

*Do you have a research project you want to develop as a senior thesis or another in-depth project? Do you want to gain skills through a hands-on internship?*

Apply for the experiential learning fellowship!

## OVERVIEW

The experiential learning program provides fellowships for \$1,000 for Native and Indigenous students at Virginia Tech to conduct hands-on projects while working closely with a faculty mentor. These experiences are student-designed and led. The experiential learning opportunities could include laboratory research projects, field-based research projects, skill-development field trips, assisting in developing extension educational programs, community-based projects, or other experiences based on the student's interest. Students participating in the program are paired with faculty mentors and on-site collaborators or supervisors. In addition to the funding students receive to support their projects, additional funding is available for materials and supplies they might require. Host organizations could include community groups, non-profits, on-campus organizations, corporate partners, government agencies, or other institutions. The program is open to Native and Indigenous undergraduate students at Virginia Tech.

Virginia Tech faculty and students partner with many potential host organizations and student faculty mentors. Applicants are encouraged to consult program director Donna Westfall-Rudd (mooredm@vt.edu) if they would like help identifying a suitable internship opportunity.

## FAQ

### What do you need to apply?

- \* A viable experiential learning idea.
- \* A preliminary plan for carrying out the idea.
- \* A faculty member who has agreed to mentor your project and has discussed your ideas with you. Faculty Mentors are expected to participate in a Community of Practice designed to help them best support you and your project. *The fellowship does not include funding for the faculty member.*
- \* A member of a community interested in assisting or supporting your project (optional)

### How is the fellowship decision determined?

The fellowship review committee will select an annual group of program fellows based on:

1. Demonstration of curiosity for academic, community, or research development with perseverance necessary to complete experiential learning plan
2. The project is well-thought-through
3. The applicant has proposed a project they are likely to complete in the timeframe they identify

### **How are the fellowships disbursed?**

The fellowship awards are credited to your Virginia Tech bursar's account. They will be applied to your university accounts.

### **How do I find a faculty mentor?**

Is your proposed project something you worked on or dreamed up in a class? Consider contacting the faculty member who taught the class. Or, you may also ask a faculty member who works in an area of interest. When you contact them, share your project idea and plan concisely and clearly. Donna Westfall-Rudd is happy to help you with the faculty matching.

### **How do I find a community or organizational partner?**

Your mentor, the program director, and other faculty on campus may have some suggestions and contacts. You are encouraged to look for opportunities in the experiential learning section of the Community, Agency, & Engagement project site <https://ccc.vt.edu/index/aiicc/agency-education.html> .

If you are looking for additional ideas, check internship boards at Virginia Tech, your local and regional professional organizations, and state and national government agencies. Additionally, organizations like AISES keep separate internship boards on their website. However, many non-profits or smaller organizations may allow you to create your own internship in partnership with their organization. Make a list of potential partner organizations and research them online. Contact and follow up professionally with appropriate representatives when one seems like a good fit (could an experience there support your career goals and your plans for the semester?).

For research projects, discuss potential partners with your faculty faculty mentor. How do your goals and expectations for the project align with theirs? Are the resources they offer readily available to you and optimal for your research needs and schedule? Clear communication between you, your faculty mentor, and the collaborator or organization is crucial during the planning process.

### **How do I plan my research?**

**After award decisions are announced, meet with your faculty faculty mentor and any community partners or team members to discuss:**

**Learning objectives: [maybe collapse into one with skill development?]**

Work with your faculty member to establish what content or experience you will gain from your experience. How does this experience prepare you for your career? How does it build on your previous coursework? What are you getting from this opportunity that you don't get in class? Write three to five ideas and explanations specific to the project, like "practice inclusive teaching" or "learn how shad migrations have changed," and share them with your partners before you start your experience or

finalize what you plan to accomplish. If they understand what you want to learn, collaborators will provide you with relevant resources.

### **Skill development:**

Work with your faculty mentor to establish what you will be learning how to do. What skills are necessary to complete this project successfully, and what skills will be helpful in the future? Write the three to five skills you want to gain or practice, like "get more practice with JMP statistical software" or "learn how to write a lesson plan," and share these before starting your experience and finalizing deliverables. Your partners need to understand your knowledge and proficiencies relevant to the project and can connect you with appropriate resources that will make your skills stronger.

### **Deliverables:**

#### **For community or organizational partners:**

Representatives from partnering organizations may want a final product at the end of the semester or throughout your time with them. Examples include a final presentation, a white paper or brief, a literature review, lesson plans, a community event, or a research report. Discuss with your faculty mentor how these products fit into your research plan or career goals and, if applicable, how they will count towards your final grade.

#### **For academic credit:**

You and your faculty mentor should discuss any additional work required to complete your experience for academic credit. Examples include a final reflection paper, a log of activities, a presentation at a conference, or a series of blog entries. Ensure that you agree about how each component contributes to your final grade and degree requirements, including the number of hours worked. For internships, every department has specific requirements for the number of hours per credit hour and limits on the number of hours that may count towards a major. Donna Westfall-Rudd,

### **A schedule:**

Meet with your faculty mentor and any community partners to decide when deliverables are due, how often you will be on-site, and when you plan to accomplish specific pieces of your project. Usually, this includes a weekly plan. Consider any necessary training, travel, family responsibilities, progress reports, or regular check-ins with your faculty mentor and partners.

### **Professional behavior on site:**

Talk to your faculty mentor and any site leader or supervisor about behavioral expectations at the workplace, including dress, preferred modes of communication, and etiquette. Every workplace has a different work culture. However, timeliness, clear and consistent communication, and honesty are valued everywhere. Never be afraid to ask questions about an assignment or the workplace, and speak to your site supervisor or the program director immediately about pressing concerns related to the work environment.

**Other Questions?** Contact project director Donna Westfall-Rudd ([mooredm@vt.edu](mailto:mooredm@vt.edu)).

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