

Enrollment Requirements

M.S. Building Construction Science & Management (BCSM)

Ph.D. Environmental Design & Planning (EDP)

All graduate students using University resources are required to be continuously enrolled during the academic year, unless on an approved leave of absence or *in absentia* status. A person who undertakes any form of academic study within the University facilities other than the library, or who consults regularly with a faculty member concerning graduate work, must be registered continuously and pay the normal fees. The number of credit hours taken should reflect the extent of a student's study or research activity.

Individuals not enrolled cease to be students and do not have access to University facilities. Graduate students who need to break continuous enrollment can do so by applying for a leave of absence or by participating in programs and activities approved by the Graduate School that require absence from the University (in absentia status). Students who fail to follow this process will be resigned from the university by the Graduate School, and will then need to apply for readmission in order to continue their studies. Readmission requires a positive recommendation from each student's home academic unit, and is not guaranteed.

Student Responsibilities for Enrollment

Graduate students are permitted to take a maximum of 18 credit hours per semester. Students who have a fellowship, scholarship, or graduate assistantship, including GAs, GTAs, and GRAs, must take a minimum of 12 credit hours per semester during the academic year. Unfunded students must take a minimum of 9 credit hours per semester. Audited courses are not counted toward these minimum requirements.

Each student is responsible for verifying his/her enrollment in courses and for making any necessary changes to that enrollment. Students should verify enrollment in classes during the first week of the semester, when any necessary changes can be made electronically. Students should work closely with their advisory committee to establish an approved plan of study as soon as possible.

Courses taken without an approved plan of study are at the student's own risk and may not necessarily be approved to count in the official plan of study. An approved plan of study requires endorsement by all members of the student's advisory committee, the Graduate Chair in Building Construction, and the Graduate School. All courses on the Plan of Study, including supporting courses, must be taken on a letter grade (A/F) basis except for those courses approved to be graded on a pass-fail (P/F) basis only. Audit courses cannot be included on the

Plan of Study. The plan is not approved until all endorsements are in place. Students may verify the final graduate school approval of their plan of study online in HokieSpa. Students are subject to departmental course requirements in force at the time their plan of study is approved.

Research Credit Hours

Students signing up for research credits (BC 5994/EDP 7994) must have the approval of a supervising faculty member, typically their faculty advisor, and are responsible with that faculty member for agreeing upon expectations for research activities during those hours. The supervising faculty will assign a grade at the end of each semester based on how well students meet those expectations.

Masters students should only enroll in these hours if they have elected to take the Research Track, and should consult with their committee regarding how many hours are appropriate. Typically, Project & Report students may count only three (3) credit hours of research on their Plan of Study, and Thesis students may count only six (6) credit hours. Students may enroll for more than these minimums to maintain minimum credit hour enrollment requirements, but credits beyond the minimum will not count toward the requirements of the plan of study.

Independent Study Hours

Students wishing to learn about topics not covered by available courses at Virginia Tech may enroll for independent study hours as part of their plan of study. Independent studies require a commitment from a faculty member with expertise in that topic to monitor and evaluate the student's learning. Students interested in independent studies should identify an appropriate faculty and discuss their interests to determine whether an independent study is appropriate.

Working with the faculty, the student must submit a Request for Independent Study form for approval that describes the title and scope of the proposed study, learning objectives, materials and methods to be used, and method of evaluation. Upon approval, this form represents an agreement between the student and supervising faculty that establishes criteria for the student's grade on the independent study and specific deliverables that must be produced to provide evidence of student learning.

Independent study requests must be reviewed and approved by the student's advisor, supervising faculty, the Graduate Chair of Building Construction, and the Academic Dean in the College of Architecture and Urban Studies. If included as part of the student's plan of study, the request form and all supporting documentation must be provided at the time the plan of study is

submitted to the department for approval. Up to the limit per degree, students may work with faculty to design one or more independent studies on different topics, worth different numbers of credit hours, to count toward their degree requirements.

A limited number of independent study hours (BC 5974) may be counted on a student's plan of study. This limit is determined by the type of degree and the number of special studies/special topics credit hours also being counted. Together, the following limits apply for the total number of independent study hours plus special study hours (5984/6984) that may be counted on the plan of study:

Degree	Maximum number of hours counted on plan of study
M.S. (Thesis)	6 hours
M.S. (non-Thesis)	9 hours
Ph.D.	18 hours

Summer Enrollment

Unless enrolled in required supporting courses prior to their first semester or otherwise taking courses toward their plan of study, graduate students are not required to enroll during summer sessions. In particular, students working on research during the summer are not required to sign up for BC 5994/EDP 7994 courses. Graduate students on an assistantship but not registered over the summer may obtain permission to use campus facilities.

Leave of Absence

Students sometimes experience situations in which they cannot be continuously enrolled (e.g., health, family emergency, change in parental status, military service, financial hardship, personal or academic reasons, or other reasons). A student may request a time-limited leave of absence to address these situations and suspend activities associated with course work or thesis/dissertation research without the need to reapply to the program. Students on leave of absence are not entitled to use University resources not normally available to the public or alumni (e.g., may not consult with advisors or work on courses or research).

Students anticipating a need to interrupt their studies should consult with their academic advisor and the Graduate Chair to discuss their options and develop a plan for the leave as well as subsequent re-enrollment or re-admission. The [Leave of Absence Request form](#) must be submitted two weeks before the beginning of the semester for which the leave is requested. The leave of absence must be approved by the student's advisor and the Graduate Chair for the

Department of Building Construction before submission to the Graduate School. If the leave of absence request is approved, the continuous enrollment requirement will be relaxed during the period of leave. The Leave of Absence form indicates when the student will return to the program and any conditions the department or the Graduate School may stipulate for the student's readmission within that time. Leaves of absence may be granted for up to one year at a time. If a leave longer than one year is required, students will need to apply to the Graduate School for readmission.

International students should consult an immigration advisor in the Graduate School before requesting a leave of absence. All students undertaking a leave of absence must notify the department and return any university equipment they have borrowed. They must also relinquish assigned space in the Graduate Studio and return keys to the Department.

Re-enrollment/Re-admission following Leave of Absence

Following an approved leave of absence, students may re-enroll as usual without the need for additional paperwork. Upon return following an approved leave of absence, students should check in with the Graduate Coordinator and Graduate Chair of Building Construction to discuss any necessary revisions to their plans for completing their degree.

The re-admission form should be used when a student has not been enrolled for more than two semesters, excluding summer. This form should also be used when returning from a leave of absence. The Department of Building Construction requires that a student who is planning to re-admit to the program meet with the Graduate Chair and Graduate Coordinator prior to submitting the application for readmission.

Change of Admission Status

Students wishing to change admission status while remaining in the same major must submit a Change of Degree Status form. This form can only be used if a student is remaining in the same major, has not missed more than two semesters excluding summer, and only desires an admission status change. Specific cases include:

Provisional students (Masters only): Students enrolled as Provisional Students must maintain at least a 3.00 Grade Point Average in their first 12 hours of graduate coursework, and must seek to change their admission status using the Change of Degree Status form after the completion of one semester of study or equivalent (12 semester hours) or be dropped from the program. If

approved, students must consult with the Graduate Chair to review their plan of study, select a track, and establish a faculty champion to serve as their advisor for the duration of their degree. Coursework taken while on provisional status may be included on the plan of study for the degree at the discretion of the student's advisory committee.

Commonwealth Campus students: Students enrolled as Commonwealth Campus students must seek to change their admission status after the completion of one semester of study or equivalent (12 credits), or be dropped from the program. Students must apply for admission to the department using the online application system and must submit all necessary documentation. If approved, students must consult with the Graduate Chair to review their plan of study, select a track (M.S. students only), and establish a faculty champion to serve as their advisor for the duration of their degree. Courses taken while classified as a Commonwealth Campus student will be evaluated by the Graduate School for applicability to the student's graduate degree when the plan of study is submitted.

Change from M.S. to Ph.D. program:

A student seeking to change from M.S. to Ph.D. programs may apply directly for the Ph.D. online, or may request the change using the Change of Degree Status form. Students changing from non-degree to degree seeking status must apply online. Typically, a request to change from M.S. to Ph.D. status without completing the M.S. degree requires demonstration of exceptional performance in the initial phases of the Research Track (Thesis option) M.S. process. Students wishing to convert to the Ph.D. program without formally applying online must provide:

- **Request for Change of Degree Status form** - This form requires endorsement by the student's committee chair. Students must have completed the M.S. Plan of Study with all approvals and have an approved graduate committee in order for the committee chair to be officially recognized as able to endorse this form.
- **Letter of Recommendation from M.S. Committee Chair** – to successfully review the student's qualifications, the Graduate Chair in Building Construction requires a letter of recommendation from the committee chair outlining the case for admissions to the Ph.D. program. The committee chair should also indicate in the letter his or her willingness to serve as the student's Ph.D. committee chair.
- **Recommendation from M.S. Committee** – the members of the student's approved graduate committee must vote on his or her fitness for admission to the Ph.D. program based on their evaluation of capabilities and performance in the M.S. program. A majority affirmative vote is required for departmental approval of the transfer, with a commitment of three faculty to serve on the student's Ph.D. advisory committee. If only two M.S. advisory committee members are willing to continue, the student must obtain agreement from a third faculty to serve on the Ph.D. committee and obtain their signature as part of the committee recommendation. A fourth member is not required for transfer to the Ph.D. program but will be required to complete the Ph.D. plan of study.

All documentation requires students to have an approved graduate committee and committee chair, and thus at a minimum they should have completed their official M.S. plan of study and received endorsement from a minimum of three faculty who agree to serve as members of their advisory committee. A brief statement of intent regarding the student's intended area of research is typically required to obtain the commitment of faculty to serve on the advisory committee. Students successfully completing the requirements for the M.S. degree may apply directly for the Ph.D. program online without committee endorsement.

If a student is approved for transfer to the Ph.D. program, their advisory committee will work with them to transition the M.S. plan of study to a Ph.D. plan of study. The committee, at its sole discretion, may also require that the student prepare and defend a proposal, project and report, or thesis as a condition of recommending your transfer. Students interested in this option should meet with their committee chair and advisory committee to determine what requirements will be imposed in each specific case.

Resignation/Withdrawal

A student may resign/withdraw without academic or tuition penalty by completing an official Virginia Tech Resignation/Withdrawal form on or before the first day of the semester/summer session (see dates on the Timetable for that semester). Resignation/withdrawals received at the Registrar's office after 5 pm on the first day of the semester result in partial tuition and fee charges. ***Resignation/withdrawal after the specified date for withdrawing without grade penalty (see Timetable for date for that semester) requires permission of the Graduate Dean and is only permitted because of extenuating circumstances.*** The student's grade report and transcript will show that he/she was enrolled for the term and that he/she resigned on the specific effective date. Resignation/withdrawals may have consequences for assistantship and scholarship awards as well as visa status, so these considerations should be investigated prior to completing the forms. Resignation/withdrawals do not affect the student's ability to enroll in the subsequent semester.

Registration at the Time of Examinations and for Degree Completion

Graduate students must be registered at VT for at least the minimum number of credits (3 credit hours) in the semester or summer session when they take an examination required by Graduate School Policies and in the semester when a degree is completed. Students who have a thesis/dissertation ready for defense by the beginning of a semester, may schedule that defense early in the semester and qualify for Start of Semester Defense Exception (SSDE, 1 credit).

Start of Semester Defense Exception (SSDE) is a special enrollment category for students who have fulfilled all requirements, *including advisory committee review and agreement that the*

thesis or dissertation is ready for defense, and are registering only to take the final oral examination. To qualify for start of semester defense exception, a student must have:

- completed all requirements (including passing grades on all courses on the plan of study), except for the final exam **and**
- submitted the final copy of the thesis/dissertation to the advisory committee **within the first three weeks of the semester and at least two weeks before the defense and**
- received permission from the advisory committee, **who have read the document and consider it ready for defense** (to the extent that the student can make corrections and submit the ETD within two weeks of the defense) within the first three weeks of the semester **and**
- been enrolled in at least three credit hours the preceding semester **and**
- submitted the SSDE form to the Graduate School **by the Friday of the third week of classes or no later than three weeks prior to the defense**, whichever date comes first

If a student registers for SSDE, his/her enrollment status will be less than full time, which may affect the following:

- financial aid or loan deferments
- employment opportunities (not eligible for assistantships or fellowships)
- visa status (for international students)

Students should consult with the Graduate School and/or Office of Scholarships and Financial Aid to understand the consequences and additional requirements that may result from enrolling under start of semester defense exception.