

**Commission on Graduate Studies and Policies**  
**Resolution 2018-19D**  
**A Resolution to Create a New Full-Time Candidate Status for Doctoral Students**

Approved, Commission on Graduate Studies and Policies	February 7, 2019
Faculty Senate Review, Waived	February 18, 2019
Staff Senate Review	February 21, 2019
Graduate Student Assembly Review	February 9, 2019
Student Government Association Review, Waived	February 15, 2019
First Reading, University Council	February 18, 2019
Second Reading, University Council	March 4, 2019
Approved, President	Under Advisement
Approved, Board of Visitors	
Effective Date	upon approval

**WHEREAS**, current doctoral students who have passed their preliminary examinations may need to remain enrolled full-time (at least nine credit hours) per semester; and

**WHEREAS**, doctoral students who have passed their preliminary examinations are engaged primarily in research and enrolled in few or no graded courses; and

**WHEREAS**, paying full-time tuition while being enrolled principally in Research and Dissertation credits can create a financial burden for the self-funded student; and

**WHEREAS**, in other cases, having to pay full-time tuition for a doctoral candidate consumes precious funds (external grant funding, fellowships and other funding, tuition remissions) that could otherwise be available for alternative purposes;

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that a new status to be termed “Candidate Status” be created for Virginia Tech doctoral students who have been enrolled in their graduate program at Virginia Tech for at least two years and who have passed their preliminary examination in accordance with Graduate School policy; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the new Candidate Status will be considered full-time enrollment at Virginia Tech with a commitment to full time effort, but students in Candidate Status will be charged a special tuition rate equivalent to three credit hours; and further that those students in Candidate Status will be permitted to enroll in up to three credits of graded coursework per semester in addition to Research and Dissertation credits. Candidate Status will be renewable annually for a period not to exceed three years, as long as the student is enrolled in a doctoral program at Virginia Tech and remains continually in good academic standing; and,

**LASTLY, BE IT RESOLVED** that the implementation of Candidate Status will be contingent upon the university being able to devise a plan that would reduce the financial impact to an acceptable level in the context of the university’s priorities.

## Summary of Purpose and Benefits of CGS&P Resolution 2018-19D

We envision a number of academic benefits to Virginia Tech (VT), its faculty, and its graduate students as a result of this resolution. Several of the most important are:

1. Creation of incentives that are beneficial to both faculty and students with regard to student progress.
  - a. The requirement of 2 years enrollment plus completion of the preliminary examination will provide incentive to complete the preliminary exam by the end of the second year. This will accelerate student progress and provide an earlier evaluation of whether the student is a viable doctoral candidate.
  - b. The limit of three years of Candidate status will provide incentive for all PhD students to complete their thesis and final examination within 5 years maximum (two years prior to candidacy and three years as Candidate). This is faster than the average time to PhD degree for many VT programs.
2. Candidacy status or its equivalent is a proven mechanism at our peer institutions and at other prestigious academic institutions across the country. We have identified at least ten other peer universities that carry out this policy or something similar. Universities with something akin to candidate status include Penn State, Florida, University of Virginia, Kansas, Maryland, and Stanford.
3. Graduate enrollment, particularly in doctoral programs, is declining at VT and elsewhere for a number of reasons, including immigration issues, the strong economy, and the relative cost of supporting a PhD student vs. that of supporting a post-doctoral fellow. In many cases hiring post-doctoral fellows is preferred by faculty who receive grant support, whenever the cost is similar to that of graduate student support, because the post-doctoral fellow is not distracted by classes and degree-related examinations, and may be more experienced. This of course diminishes the strength of our graduate education programs, and can harm undergraduate education as well by limiting the supply of available teaching assistants (many programs bring first year graduate students in on a first-year teaching assistantship (TA), even when they have grant support for subsequent years). **Candidacy status** will enhance the value of a graduate student to the primary investigator and make easier the choice to employ a graduate student rather than a postdoctoral fellow. The grant funds freed up by Candidacy status may be plowed right back in to tuition funding (for example, summer support for another student who is on a TA), or may be used to enhance research productivity of the faculty member, graduate student, and VT in other ways, for example by purchasing needed equipment or services that accelerates the research. Candidacy status will enhance equity for students across disciplines, between domestic and international students, and with regard to funding status.

**Graduate Student Assembly of Virginia Tech  
Resolution 2018-19B**

**Resolution in Strong Support of a New Full-Time Candidate Status for Doctoral Students**

**Sponsoring Delegate: Joseph Kozak**

Approved, GSA	[date]
Faculty Senate Review	[date]
Staff Senate Review	[date]
Graduate Student Assembly Review	[date]
Student Government Association Review	[date]
Approved, University Council	[date]
Approved, President	[date]
Approved, Board of Visitors	[date]
Effective Date	Fall, 2019

**WHEREAS**, on December 5th, 2018, the Commission on Graduate Studies & Policies (CGS&P) put forth a first reading of Resolution 2018-19D: the Resolution to Create a New Full-Time Candidate Status for Doctoral Students; and

**WHEREAS**, CGS&P18-19D proposes to create a special “Candidacy Status” for doctoral students who have been enrolled in their department or program for at least two years, and who have passed their preliminary exams; and

**WHEREAS**, “Candidacy Status” would allow graduate students to be enrolled full-time, yet only pay for three credits, for up to three years; and

**WHEREAS**, paying full-time tuition while doing research or teaching for one’s department, writing one’s dissertation, and taking few to no courses is a financial burden, especially for self-funded students; and

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Graduate Student Assembly of Virginia Tech strongly supports the adoption of a “Candidate Status” for Virginia Tech doctoral students who





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have been enrolled in their department or program for at least two years, and who have passed their preliminary exam;

**THEREFORE, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that the Graduate Student Assembly of Virginia Tech waives a second reading for this resolution, as there will be no General Assembly Meeting before the second reading of CGS&P18-19D on Wednesday, February 6th, 2019.





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## Staff Senate review of CGSP 2018-19D resolution

While there is support from Staff Senators for making graduate education more affordable, Senators have expressed concerns about how this affects budgets (much as was discussed in University Council this week), how this might affect eligibility for student health insurance, and whether doctoral students would be pressured to stay in the status longer than necessary so faculty could have a lower cost lab assistant (than if the student completed the degree and became a post-doc).

Accordingly, Staff Senate will not support this resolution at this time until we have more clarity around these issues.

Robert Sebek  
President, Staff Senate