Background for CUSP Resolution 2018-19F
Resolution to Approve Transitional Plan to Facilitate the Change to Date of Entry
Graduation Requirements

Virginia Tech's commitment to increase access and affordability is central to the university's land-grant mission and is articulated in the university's goal to increase matriculation of students from under-represented and under-served populations to 40% by 2022. That goal goes beyond attracting students to Virginia Tech. It requires the university community to build a "student-ready university" prepared to support all admitted students to earn a degree from Virginia Tech.

In order to meet our enrollment, persistence, and graduation goals, Virginia Tech must interrogate university policies, procedures, and practices that create barriers to attracting, supporting, and graduating undergraduate students. Virginia Tech has made significant progress in developing admissions policies and practices to recruit and admit a more diverse undergraduate student population. University Scholarships and Financial Aid's leveraging model is designed to maximize the impact of the university's financial resources on recruiting and retaining students. Academic Decision Support dashboards and the EAB Navigate tools empower college and department leaders, faculty, academic advisors, and partners across campus to identify opportunities to improve student achievement.

Increased enrollment also will require more efficient resource management. Industry best practices and technology tools will be needed in order to maximize course offerings, classroom seat availability, and student course scheduling. Data-informed decision making will be needed for advanced course management and academic advising.

While the university has made significant progress, the differentiation of degree requirements based on date of entry and date of graduation inhibits Virginia Tech's ongoing work to advance access and affordability while also efficiently managing resources. Virginia Tech establishes graduation requirements in two ways. General education requirements are established through the undergraduate catalog upon date of entry (DOE). Degree requirements are established through the graduation checksheet based on date of graduation (DOG). Graduation requirements for each major are confirmed at least two years prior to DOG. In practice, a student who matriculates to Virginia Tech as a first-time, full-time (FTFT) student in 2019 who plans to graduate in 2023 will not have confirmed graduation requirements until the publication of the 2021 undergraduate catalog and the checksheet on the University Registrar's website.

This practice creates challenges and barriers to graduation for Virginia Tech students:
- The university's inability to provide a four-year course of study for undergraduate students at the point of admission prevents robust academic planning to build students' self-efficacy and ownership of their education.
- For students who do use Virginia Tech's advising tools to build a plan of study, the degree audit system checks the plan against the most recently approved graduation requirements.

Thus, a degree audit run prior to the establishment of DOG degree requirements may lead a student to enroll and complete courses that do not support progress to the degree, potentially extending time to graduation and increasing the cost of education.

- Students who do not graduate "on time" may be required to meet new or different graduation requirements, thereby further extending time to degree. The impact of "stopping out" for a semester or longer due to financial, medical, or personal circumstances creates additional challenges for these students, potentially resulting in a decision not to return to Virginia Tech to complete an undergraduate degree.
- Virginia Tech cannot provide reliable curricular plans for students who plan to transfer to Virginia Tech. This is especially problematic for those students who plan to transfer with a VCCS Associate of Art or Associate of Science degree. Students and their VCCS advisors cannot identify Virginia Tech graduation requirements until the student transitions to Virginia Tech. For many students who transfer to Virginia Tech, this may result in extended time to degree and thus additional cost.
- Virginia state code requires Virginia Tech to add a surcharge to in-state students who exceed their degree requirements by 125%. See guidelines at: https://registrar.vt.edu/academic-records-multi-brief/in-state/125-percent-rule.html. For a student pursing a degree with 120 credits, the surcharge goes into effect in the semester the student attempts 150 credits. Thus, "excess credits" may result in increased tuition costs for in-state just at the point that financial aid may run out.

Some faculty have expressed concerns that changing to date of entry would constrain curricular innovation. Using date of entry doesn't prohibit a department from changing degree requirements from year to year, as they are done today. In addition, the resolution accounts for this challenge by allowing students to change their date of entry to take advantage of new opportunities as they evolve. Rather than requiring students to adapt to new requirements after matriculation, this approach makes it an option for students.

A change to DOE for all graduation requirements would provide additional benefit to the institution. Analytics and modeling for resource management depend on accurate prediction of enrollment patterns. At present, as with the DARS system, we are defaulting all analyses to the most recent degree requirements. The ability to predict accurately the impact of course enrollments and class scheduling will allow Virginia Tech to proactively plan to accommodate our growing enrollments well in advance.