responsibilities including telework and mindful of the need for PPE.
 - We will ensure that the Graduate School offices and operational spaces follow the CDC guidelines; employees will sign the commitment document.
 - We will work with graduate program directors and graduate coordinators to implement the “Guidelines for Graduate Education during COVID-19” (Available on Graduate School website).

- *Academic program –*
 - We will uphold the standards for graduate education at VT while also reviewing modifications/accommodations to allow for academic progress and timely degree completion.
 - We have issued “Guidelines for Graduate Education during COVID-19” and will work closely with departments and programs on issues involving graduate student research and teaching including assistantships. Regular communication with the graduate education community will occur through Dean’s messages, FAQs, and meetings with constituency groups.
 - Graduate School staff will continue to deliver quality services to graduate students (recruitment, admissions, academic progress, student services, inclusion, and more) while protecting the health of all involved.
 - GRAD and other courses will follow instructional guidelines.
- *Resource capacity –*
 - We will follow University guidance regarding Faculty and staff FTEs, educational spaces, class scheduling time, and course preparation time. Resources will be sufficient to deliver academic programs, academic program support and student support services in a sustainable manner.
 - The Graduate School will procure supplies and equipment to enable operation in a manner that protects public health, including that of faculty, staff, and students.
 - Graduate assistants, faculty, staff, and administrators are critical to the University’s success and the graduate school will prioritize their retention.

The Graduate School will be open for normal working hours and adhere to the University fall semester schedule as described and adjust our deadlines, activities and programs. In addition, the Graduate School will contribute to the University’s overall goal of achieving 30% of the graduate education experience “in person” in support of the Graduate School’s commitment to sustaining an affirming, inclusive global graduate community. To do so, the following will be undertaken and modifications as appropriate will be pursued:

- The Graduate School and the Graduate Life Center will open in August in accordance with University guidance and in coordination with SECL. Staff will return or select telework by August 3rd. Graduate students will have access to the Graduate School and Graduate Life Center including the computer lab, study rooms and the health/wellness room
- Beginning August, Cook Counseling Center will have an embedded counselor in the GLC during the weekdays.

- The Graduate School will reorganize the Blacksburg Graduate School offices and work stations to have two primary public areas: Dean’s suite and 120 welcome space
- GRAD courses will continue to be offered in alignment with health and safety guidelines; all GRAD courses will allow students to access the course remotely or through zoom
- Graduate School will continue to adhere to the academic standards and professional behaviors articulated in the Expectations for Graduate Education document and work with department and programs to do the same. Graduate School policies and procedures will be followed. As appropriate exceptions to policy will be considered such as:
 - Extend deadline for arrival on campus for international graduate students
 - Extend deadline for taking final examinations under SSDE with reduced enrollment
 - more to be determined
- All programs, workshops, and regularly scheduled events will be reviewed and modified as appropriate. These include but are not limited to the following:
 - GTA workshop (virtual)
 - New graduate student orientation (virtual offerings)
 - Cultural diversity and inclusion community events
 - Week of Welcome events including welcome back BBQ (TBD)
 - Campus tours to include virtual tours
 - Recruitment fairs to include virtual
 - Ongoing events such as “with the Dean” series, professional development workshops, GLC weekly café will be offered and modified as appropriate
 - Activities and meetings offered by student organizations (e.g., VT_GrATE, GSA) will be modified appropriately.
- Meetings regularly held in the Graduate Life Center or in conjunction with the Graduate School will include if not entirely virtual attendance such as:
 - Commission on Graduate & Professional Studies and Policy
 - Graduate Program Directors workshop
 - Graduate Student Assembly
 - And others to be determined more
- Communicate and provide updates to the Graduate Community via the website, social media platforms, emails and other communications portals to ensure students, faculty, staff and administrators have accurate and up-to-date information, provided in an accessible format.

- The Graduate School will actively engage with ongoing working groups to enhance the experiences for graduate students such as:
 - Fall Teaching & learning - graduate students and GTAs
 - Office of Research and Innovation - graduate students and GRAs
 - Innovation campus planning groups
 - Foreign Influence task force
 - Cranwell International Center
 - Others to be determined
- Little Hokies Hangout will begin operations on July 8th and will abide by all health and safety regulations

Graduate School Operations in the DC Area

The DC Area is fundamentally different from Blacksburg in a number of ways.

- The DC Area is a dense urban interstate metroplex with three international airports and an extensive public transit infrastructure, not an isolated town in rural Virginia.
- With the exception of the Gallery in Alexandria, the DC Area has no residential living space. Students live in the wider community and are not concentrated in any geographic area. Because of the high cost of housing, many students are in multi-person housing. These factors make it impossible to provide space for students to self-isolate in the event of a confirmed case or an outbreak.
- Many students attend school part-time and work full-time. Thus, the number and diversity of potential contacts for an individual student could be much higher than a student living in Blacksburg.
- Many students only come to a VT site to attend a class.
- Many students in the DC Area are older and have children in K-12 education. This represents another significant vector for community transmission of disease.
- The DC Area was a “hotspot” for COVID-19 in the past and there is no reason to believe that it will not become one again in the event of a disease resurgence.

For these reasons, the university response to COVID-19 should be modified to reflect the realities of the DC Area.

A second important factor to consider is that in the DC Area, the Graduate School has a significant operational role at the Northern Virginia Center in Falls Church. Functional domains include IT, Facilities, Parking & Transportation, Emergency Management, Classroom Scheduling and A/V Support.

Below are key principles we are following

The Northern Virginia Center general assignment classrooms will be managed according to guidelines from the Registrar regarding capacity and configurations. Where possible, we will allow for non-standard class meeting times to reflect the desires of academic programs.

Online learning/events should be the default choice during the Fall 2020 semester. Every Graduate School program during Fall 2020 will be offered online, even if an in-person option is also available. Although the Graduate School should not dictate how individual academic programs teach their classes, we can take an active role in providing training and support for online instruction, lecture capture, and live streaming of lectures. In keeping with the resource capacity of the university and the expectations set by the Registrar, faculty will be given training in the use of instructional technology, but will be expected to be self-sufficient. In other words, there will not be a staff person or GTA sitting in every classroom to manage the technology.

Employees will telework most of the time. For student-facing positions, we are modifying the physical environment to de-densify gathering spaces and provide shielding to limit virus transmission. We will implement an online appointment system to manage student walk-in traffic so that students do not need to queue up or congregate in waiting rooms. Student advisors will have a defined schedule of when they are available in-person to allow students to plan their visits. Similarly, we will modify other processes such as key distribution to minimize in-person contact.

In order to limit the potential for virus transmission, the Northern Virginia Center will only provide space for academic classes or university events.