



Virginia Sea Grant Graduate Research Fellowship

Registration Deadline: November 10, 2021

Application Deadline: November 19, 2021

Virginia Sea Grant (VASG) is pleased to announce funding for its Graduate Research Fellowships for the 2022-2024 academic years. The fellowship is open to full-time graduate students at any Virginia academic institution engaged in coastal and marine research relevant to Virginia and the **VASG Strategic Plan**. In addition to supporting academic expenses, the fellowship provides students with professional development opportunities. VASG is accepting applications until 5:00 p.m. EST on Friday, November 19, 2021. This announcement and additional information can be found at: <https://vaseagrant.org/>.

FELLOWSHIP DESCRIPTION

The VASG Graduate Research Fellowship invests in people and supports graduate students engaged in education and research that further the goals of VASG and show potential for:

- Long-term professional success in academic, government, non-profit, or private sectors;
- Highly collaborative, team-oriented research and problem-solving that integrates diverse perspectives, and produces innovation to address our most challenging coastal and marine problems; and
- Effective transfer of knowledge to practice and interest in ensuring their research results are useful to and used by stakeholders.

Graduate Research Fellows address issues relevant to Virginia communities and of importance to coastal and marine resources – broadly defined (e.g., natural or social sciences, engineering and design, policy and legal analysis, architecture, business, education, arts and humanities, etc.).

The fellowship covers student expenses but not research costs (see eligible and ineligible cost items in the budget justification section). The fellowship builds skills and competencies through professional development training and provides hands-on experience in translating research results to coastal and marine stakeholders through a professional mentor.

FOSTERING A SAFE AND WELCOMING COMMUNITY

VASG is committed to building inclusive research, extension, communication, and education programs that serve people from diverse backgrounds, circumstances, needs, perspectives, and ways of thinking. Diversity includes, but is not limited to, age, disability and/or health status, ethnicity, gender identity, geographic origin, nationality, race, religion, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, and/or veteran status.

VASG does not tolerate any form of misconduct, discrimination or harassment, including sexual harassment, or sexual misconduct (e.g. sexual assault within its organization, at awardee organizations, field sites, meetings, or anywhere VASG-funded research, outreach and education are conducted).

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ELIGIBILITY

Applicants must be enrolled in a full-time graduate, professional degree, or Ph.D. program at a Virginia academic institution prior to the award of the fellowship, no later than Fall 2022, and must remain in good standing at their academic institution. Students may be working toward a degree in any discipline as long as they are engaged in research or rigorous inquiry and evidence-based knowledge generation that is coastal- or marine-related and relevant to VASG's mission and strategic plan. Previous recipients of a VASG Graduate Research Fellowship are not eligible to apply.

FELLOWSHIP RESPONSIBILITIES

Selected fellows will:

- **Collaborate with a Professional Mentor:** Select and work with a professional end-user mentor, including identifying opportunities to execute their professional development plan (see VASG's Guidance on Fellow-Mentor Relationships).
- **Work with VASG's Professional Development Coordinator:** To develop and launch an individual professional development plan, based on their short- and long-term professional goals.
- **Collaborate with VASG's Communication Center:** To publicize their research and fellowship activities, including submitting blog posts and sharing story ideas.
- **Attend and participate in VASG Events:** Including the fellowship orientation meeting; presentation of research and outreach; and appropriate professional development offerings.
- **Engage in VASG Relevant Research:** Fellows must be conducting rigorous inquiry and evidence-based knowledge generation that is coastal- or marine-related.
- **Share Milestones:** Including defense and graduation dates; at the conclusion of the graduate program. Fellows are required to notify VASG of their graduation date and submit a digital copy of their final project, thesis or dissertation.
- **[Optional] Mentor a Summer Undergraduate Intern:** Fellows may elect to request a paid summer undergraduate intern to support their research activities. Interns will be paid independently of the fellowship. However, fellows will participate in VASG mentorship orientation training.

VIRGINIA SEA GRANT

VASG is a federal-state partnership, funded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) with matching support from our university partners - Virginia Institute of Marine Science at William & Mary, University of Virginia, Virginia Tech, George Mason University, Old Dominion University, and Virginia Commonwealth University.

The mission of VASG is to provide transformative, integrated education, research, communication, extension, legal and policy programs - programs that create the coastal and marine workforce, and novel solutions to meet challenges in coastal communities. We do this through funding, and by conducting research, education, outreach, and communication services. Please review VASG's website to see more about how we achieve our vision and mission, including our commitment to collaboration and integration across sectors and disciplines, investing in people, and promoting diversity and inclusion (vaseagrant.org).

VASG's Strategic Plan aligns with and complements the National Sea Grant College Program (NSGCP) Strategic Plan, while addressing the Commonwealth of Virginia's specific coastal and marine challenges. VASG's Strategic

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Plan focuses on four areas: workforce development and environmental literacy, resilient coastal communities and economies, sustainable fisheries and aquaculture, and healthy coastal ecosystems and communities. The research, outreach, education, and communication conducted by fellows must address focal areas and goals of the VASG Strategic Plan. More information, including the 2021 - 2023 Strategic Plan, can be found at: <https://vaseagrant.org/who-we-are/>.

AWARD INFORMATION

Contingent upon available federal funding, fellowships are available for up to two years for master's, J.D., and Ph.D. students. The fellowship provides an award of up to \$40,000 per year to support the student's academic expenses. The start date for the fellowship is September 1, 2022. VASG expects to fund up to eight fellowships for the 2022-2024 academic years.

VASG-funded projects require a 50 percent funding match (i.e., budgets must show \$1 of match for every \$2 of Sea Grant funding requested). Only non-Federal funds may be committed as matching contribution. VASG will make all awards to the student's primary faculty advisor, who must be listed as the principle investigator (PI) on the fellowship application. Refer to the Budget and Budget Justification section below for additional information.

HOW TO APPLY

Applications must be submitted online via eSeaGrant (<http://vaseagrant.ecsion.com>) by 5:00 pm EST on Friday, November 19, 2021. If you plan to apply, VASG requires pre-registering for eSeaGrant by November 10, 2021, refer to the "Registration Information" under the Application Guidelines section below for additional information.

Instructions on how to register and start a fellowship application on eSeaGrant can be found on the VASG website (<https://vaseagrant.org>) and on eSeaGrant.

APPLICATION GUIDELINES

Students are expected to take the lead in developing their application - including writing the project narrative, developing the budget, and engaging with the institution's sponsored programs/research office. Students are responsible for routing the application through their institution's research administration or sponsored programs office, and obtaining all required institutional endorsements before submitting to VASG.

Adherence to the format requirements is mandatory, and ensures fairness across all applications. Applications not meeting the format requirements may be rejected without review. Several application elements have specific page limits or word limits. Excess pages will not be reviewed. Only the requested materials should be submitted; additional documents (e.g., appendices, letters of support, resumes/CVs longer than two pages, etc.) will not be reviewed. VASG recommends including the name of the student in a header or footer on all pages.

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REGISTRATION INFORMATION (SUBMITTED VIA ESEAGRANT)

As part of the eSeaGrant application process, VASG requires interested students to complete an online registration form prior to the registration date on November 10, 2021 at 11:59 PM. Applicants should enter as much information as possible and update any remaining questions as they identify their professional mentor and finalize the outreach and professional mentoring activities. The form *must* be completed prior to the registration deadline.

- Title
- Student name, university, contact information
- Faculty advisor, contact information
- Professional mentor, contact information
- Abstract (no more than 200 words): Please describe the major activities undertaken with the fellowship, including research (funded by others), and outreach and professional mentoring activities (funded by VASG).
- Identify the specific VASG strategic plan focus area that the fellowship project will address
- Interest in having a summer undergraduate intern support their research and willingness to serve as a mentor, if selected for a Graduate Research Fellowship.

APPLICATION ELEMENTS

Each application must include the following elements:

Title Page (two-page maximum; template available on VASG website): List the project title and identify and provide contact information for the prospective fellow, faculty advisor(s), and professional mentor. The proposed start and end dates, and the total amount of VASG and matching funds being requested for each project year must also be listed. Signature of the institution's authorized representative for proposal submissions (typically this is a representative from the university's Office of Sponsored Programs/Research; digital signatures are acceptable).

In addition, include a list of funders (agency, organizations, university programs, etc.) and funding amounts that are supporting the proposed research. Separate research funding is not a requirement or selection criteria for VASG fellowship support. Although, students will need to demonstrate the feasibility of implementing the proposed work. Please indicate if the funding program(s) peer-reviewed the associated proposal/research work plan.

Applicant Form

Professional Development Statement. (maximum 300 words per section) Applicants are asked to prepare a statement that includes: a) a brief introduction with short- (1-5yr) and long-term (>5yr) professional goals and b) responses to any three of the following prompts:

- Detail a skill or competency that you would like to improve upon, including an example of a situation where you learned that you needed to improve. Why do you want to improve it? How will that skill or competency help you achieve your goals?
- Provide an example of a personal goal that you set and how you overcame obstacles to reaching that goal. Please be specific about the obstacles. What did you learn about yourself from this experience?
- Describe a critical piece of feedback you have received that was really difficult to hear. Why was it difficult and what did you do with that information? What did you learn about yourself?
- Describe a time when you completed a project as part of a team. What challenges did you face and how did you overcome them?
- Describe a situation where you needed to apply one or more of your strongest skills or competencies. What were those skills? What was the outcome? When and how did you learn that you possessed this strength?

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Diversity Statement. (maximum 300 words) Applicants will provide a short comment on diversity. Specifically, how they are unique and bring a diverse perspective, their experience with teams of diverse perspectives, and what they see as the strengths and challenges of diversity in a team setting.

Self-Certification. The applicant will be asked to check a self-certification confirming that they are in good standing with their academic institution.

Recommendation Forms (VASG form submitted separately, 250 words maximum per section)

Two recommendations (academic and professional) must be submitted in support of the student. To maintain confidentiality, VASG requires that recommendations NOT be submitted with the student's application, but rather requested and input through eSeaGrant independently. The forms must be submitted before the application deadline.

Academic recommendation. The student's primary faculty advisor or appropriate faculty member (PI on the research award the applicant will be working on during the fellowship) must provide one recommendation. Co-advisors are required to fill out the form jointly.

Professional recommendation. VASG encourages applicants to consider someone who knows them from a different perspective than their academic advisor (e.g., former employer, mentor from a previous position, colleague they worked with in the past). Selected recommenders should provide a professional perspective to demonstrate the applicant's breadth and may highlight different strengths and experiences than an academic advisor.

Referees will be asked to rate and describe the applicant on the following:

- Self-motivation
- Response to set-backs
- Skills and interest in teamwork
- Leadership skills or interest, particularly collaborative leadership
- How the applicant would most benefit from VASG support
- Academic/Professional performance
- Academic/Professional potential
- Anything else that VASG should know about the applicant in order to fully consider their candidacy

Professional Mentor Form: The form indicates a commitment to mentor the student and uphold the highest standards of mentorship. Only a single form should be sent (i.e., mentor teams must complete and submit a single joint form). To maintain confidentiality, VASG requires that forms NOT be submitted with the student's application. Forms must be requested and submitted through eSeaGrant. The form must be submitted before the application deadline.

Mentors will be asked to respond to the following:

- Objectives of the professional mentorships from the mentor perspective.
- Why mentor wants to be a mentor.
- Role that the mentor will play in the student's academic and professional experience.
- How much time the mentor is willing and able to dedicate to the applicant during the fellowship.
- Willingness to participate in a VASG orientation and mentorship training.
- Statement of commitment to ethical behavior, respect, honesty, and open communication with the fellow (i.e., abiding by standard code of conduct policies including, but not limited to, any: personnel policy, policy regarding sexual harassment, policy regarding workplace violence and policy regarding ethical behavior).

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Resumes/CVs (two-page maximum per Resume/CV, minimum font size 11 point, one-inch margins): A CV or resume should be included only for the student, primary advisor(s), and professional mentor. Any additional pages beyond the two-page maximum will be redacted or removed.

Project Narrative (two-page maximum, excluding figures, tables, other graphics, literature cited, minimum font size 11 point, one-inch margins): The full project title and name of the student must be included in the header. The narrative is intended to be a brief summary of your area of study and how you will leverage those activities to achieve your proposed outreach plan. The narrative should include sufficient detail to evaluate the appropriateness and relevance of your research to the Commonwealth of Virginia, and how the project aligns with the VASG Strategic Plan.

The narrative should include the following sections:

Rationale: Clearly indicate the significance of the issue being studied to the Commonwealth of Virginia. Describe why the outreach strategies employed will be effective at transferring the findings of your research or academic work to the end-user you are targeting.

Objectives: Detail the research, outreach and professional development goals and objectives.

Methods and Timeline: Detail the approach to undertake your outreach activities and advance the translation of findings to your targeted end-user. Students should include a schedule that indicates academic, research, and outreach milestones and tasks along with the anticipated dates for achieving those tasks.

Outcomes: Clearly identify and describe the anticipated outcomes of the activities, including the societal impacts on the Commonwealth of Virginia. Highlight any impacts with underrepresented or underserved communities. Discuss how specific end-users or audiences will use the results. You may also indicate what longer-term deliverables may be planned after the fellowship.

Literature Cited (does not count toward page limit)

Budget and Budget Justification: Up to \$40,000 per year for up to two years for full-time graduate, professional degree, or Ph.D. program students at a Virginia academic institution can be requested for fellowship-related costs. The following are examples of eligible and ineligible fellowship-related costs:

Eligible Costs include: student stipend; fringe benefits; tuition; enrollment, university and graduate program fees; health insurance; indirect costs; VASG events and conference fees, expenses and travel; and professional development training and travel.

Ineligible Costs include: research and lab supplies; research and field work travel; sample processing; research-related service fees; laboratory and field equipment (expendable supplies and permanent equipment); and other expenses needed to conduct research activities. Students who graduate before the end date of their fellowship award will not be permitted to use the remaining funds to support post-graduation expenditures.

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The budget should include travel support for the fellow to attend one to two VASG meetings per year (e.g., fellowship orientation meeting, presenting at a VASG event, and VASG-sponsored professional development workshops).

If universities limit travel and in-person meetings during the fellowship award, then travel funds can be re-budgeted into eligible cost categories only, with VASG approval.

VASG-funded projects require a 50 percent funding match (i.e., budgets must show \$1 of match for every \$2 of Sea Grant funding requested). Only non-Federal funds may be committed as matching contribution. In-kind contributions, unrecovered F&A and tuition, non-federal research expenses, start-up funds, faculty salaries, travel support (research, conference, professional development, etc.), partial stipend and tuition are all examples of match.

Common methods used to meet match and full support requirements include: 1) providing partial support for the stipend and/or tuition as part of the required match (although that partial support cannot come with other responsibilities, e.g., teaching assistantships, in order to receive the full professional development benefits of the fellowship), or 2) the academic institutions volunteering to waive overhead on the federal dollars. To date, VASG partner institutions have chosen the latter option and have used the foregone overhead to make up most or all of their match requirement.

Budgets should be developed in the 90-4 budget worksheet (available on the VASG website). The budget justification must be a detailed description of each cost item in the 90-4 budget; additional guidance is available on the VASG website. VASG strongly encourages students to begin working early with their institution's research administration or sponsored programs office to develop their budgets.

OTHER AWARD INFORMATION

All Sea Grant-funded projects are required to address the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and submit a detailed data management plans prior to receiving funding. Once the applicants have been selected, VASG will require PIs to submit a data management plan that aligns with NOAA Sea Grant requirements and provide the information to ensure all NEPA requirements are met, either by submitting an abbreviated environmental compliance questionnaire or NEPA statement, prior to an award being issued.

REVIEW AND SELECTION PROCESS

VASG follows strict conflict-of-interest policies in all of its review procedures.

Stage 1

VASG staff, VASG's External Advisory Committee (EAC) members, and key stakeholders will review all fellowship applications for scientific, technical and outreach relevance to Sea Grant and Virginia, completeness of applications, and adherence to format requirements. Any fellowship application not considered complete will not be eligible for further review. Feedback submitted by VASG's EAC and key stakeholders regarding the scientific, technical and outreach relevance will be shared with and considered by subsequent review stages.

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Stage 2

A review panel composed of coastal and marine science scholars, educators, fellowship managers, and talent search and development professionals will assess the student's academic/professional performance and potential, professional mentorship plan, and outreach activities. Top candidates will move forward to Stage 3.

The Stage 2 review panel will consider the following criteria:

Strength of academic and professional performance (25%): Reviewers will consider applicants: responsibility, motivation, resiliency, teamwork and leadership; their interests in the applied impact of their work and with end-user engagement; and any extraordinary circumstances. Past performance is assessed by the student's resume/CV, professional self-reflection statement, and recommendations; students are evaluated on their suite of academic/professional accomplishments including breadth of relevant professional and extracurricular experiences.

Academic and Professional Potential (40%): Students will be evaluated on their professional motivation, initiative, interests in the applied impacts of findings and knowledge generated in universities, collaborative team-based problem-solving, and in end-user engagement. Demonstration of academic, professional, and outreach potential; evidence of vision and past professional growth, work ethic, and strong interpersonal and communication skills; and strength and breadth of relevant academic, professional, and extracurricular experiences. Reviewers will consider the student's potential as a collaborative team member or leader, particularly in integrated, trans-disciplinary or co-production of knowledge settings, their resilience, ability to learn from mistakes and bounce back. Reviewers will apply a holistic perspective - considering the student's academic/professional experiences, growth, attributes, competencies, and achievements as a demonstration of future impacts both academically and professionally.

Professional Mentor Relationship (20%): Strength and potential of the relationship established with a professional mentor. Is there a clearly communicated rationale for selecting the proposed professional mentor and outreach activities? Will the arrangement lead to professional growth for the student? Have the student and mentor worked collaboratively to develop a thoughtful, systematic, and strategic plan for professional growth, and impactful outreach activities? Will it produce valuable transferable knowledge to an end-user? Does the plan engage with underserved coastal communities and stakeholders from a diverse range of backgrounds and disciplines? Is the approach feasible and likely to achieve the professional growth and outreach objectives identified?

Outreach Plan (15%): Strength and potential of the outreach to impact the end-user. Creativity and innovation of the outreach activities, adding value to the existing field of outreach content and methods. Feasibility of the plan to be accomplished within the financial and time constraints of a graduate student.

Stage 3

Selected finalists will be invited for in-person interviews to discuss their research, professional goals and objectives, professional skills and competencies they are most interested in growing, proposed mentorship and outreach plans, and how they think a VASG Graduate Research Fellowship would be most helpful to them. Finalists will be asked to provide a 15-minute overview of their proposed fellowship activities, their academic and professional background, and why they want a VASG Graduate Research Fellowship. The location is TBD and will seek to accommodate the distance of the applicants from VASG headquarters.

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The committee will consider all application elements and the interview, including submitted comments regarding the scientific, technical and outreach relevance, and will advise VASG on the selection of fellows based on the following criteria:

Candidate Interview (45%): Candidates will be assessed on their ability to communicate the importance of their proposed activities to a lay audience, describe how those activities align with VASG’s vision and mission, and their ability to demonstrate how their mentor will meaningfully contribute to both their short- and long-term goals. Candidates should illustrate how they reflect upon professional experiences, and hope to grow from a VASG Graduate Research Fellowship. Candidates should explain why the outreach plan they have selected best aligns with their professional goals and the professional skills and competencies they hope to grow.

Relevance of Project (20%): Relevance of the research to the Commonwealth of Virginia and VASG’s Strategic Plan, and the significance of the issues to coastal and marine science. Potential of adoption or influence of the findings by the end-user.

Professional Potential and Impact (35%): Quality and extent of collaboration between student and mentor, and quality of mentorship and outreach activities. VASG will consider how much professional growth potential exists for the student under the mentor relationship structure. Interest of the student in being an engaged, active member of a long-term professional network and cohort. VASG will evaluate the quality, merit, and feasibility of the proposed outreach activities, and their importance to the target end-user audience(s). VASG will assess the short- and long-term potential to make a difference and address a substantial societal challenge locally, regionally, nationally, or globally.

The VASG Director will consider peer and relevancy reviews and panel recommendations, as well as interview committee recommendations for funding when making selections. However, the Director retains final discretion to select projects based on the panel recommendations, interview committee advice, diversity and balance of the award portfolio, availability of funding, and programmatic objectives, needs and priorities.

TENTATIVE TIMELINE FOR FELLOWSHIP COMPETITION

Announcement released	September 2021
Registration date via eSeaGrant	November 10, 2021
Applications due to VASG by 5:00 p.m. EST	November 19, 2021
Stage 1 - Relevancy review	December 2021
Stage 2 - Review panel	January 2022
Stage 3 - Candidate interviews	March 2022
Notification of results	Spring 2022
Awards begin	September 1, 2022

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND CONTACT

Applicants are strongly encouraged to register and attend one of the VASG fellowship webinars which will be conducted during the fall semester; dates, times and URLs will be announced in the VASG email newsletter (**sign up on the VASG site**) and on the fellowship webpage. This announcement, application element templates, and additional resources can be found at: <https://vaseagrant.org/graduate-research-fellowships/>.

For questions or inquiries, please contact VASG at vaseg@vaseagrant.org. Please reference “Graduate Research Fellowship” in your email subject line.

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