Doctoral Training Program in Physiology and Biophysics 2015-2016

1 Updated August 18, 2015
PHYSIOLOGY AND BIOPHYSICS TRAINING PROGRAM
VCU SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Training Program Objectives: This program exposes students to important questions in physiology emphasizing the scientific method in general and biophysical approaches in particular at the molecular, cellular, organ and system levels. Our alumni enjoy diverse careers in academia, government, and industry.

I. Training Program

A. CURRICULUM

1. First Year:
PhD students enter through the Biomedical Sciences Doctoral Portal (BSDP website: http://www.medschool.vcu.edu/graduate/phd/index.html). The BSDP is a central portal for the School of Medicine, with advisors from each of the School of Medicine’s graduate programs. The BSDP Office guides the student for the first year of their PhD. The director of the BSDP is Dr. Louis J. De Felice, who is also a member of the Physiology and Biophysics training program. BSDP activities include an interdepartmental curriculum, laboratory rotations, and placement into a specific graduate program in the second year.

After admittance and near completion of the first doctoral year (in the BSDP), students interested in pursuing a PhD specifically in Physiology and Biophysics should reach out to the Graduate Program Coordinator, Kelly Bowery (kbowery@vcu.edu) and/or Dr. Roland N. Pittman (pittman@vcu.edu), the Director of the Physiology and Biophysics Training Program.

In the fall, BSDP students interested in Physiology and Biophysics normally take:

- A didactic lecture course (organized by organ systems) in Graduate Physiology (PHIS 501-001). The course director is Dr. Margaret Biber. Doctoral students take a parallel seminar course, PHIS 691-501 (see below).
- The Physiology 501 Seminar (PHIS 691-501) introduces classical research papers selected from the lecture course (PHIS 501) and incorporates problem sets in areas that lend themselves to an analytical approach. Students present 20 original papers and provide written answers to questions about them. They are given feedback after each paper presentation and are graded on the final one. The director for this course is Dr. Qinglian Liu.
- A basic Biochemistry course (BIOC 503) is also recommended. This is a comprehensive year-long introductory course (BIOC 504 in the Spring) that describes basic biochemistry and reviews current concepts of modern cell and molecular biology. BIOC 601-004 (Critical Thinking) is a parallel course taken together or independently from BIOC 503. This course covers papers directly linked to the topics presented in BIOC 503, offering a critical analysis of the literature.
- All graduate students in the Physiology and Biophysics graduate program participate in the Physiology Research Seminar each semester. Doctoral and Masters students are required to take PHIS 690-901, and receive credit for credit for attendance of the seminar lecture (Masters students only are required to submit 3 one-page summaries per semester). These summaries are evaluated by the faculty host for the particular seminar speaker. Doctoral students do not have to submit summaries, but are required to register each semester for PHIS 690-902 (in addition to the 901 section). PHIS 690-902 earns students credit for the Pre-Seminar Highlights presentations/discussion. Fall/Spring seminars are listed on the website address: http://www.physiology.vcu.edu/seminars/index, as well as in the Department’s Blackboard. The director for this course is Dr. Lei Zhou.

The Pre-Seminar Highlights that Doctoral students are required to attend (PHIS 690-902) meets on the Tuesday prior to the weekly seminars, which are held on Thursdays at 4:00 PM. At the beginning of each semester, students are required to look at the seminar schedule and select which pre-seminar discussion they would like to lead, presenting a paper related to that week’s speaker/seminar. Students also participate in an informal luncheon with the guest speaker before the seminar on Thursdays. This is an opportunity to network and learn more about the work, career path, and institutions of the guest speakers.

- Faculty eligible to mentor students make brief presentations of their research programs to first year PhD students in the Research Opportunities course (IBMS 610).

- First year PhD students who may be interested in joining the Physiology and Biophysics program will also select Directed Research in Physiology (PHIS 697-801) as part of the laboratory rotation program. This allows students to become familiar with our laboratories and identify a particular area and lab atmosphere that are attractive for dissertation work (students can also use the IBMS 620 course to register for rotations in this program). The rotation also allows the Principal Investigator (PI) and lab members to assess the student. Rotations in labs of primary and affiliate faculty must be approved by the Graduate Program Director (GPD) (see below for more details). All BSDP students must pass an online Laboratory Safety course (IBMS 600) before starting rotations. During a rotation, students are expected to spend at least 15-20 hours per week in the lab learning basic techniques, performing experiments, reading and discussing scientific papers, attending lab meetings, and other related activities. Students are expected to present their rotation results at lab meetings and give a brief (10-15 min) talk to the “Research in Progress – Data Club” (see below). This presentation is in addition to an oral or poster presentation scheduled by the BSDP program. Students and PI will communicate frequently in order to monitor progress and adjust lab schedules to meet the student's curriculum needs, while still satisfying research objectives. The rotating student and the lab PI will sign an agreement stipulating their respective commitments to this important endeavor (see Appendix I). Each rotation lasts 10 weeks. In the first year, students may select all three rotations in the Physiology and Biophysics program, or may rotate in other programs in search of a dissertation lab. In the Physiology and Biophysics program, the laboratory host submits a grade of
Satisfactory (S) or Unsatisfactory (U) to the Graduate Program Director (GPD) along with a paragraph describing the student’s performance during the rotation, pointing out strengths and weaknesses and stating whether he/she would be willing and able to mentor the student for dissertation work. The rotation student also submits a brief description of his/her rotation experience to the GPD, who adds it to the student’s file. The GPD weighs this evaluation with the student’s rotation presentation at the Research in Progress/Data Club seminars and submits a grade of S or U for each research rotation. By the end of the first year, a student should have identified a dissertation lab by mutual agreement with the laboratory PI. Two or three rotations will normally suffice although a fourth will be allowed if needed. In rotations that extend beyond the formal semester limits (e.g., mid-May to end of June or beginning of July to mid-August) students are expected to spend at least 40 hours per week in the lab (see B. RESEARCH).

**In the Spring, students interested in Physiology and Biophysics usually take:**

- **From Molecules to Organisms I (PHIS 606-001)** The emphasis is on the molecular and cellular level research areas in the program. These areas span the range of molecular science with concentration on structural biology and molecular biophysics, ion channel biophysics and physiology. Students have the opportunity to select their favorite topic and write a mini grant proposal that gets critiqued based on criteria used by the NIH. The director for this course is Dr. Carlos Escalante.

- **A Cell and Molecular Physiology Seminar (PHIS 691-606)** (graded) similar to the Fall Semester seminar corollary to PHIS 501, parallels PHIS 606, covering key papers and cutting-edge research articles. Students are required to make presentations based on two publications and write summaries of each; they are given feedback after the first and graded on the second. The course director is Dr. Liya Qiao.

- **Biochem/Cell and Molecular Bio II (BIOC 504)**, This is the second half of the comprehensive year-long introductory course (BIOC 503 in the Fall) that describes basic biochemistry and reviews current concepts of modern cell and molecular biology.

Depending on their research interests and selection of a lab and a Program, students may take a number of electives (see list under Second Year curriculum) in the fall and the spring. This selection as well as specific lab rotations will be made with the help of the student’s advisor. A summary of the recommended first year curriculum for those interested in Physiology and Biophysics is listed below.

**SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDED FIRST YEAR CURRICULUM**

**G1 – Fall [12.5-16.5 credits]**
- Graduate Physiology (PHIS 501) [5]
- Graduate Phys. Seminar (PHIS 691-501) [2]
- Biochem/Cell and Molec. Bio I (BIOC 503) [5]
  - OR Critical Thinking (BIOC 691-004) [1]
- Research Seminar & Journal Club (PHIS 690) [1]
- Directed Research (PHIS 697 or IBMS 620) [2]
- Laboratory Safety (IBMS 600) [1]
- Laboratory Opportunities (IBMS 610) [0.5]

**G1 – Spring [12 credits]**
- From Molecules to Organisms I (PHIS 606) [3]
- Seminar for PHIS 606 (PHIS 691-606) [1]
- Biochem/Cell and Molec. Bio II (BIOC 504) [5]
- Research Seminar & Journal Club (PHIS 690) [1]
- Directed Research (PHIS 697 or IBMS 620) [2]
In order to advance to the second year of studies in Physiology and Biophysics, students must have a “B” average during the first year and must have joined a dissertation laboratory in the program that includes affiliate laboratories. In their second year, students mainly choose from a number of advanced Physiology and Biophysics courses offered usually in an alternating-year sequence and covering specialized topics. Each PhD student is expected to take at least two advanced electives. The choice of elective courses will depend upon the student’s interests and is made in consultation with the student’s Graduate Advisory Committee (see below). If the Graduate Advisory Committee agrees that an advanced course in another program would be particularly relevant to the student’s research, it may substitute for an advanced Physiology and Biophysics course. Some that are typically recommended are:

**Recommended Summer Courses**
- **Directed Research** (*PHIS 697-801*) 1-9 credits [Pittman] {S/U}
- **Writing workshop, (PHIS 692-004) 2 credits [Stuckey/Logothetis] {S/U} Offered annually.** This focuses on identifying and utilizing patterns of thought in writing. The aim is to teach effective writing and how it translates into fundable grant proposals.

**Recommended Fall Courses**
- **Cell Physiology: Molecules to Organisms II (PHIS 604-001) 3 credits [Pittman/Logothetis], {graded}.** The first part of this year-long course focuses on physiology at the level of individual cells and entire organs and organisms and is structured around the ongoing research activity of the program participating faculty. Given the number of faculty working at a systems level, topics are divided into two courses that are offered in alternate years. In odd years topics in oxidative stress, cardiovascular and pulmonary physiology as well as transgenic mouse models and drug development are presented. In even years topics in gastrointestinal and reproductive physiology are presented. Students have the opportunity to select their favorite topic and write a mini grant proposal that gets critiqued based on criteria used by the NIH.
- **Introduction to Electrophysiology and Photonics Methods (PHIS 631-606)** is a comprehensive view of conventional electrophysiological techniques, including two-electrode voltage clamp on *Xenopus* oocytes and patch clamp on oocytes and mammalian cells and extending to more complex techniques, such as Cut-Open oocytes. Photonics includes fluorescence and phosphorescence microscopy, fluorescent molecules, and light as an investigative tool. Voltage clamp fluorescence microscopy combines electrophysiological and photonic methods. The course director is Dr. Carlos Villalba-Galea.
- **Scientific Integrity (OVPR 601), 1 credit [Macrina – Fall] {S/U} Offered annually. Required for all PhD students.**
- **Research in Progress – Data Club (PHIS 695-001) [Baumgarten], 0.5 credits {S/U/F} Students and post-doctoral fellows present to the department their work-in-progress within 20-30 minutes and entertain questions from the audience (also see below, under Research)**
- **Research Seminar and Journal Club (PHIS 690-901) [Zhou], 1 credit {S/U/F}**
- **Research Seminar/Pre-Seminar Highlights (PHIS 690-902) [Zhou], 1 credit {S/U/F}**
- **Directed Research (PHIS 697-801) [Pittman], variable credit {S/U/F}**
Advanced Elective(s) (See below)

Recommended Spring Courses

- **Methods in Molecular Biophysics** (*PHIS 630-001*), 2 credits, covers the theoretical and practical aspects of techniques used to study the structure and function of biological macromolecules in order to better understand biological phenomena. The course director is Dr. Carlos Escalante. Topics include: analysis of protein sequences, protein expression in heterologous systems, protein purification, protein detection and quantification, X-ray crystallography, electron microscopy, analytical ultracentrifugation, light scattering, isothermal titration calorimetry, fluorescence spectroscopy, NMR spectroscopy, and mass spectrometry.

- **Research in Progress – Data Club** (*PHIS 695-001*), 0.5 credit [Baumgarten] {S/U}

- **Phase 2 – Qualifying Candidacy Exam Preparation** (IBMS 680) 1 credit [De Felice] {S/U} [see below]

- **Research Seminar and Journal Club** (*PHIS 690-901*) [Zhou], 1 credit {S/U/F}

- **Directed Research** (*PHIS 697-801*) [Pittman], 1-9 credits {S/U/F}

- Advanced Elective(s) (See below)

**Recommended Advanced Electives** (Number 1-5 *offered in alternate years*)

1. **Cardiovascular Physiology** (*PHIS 612-001*), 3 credits [Tseng – Spring of even years] {Graded} An in-depth study of the original literature in selected areas. The course involves lectures, group discussions, and student presentations. Topics include cardiac ion channel physiology and modulation, excitation-contraction coupling, lipid metabolism and vascular injury, endothelial physiology and dysfunction, mechanism of cardiac protection, vascular smooth muscle physiology and signal transduction, and regulation of the microcirculation.

2. **Signal Detection in Sensory Systems** (*PHIS 615-001*), 3 credits [Lyall – Spring of odd years] {Graded} An in-depth study of cells and cell systems that serve as sensors of the internal or external environment. Topics will emphasize the physiology, anatomy and biochemistry of mature and developing sensing systems, as well as their plasticity.

3. **Cellular Signaling** (IBMS 635), 3 credits [X. Fang - TBD] {Graded} Semester course; 3 lecture hours. Prerequisites: minimum B grade in BIOC 503/504, or permission of instructor. An interdisciplinary introduction to molecular mechanisms important in eukaryotic inter- and intracellular signaling. Topics covered: Common signaling mechanisms (heterotrimeric G proteins and G-protein-coupled receptors, small G proteins, tyrosine kinases and MAP kinases, and ion channels), Membranes, lipids and ions (calcium signaling, phosphoinositols, and lipid signaling through GPCRs), immune and metabolic kinase cascades (AMP-activated kinase, NFκB, and Jak/Stat pathways), and Programmed cell death.

4. **Ion Channels in Membranes** (*PHIS 620/PHTX 620*), 3 credits [Ramsey – Spring of odd years] {Graded} Detailed presentation of the fundamental biophysical properties of ion channels in membranes including the elementary properties of pores, molecular mechanisms of ionic selectivity, mechanisms of drug block, structure-function relationships, and basis for channel gating. Discussion will encompass modern approaches to ion channel function.

5. **Physiology and Pharmacology of the Gastrointestinal System** (*PHIS 691-004*), 3 credits [Grider – Spring of even years] {Graded} A comprehensive study of neurogastroenterology and motility. Faculty from different departments will cover all major aspects of gastrointestinal motility from the molecular to the organ level. The format utilizes didactic lectures, group discussions, historical perspectives and in-depth analysis of scientific articles
pertinent to the function of enteric neurons, enteroendocrine cells, and smooth muscle cells of the gut.

6. **Biostatistics (BIOS 543)**, 3 credits. Basic concepts and techniques of statistical methods, including: the collection and display of information, data analysis, and statistical measures; variation, sampling, and sampling distributions; point estimation, confidence intervals, and tests of hypotheses for one and two sample problems; principles of one-factor experimental design, one-way analysis of variance, and multiple comparisons; correlation and simple linear regression analysis; contingency tables and tests for goodness of fit.

7. **Cell and Molecular Neuroscience (NEUS 609)**, 4 credits [Bigbee – Fall semester] {Graded} Designed as an interdisciplinary introduction to the cellular and molecular aspects of central nervous system function. The basic principles of neuroscience including neuronal structure, electrical properties of single neurons, cell biology of neurotransmitter release and postsynaptic function will be discussed, followed by intracellular signaling in neurons, gene regulation, transgenic model systems, glia, neuronal development, basic neurochemistry, and molecular and cellular aspects of motor, sensory and integrative function. The course will conclude with lectures on various aspects of neural injury/disease, including traumatic brain injury, Parkinson’s & Alzheimer’s.

Two electives (or alternatives approved by GPD) are required for all PhD students.

In order to continue in the Program, students must maintain a GPA of at least 3.0 in graded courses and Satisfactory performance in non-graded courses.

By the Fall Semester of the 2nd year, the candidate will have completed most required and recommended courses (excluding **PHIS 690-901/902, PHIS 695-001, and 697-801**, which are ongoing), selected a dissertation lab, and formed a dissertation committee. The stage is then set for the Qualifying Exam (see below).

3. **Candidacy Years**:

Following successful completion of the first two years of the program and the Qualifying Examination (see below), students advance to candidacy for the PhD degree.

During the candidacy years:

- Attendance at weekly Departmental Seminars (**PHIS 690-901**) is required of all full-time students, including the first BSDP year, if the student is rotating in a Physiology lab. The requirement to register for PHIS 690-901 is waived for the semester in which the student plans to defend his/her dissertation.
- In addition to PHIS 690-901, Doctoral students are required to register for **PHIS 690-902** (Pre-Seminar Highlights)
- Participation and attendance in the Research in Progress – Data Club course (**PHIS 695-001**) is also required.
- All PhD students are expected to be in residence and pursue research during the summers and must register for 15 credit hours in the fall and spring and 3 credit hours in the summer (no more nor less).
It is recommended that PhD candidates who intend to pursue academic careers take the 7-credit set of courses entitled ‘Preparing Future Faculty in the Professions’ (PFFP; GRAD 601-606). This can be done any time during the course of study.

Qualifying Examination:

**Phase 1 Qualifying Exam** (scheduled by the Physiology and Biophysics program) occurs in the Fall semester of the second year and consists of two parts, written and oral. The written part is a five-page (Arial 11, 0.5” margins, single spaced) mini-review, the topic selected by the student and dissertation mentor and approved by the GPD. The 5-page limit includes figures but not references. The purpose of the mini-review, containing approximately 30 references, is to summarize the background and outstanding questions in a particular field, potentially leading to a dissertation project. Successful mini-reviews may be expanded into publishable reviews or included in the background for the student’s dissertation. For the 2015-2016 academic year the topic title needs to be submitted to the GPD by Friday, 10/09/15. The candidate then has one month to submit the mini-review to the GPD. This year the mini-review will be due on Monday, 11/09/2015. The GPD distributes the document to a standing Examining Committee, which is the same for all candidates in a given year. While writing Phase 1, students may neither ask for nor receive advice on the scope, form, or specific content of the mini-review, which is to be written solely by the student and neither edited nor proofread by another person. Most students will be taking OVPR 601 (Scientific Integrity) in the Fall semester of the second year, which addresses plagiarism - All written assignments and exams ought to acknowledge the sources of borrowed material. Even one copied sentence from another source constitutes plagiarism if not credited appropriately.

The **Phase 1 PhD Examining Committee** is composed of senior faculty with combined expertise to critique mini-reviews for a broad range of topics represented in the Program. Within two weeks, the Committee will evaluate the mini-review and two weeks later it will conduct a two-hour oral examination based on it (students whose papers are unacceptable may submit another in the following January). Part 1 is designed to take no more than 2 months (to write, submit, and prepare for the oral examination). The Graduate Program Coordinator helps with organizing the date/time/location of the oral examination for Phase 1. Since the committee will have a copy of the Phase 1 proposal prior to the meeting, students need only give a 10 minute overview/presentation before committee members begin to ask questions. The purpose of the oral examination is to evaluate the student’s comprehension of course work and ability to synthesize information, integrate the literature in a particular area, and formulate research questions. If a student does not pass the oral, the committee may (at its option) allow the student to repeat only the oral portion of the exam. A student may be permitted to repeat Part 1 of the qualifying exam no more than once. Part 1 should be completed by the end of the Fall Semester of the second year, or, in the case of a repeated exam, no later than the end of the Spring Semester of the 2nd year.

Phase 1 PhD Examining Committee evaluates this part using the following assessment tool:

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<th>Phase 1</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Below average</th>
<th>Poor</th>
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<td>Identifies appropriate background / existing information</td>
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<td>Presentation, assessment and analysis of</td>
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The Phase 2 Qualifying Exam is administrated by the student’s Dissertation Committee. This committee is formed (through GradTrak) in January following the successful completion of the Phase 1 exam, and a meeting is scheduled to discuss plans for the thesis proposal that constitutes the Phase 2 exam. From this point on the formal advisory mechanism for students is through the dissertation committee, while prior to this point this role is served by the GPD. Phase 2 of the Qualifying Examination consists of a written thesis proposal modeled after the NIH F31 or F30 grant application mechanisms (see below), and an oral defense of the proposal. It must be scheduled through the Office of Graduate Education and requires a Dean’s representative (see guidance from the Department’s Graduate Program Coordinator).

Before the G3 Fall semester, each student (with the help of the Graduate Program Coordinator) must arrange a date, time, and location for the committee to meet for the Oral Qualifying Exam. The **2 hour exam must take place prior to the start of the G3 year** (before late August). Due to the steps involved, it is suggested that the student begin preparing for the exam immediately after the G2 spring semester ends. Once an exam date has been formalized, the student must input the date, time, and location, within GradTrak. This notifies the Graduate Education Office so that a Dean’s representative may be secured. A copy of the proposal should be submitted to the GPD three weeks prior to the exam date. Five days later the GPD will notify the student whether the committee members have found the written document acceptable so that the student can proceed to the scheduled oral exam. GradTrak provides a form (Oral Examination Announcement) soon after the exam is scheduled. The student must print this form and retrieve signatures from each committee member. **IMPORTANT:** this signed document (along with the Phase 2 proposal) must be delivered to the Office of Graduate Education (Sanger 1-055) **two** weeks prior to the exam date (no later).

**NOTE:** A sample proposal is available – please email the Graduate Program Coordinator.

A **6-page research proposal** (Arial 11, single space, 0.5” margins) of the anticipated dissertation project is required. It may be submitted at any time during the Spring/Summer Semester of the second year, but not later than the start of the G3 Fall semester (before mid August). The proposal is based on the student’s experimental work in the advisor’s laboratory, and it consists of a basic plan for the dissertation research, with the student’s own preliminary data supporting feasibility. Mentor input should not extend to editing the document, but discussions on the content are considered part of student training. Eligible students are strongly advised to use the proposal as a basis for the 6-page NIH F31 (or F30 for MD/PhD students) fellowship application (see: [http://grants.nih.gov/training/F_files_nrsa.htm](http://grants.nih.gov/training/F_files_nrsa.htm)).

The oral exam begins with a 20-min presentation by the student of the major points of the proposal and the exam follows with questions asked by the committee members.
Unsatisfactory proposals may be revised and resubmitted once. The reexamination must be completed during the Fall of the third (G3) year and before the end of the semester. Prior approval of the MCV Campus Graduate Committee is required for a student to repeat Part 2 of the Qualifying Examination. After completion of Part 2, the student’s Dissertation/Advisory Committee meets at least once every 12 months (usually following the student’s presentation at the Research in Progress – Data Club seminars – PHIS 695-001), although it can meet more often to monitor the student’s progress. The Graduate Program Coordinator helps to organize these meetings.

Dissertation Committee members will evaluate Phase 2 using the following assessment tool.

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<tr>
<th>Phase 2</th>
<th>Excellent</th>
<th>Good</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Below average</th>
<th>Poor</th>
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<td>Identification and articulation of the problem</td>
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Students who do not pass the second attempt at Phase 2 cannot remain in the PhD program.

**Thesis Defense and Deposition:**

Once the advisory committee agrees that a student is ready to defend his/her dissertation, the PhD candidate is required to give a departmental seminar, in conjunction with the final oral defense. Guidelines for completion of the graduate degree can be found at: http://www.medschool.vcu.edu/graduate/student_res/ (see section on “Degree Completion”).

**B. RESEARCH**

1. **Laboratory selection and Rotations:** Until a dissertation laboratory is found, PhD students take Directed Research (PHIS 697-801) [Pittman] {S/U} each semester. The GPD assigns the S/U grade based on the mentor’s recommendation. Rotations are 10 weeks long. If the student has not identified a lab for thesis work, rotations can continue. The effort in the lab is expected to intensify to full-time as the Spring semester ends. After 2-4 rotations, not all of which must be in labs participating in this program, students should have selected a dissertation research laboratory from the list of approved primary or affiliate faculty members. Ideally, the student will identify two viable choices for dissertation work before completing the rotation.
The student’s Dissertation/Advisory Committee meeting typically occurs in or near the week of the Research Progress - Data Club seminar presentation (and is organized by the Graduate Program Coordinator). Thus, the PhD candidate’s presentation should occur roughly every 9-12 months, in synchrony with their Committee meetings. After each Dissertation Committee meeting, the Chair of the Dissertation Committee (the student’s dissertation advisor) briefly summarizes the student’s progress in a standard form reflecting the committee’s discussions. All committee members sign the form and submit it to the GPD for inclusion in the student’s file. A more extended summary of the student’s progress by the thesis advisor is prepared and discussed at the Graduate Program Research Committee meeting (see below).

3. **Retreat**: Students are expected to plan and participate in the annual retreat of the Physiology and Biophysics Graduate Program, which occurs in June. In alternate years students will either present posters of their ongoing and proposed research or selected students will give oral research presentations and students and faculty will discuss in small groups how to improve different aspects of the program. Discussions with program alumni about diverse careers are part of the retreat program. Although primarily an opportunity to showcase the progress of our Graduate Program trainees, all members of the program are strongly encouraged to attend. It affords everyone, including faculty and post-doctoral fellows, the opportunity to obtain a complete picture of the Training Program.
C. TEACHING

All PhD students will be given the opportunity to serve at least once as a Teaching Assistant (TA) in the undergraduate Human Physiology Lab (PHIZ 206), which is given in parallel with the Human Physiology lecture course (PHIS 206). PhD (or MS) TAs will give an introduction to each lab session, supervise laboratory exercises, correct laboratory reports, and participate in the laboratory curriculum development. TAs will be evaluated by a faculty member participating in the laboratory course, who will write an evaluation of teaching performance to be included in the student’s file. The GPD can refer to these files when considering students for future teaching responsibilities or in letters of recommendation. Students with exemplary performance will have the opportunity to give selected lectures in the undergraduate lecture course, PHIS 206. Additional teaching opportunities exist for other graduate level courses.

NOTE: This PHIZ 206 undergraduate lab course takes place on the Monroe Park Campus, every Tuesday afternoon (preparation and class time requires most of the afternoon).

II. Program Direction/Administrative Structure

A. GRADUATE PROGRAM DIRECTOR

Dr. Roland Pittman, with the assistance of Dr. Carlos Escalante, serves as the Graduate Program Director (GPD) for the Physiology and Biophysics Graduate Program. Administrative support extending to the administrative needs of students (stipends, insurance, registration, tracking of graduate student deadlines, keeping the student academic folders updated, international student office matters, etc.) is provided by the program’s coordinator, Ms. Kelly Bowery (kbowery@vcu.edu), who also serves as the Department Administrator. In addition to administrative matters, Ms. Bowery also assists with scheduling all advisory committee meetings, maintains student files, prepares F30/F31 grant proposals and attends/organizes program related meetings. Students should feel free to reach out to the Program Coordinator first with questions/concerns.

B. GRADUATE PROGRAM TRAINING/RESEARCH COMMITTEE

All training faculty (trainers) in the Physiology and Biophysics graduate program meet throughout the year to review the progress of all students. The thesis mentor discusses the student(s) in his/her lab. The Program Directors present the progress of rotating students who are prospective new students in the program. These meetings aim to acquaint all faculty mentors with all the students within the program and to monitor their progress. The meetings are staffed by the Program Coordinator.

C. STEERING COMMITTEE

A Steering Committee for the Graduate Program meets annually to review all aspects of Training in Physiology and Biophysics during the preceding academic year, to identify strengths and weaknesses, and to develop strategic plans for the future. The Steering Committee also serves as a promotions committee and reviews all PhD students annually with
regard to performance in course work, laboratory work, and advancement in the Program. This committee is also the Admissions Committee as it considers BSDP students wishing to transition to laboratories of faculty within the Physiology and Biophysics program. The members of this committee are: Drs. Roland Pittman, Diomedes Logothetis, Louis De Felice, Scott Ramsey and Carlos Escalante.

D. CURRICULUM EVALUATION

The Program in Physiology and Biophysics evaluates all courses every 3-5 years. In the year of the evaluation and at the conclusion of the course, an ad hoc committee is formed to review course objectives, content, delivery, rigor, and effectiveness. The course review committee is appointed by the GPD and makes recommendations to the GPD and the Department Chair. The course review committee requests a written report and supporting documents from the course director and then meets with the course director, course faculty, and doctoral students. It then prepares a course summary report, describing strengths and weaknesses and recommendations for change. The report is submitted to the GPD, who makes final recommendations for changes and improvements to the Teaching Leadership Committee (TLC), comprised of all course directors in the Physiology and Biophysics program (see below). After TLC approval, the GPD meets with the director(s) of the evaluated courses and the Department Chair to discuss plans for changes.

E. TEACHING LEADERSHIP COMMITTEE

The GPD organizes monthly meetings of this committee. Proposed changes in the Curriculum of the Program must have majority approval by the Teaching Leadership Committee (TLC), which oversees the teaching efforts of the Training Program. The membership is comprised of all current course directors.

III. Training Faculty

A. TRAINING PROGRAM MEMBERS

The training faculty consists of primary (or tenure-track), collateral (or research), and affiliate faculty of the Program. Primary and affiliate faculty maintain research programs mainly funded from the National Institutes of Health and National Science Foundation, while research faculty support the research program of primary faculty. If a faculty member experiences a lapse in funding, he/she cannot accept new students for dissertation work until
Primary Faculty (Potential Doctoral Student Research Mentors)

Clive M. Baumgarten  Richard M. Costanzo  Louis J. De Felice  Carlos R. Escalante  Javier Gonzalez-Maeso

John R. Grider  John Hackett  S. Murthy Karnam  Qinglian Liu  Diomedes E. Logothetis

Vijay Lyall  Roland N. Pittman  Liya Qiao  I. Scott Ramsey  Montserrat Samso

Gea-Ny Tseng  Lei Zhou

Collateral or Research Faculty
Eltit Ortega José Miguel, PhD (Instructor, De Felice lab)
Golub Aleksander, PhD (Associate Professor, Pittman Lab)
Kawano Takeharu, PhD (Assistant Professor, Logothetis Lab)
Mahavadi Sunila, PhD (Instructor, Karnam Lab)
Villalba-Galea Carlos A., PhD (Assistant Professor)
Zarate-Perez, Francisco, PhD (Instructor, Escalante Lab)

**Affiliate Faculty (Potential Doctoral Student Research Mentors)**
Affiliate faculty have their primary appointments in departments other than Physiology and Biophysics but participate actively in the Physiology and Biophysics Graduate Training Program. Membership of affiliate faculty is reviewed each year for level of participation and interest in the program. For more information on affiliate faculty see the web site: [http://www.physiology.vcu.edu/directoryaffiliate/index.html](http://www.physiology.vcu.edu/directoryaffiliate/index.html)

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**B. RESEARCH AREAS**
Current Physiology and Biophysics faculty members (primary and affiliate) concentrate in nine areas of research:

I. Apoptosis and Cell Cycle Control [Dent]

II. Chemical Senses (Taste and Smell) [Lyall, R. Costanzo]

III. Cardiovascular (Cardiac Ion Channels, Microcirculation, Ischemia/Reperfusion Injury, Atherosclerosis, Hypertension) [Abbate, Baumgarten, Ghosh, Kukreja, Li P-L, Logothetis, Pittman, Salloum, Tseng, Zhou]

IV. Gastrointestinal (Molecular/Cellular Biology of smooth muscle cells/enteric neurons and Whole Organ Reflexes, such as peristalsis and acid secretion) [Akbarali, Grider, Karnam, Kuemmerle, Qiao]

V. Mitochondrial Physiology/Cardiovascular Diseases [Baumgarten, Lesnefsky, Liu]

VI. Molecular Biophysics (Structural/Computational Biology and Ion Channel, Receptor, and Transporter Biophysics) [De Felice, Escalante, Gonzalez-Maeso, Hackett, Liu, Logothetis, Ramsey, Samso, Tseng, Zhou]

VII Physiology of Pregnancy/Pre-eclampsia [Strauss, Walsh]

VIII. Respiratory (Asthma, Cystic Fibrosis) [Rubin]

IX. Wound/Tissue Repair, Head Trauma, Regeneration [Marmarou, R. Costanzo]

X. Neuropsychiatric diseases (Gonzalez-Maeso, Logothetis)

For more information, visit the web site: http://www.physiology.vcu.edu/research/index.html

C. FACULTY RESEARCH SEMINARS

A collaborative research spirit is nurtured in the program by bimonthly research meetings where faculty members (tenure, research track, and affiliates) present ongoing and planned future research for critical feedback. These meetings have proven invaluable in making each faculty aware of what research questions others are pursuing and the research tools they utilize. This awareness has promoted discussions and collaborations.

D. RESEARCH CORE FACILITIES

Core facilities are defined as research facilities that are open to multiple members within the graduate program and the institution at large. Core facilities aim to make advanced or specialized technologies available to members of the VCU research community for a nominal fee.

1) Measurement of intracellular calcium (Director: Dr. Jose Miguel Eltit)
2) Cryo-Electron Microscopy (Director: Dr. Montserrat Samso)
3) *Xenopus* Oocytes for heterologous expression of proteins (Director: Dr. Diomedes Logothetis)

IV. Trainee Recruitment, Selection and Retention

A. RECRUITMENT

The Program in Physiology and Biophysics targets four major national meetings: Biophysical Society, American Physiological Society, SACNAS (minority recruitment), and ABRCMS (minority recruitment). The Biophysical and American Physiological Society meetings are well attended by faculty in the program who man a booth to disseminate information about the program in particular and the VCU School of Medicine at large. Dr. De Felice, who is in charge of graduate recruitment for the program and the School of Medicine, brings strong recruitment experience, having led a very successful Neuroscience Program and the minority Bridges Program at Vanderbilt University. He has already provided presence of the Training Program in Physiology and Biophysics at regional (Virginia Junior Academy of Sciences, Virginia Academy of Sciences, university fairs in Virginia and in neighboring states), and national meetings targeting undergraduates interested in research careers. The Program also taps into VCU resources (the Honors College, HHMI undergraduates, and HERO programs) including its own Summer Undergraduate Research Program (see below). A brochure has been developed summarizing the Training Program and primary faculty research interests to be distributed to directors of targeted undergraduate programs and students who inquire about training opportunities in Physiology and Biophysics. The Program is committed to diversity in recruitment and enrollment and is actively engaged in School of Medicine initiatives to promote underrepresented minorities.

B. ADMISSIONS

Admission to the PhD programs in the first year is through the BSDP, as described above. After the first year, students matching to laboratories in the Physiology and Biophysics Program are reviewed by the Steering Committee of the Program, which has the authority of an Admissions committee to accept or reject a student.

http://www.medschool.vcu.edu/graduate/phd/index

C. OVERSIGHT and RETENTION

The first year advisor, appointed by the BSDP, is Dr. Roland N. Pittman and Ms. Kelly Bowery for students interested in Physiology and Biophysics. During the first year academic progress is tracked closely by the BSDP and is reported to the GPD. After a student has selected Physiology and Biophysics and joined a research group, progress is tracked by his or her research mentor, under the oversight of the Graduate Program Director and Coordinator.
Twice a year the mentor submits a brief written report describing the student’s status and progress. These reports are discussed at meetings of the Graduate Program Training/Research Committee, which includes as members all faculty in whose laboratories a student is currently training. **In addition, following completion of the Phase 1 Qualifying Exam, the student meets with his or her Dissertation Committee at least once a year.** Prior to each of these meetings the student should prepare (or update) an Individual Development Plan (IDP) and submit a printed synopsis to his/her Dissertation Committee, to the GPC (Kelly Bowery), and to the Graduate School. (A convenient resource for preparation of the IDP is [http://myidp.sciencecareers.org/](http://myidp.sciencecareers.org/).)

**D. CURRENT PhD STUDENTS**

The current PhD trainees are listed below. For more information, visit the Department of Physiology and Biophysics web site: [http://www.physiology.vcu.edu/directory/students/index.html](http://www.physiology.vcu.edu/directory/students/index.html)

**PhD Students:** (year of matriculation, Graduate Year, [lab head])
- Alkahtani, Reem (2012, G4) [Karnam]
- Bennett, Ashley (2014, G2) [Ramsey]
- Cao, Tuoxin (2011, G5) [Ramsey]
- Davis, Michael (2012, G4) [Rubin]
- Ellaithy, Amr (2013, G3) [Logothetis]
- Hatcher, Candice (2010, G6) [Logothetis]
- Hendon, Tyler (2014, G2) [Hackett]
- Idikuda, Vinaykumar (2013, G3) [Zhou]
- Nalli, Ancy Dimpy (2013, G3) [Karnam]
- Park, Sung (2010, G6) [Baumgarten]
- Ruchala, Iwona (2012, G4) [De Felice]
- Santosh, Vishaka (2013, G3) [Escalante]
- Steele, Tyler (2012, G4) [De Felice]
- Waite, Christopher (2013, G3) [Zhou]
- Xiang, Guoqing (2013, G3) [Logothetis]
- Younkin, Jason (2010, G6) [Logothetis]

**MD/PhD Students**
- Blakeney, Adam (2013, G2) [Heise]
- Ha, Junghoon (2011, G4) [Logothetis]

**E. MASTERS PROGRAM**

All prospective students for the Master of Science (MS) degree in Physiology and Biophysics **generally enter through the Premedical Graduate Health Sciences Certificate Program**, or an equivalent program: [www.medschool.vcu.edu/graduate/premed_cert/index.html](http://www.medschool.vcu.edu/graduate/premed_cert/index.html). The Certificate Program is usually a duration of one year and students must successfully graduate from this program in order to enter our Masters program. **Certificate Program students who have interest in applying to our Masters program should email the Physiology and Biophysics Program Coordinator (Kelly Bowery, kbowery@vcu.edu) no later than April 30th of that year, for Summer entry.**
After the Certificate program, a minimum of two semesters (30 credit hours) in residence is required for the Masters Degree. Although most MS students will pursue careers in professional schools, it is hoped that the exposure to research will serve as an invaluable experience that will shape the way in which these students will approach their future studies and careers. Often enough, students pursuing the MS degree become excited by research and decide to pursue a career in biomedical research, instead of one as a health practitioner. For more information on the MS program, visit the Department of Physiology and Biophysics website: [http://www.physiology.vcu.edu/education/masters/index](http://www.physiology.vcu.edu/education/masters/index)

**F. SUMMER UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH PROGRAM (SURP)**

The goal of this program is to recruit academically excellent undergraduate students in order to engage them in research projects during the summer with the goal of interesting them in research. Our hope is that we will enrich the candidate pools for the PhD and MD/PhD programs of the School of Medicine at VCU. The program provides limited support to 1-3 students (a $2,500 stipend for living expenses and, if needed, additional assistance for housing). The duration of SURP in Physiology and Biophysics is 10 weeks, usually from mid May to end of July. Several other students also join the program without support. Mechanisms to enhance interactions among participating students and faculty include: 1) a breakfast gathering once per week with scientific presentations from members of the Department hosting students, student presentations of progress reports, and group discussion of original papers from labs participating in the program; and 2) departmental social events (happy hours, doctoral student post-defense parties, etc.). At the conclusion of the program, each student presents a poster summarizing his/her results at the “SURP in Physiology and Biophysics Poster Symposium”. Dr. Qinglian Liu serves as the SURP Director.

**V. Tracking Plan/Outcomes**

*Tracking Career outcomes*

We track our graduates after they leave our program, in particular the position, publication record, grant proposal history, awards, and career trajectory. We are also evaluating the average time to degree and the attrition rate of the Training Program. A record of the graduates from our program for the past decade can be seen at [http://www.physiology.vcu.edu/directory/alumni/index.html](http://www.physiology.vcu.edu/directory/alumni/index.html).
VI. Research and Training Environment

A. GENERAL
The Graduate Program at the VCU School of Medicine provides two years of full support to all PhD level graduate students. In addition, the Graduate School has an emergency program for one-year of support of students whose mentors experience lapses in funding. Students receive an increase in stipend level ($1,000) after they successfully complete the Qualifying Examinations and advance to candidacy.

Laboratory space of primary faculty in the program of Physiology and Biophysics is either recently built or newly renovated. The labs are in Sanger Hall and the Molecular Medicine Research Building (MMRB), which opened in the spring, 2009. State-of-the-art facilities exist within the Department of Physiology and Biophysics and the School of Medicine. Institutional core facilities at the MCV campus include Molecular Biology, Imaging, Transgenic Animal, Computational, Nucleic Acid Sequencing, etc. [see: www.medschool.vcu.edu/research/core_resources/index]

B. POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWS
The Program in Physiology and Biophysics actively involves postdoctoral fellows in participating laboratories. They participate in the seminar series (PHIS 690) through pre-seminar highlights, and they attend seminars and luncheons with the guest speakers. Together with doctoral students, postdoctoral fellows may invite guest speakers for the Departmental seminar series and host the guest’s visit. In addition, postdoctoral fellows present ongoing work in the Research Progress - Data Club seminars. The Program capitalizes on every opportunity to bring students and postdoctoral fellows together, as their respective research training benefits immensely from close interactions. Finally, interested postdoctoral fellows are offered teaching opportunities in undergraduate, graduate, and professional school courses. The following postdoctoral fellows train currently in participating laboratories:

http://www.physiology.vcu.edu/directory/postdocs/index.html
Current Postdoctoral Fellows [Lab]
De La Rosa Jimenez, Victor, PhD [Ramsey]
Dhindwal, Sonali, PhD [Samso]
Gao, Weihua, PhD [Zhou]
Jennings, Gareth, PhD [Hackett]
Kawano, Takeharu, PhD [Logothetis]
Li, Hongtao, PhD [Liu]
Liu, Miao, PhD [Qiao]
O’Brien, Laura, PhD [Logothetis/Bennett]
Qian, Jie, PhD [Lyall]
Shock, Lisa, PhD [Hackett]
Solis, Ernesto, PhD [De Felice]
Xu, Yu, PhD [Logothetis/Tseng]
Yang, Jiao, PhD [Liu]

Richmond, Virginia and the James River
# VII Doctoral Program Time Line

## G1 – Fall [12.5-16.5 credits]
- Graduate Physiology (PHIS 501) [5]
- Graduate Physiology Seminar (PHIS 691-501) [2]
- Biochem/Cell and Molecular Bio I (BIOC 503) [5] OR Critical Thinking (BIOC 691-004) [1]
- Research Seminar (PHIS 690-901/902) [1-2]
- Directed Research (PHIS 697 or IBMS 620) [2]
- Laboratory Safety (IBMS 600) [1]
- Laboratory Opportunities (IBMS 610) [0.5]

## G1 – Spring [10-15 credits]
- From Molecules to Organisms I (PHIS 606) [3]
- Seminar for PHIS 606 (PHIS 691-606) [1]
- Biochem/Cell and Molecular Bio II (BIOC 504) [5]
- Research Seminar (PHIS 690-901/902) [1-2]
- Directed Research (PHIS 697 or IBMS 620) [2]

## G2 – Summer [3 credits]
- Writing Workshop (PHIS 692-004) [2]
- Directed Research (PHIS 697) [1-3]

## G2 – Fall [15 credits]
- From Molecules to Organisms II (PHIS 604) [3]
- Intro to Electrophys. and Photonics (PHIS 631-606) [2]
- Advanced Elective (see choices below) [3]
- Scientific Integrity (OVPR 601) [1]
- Research Seminar (PHIS 690-901/902) [1-2]
- Research in Progress (PHIS 695-001) [0.5]
- Directed Research (PHIS 697) [3.5]
- Qualifying Exam – Phase 1

## Advanced Electives (Fall)
- Biostatistics (BIOS 543) [3]
- Cell and Molec. Neuroscience (NEUS 609) [4]
- Mitoch. pathophys. & Human Disease (PHIS 619) [3]
- Sensory Sys. Signal Detection (PHIS 615) [3] *odd yr*

## G2 – Spring [15 credits]
- Methods in Molecular Biophysics (PHIS 630-001) [2]
- Advanced Elective (see choices below) [3-4]
- Thesis Proposal Preparation (IBMS 680) [1]
- Research Seminar (PHIS 690-901/902) [1-2]
- Research in Progress (PHIS 695-001) [0.5]
- Directed Research (PHIS 697) [3.5-6.5]
- Qualifying Exam – Phase 2

## Advanced Electives (Spring)
- Physical Prop. of Macromolecules (BIOC 602) [4]
- Cardiovascular Physiology (PHIS 612) [3] *even yr*
- Ion Channels (PHIS 620) *odd yr*
- Phys & Pharm of GI Syst (PHIS 691-003) [3] *even yr*
- Cellular Signaling (IBMS 635) [3]

## G3-G5 – Summer [3 credits]
- Directed Research (PHIS 697) [3]

## G3-G5 – Fall [15 credits]
- Research Seminar (PHIS 690-901/902) [1-2]
- Research in Progress (PHIS 695-001) [0.5]
- Scientific Integrity Cases (PHIS 601) [1] G4 students
- Teaching Assistant in Physiology [0] (req. for 1 sem.)
- Specialty Journal Club [0] (recommended)
- Directed Research (PHIS 697) [Variable]

## G3-G5 – Fall [15 credits]
- Research Seminar (PHIS 690-901/902) [1-2]
- Research in Progress (PHIS 695-001) [0.5]
- Teaching Assistant in Physiology [0] (req. for 1 sem.)
- Specialty Journal Club [0] (recommended)
- Directed Research (PHIS 697) [Variable]
LABORATORY ROTATION AGREEMENT

Student Name:  
Rotation Dates:  
Rotation Preceptor:  
Project Title:  
Who will directly supervise the student?

Hours per week that the student is expected to be in the laboratory (15-20h recommended):  
(Expectations should include time needed for coursework/studying for exams.)

Were laboratory guidelines/policies (e.g., biohazards, lab notebook) explained to the student?  
____ Y ____ N
Has the student been provided with a reading list?  
____ Y ____ N
Is the student expected to attend lab meetings?  
____ Y ____ N
Is the student expected to present at lab meetings?  
____ Y ____ N
Will the student be required to present in a lab meeting before the end of the rotation?  
____ Y ____ N

Goals and activities for this rotation: (attach additional sheets if necessary)

At the end of this rotation the student will:

1) Meet with the rotation preceptor and complete the Student Laboratory Rotation Evaluation Form

At the end of this rotation preceptor will:

2) Meet with the rotation student and complete the Preceptor Laboratory Rotation Evaluation Form

We accept these conditions and have discussed the likelihood of space and support should the student consider this lab for their dissertation

__________________________  ____________________
Rotation Preceptor Signature          Student Signature
Advisory Committee Meeting Form
Doctoral Program in Physiology and Biophysics – Student Progress Report

Student must get signatures and submit to Program Coordinator at least ONCE a year (each committee meeting)

Student Name

**THIS SECTION MUST BE COMPLETED**
The following questions should be explicitly answered at the Advisory meeting so that problem areas can be identified as early and productively as possible:

The Advisory Committee met on __________________________ and the outcome is the following:

This student’s progress has been:  [ ] Excellent  [ ] Good  [ ] Adequate  [ ] Problematic

Please Rate your level of satisfaction with the student in the following areas:

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Thesis Advisor

Signature				Date

Please summarize the committee’s impressions regarding the student’s progress:

What do you recommend to further the student’s skill development before the next meeting?

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Student

Signature				Date

By signature, we certify that we have met with the student and reviewed/discussed the information on the Progress Form, unless otherwise noted.
MCV CAMPUS COURSE OVERRIDE PERMISSION FORM

Year ___________ Semester   ___ Spring   ___ Summer   ___ Fall

All sections must be completed in order for this card to be accepted by Records & Registration.

Student Name ____________________________ Last    First    MI

Student ID Number ________________________

Course Reference No.   Subject    Course    Section    Credits

Type of override(s) approved (Check all that apply)

___ Major, School ___ Size ___ Early audit
___ Classification, Class ___ Duplicate section ___ Time Conflict

Instructor Approval ____________________________

Signature ___________ Printed Name ___________ Phone ___________ Date

Dean/Designee ____________________________

Signature ___________ Printed Name ___________ Date
COURSE REQUEST FORM

NAME ___________________________ Last ________ First ________ MI ________ Student ID Number ________

INSTRUCTIONS  Print Clearly
1. Check the appropriate transaction box.
2. Select alternates for courses you are adding.
3. Course information may be found in the Schedule of Classes

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All students: I understand I will not receive credit for these courses if my academic eligibility is not established.

Graduate students: I am prepared to document that I meet the requirements and prerequisites for the listed graduate level course(s) as outlined in the current graduate bulletin and understand that I may be removed from the course(s) if I am not qualified.

Special Undergraduates: Special non-degree seeking undergraduates are limited to 11 credit hours per semester.

I have read and agree to abide by the University Honor System, University Code of Ethics, and University Academic Regulations.

STUDENT SIGNATURE ___________________________ DATE ____________

ADVISOR SIGNATURE ___________________________ DATE ____________

Virginia Commonwealth University
Office of Records & Registration
Division of Student Affairs & Enrollment Services
P.O. Box 842320 • Richmond, VA 23284-2320
http://www.vcu.edu/emsl/rar/

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