



**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 students' interests, passions and personal circumstances. Winners are selected by each college.



Dr. Boris Vinatzer

Well-known for providing a supportive environment in his lab and advocating for his students, Dr. Vinatzer guides students through challenging interdisciplinary research projects that lead to high impact publications essential for future success in industry or academia.

Dr. Vinatzer consistently promotes the intellectual, personal, and professional growth of his students by facilitating their conference attendance and introducing them to collaborators and other scientists in the field.

He encourages students to become experts in their own field, improve their critical thinking and scientific writing skills, and hone their science communication, time management, and networking.

Outstanding Mentor Agriculture and Life Sciences



Outstanding Mentor

Architecture and Urban Studies

Frank Weiner

Mr. Weiner has chaired 25 graduate thesis committees and served on an additional 90 thesis committees.

Mr. Weiner is a gifted educator with an innate ability to assist and guide students through gathering, synthesizing, and weaving together disparate ideas. He treats students with profound respect, giving each his focused and full attention, seeking to find common ground and build upon individual student capacities.

According to one of his students, “he gives galvanizing praise to the timid, a sense of direction to those who meander, and slows the pace of those who sprint past their own ideas.”



Outstanding Mentor Business

Dr. Mario Pandelaere

In his six years at Virginia Tech, Mario has had a tremendous impact on doctoral students and doctoral education. His doctoral seminars are extremely popular and highly praised among graduate students. He takes great pride in helping graduate students learn how to conduct academic research.

He has chaired six doctoral dissertation committees, and offers non-traditional consultation hours to executive PhD students who work full time. His students have been placed in some of the top marketing programs world-wide.

Mario goes out of his way to work with PhD students who are somewhat struggling. For him mentoring is a life-long commitment, including guiding students through the publication process and teaching them how to become successful academics. He continues to work with his students post graduation, and he treats them like family.



Outstanding Mentor Engineering

Dr. David Knight

Dr. Knight has graduated 8 PhDs and is currently advising 3 candidates and 3 doctoral students, while also serving on 15 other committees.

His work with graduate students goes far beyond directing academic outputs, making a significant impact on dozens of students he works with through effective advising and exemplary professionalism. He is transparent, flexible, and deeply committed to students' professional development, nurturing an atmosphere of inclusion and cultural sensitivity, and personal and professional integrity.

Quoting one of his students, "his superpower is meeting students where they are, listening to their interests, and guiding them to places that didn't seem possible. "



Outstanding Mentor

Liberal Arts & Human Sciences

Dr. Jordan MacKenzie

Professor MacKenzie's advising contributions to the discipline in general, and Virginia Tech's Philosophy MA program in particular, have been exceptional. She has chaired 17 MA committees, and served on the committee of an additional 17. Her students have secured admissions offers to doctoral programs at premier institutions.

Dr. MacKenzie has done exemplary work to institutionalize these successes for the department. Through her efforts, starting in Fall 2022, the Philosophy MA proseminar will provide systematic training in essential philosophical writing skills, a survey of cutting-edge topics in the field, and vital professionalization sessions.



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Outstanding Mentor

Natural Resources & Environment

Dr. Kevin Edgar

His nominators consistently use phrases like “he inspires students to think independently, encourages cooperation and creativity, promotes professional development, and respects his students.”

Dr. Edgar fosters a collaborative environment in his lab, where students can hone their academic and research skills as well as be supported through the trials and challenges of graduate school. Even after their graduation, he continues to provide advice and encouragement in their early career development.

As one student stated, “Apart from his incredible ability to devote time, energy, and resources specifically designed to elevate the academic, mental and professional development of each student in our group, Dr. Edgar is also a kind, compassionate, patient, and humble mentor.”



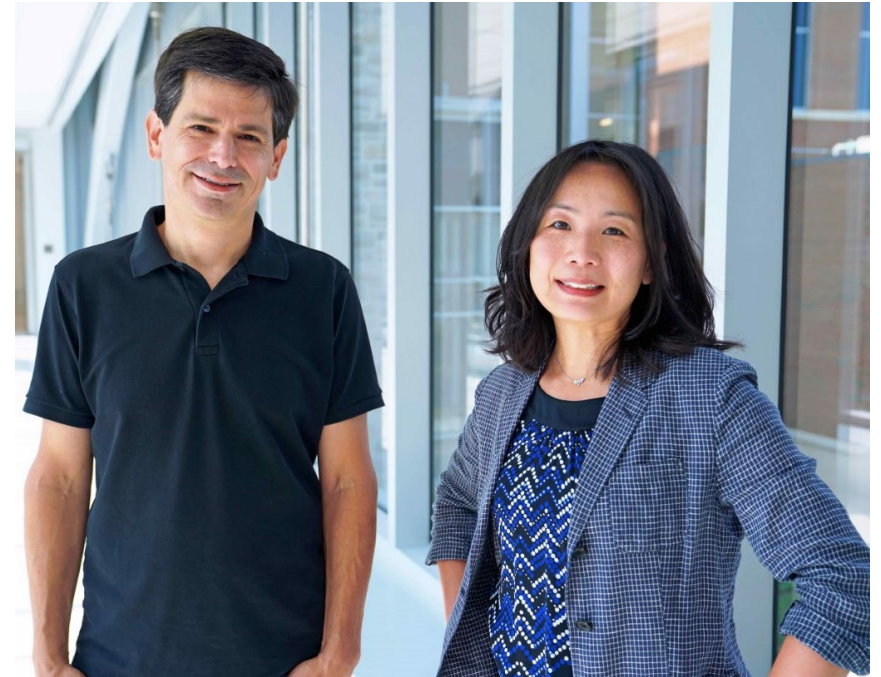
Dr. Pearl Chiu and Dr. Brooks King-Casas

Drs. Chiu and King-Casas have distinguished themselves as outstanding mentors with the care and support they provide for their students both inside and outside the lab and before and after they graduate.

They support and encourage through hands-on learning in the lab, teaching all the skills students will need for complex and interdisciplinary work. They provide both physical and financial resources and guidance to equip students with skills they need now and later in their careers. They create opportunities for presentations and publications and they also assist with grant writing.

They care for their students on a basic human level by being flexible, accommodating, and assisting with personal challenges their students may be facing. They promote diversity and inclusivity in their lab through active recruiting of students from diverse academic and cultural backgrounds and by promoting social interactions among the lab members.

Outstanding Mentors Science



Outstanding Mentor Veterinary Medicine

Dr. John Rossmeisl

All of Dr. Rossmeisl's current graduate students are veterinarians pursuing doctoral degrees. As a veterinarian himself, Dr. Rossmeisl understands the rigors that come with a career in veterinary medicine and is intentional about ensuring his students have a healthy work-life balance. He puts health and family first and models this for himself.

He has created a comfortable and accepting laboratory environment and reassures students as critical members of his research team. He finds time to discuss with students their research progress, address questions, and practice research presentations. He encourages critical thinking about research, inquires about results and probes for additional ideas. He creates opportunities to develop new skills, such as performing brain surgery on rodents, and provides tools for his students to become successful researchers.





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

Aryanna James

Entomology

Ary's breadth of experience, sheer delight in all things entomological and her desire to learn are clear in all her successes. She distinguished herself through her meticulous approach to teaching and scientific questioning, her creative research ideas grounded in the literature, hard work, and an ability to work with peers and undergraduates to execute an ambitious project and complete a well-rounded program.

Ary presented her research at six national conferences as first author, was awarded a Research Excellence Award by the Society for Freshwater Science, and has her first of two thesis chapters in review.



Outstanding Doctoral Student Agriculture and Life Sciences

Leah Hamilton

Food science and technology

In her four years in FST, Leah has authored and co-authored 7 peer-reviewed publications, become a popular instructor, and served the Virginia Tech and Food Science communities through multiple leadership roles. Leah deserves recognition for more than just the quantity of her accomplishments: her work is truly interdisciplinary, as she has successfully developed expertise in food science, machine learning, and linguistics—to name just a few of her research interest!

In addition, she is a thoughtful, kind, funny, and supportive contributor to the FST community and CALS. From mentoring students in using the sensory lab to sharing coding jokes from XKCD, Leah has enriched her environment in a myriad ways.



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Alexandra Palin

Visual Arts

Alexandra is a truly exceptional student whose career interests in museum studies focusing on the material culture of fashion have resulted in a major arts outreach project to the local and regional communities.

Her collaborative and interdisciplinary work in material culture and achievements as a student curator at the Moss Arts Center for the Fall 2021 exhibition *Gathering: Pearls and Polyester* has raised the public-facing profile of the arts in SOVA, CAUS, and VT.

Outstanding Master's Student Architecture and Urban Studies



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Outstanding Doctoral Student Architecture and Urban Studies

Omobolanle Ogunseiju

Environmental design and planning

Omobolanle is an exemplary doctoral candidate doing cutting edge interdisciplinary work in smart construction that involves the application of artificial intelligence and wearable robots to advance workforce development.

Her specific contributions will advance the ability of the industry to gainfully apply sensors specifically toward increasing human health and safety during the construction process, using knowledge and theory from cognitive science, pedagogy, computer science, ergonomics, and construction.



Outstanding Master's Student Business

Alexis Monahan

Business administration

Alexis was selected to participate in the UVA Darden Batten Institute's Venture Capital Bootcamp, an elite case competition, with other graduate students from top schools in the region. She brings a great deal of professional experience and knowledge to the MBA classroom, having worked for big name companies right out of college. She takes her newly acquired knowledge to her workplace at the request of her leadership so that she can "take on new projects to practice and demonstrate her new skill sets".

She readily engages in the varied functions and events offered to MBA students, such as career & professional development workshops and current topic seminars. She is also active on LinkedIn, promoting the MBA program to her network.



Outstanding Doctoral Student Business

Haozhen Zhang

Business, Management

Haozhen has many admirable qualities: she is hard-working, inquisitive, perceptive, and adaptive. She is also one of the nicest people her nominator has had the pleasure of working with and she has always been a model student within the program: excelling in all her classes, submitting and publishing papers beginning in her first year, and proposing an ambitious dissertation and steadily making progress.

She will succeed wherever she may land next.



Outstanding Master's Student Engineering

Bharath Bharadwaj

Mechanical engineering

Bharath has strong leadership skills to build and work in cross-functional interdisciplinary research teams. He has mentored undergraduate and graduate student peers in conducting collaborative research. In 2021 he assembled a multi-university team with undergraduate and graduate students to compete in the ASME Heat Sink Design Competition. He has contributed to using technology to improve accessibility for students with disabilities, and has been instrumental in co-founding a student club focused on digital and physical accessibility leveraging engineering and innovation.

As a GA, he mentors students and staff associated with Services for Students with Disabilities, teaches courses, holds workshops, and develops new methods to test and improve digital accessibility. He is an active member of the ASME, regularly participating in conferences and design competitions. His research, his commitment to interdisciplinary work, active participation in professional conferences, and dedication to serve make him an exemplary student.



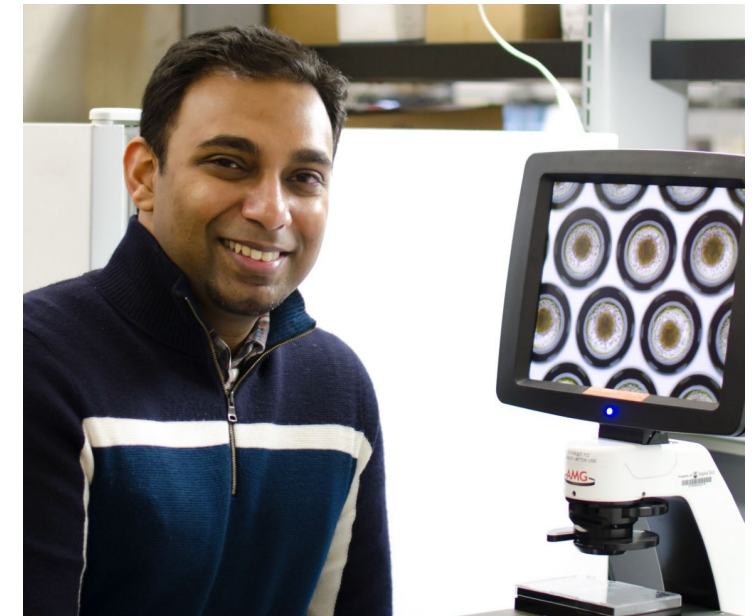
Outstanding Doctoral Student Engineering

Barath Udayasuryan

Biomedical engineering

His work on tumor-microbe interactions was recently published as a co-first author cover article in the prestigious journal *Science Signaling* and has been cited over 40 times. He published a first author paper and has two more papers under preparation for high impact journals. He has been a leader on collaborations with labs in other departments and colleges at Virginia Tech. Barath's research feats, along with his other responsibilities, are all the more incredible. He presented at numerous conferences, including 12 posters and 6 talks at high-profile venues.

He served as a GTA for two iterations of BMES lab courses -- highly challenging to accomplish safely and effectively during the pandemic, while receiving stellar evaluations from students. He maintains a 4.0 GPA, and serves as a peer reviewer for high-impact journals. Barath is an utterly reliable leader in the lab, acting as an unofficial lab manager, mentor and trainer for junior lab members. He has even managed to design an interactive science lesson for middle school students visiting VT, and act as a judge in the Blue Ridge Regional Science Fair. Barath has received a number of competitive awards recognizing the quality of his work.



Outstanding Master's Student Liberal Arts & Human Sciences

Kiana Wilkerson

History

Kiana is a diligent, driven student who has worked hard to develop a creative and meaningful research project for her M.A. in History.

Kiana has an aptitude for reading a broad range of texts, distilling their arguments and relationships to one another, and making strong and compelling arguments for the contribution her current work on Black comics will make to those very fields.



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Outstanding Doctoral Student Liberal Arts & Human Sciences

Damien Williams

Science & technology studies

Damien Williams is an excellent teacher with years of experience. He helped develop curriculum for a science and pop culture class, he's given many guest lectures, and subbed on short notice for others. Students are deeply enthralled as he shifts from things they care about in popular culture or world news into critical lessons in caring and philosophy. Damien makes sure they remember communities, impacts, who is centered, and what gets valued. He is gifted at knitting topics together in ways that invite others into dialogue.

He is active in publishing and public communication. He explains his dissertation: "The things we believe and hold dear... become motivations that drive the questions we ask to shape our knowledge. We then inscribe the shape of this knowledge in what we create, and those inscriptions become facts in the world—facts which have real and potentially long-lasting repercussions."



Outstanding Master's Student Natural Resources & Environment

Brogan Holcombe

Fish and wildlife conservation

Brogan is working on black bear video data from the Appalachian Mountains of Virginia, using cutting-edge technology: “critter-cams” (a.k.a. GoPros) placed on collars on bears, with which she can determine what species of plants, animals, fungus, and insects bears consume. By analyzing about 17 hours of video per bear for up to 16 bears, she will advance knowledge of bear foraging ecology, especially post-hibernation.

In addition to her research, Brogan co-founded the DEI graduate student committee for her department, and currently serves as the graduate student representative on the College DEI committee. She also mentors undergraduate students.



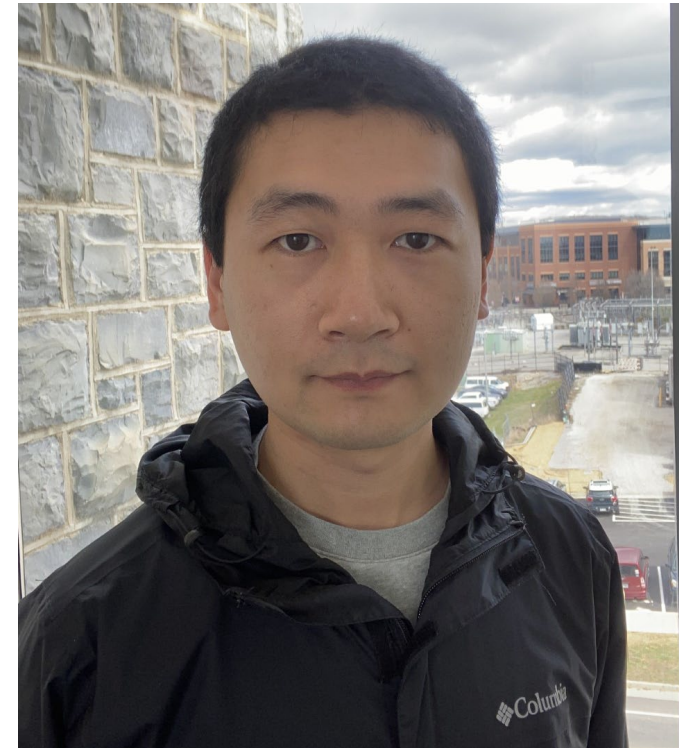
Outstanding Doctoral Student Natural Resources & Environment

Yang Zhou

Sustainable biomaterials

Yang has achieved remarkable results within about 23 months, completing research that will lead to at least four first-author manuscripts. Learning the challenging field of polysaccharide chemistry and producing such results so quickly is testimony to his diligence, determination, and academic abilities.

He has also displayed a special degree of creativity and innovation by developing a novel method for synthesis of all-polysaccharide hydrogels from carboxymethyl chitosan and oxidized hydroxypropyl cellulose. In addition, he mentored an undergraduate researcher who has accomplished enough under Yang's guidance to co-author a paper.



Outstanding Master's Student Science

Carla Lopez Lloreda

Biological sciences

Carla has not only proven herself as an excellent researcher and academic but also as a communicator of science with a passion for sharing knowledge through outreach. She holds a 4.0 GPA, has co-authored four peer-reviewed journal articles, has received various awards and honors including the National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship and a competitive graduate student travel grant.

She is co-PI on an ongoing grant award supporting educational outreach to K-12 in Puerto Rico and was the project coordinator for an outreach and education project in Puerto Rico as well. She is helping to support and organize a "Flipped Science Fair Event" and she is active in promoting equity, inclusion, and diversity at Virginia Tech.



Outstanding Doctoral Student Science

Whitney Woelmer

Biological sciences

Whitney excels as a researcher and shows a passion for teaching and outreach. She is co-author on 12 peer-reviewed publications, two as first author with a third publication in revisions, and presented her work at 8 international conferences. She has won several awards and honors including the NSF Graduate Research Fellowship and the Gold award for best research presentation at the Virginia Tech 35th annual graduate research symposium.

Whitney teaches the Freshwater Ecology Lab and developed a teaching module that is now used in undergraduate classrooms around the country. In 2019 she was elected as the Student Co-chair for the international Ecological Forecasting Initiative and she led 50 early career researchers from around the world, organized workshops and conferences, and has given multiple lectures. She also volunteers at the Roanoke Mission and the Virginia Tech Science Festival.



Emily Hellstern

Biomedical and veterinary sciences

Emily has taken initiative on several occasions during her time as a graduate student. Upon reviewing the preliminary data for her project, she made suggestions for a follow-up project this spring. This project will not only enhance her thesis, but also allow her to learn how to perform real-time qPCR. Additionally, she also helped her advisor, Dr. Stewart, complete additional projects involving working with sheep, which also helped to add to her skill set.

She attended the annual meeting for the International Embryo Technology Society (IETS) and is planning to submit an abstract this summer to present her data at the next IETS meeting.

Outstanding Master's Student Veterinary Medicine



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Outstanding Doctoral Student Veterinary Medicine

Sarah Kuchinsky

Biomedical and veterinary sciences

According to her advisor Dr. Duggal, Sarah is an incredibly dedicated and enthusiastic graduate student with a passion for One Health research. She embodies the spirit of the college, and she has tackled a difficult project that involves a complicated transmission cycle.

Her dedication and enthusiasm to wildlife disease research is very apparent, and it has driven the direction of her dissertation. She has been industrious, as she has gone out of her way to learn new techniques from other labs and has developed strong collaborations with several labs across campus, including Dr. Dana Hawley, an avian ecologist, Dr. Paul Siegel, a chicken geneticist, Dr. Stanca Ciupe, a mathematician, and Dr. Chloe Lahondere, a mosquito biologist.



Outstanding Doctoral Student Interdisciplinary Programs

Connor Brown

Genetics, bioinformatics and computational biology

Connor is known for his passion for research and tenacity to persevere through multiple uphill battles to achieve his dreams, whether it is his first generation student status, financial barriers, or the nature of interdisciplinary work. He meets adversity with creativity and hard work.

He has emerged as the leader of research groups; he is the go-to person for any student with a question; he is to be a co-author on several works in progress led by his lab mates. He excels in working as part of a team and nurturing others. He is a gifted and generous mentor to undergraduate students and an outstanding presenter.





The **Graduate Student of the Year** award recognizes up to two graduate students for their character, service, and outstanding contributions. Winners are 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

Gabriela Carrillo

Doctoral student in translational biology, medicine and health

According to her nominators, Drs. Michael A. Fox and Steven Poelzing, Gabby's work ethic, drive, and skill as an experimentalist has led her to be extremely successful in advancing projects – whether she is a leader or a significant contributor. She not only excels academically and professionally, but somehow finds time to contribute to student organizations, volunteer at a women's resource center, a hospice center, and serve as a committee member for the local Planned Parenthood organization, to mention just a few. She has also mentored and provided research experiences and training for almost a dozen students from underrepresented backgrounds in STEM through a variety of programs and organizations.



Graduate Student of the Year

Jack Leff

Doctoral student in science & technology studies

According to his nominators Drs. Rebecca Hester and Ashley Shew, Jack works tirelessly to live the Virginia Tech Principles of Community across his service, research, and teaching. He has been actively involved with mutual aid societies and community organizations; he is tireless in advocacy and organizing; he attends many administrative meetings and works to coordinate between groups; he focuses on environmental justice, disability justice, racial justice, and economic justice. He has worked toward greater food security, increased wages, and more diverse representation for students, staff, and adjuncts. He does all of this while maintaining a high level of scholarly productivity, advancing his dissertation research, and leading a university-based group on prison abolition.



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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

Sarah Blackowski

Doctoral student in engineering education

Sarah has excellent rapport with students, receiving consistently high ratings for effectiveness. She is enthusiastic and has been able to motivate students to stay engaged with course materials. Sarah is able to walk a difficult line of authority and approachability, while demonstrating a mastery of the subject matter. Navigating this nuanced balance is even more difficult for women instructors in engineering, and for graduate students who are often seen as near-peers by students.

Sarah's contributions to department colloquia and development meetings have showcased her expertise and devotion, and also provided guidance to others teaching in the program, including experienced faculty.



Graduate Teaching Excellence Assistant

Troy Jaisohn Kim

Master's student in mechanical engineering

According to his nominator, Dr. Brian Vick, Jaisohn's desire to innovate and improve a course is unmatched within the department and likely within the university. His first major accomplishment was implementing an automated grading platform, Matlab Grader, for which he wrote 127 original problems and solutions and created test cases. The interactive platform and instant feedback allowed students to improve their coding skills, and the suite is now used every semester. Jaisohn also created short YouTube tutorials, then 45 brief "supplemental lectures" to give students another learning perspective. He orchestrated a semester-long group project, managing all its minutiae and meeting with teams after business hours, receiving universal praise from students.





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

Kathryn Lopez

Doctoral student in civil engineering

Kathryn founded the Science Policy Education and Advocacy Club in 2019 to enhance graduate students' understanding of policy processes; provide opportunities to connect with careers and roles in government and policy; and facilitate opportunities to work with community and other groups in need of technical support. Kathryn works tirelessly to provide meaningful opportunities for students and to develop lasting connections with local communities. Dr. Todd Schenk notes that “service is a part of her DNA.” She finds time to mentor incoming graduate students, has held leadership positions in the Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers, and served on her department’s diversity committee.





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. Nominations may be made in three categories. Winners are selected by a committee of graduate faculty, chaired by an associate dean of the Graduate School.



Outstanding Thesis

Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics

Molly Hickman

Computer science

Molly's choice of thesis topic was influenced by her dedication to addressing the global divide between developing and developed countries.

She explored how different language editions of Wikipedia maintain neutrality regarding controversial topics, and she focused her analysis on Wikipedia articles related to the Jammu and Kashmir conflict across Hindi, Urdu, and English language editions. Understanding how neutrality is (or is not) enacted across language editions is critical given the importance of Wikipedia as a trusted resource by users across the world. This thesis makes multiple significant contributions, owing in part to its use of mixed methods to explore its key research question from multiple dimensions.

The thesis identifies a number of other interesting observations on the behaviors of non-English Wikipedia editor communities, such as the use of off-platform communication channels for resolving disputes, presenting interesting possibilities for future work. The quality of writing and clarity of presentation is superb.



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Outstanding Thesis

Social Science, Business, Education & Humanities

Jessica Brabble

History

Jessica's work is situated at the intersection of women's history, disability history, and 20th century United States history. Her thesis demonstrates a remarkable facility with a range of relevant historical work in these areas, as well as in the history of medicine and science. Jessica has made original and timely connections between women's history and the rising field of disability history, an area with profound relevance to contemporary debates about public health and disability justice. Her thesis also demonstrates her commitment to crafting clear, compelling writing. Jessica's thesis, "Save the Babies," shows tremendous promise in re-centering the history of eugenics and the broader social engineering movement in the first half of the twentieth century.





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

Lindah Kotut

Computer science

Dr. Kotut's dissertation is both timely and timeless, grounded in science and innovative in its ways of conducting research. Dr. Kotut defined a lens for studying storytelling in a respectful manner, examining tensions between traditional oral storytelling and social media storytelling. Her work is key in ways that technology can amplify voices, particularly for people in underrepresented groups whose voice goes unheard.

The originality of the core idea is a strength of the dissertation. Dr. Kotut combined elements from her upbringing in a rural village in Kenya with her ongoing experience in a rural area in southwest Virginia—all under the umbrella of studying technology use by underrepresented communities. Dr. Kotut has identified a new way to explore the ethical tensions that are prevalent in the age of social media, with implications for how researchers will study social media analysis, ethics in computing, tech impacts on minority populations, and story capture and sharing for underrepresented groups.



Outstanding Dissertation

Social Science, Business, Education & Humanities

Kazuki Hori

Educational Research & Evaluation

The nature of Dr. Hori's dissertation is methodological, and it addresses an important statistical and methodological problem that plagued longitudinal data analysts for the last two decades.

Dr. Hori developed novel detrending methods within an existing framework on the basis of insights gained from an extensive literature review not only from psychometrics but also from other fields of study such as econometrics. He used an innovative idea of residualization and added cross-level covariances for the purpose of disentangling the within-person and between-person effects. He showed that residualization subsumes centering and detrending, which have been considered as different procedures for different purposes. This methodology and conceptualization are significant contributions to the fields of longitudinal data analysis.

