

Navigating VIMS and the School of Marine Science as a graduate student¹

Welcome to VIMS. Now the exciting and challenging work begins. We offer this as a guide about faculty expectations for new students at VIMS; however, every advisor is different, and every student is different. Be sure to stay in communication with your advisor about their expectations.

Professionalism and Collegiality

1. You have entered graduate school, training to become a professional scientist. VIMS is your new professional workspace.
2. Making progress in graduate school requires careful planning, creativity, hard work, and discipline. You also need to be resilient when things don't go as planned. It is not always easy when conducting research, and the learning curve can be steep. Learning is a continual process, embrace it. Ask for help when necessary, but do not expect all your questions to have simple answers.
3. When you made the commitment to become a graduate student at VIMS, you committed to producing top-quality science. Striving for scientific excellence is a frame of mind and it should permeate every aspect of your study. Invest in the full graduate school experience. You may have to pass up some other opportunities, even vacations, because of your obligations.
4. The best way to become a competent scientist is to become a team player and foster good working relationships with everyone, including faculty, staff, and students. This will allow you to learn from others and others to learn from you. After graduate school, many of these people will be the foundation of your network. Good working relationships will pay dividends over the long term while negative relationships lead to tension and an unhealthy, unproductive workspace. Future employers will expect you to have good interpersonal, communication, and negotiation skills.
5. Treat everyone with respect. This includes all faculty, staff, and students. Remember that members of the technical staff will help you along the way, but they do not work for you.
6. Take advantage of the many scientific and professional development opportunities available to graduate students – as long as you prioritize your educational and research commitments. VIMS scientists have diverse skill sets and we encourage you to spend time learning about and participating in other programs. However, try not to overcommit yourself. This may mean sometimes saying no to your colleagues,

¹ These guidelines were developed from the document “*Navigating the Department of Fisheries Science*”, created by Department of Fisheries Science faculty for its graduate students, dated September 2019.

friends, or even committee members. The best way to get the most out of graduate school is to plan ahead with the guidance of your advisor, committee members, and other mentors you gather along the way.

7. Take advantage of your coursework and seminar opportunities. Success in the sciences requires an interdisciplinary, holistic perspective.
8. Be willing to help each other. Scientific endeavours are increasingly interdisciplinary and collaborative. Future employers will expect you to have good collaboration skills.
9. Sustained self-motivation is important to your success. Take ownership of your degree program; your advisor is there to guide but not lead your program. Following your graduate work, the ability to self-motivate and work productively in the face of challenges and adversities are key characteristics sought by employers.
10. Leave and time away are important for mental health and well-being, but be sure to consult with your advisor in advance to schedule leave. Graduate students on full-time assistantships are allowed up to 6 days (24 hrs) of annual leave a year in addition to paid university holidays.² Days on which classes are not in session but the university is open (e.g., fall and spring break, January intersession) are not automatic holidays for graduate students holding assistantships. Longer leave may be taken in consultation with the advisor. See the policy for further details.

Communication

1. Talk to your advisor often. Every advisor has slightly different workplace rules and expectations for their students. Make sure you understand the expectations; this is absolutely critical for your success. For example, make sure you understand whether your advisor expects you to schedule meetings regularly or as needed, or if they prefer periodic, but regular, email updates. Refer to the School of Marine Science's [Roles and Responsibilities](#) document for more information.
2. Keep track of your own timeline and milestones and be proactive about scheduling committee meetings. Utilize the annual planning meeting with your advisor to make plans and set goals for research, academic, and professional activities.
3. Communicate with your committee about your progress and setbacks. Your committee is there to help you become a successful scientist and can give great advice.
4. Do not compare yourself with other students. Recognize that individual needs and timelines vary. Our goal is to help each student develop to their full potential.

² The VIMS "Vacation & Leave Policy for Students on Assistantships" (PPD 0605) can be found in the VIMS Policy & Procedures Guide, which is available on the VIMS website through the gateway for faculty & staff.

5. Your advisor is investing an enormous amount of time and money into your future. Please remember this and be respectful.
6. Sometimes the timing of an opportunity for the next step in your career (e.g., employment) does not align with your degree timeline. If you are considering changing your student status from full-time, on-campus prior to the completion of your degree, communicate with your advisor early in this process. Be open and share your thoughts, even if the position you are pursuing seems like a long shot. Your advisor ultimately wants you to succeed as both a student and as a professional, and this is best accomplished through communication and close coordination.

Samples, Data, and Publication

1. A lot of time and money go into the collection of samples and data for your project. Proper collection and archiving are critical to ensuring quality. Follow approved protocols for disposing samples when archiving is not required.
2. The research products you generate belong to VIMS and may be needed for future projects. Grants and contracts are awarded to VIMS, not to individuals. You have an obligation to archive your data, useful samples, model code and output, and field and lab notebooks of sufficient quality such that others could replicate your work. These must be conveyed to your advisor before you graduate and must be in good order to be accessible and understandable.
3. As a professional scientist, your work is complete when you publish your results. Until then, you are not finished. If finding time to write or the writing itself is a hurdle, consider participating in Writing Boot Camp. If you leave VIMS before publication, discuss a publication timeline with your advisor, including a discussion of authorship. Be aware that if you do not publish within a reasonable and agreed upon timeframe, and others have to finish the publication, you may lose your privilege of being first author.

Scientific Ethics

1. You and your body of work represent VIMS. As a scientist, your most important asset is your integrity. Do not in any way compromise your integrity.
2. Your research is a reflection of you as a scientist. It is important to produce quality science that will represent you well as you build your career.
3. During your time at VIMS you may be working with live animals. Your research subjects didn't ask to be here, but you did. Proper animal handling and care are your responsibility and must be a priority. If you are uncertain about proper procedures, ask for guidance. Do not proceed with working with live animals without following proper routes for approval (e.g., IACUC).

4. During your time at VIMS you will be working with equipment that is likely shared with your current colleagues and future generations of VIMS students. Treat it all with respect, know what you're doing, and leave it in good condition when you're finished. If you break something, tell someone. You will also be working in shared spaces and should leave those places clean and clutter-free after you are finished each day.
5. During your time at VIMS you may be required to work with hazardous materials. You must be completely familiar with all proper handling, storage, and disposal procedures. The VIMS Safety Office is a resource you can use for any questions that cannot be easily answered within your working group.
6. During your time at VIMS you may be working with High Performance Computing (HPC) resources. These are shared institutional resources used by faculty, staff, and students. You should coordinate your HPC usage with other HPC users and be respectful of other peoples' computing needs, especially during high demand periods.
7. If you need to collect samples, understand the collection permits granted to VIMS and work within them. You cannot collect whatever you want.
8. All aspects of your research (e.g., data curation and management, model code and results) must be clearly described in writing. You must follow accepted principles for dealing with data and model results, as agreed to with your advisor, committee, and any other project team members. For example, you cannot simply remove "outliers" because "they must be wrong"; follow acceptable procedures. Similarly, if your statistical analysis program gives you warnings you must acknowledge and deal with them. Your committee must understand what procedures you have followed to the point of being able to duplicate your results. Remember, although negative results are frustrating, they are still valid results.
9. You are now a valued member of the VIMS community. Please read the [VIMS Principles of Community](#), and strive to maintain these values so that our campus is a comfortable and productive work place for all individuals.