Create Your Own Adventure

The Graduate School salutes Virginia Tech's outstanding graduate students, graduate advisors, and graduate and research faculty and staff for their contributions to quality graduate education.

The **Outstanding Mentor** awards recognize one faculty member from each college for their role in supporting, encouraging, and promoting a positive and inclusive scholarly and teaching environment and providing guidance and motivation in the context of graduate students' interests, passions, and personal circumstances. Winners are selected by each college.

Outstanding Mentor
Agriculture and Life Sciences

Justin Lemkul
Biochemistry

Dr. Lemkul exhibits exemplary mentorship, dedication to student success, and an unmatched commitment to creating a positive and inclusive academic environment.

By providing exceptional formalized training and personal support, Dr. Lemkul has helped students achieve outstanding careers in a diverse array of scientific disciplines within the government, biochemistry education, and the pharmaceutical industry.

His influence extends far beyond students in his lab, leaving an unforgettable mark on the lives and careers of the graduate students he mentors and works with.

Graduate Education Week 2025

Outstanding Mentor
Architecture, Arts, and Design

Nate King

School of Visual Arts

Nate King was enthusiastically nominated for this award by four of his graduate students. In their nomination letters, each spoke specifically of Nate's unmatched personal attention and care, commitment to their artistic success and development, that he 'pushed me to write more and think further’.

They wrote of his inclusive and constructive critique methods, that he makes sure that their voices are seen and heard, of the impacts of his individualized and collective mentorship. In describing his impact, one describes it as having 'transformed my graduate experience... allowing me to approach my work with newfound authenticity... nurturing both [my} intellectual and artistic growth.' One of Nate's international students cites Nate as 'instrumental in reigniting my creative spark... making graduate school a transformative journey for me.’

Outstanding Mentor
Engineering

Chris Brown

Computer Science

Dr. Chris Brown is a full-time faculty member whose dedication to graduate mentorship has profoundly shaped the academic and professional journeys of his students.

His commitment to student learning, research excellence, and professional development aligns seamlessly with the award criteria, making him an exceptional nominee for this honor. He fosters a rigorous yet supportive research and teaching environment where students from diverse backgrounds thrive. His ability to cultivate a culture of high expectations, paired with genuine care for his students' well-being, has made his lab a space where innovation and collaboration flourish.

Beyond academic guidance, Dr. Brown is deeply invested in the overall success of his students. He actively helps them identify funding opportunities, connects them with key academic and industry professionals, and provides thoughtful career advice. His influence on student research is evident in their success.

Graduate Education Week 2025

Outstanding Mentor
Liberal Arts & Human Sciences

Matthew Fullen

Education

Excerpts from statement by Dr. Fullen:

“As a faculty advisor and mentor to graduate students at Virginia Tech, my central aim has been to equip my students with the skills and self-efficacy to navigate real world issues, such as the legacy of the Medicare mental health coverage gap described above.

I provide mentorship in the areas of promoting client and professional advocacy, developing an awareness of the intersection of mental health and aging, and cultivating the ability to engage the realm of mental health policy in pursuit of systemic change.

Moreover, I greatly value apprenticeship in my approach to advising and mentorship. I want students to have hands-on experiences with scholarship, sponsored research, public policy, professional leadership, and clinical practice, all to improve the counseling profession’s support of mental health and aging.”

Graduate Education Week 2025

Outstanding Mentor
Natural Resources & Environment

Thomas Adam Coates

Forest Resources & Environmental Conservation

Adam devotes significant time to his graduate students to ensure they are successful both in the classroom and in the field. This involves weekly individual meetings with his many students to discuss any issues they may be facing, including personal ones.

He also closely supervises his students in the field to ensure they are equipped to handle challenges encountered during field season. Adam's students have produced 17 peer-reviewed publications with graduate students listed as first author. He also encourages and supports his students to present their research at conferences and workshops. Results from 30 student-led projects have been presented in professional conference settings.

His commitment to his students exists beyond the classroom; this is the reason his students excel academically and professionally.

Graduate Education Week 2025

Outstanding Mentors
Science

Birgit Scharf

Biological Sciences

Professor Scharf demonstrates a selfless and dedicated approach to mentoring students implementing strategies to ensure the overall well-being and success of her students.

She has mentored a total of 16 graduate students, 4 postdocs and 50 undergraduate students (with 25 of these pursuing graduate studies). Her students have successfully pursued a variety of career paths in publish health, biotechnology, pharmaceuticals as well as in academia, government agencies and education. Not only does Professor Scharf ensure the success of her students, but she also demonstrated her own success as a scholar.

She has published 84 peer-reviewed publications, 4 reviews and 3 book chapters. She has been the recipient of numerous grants including an NSF Career Award, Jeffress Memorial Trust and VT COS Dean's Discovery Award.

Graduate Education Week 2025

The **Outstanding Advising/Mentoring Award** recognizes one faculty/staff member who helps in navigating the graduate school system, policies, and procedures, services as an advocate for graduate students, and contributions to a safe, supportive, student-centered, and inclusive environment.

This person shows exemplary guidance toward academic and/or professional success through high-quality information and advice and has contributed to a positive student experience (e.g., developing and implementing programs that support professional and soft-skill development; creating resources that improve student satisfaction; advising and supporting student organization(s).)

Outstanding Advising/Mentoring Award

AP Faculty/Staff

Rabeya Rahman

Master of Information Technology Department

From award nomination letter from a student

“I feel especially fortunate to have had Rabeya Rahman as my administrative advisor from 2022 to 2024.

Her unwavering support, kindness and dedication were truly invaluable to my success. Ms. Rahman was behind me every step of the way, always treating me - and every student - with respect, love and compassion.

I cannot imagine completing such a complex and rigorous program without her guidance. Her ability to make students feel heard and supported is unmatched and she has been a cornerstone of the VT-MIT experience for so many of us.”

Graduate Education Week 2025

For the **Outstanding Master's and Doctoral Student awards**, each college sets its own criteria and selection process. Considerations include demonstrated excellence in one or more of the university's tripartite mission of teaching, research, and outreach.

Outstanding Master's Student
Agriculture and Life Sciences

Juan Romero

School of Plant and Environmental Sciences

Juan Romero is recognized for his groundbreaking work in weed management.

Raised on a coffee plantation in Honduras, Romero's research is driven by a personal mission to innovate sustainable agricultural practices. Over the past 1.5 years, he has published twenty scientific abstracts, given twelve talks, and co-authored two journal articles, with three more in progress.

His research on laser, cryogenic, and thermal weed control methods has not only earned him four top-three awards at various scientific meetings but also secured a significant $200,000 research collaboration with a robotics company.

Romero's contributions extend beyond academia, as he has also developed translated educational materials for Virginia Cooperative Extension, furthering the reach of agricultural knowledge. His work promises to revolutionize selective weed control, addressing both productivity and environmental concerns in agriculture.

Graduate Education Week 2025

Outstanding Doctoral Student
Agriculture and Life Sciences

Navdeep Godara

School of Plant and Environmental Sciences

Navdeep Godara, a doctoral student at Virginia Tech since June 2022, has been recognized for his outstanding contributions to turfgrass weed science.

Transitioning from crop science, Navdeep's research has innovatively explored the impact of crop protection products on UV floral reflectance of weedy flowers in turfgrass, aiming to protect pollinators from pesticide exposure. His work involves advanced UV imaging and radiometry to develop pollinator deterrents, showcasing significant methodological innovation.

Navdeep has published 18 peer-reviewed articles, with 53 citations since 2022, and has actively engaged with the academic community through 63 abstracts earning 14 presentation awards, 16 extension talks, and roles in seven scientific society committees. His research not only promises to enhance turfgrass management but also has broader implications for agricultural practices and biodiversity.

With a PhD defense scheduled for March, Navdeep has already secured an Assistant Professor position at North Carolina State University, highlighting his rapid academic progression and leadership in the field.

Graduate Education Week 2025

Outstanding Master's Student
Architecture, Arts and Design

Megan Wysocki
Architecture

Megan has consistently demonstrated exceptional research skills, dedication, and creativity. Her work embraces cutting-edge approaches in architectural acoustics and aims to advance evidence-based design practices for indoor spaces.

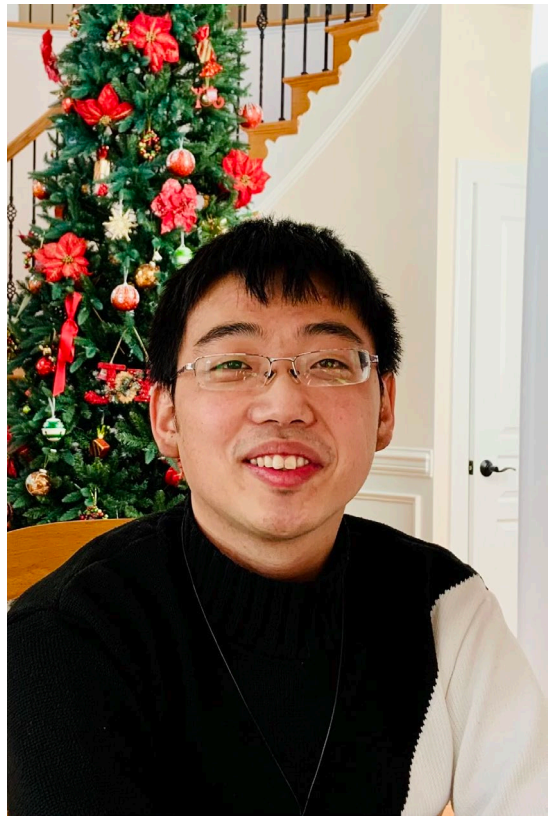
Her integration of innovative technology into her research is particularly noteworthy. She has been invited to present her work at the International Congress of Acoustics in New Orleans, LA, in May 2025. Megan's research bridges science, technology, and design.

Her innovative methods have the potential to inform design practices for indoor environments, influencing spaces that prioritize health, productivity, and cognitive restoration. Her ability to synthesize advanced technologies with practical applications exemplifies the excellence we strive for at Virginia Tech.

Graduate Education Week 2025

Outstanding Doctoral Student
Architecture, Arts and Design

Tianming Zhao
Architecture



Tianming Zhao is a Ph.D. candidate in architectural history and theory, who has made outstanding contributions in research, teaching, and service.

His dissertation research shines a new light on one of America's best known architects, Frank Lloyd Wright, by examining Wright's connections to China, which have gone nearly unrecognized. Tianming has already been selected to present his research at Virginia Tech and Georgia Tech, to present his paper at the 2023 international WAAC Frascari VI Symposium, and is publishing a revised version as a book chapter in Finishing in Architecture: Polishing, Completing, Ending (Routledge, forthcoming 2025).

Tianming has also received internal and external awards, including the John G. Thorpe Fellowship from the Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy. His work has received internal and external awards, including the John G. Thorpe Fellowship from the Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy, and makes a great contribution to Wright scholarship while increasing appreciation of an aspect of shared U.S./ China history.

Graduate Education Week 2025

Outstanding Master's Student
Business

Sally Steppling

Business Administration — Business Analytics

Sally Steppling exemplifies the ideal graduate student—highly driven, intellectually curious, and an outstanding leader.

Her academic excellence is evident in her 4.0 GPA, but what truly sets her apart is her ability to translate knowledge into action. She leads with confidence and professionalism, making an immediate impact in the MSBA-BA program and beyond. Sally's leadership extends beyond the classroom, from spearheading strategic initiatives for Pamplin's Capstone team to mentoring future PRISM leaders.

Her collaborative spirit, ability to navigate complex projects, and dedication to service through mentoring and recruitment showcase her commitment to the Virginia Tech community. Described by faculty as a consummate professional, Sally is known for her preparation, communication skills, and ability to drive results. She embodies the spirit of *Ut Prosim*, leaving a legacy that will benefit students and faculty for years to come.

Graduate Education Week 2025

Outstanding Doctoral Student
Business

Sara Easterwood

Finance

Sara coauthored one paper published in Journal of Financial and Quantitative Analysis, a Pamplin elite finance journal.

She also has multiple research papers in her portfolio Her teaching evaluations were consistently above department and college averages, allowing her to win a departmental teaching award.

Further, Sara was invited to 12 different peer and aspirant research schools (not counting Virginia Tech) to give research seminars, and her papers were accepted into national research conferences nine times. She was also invited to serve as a conference discussant three times.

From Jin Xu Finance Department PhD Director: “Her research and outreach achievements, in particular, are far above what a typical PhD student has and the best the finance department has seen in a long while.”

Outstanding Master's Student
Engineering

Emma 'Reilly' Oare
Biological Systems Engineering

Overall, Reilly is intelligent, inquisitive, passionate, and hardworking. Reilly has my highest recommendation of support as an Outstanding Masters Student because of her contributions to research and presentations, demonstrated excellence as an educator, and service and outreach that reflect her strong leadership potential, commitment, and ability to connect with a variety of people in and out of the classroom.

- J. CZuba - Advisor

Graduate Education Week 2025

Outstanding Doctoral Student
Engineering

Tolulope Odimayomi

Civil and Environmental Engineering

Tolu exemplifies the VT principles of community while succeeding in all three dimensions of our tripartite mission including teaching, research and outreach/service. She is very bright, caring, diligent, meticulous and hard-working, as she seeks to remedy injustice and improve public health through application of sound science and engineering.

Tolu is renown for perpetrating random acts of kindness in every endeavor. Her undergraduate research mentees, students in her introduction to environmental engineering classes, graduate student colleagues, community service groups, and her advisors frequently share 'Tolu' stories of uplifting actions.

Whether it is in outreach work to victims of environmental hazards and injustice, inspiring undergraduate mentees in the lab or students in her class to achieve, or executing groundbreaking research to reduce health risks from premise plumbing pathogens, Tolu sets very high expectations for herself and always achieves them.

Graduate Education Week 2025

Outstanding Master's Student
Liberal Arts & Human Sciences

Elena Roe
Political Science

Elena Roe's research on women executives and the security crisis and related topics has resulted in quality outcomes that testify to her potential as a scholar. Her contributions to instruction are confirmed by the strong record she accomplished as a graduate teaching assistant.

As Project Leader for Diplomacy Lab, Elena Roe provided thoughtful and inspirational guidance for undergraduate students that have enhanced their academic experience.

Graduate Education Week 2025

Outstanding Doctoral Student
Liberal Arts & Human Sciences

Savannah Mandel

Science, Technology, and Society

Savannah Mandel's scholarly achievements are truly remarkable as evidenced by the publication of her book, Ground Control, and her dissertation on asteroid tourism. The dossier also confirms her excellent teaching record across a range of courses that illustrate your commitment to innovative and engaging pedagogy.

Her commitment to supporting graduate students in the Science, Technology, and Society program illustrates her enthusiasm for building and sustaining an intellectual community.

Graduate Education Week 2025

Outstanding Master's Student
Natural Resources & Environment

Chrishma Perera
Geography

Chrishma Perera is excelling in her master's research.

Her "Interactions Between Climate Change and Indigenous Peoples' Health" project has already produced two manuscripts. The first one is currently under review in a peer-reviewed journal. The second manuscript, in collaboration with the World Health Organization, will be submitted soon to a peer-reviewed journal. In addition to her Master's work, she has contributed to international collaborative projects, COVID Observatories, and the Indigenous Peoples Observatory Network (IPON). She has six co-authorships of peer-reviewed publications from these projects.

In addition to these publications, Chrishma delivered five conference presentations sharing her research. Chrishma a $2,000 Rachel Carson Council (RCC) Fellowship, awarded by the RCC in Washington, D.C., to support her efforts in launching a sustainability initiative at Virginia Tech. A second fellowship recognized her as a One Health Fellow by the Soulsby Foundation in the United Kingdom, providing $10,000 to conduct community-based research with Shawi Indigenous communities in Peru.

Graduate Education Week 2025

Outstanding Doctoral Student
Natural Resources & Environment

Abasali Masoumi
Sustainable Biomaterials

Abas Masoumi's performance, work ethic, and academic output are outstanding.

Since enrolling at Virginia Tech in January 2023, he has published seven refereed journal articles in respected journals, has three more in preparation, and has submitted a patent application—all based on preliminary work. His patent application is for ZyloMesh, an innovative mesh inspired by the anatomical structure of wood and bamboo for advanced structural simulations. Also, his research on thermally modified wood has had a significant industry impact.

He is deeply committed to mentorship and service. In the 2024-2025 academic year, he trained graduate students in advanced microscopy techniques and created instructional videos to enhance accessibility to complex tools. Abas is treasurer of the SBIO Graduate Student Association, a student panelist on the VT Graduate Honor Association system, and a volunteer at Hahn Garden.

Graduate Education Week 2025

Outstanding Master's Student
Science

Allison Tobar-Santamaria

Psychology

Allison is a rising leader in psychological science exemplifying superior academic and research achievements, mentorship, service and commitment to broadening participating in psychology.

Her research examines consequences of sexual trauma, such as alcohol and drug use among high priority populations with particular focus on Latina women.

She has published 6 peer-reviewed manuscripts with an additional 2 publications under review, is currently preparing her thesis for publication and has authored/co-authored 41 scientific posters and delivered two lectures at national conferences. She has mentored 15 undergraduate students. She has presented (in Spanish) community parent/presentations on teen dating violence, served as volunteer for several psychology mentorship programs and is an active member for national and international professional organizations.

Graduate Education Week 2025

Outstanding Doctoral Student
Science

Ainul Huda

Neuroscience

Ainul has demonstrated excellent research skills. She has published 2 first-author manuscripts and 2 second-author manuscripts. She has received a number of internal awards and was recently awarded the Rugh L. Kirchstein National Research Service Award Individual Predoctoral Fellowship (F31) from NIH.

Ainul is passionate about pedagogy and education - having attended a number of conferences and having earned a Future Professoriate Graduate Certificate and Center for the Integration of Research, Teaching and Learning (CIRTL) Associate Badge. She has mentored 8 undergraduate students with four serving as co-authors on manuscripts.

She also is active in service to the university and beyond including serving as an instructor in VT Science Summer Camp and won first place in the 2024 Nutshell Games.

Graduate Education Week 2025

Outstanding Master's Student
Veterinary Medicine

Mahfuzul Islam

Biomedical Sciences and Pathobiology

Mahfuz is anticipated to be a co-author/lead author in 1-2 publications from his MS degree using these unique lupus-prone mice.

Mahfuz has demonstrated exceptional leadership skills. At Virginia Tech, Mahfuz was honored with induction into the Omicron Delta Kappa leadership award (2024). Prior to his enrollment, he was actively involved in outreach initiatives, serving as a campus ambassador for village youth, volunteering for a public health campaign, and participating as a delegate in the Arab Youth Model United Nations. Additionally, he was recognized with the best delegate award from the Ministry of Youth and Sports in Egypt, showcasing his commitment to both leadership and service.

Mahfuz juggled his teaching responsibilities while also balancing his lab work, showcasing his remarkable ability to manage multiple demands effectively.

Graduate Education Week 2025

Outstanding Doctoral Student
Veterinary Medicine

Charlotte Nyblade

Biomedical Sciences and Pathobiology

Charlotte has greatly exceeded the expectations essential for this award. She published a total of four first-authored peer-reviewed papers during her PhD.

In addition to working on her own projects, Charlotte contributed to many other projects in the lab. She was a co-author on two different rotavirus vaccine projects. She helped guide multiple undergraduates in the lab, with one example being to support a Summer Undergraduate Research project testing archived serum samples for cross reactive norovirus antibody titers

Now as a vet student, Charlotte's dedication to science and leadership continues.

Graduate Education Week 2025

The **Outstanding Doctoral Student in Interdisciplinary Programs** is selected by a committee of faculty members active in interdisciplinary programs, chaired by an associate dean of the Graduate School.

It recognizes a student's clarity, effectiveness, and originality of ideas through academic efforts that expand and promote the concept of interdisciplinary studies.

Outstanding Doctoral Student
Interdisciplinary Programs

Kelsie King

Genetics, Bioinformatics, and Computational Biology

Comments from award nomination packet

"Kelsie is an incredible student in every regard, and has impressed me with her research acumen, her persistence of the most robust and open methodologies, and her ability to ask and answer difficult scientific questions.

Building upon her M.S. thesis work investigating the role of polyphenolic compounds on the aggregation of the human islet amyloid polypeptide, hIAPP, she has developed an outstanding body of work in her doctoral dissertation, which she will complete this year.

She has pursued the most rigorous methodology in all of her work, never being satisfied to arrive at a convenient answer, but to truly dig into the data to reveal the truth. Doing so often requires her to write her own software, thus developing skills as a computational researcher and a biochemist. She always makes her code publicly available, a commendable trait."

Graduate Education Week 2025

The **Graduate Student of the Year** award recognizes a graduate student for their character, service, and outstanding contributions.

The winner is selected by a committee comprised of five graduate students and one staff member each representing Student Engagement & Campus Life and the Washington DC Metro Area campus.

Graduate Student of the Year

Tolulope Odimayomi

Civil and Environmental Engineering

Comments from award nomination packet

"Tolu's Academic pursuits and accomplishments are impressive. To have degrees from both Purdue and Virginia Tech is an accomplishment. Not only are these universities difficult to get in to, she has excelled and contributed to the academic excellence of these institutions.

I had the privilege of sitting in on her PhD defense, and I was amazed at the depth of work, the application of findings, and the working knowledge she displayed as she presented. Tolu will undoubtedly go on to impact the health and wellness of Humanity as she continues her work as a civil engineer."

Graduate Education Week 2025

The Graduate School, in conjunction with the Alumni Association, presents two **GTA teaching awards** each year to honor students who demonstrate excellence during their teaching assistantships.

This award is sponsored by the Alumni Association. Winners are selected by a committee chaired by an associate dean of the Graduate School and comprised of graduate faculty.

Graduate Teaching Excellence
Instructor of Record

Erin Drolet

Biochemistry

Comments from award nomination packet

“Erin’s leadership in the 6-credit laboratory course, BCHM 4124: Laboratory Problems in Biochemistry, has been transformative for the course and its students. Erin was responsible for not only delivering the course content but also for leading its transition into a new facility, for updating the course to be more representative to modern biochemical techniques, and to make it a better experience for both faculty and students.

She successfully integrated advanced methodologies, such as HiFi assembly for mutagenesis, computational tools for protein analysis, and innovative workflows that align with current biochemistry research practices. She completely updated and taught the course as instructor of record in Fall 2024, effectively acting as a faculty member teaching the course.

Erin’s approach to teaching BCHM 4124 emphasizes inquiry-based learning, challenging students to design their own research projects while developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills.”

Graduate Education Week 2025

Graduate Teaching Excellence
Assistant

Megan Sweet

Biological Sciences

Comments from award nomination packet

“Megan really cares about teaching. She has completed the requirements for the future professoriate certificate. She is also very good at explaining complex concepts. Therefore, she was happy to cover a few lectures and she did a very good job with that. Megan can also be very creative.”

“The work she has done as a GTA for the cancer biology lecture course (BIOL-4874) is exceptional and far beyond what is required for most, if not all, other teaching assistantships. Megan developed and led her own lectures (at least a third of all class meetings), organized review sessions, proctored exams, and graded assignments and exams. Throughout the semester, Megan seemed to be in constant communication with students by email and zoom.”

Graduate Education Week 2025

The Graduate School, in conjunction with the Alumni Association, presents one **Service Excellence Award** each year to honor students who distinguish themselves in service internally or externally to the university.

This award is sponsored by the Alumni Association. The winner is selected by a committee chaired by a representative of graduate student services in the Graduate School and comprised of student and staff representatives of service-focused areas of campus.

Graduate Service Excellence

Jacob Robinson

Sociology

Comments from award nomination packet

“Jacob’s service as a student in 2024 was extensive both internally and externally to the university.

In both his internal and external service, he leveraged his skills and knowledge as a doctoral student to nurture initiatives for the public good. The entry point for Jacob’s contributions to the Raising the Shade monument project was internal to Virginia Tech, in that he provided unpaid expertise in historical data for APS 4094: Appalachian Community Research, unpaid services as a volunteer co-researcher with Rocky Mount community members he met through that class, and unpaid services as a chaperone for three days and two nights, driving the undergraduate researchers to Washington, D.C., so that they could present their findings about Black history to the Appalachian Regional Commission.”

Graduate Education Week 2025

The **Outstanding Master's Thesis Award** was established in 1999 by the William Preston Society to recognize graduate students whose thesis presents the best original research with potential to benefit all people.

Winners are selected by a committee of graduate faculty, chaired by an associate dean of the Graduate School.

Outstanding Thesis
Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics

Logan Benninghoff
Physics

Comments from award nomination packet

“Logan has always been diligent and focused in his work.

For his Master’s thesis, Logan tackled the application of machine-learning and artificial-intelligence methods to the identification of muons in Belle II, with the aim of improving the performance at low momenta (below about 1 GeV/c) where the muon stops due to electromagnetic energy loss somewhere within the KL-muon (KLM) subdetector that is located within the magnetic flux return of the Belle II solenoid and outside all of the other subdetectors.

Logan’s studies have indicated the promise of better purity and less contamination by mis-identified pions, predemoninantly by tuning the weights of the KLM hits associated with the charged-particle track.”

Graduate Education Week 2025

Outstanding Thesis
Social Science, Business, Education & Humanities

Stephanie Pham
Psychology

Comments from award nomination packet

“The quality and clarity of her writing and oral presentation, particularly her discussion of the analytic approach, were superb and more in line with what you would expect for a dissertation defense.

Her master's thesis used latent profile analysis (LPA), a sophisticated person-centered statistical methodology that many graduate students and even professors are too intimidated to run.

In order to run such analyses, she attended an intensive statistical training this past summer and learned to use a new statistical software program (i.e., Mplus) under my mentorship. Her outstanding clarity, quality, and effectiveness of communicating her science in writing and through oral presentation is not surprising given her outstanding training prior to graduate school.”

Graduate Education Week 2025

The Graduate School presents two **Outstanding Dissertation awards** each year, one per category, to recognize doctoral students for their originality of idea, clarity and effectiveness of presentation, quality of writing, and significance of contribution to the field.

Winners are selected by a committee of graduate faculty, chaired by an associate dean of the Graduate School.

Outstanding Dissertation

Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics

Nathaniel Esteves

Biological Sciences

Comments from award nomination packet

“Nate’s productivity, independence, and writing skills are remarkable. He was awarded several fellowships and research grants at Virginia Tech. For the last two years of his graduate studies, Nate was as independent and creative as one would like to see for a postdoctoral fellow.

Nate is also an excellent, patient, and supporting teacher and mentor, both in the classroom and in the research laboratory. This is shown in his student teaching evaluations as well as the fact that two of his six undergraduate mentees earned co-authorships on publications. Finally, Nate is passionate about outreach and community service. He is co-founder of the Bacteriophage Club at Virginia Tech and participated in outreach activities to a rural Appalachian High School in Giles County.

Nate joined the Zhu lab at the University of Pennsylvania as postdoctoral fellow, where he is studying motility, biofilm formation, and virulence in the pathogenic bacterium Vibrio cholerae. He hit the ground running, as he is already co-author on an accepted manuscript, and most noticeable, shared first coauthor on an under-revision Science article. “

Outstanding Dissertation

Social Science, Business, Education & Humanities

Malle Schilling

Engineering Education

Comments from award nomination packet

“The creativity and intellectual merit of Malle’s is work grounded in her ability to leverage emergent approaches to broadening participation (i.e., the call to shift from deficit-based to asset based approaches) to address populations that have not been extensively studied.

Her work encompasses two empirical studies to identify patterns in enrollment and unpack the career pathways of rural students who pursued engineering, followed by a synthesis of her findings and related literature to develop a conceptual framework for engineering education scholars and faculty published in Studies in Engineering Education.

Her ability to move from the empirical studies to an actionable framework speaks to both the quality of Malle’s own work and her commitment to moving research into practice in meaningful ways.”

Graduate Education Week 2025

Congratulations

to all of our winners for their outstanding work in teaching, research and service, and for their contributions to a positive and inclusive scholarly and teaching environment.