



Student Handbook  
2017-2018

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# VAIGS STUDENT HANDBOOK

## ACADEMIC SUPPORT

Van Andel Institute Graduate School (VAIGS) directors, faculty, and administrators know that the quality of a program is directly related to the quality of the students. For that reason, VAIGS strives to recruit talented persons and provide excellent support for the students when they are enrolled. VAIGS has a supportive culture expressed in the collaboration among investigators and students. Students are considered full participants in the life of the Institute, contributing both to the present and the shaping of the future of the Institute. As such, they are required to uphold the policies and values of the Graduate School and of the Institute, as do the faculty and staff.

### Orientation and Registration

Prior to orientation, VAIGS **MUST** have received final, official transcripts for all previous academic work that the course of study was completed and the degree was awarded.

Matriculating students begin the academic year with an intensive two weeks of orientation the week before school begins, and then continuing into the first week of classes. Family and significant others are invited to a tour, lunch and the Convocation ceremony.

- New student orientation includes:
- An introduction to the research community at the Van Andel Institute (VAI)
- Overview of general policies of VAI
- Academic policies and procedures of VAIGS
- Official enrollment
- Student affairs support introduction
- Compliance
- Safety
- Security
- Information technology
- Research administration departments
- Library resources
- Vivarium
- Connection to peer mentor

Students are responsible for adhering to all VAI policies, which are available at the Human Resources SharePoint site (<https://home.vai.org/sites/HR/Pages/Home.aspx>). The Dean presents the academic policies and procedures, provides an overview of the requirements for the Ph.D. degree, and discusses the benchmarks for good progress toward fulfilling the requirements. Academic policies and requirements are summarized in the Graduate School Catalog and are available at the VAIGS SharePoint site (<https://home.vai.org/sites/VAIGS/Pages/Home.aspx>).

## **Academic Records**

The official academic records for graduate students are kept by the Enrollment and Records Administrator(ERA). Academic records include:

- Personal and emergency contact information
- Course grades
- Thesis Advisory Committee (TAC) reports
- Comprehensive Exam reports
- Other documentation that provides evidence of the fulfillment of graduation requirement

The academic record is a permanent record and is subject to change only upon written authorization from the Dean. Students are responsible for reporting changes in personal information (name, address, etc.) through the Blackbaud Student Portal, and with Human Resources.

VAIGS makes the academic record available to the student upon request. It is also available to the Academic/Thesis Adviser, and the Student Affairs Specialist for use in counseling the student. VAIGS will furnish an official academic transcript upon the written request or approval of the student. The request can be made through SharePoint under the 'For Alumni Tab'.

VAIGS complies with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), which assures the student the right to

- 1) inspect and review his/her education records,
- 2) request amendment to parts of the student's education record that are shown to be inaccurate,
- 3) consent to all disclosure of personally identifiable information in the record except that which is authorized for school officials with legitimate educational interests,
- 4) review letters of recommendation written for the student's file unless the student has signed a waiver, and
- 5) file a complaint to the U.S. Department of Education concerning alleged failures of VAIGS to comply with requirements of FERPA. The Act also permits VAIGS to release certain information upon request under the guidelines of FERPA. Additional information about FERPA can be found at <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html>.

## **Advisers, Academic and Research**

A congenial and respectful student relationship with the faculty is vital to VAIGS culture and the continuing development of the student as a research scientist. In order to ensure the students' goals are achieved (as well as those of the Institute), students will be guided in their work by Academic and Thesis Advisers.

The Dean serves as the students' first year Academic Adviser. The Thesis Adviser is selected in the first year following completion of three laboratory rotations. The Thesis Adviser guides the student in her/his research from thesis proposal to thesis defense.

Although the students will become acquainted with the entire faculty, the formal responsibility of advising the students resides with the designated Thesis Adviser. The Thesis Adviser will be an intellectual mentor who advises the student regarding academic work and progress toward fulfilling the requirements, serves as a liaison between the student and the faculty and administration, recommends the student for a degree, and is a colleague in the life of the Institute. The Thesis Adviser also approves courses for students in years 2-5.

Students will have many opportunities to interact and form relationships with one another and with faculty and staff through courses, seminars, informal discussions, social events, and personal friendship, all of which contribute to desired collegiality. The collegiality among students provides them support and an avenue for advice from VAIGS faculty and administration.

### **Peer Mentors**

Entering students will be assigned a peer mentor in late Spring before the student matriculates. This allows the mentor/mentee to get to know one another before classes begin giving time for questions and suggestions that can aid in the adjustment to Grand Rapids and VAIGS.

A more formal introduction to the peer mentoring process will take place during the first month of the academic year. Follow up meetings will take place at the end of the semester.

### **Graduate Student Association (GSA)**

VAIGS graduate students, Michigan State University students working in VARI labs, and graduate students from other institutions who are guests in VARI labs comprise the Graduate Student Association (GSA). The purpose of the GSA is to provide a platform for professional development and a medium through which graduate students can communicate with one another on both personal and scientific levels. The GSA has the opportunity to invite external speakers as part of the ongoing VARI Seminar Series program. The GSA also organizes an annual retreat and a monthly “chalk talk” event for informal, structured discussions of their research progress. Calendar and contact information is communicated through a VAIGS GSA SharePoint site. Financial support for the GSA is provided through the Dean’s budget and thus is subject to the same reporting and audit procedures as other aspects of VAIGS.

GSA is led by the Leadership Council. This group of VAIGS graduate students are voted into office according to the GSA By-Laws. The Student Affairs Specialist acts as the liaison for the GSA. The liaison assists with elections, supports the transition meeting, discusses town hall meeting agenda, and overall supports the GSA.

### **Facilities**

VAIGS operates within the physical facilities of VARI, an exceptional building with state-of-the-art equipment. The open-concept research space fosters collegiality, and core

technology laboratories provide exceptional support for research. Space is available for study and social interactions. Additional information about VARI's facility, research services, and technology can be found on VAI's SharePoint site. Phase II of the facility was awarded Leadership in Energy and Environment Design (LEED) Platinum status by the United States Green Building Council.

## **Library**

VARI's Hope Library subscribes to a number of core journals in cancer biology, biochemistry, genetics, cell biology, and molecular biology. Most journals are available online, although a few titles are available only in print. The library also houses a small book collection. VARI contracts with Grand Valley State University (GVSU) for library services, and the VARI book collection is searchable in the GVSU library catalog ([www.gvsu.edu/library](http://www.gvsu.edu/library)). VARI books and online and print journals, along with other pertinent information, can be accessed from the Hope Library's SharePoint site (<https://home.vai.org/sites/OD/Pages/How-To.aspx>)

GVSU provides VARI with Library Services Manager who has a deep understanding of the biomedical literature and is available to assist with developing literature search strategies. The Library Services Manager also facilitates access to GVSU's book and journal collection, both in print and online, as well as GVSU's licensed databases. Interlibrary loans for journal articles and books not owned by VARI or GVSU are also obtained by contacting the Library Services Manager.

Additionally, VARI researchers can utilize Spectrum Health's Amberg Health Sciences Library, located on Level A in the West wing of Spectrum Health hospital.

## **Information Technology (IT)**

VAI provides a computing infrastructure to support teaching, learning, and research. VAIGS students will be provided with a laptop computer, office productivity tools (e.g., Microsoft Office Suite), an e-mail account, personal file storage space, local printer capability, and an institute-wide wireless network. The VAI IT Department supports and provides services to the Institute and has policies that protect the IT infrastructure. Orientation to VAI's infrastructure and to IT policies is provided during the new student orientation. Failure to follow the IT policies can result in disciplinary action up to and including possible dismissal. Information about the IT HelpDesk and additional support can be found on VAI's SharePoint site.

The help desk can be reached by calling 5555 for urgent matters. All other needs require completion of a help desk ticket, which can be initiated on SharePoint: <https://helpdesk.vai.org/>

## **STUDENT SERVICES**

### **Financial Assistance**

Applications for regular admission to VAIGS include application for financial assistance. Students who are accepted into the graduate program, and who do not have an external fellowship, receive a fellowship from VAIGS that is competitive with those of regional universities. VAIGS fellowships include a stipend for living expenses, health, dental and vision insurance, life insurance, travel allowance and a tuition waiver. VAIGS fellowships will be awarded for up to five years if the student is making satisfactory progress and are engaged full-time in graduate work. The student's Thesis Adviser will be responsible for continuing financial support beyond the fifth year. VAIGS students are expected and encouraged to apply for external fellowships with the support and assistance of their thesis adviser and the VAI Office of Sponsored Research. VAIGS provides financial incentives for obtaining external fellowships, including supplements to the student's stipend and additional allocations of research support funds.

### **Stipends**

Stipends are issued on the 20th of each month for the following month and, are distributed by the Student Affairs Specialist. Direct deposit is available and encouraged. Income tax is not withheld from stipends. VAIGS Students will need to plan how to pay their own taxes.

### **Tuition**

Block tuition for a full academic year (three semesters, including summer) is \$25,000. For individual courses, tuition will be assessed at a rate of \$835 per credit hour. Tuition will be waived for students supported by VAIGS fellowships. Enrollment of non-VAIGS students in VAIGS courses is permitted under certain conditions and requires establishing a mechanism for assessing tuition for individual course enrollment.

### **Benefits**

Students who are enrolled in the Ph.D. program and who are recipients of a VAIGS fellowship, or comparable support, are eligible to participate in medical, dental, vision and life insurance plans administered through Human Resources. Family members are also eligible for medical, dental and vision insurance coverage when the student is receiving those benefits.

**Medical Plan:** The medical plan is a preferred provider (PPO) plan provided through Priority Health. VAIGS students are eligible for Medical Plan B only. Details and summaries of Medical Plan B can be found on the VAIGS SharePoint site under the stipend and benefits link. Medical insurance premiums are paid by VAIGS. Students are responsible for paying out-of-pocket expenses (e.g., office and prescription co-pays). Certain deductibles and maximums will apply depending on whether service was provided in-network or out-of-network, and on whether the student is enrolled as an individual or with eligible dependents.

Students may opt out of the medical insurance plan if they demonstrate to Human Resources that they are adequately covered by another insurance plan. Students receive no payment in lieu of not participating in the medical insurance program.

**Dental/Vision Plan:** Dental and vision insurance are offered as a package and not separately. Dental coverage is through Delta Dental of Michigan, and vision coverage is provided through VSP. Students are responsible for paying a portion of the premium and any out-of-pocket expenses (co-pays).

**Life Insurance Plan:** VAIGS students are provided life and accidental death and dismemberment insurance valued at \$10,000.

New student benefit enrollment occurs in August. Medical open enrollment occurs each year in November. Dental and vision open enrollment occurs each year in June.

For questions regarding benefits see the Human Resource page on SharePoint.

### **Outside Employment and Concurrent Degrees**

Students enrolled in VAIGS are presumed to be devoting their full professional efforts toward the pursuit of their Ph.D.. Therefore, outside employment or concurrent pursuit of other degrees may be undertaken only with explicit permission from the **Thesis Adviser and the Dean**.

Please see VAIGS Policy on Students' External Work – GS-POL-21 for further clarification information.

### **Student Support**

The VAIGS Student Affairs Specialist is available to help with:

- Confidential counseling regarding stress, personal issues, and adaptation to VAIGS
- Coordination of Career Services training and opportunities
- Direction to local resources
- Support of the well being of VAIGS students

### **Disabilities/Accommodations**

Any requests for accommodations based on documented disabilities should be brought to the Student Affairs Specialist.

### **Employee Assistance Center (EAC)**

VAIGS recognizes the importance of maintaining an academic environment that is productive. Occasionally, problems related to work, family, drugs, alcohol, or personal issues affect a student's performance. Through the Institute's Employee Assistance Service Program (EASP), students are able to access professional, confidential assistance in resolving issues / problems as the need arises. Additionally, student's family members and other persons residing with the student in his/her home who are eligible dependents as



defined by the health plan are eligible for EASP benefits. Students are encouraged to seek assistance through the EASP before performance and morale are negatively affected. Up to five sessions per issue are available to those using the EASP.

Additional information about the EASP can be found on the Human Resources SharePoint Site, HR Information Center, Employee Assistance Services Summary, or by contacting EAC at 1-800-227-0905 or <http://www.eaccare.com/>.

### **Hepatitis B Vaccinations and Titer Screenings**

VAIGS covers the cost of Hepatitis B vaccinations and titer screenings offered by the Institute for first year students. After the first year, the cost of student vaccinations and screenings will be covered by the dissertation research laboratory. Additional information about Hepatitis B Vaccinations and screenings can be found in the Hepatitis B Vaccinations for VAIGS Graduate Students Policy at <https://home.vai.org/sites/VAIGS/Pages/PGP.aspx>.

### **Flu Shots**

Free Flu shots are offered on site each fall when you are covered by VAI health insurance.

### **Immigration**

VAIGS is authorized to admit international students using the Visiting Scholars (J visa) category. We do not currently admit students using the Student (F visa) category. Immigration policies and procedures are supported by the immigration specialist in the VARI Human Resources department, with additional support from the VAIGS Student Affairs Specialist and the Enrollment and Records Administrator. Any questions related to the JVisa and travel should be directed to Human Resources.

### **Café**

The VAI Café is open Monday through Friday 7:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Breakfast	7:00 a.m. - 9:30 a.m.
Lunch	11:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.
Snacks and Light Dinner	1:30 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.

### **Fitness Center**

The Institute has a Fitness Center located in Phase 2 on Level 2. The Fitness Center is open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, with the exception of VAI observed holidays. Students are invited to use the Fitness Center under the same guidelines as employees. A signed Fitness Equipment Use Waiver Form (VARI Waiver of Liability and Covenant Not to Sue Agreement) is required from all persons using the Fitness Center. Additional information about the Fitness Center, and the form, can be found at <https://home.vai.org/sites/Facilities/Pages/Fitness-Center.aspx>

### **Child Care**

The Institute does not provide child care. Information about local, licensed child care providers is available from Kent Regional 4C (Community Child Care Connection).

Additional information about Kent Regional 4C can be found at <http://www.4cchildcare.org/>.

### **Lactation Rooms**

The Institute has lactation rooms within the lounges located in Phase 2 on Levels 1, 2, and 5. The lactation room provides a private, lockable space for lactating mothers. The rooms are equipped with a comfortable chair, a small table, an electrical outlet and a mini-refrigerator intended for milk storage only (refrigerators in the employee break areas are for lunches). Use the signage available to indicate when the rooms are "In Use". Please contact Human Resources to receive information to access these rooms.

### **Housing**

The Institute does not provide housing for students. Housing resource information is available through the Human Resources office, and the Student Affairs Specialist.

### **Parking**

Parking is provided by VAI and is a privilege, rather than a right. The Institute reserves the right to remove employees, guest workers, visiting scientists and students from their designated parking areas with or without cause. Parking in the Michigan Street Development (MSD) structure and all other Institute parking areas will be assigned based upon availability. Parking in the MSD structure is not available to visitors or contractors. Students are permitted to park in the MSD parking facility for a one-time \$15 fee.

### **Professional Development**

Professional development training opportunities for students are coordinated by the Student Affairs Specialist. These occur up to four times year. They may take place with faculty.

Students are eligible for a \$2000 annual travel stipend as documented in Policy GS-POL-019. After attendance at a VAIGS paid professional development event or conference, the student is responsible for writing a review of the experience. This should be presented within two weeks to the Senior Administrative Assistant.

### **Student Conduct**

Students are expected to conduct themselves in a manner that promotes and supports the educational process, promotes the safety and welfare of others, and follows established policies, statutes, ordinances, and public law.

Any incidents that are contrary to this expectation should be reported to the Dean, Human Resources, or Student Affairs Specialist. An investigation will be completed in accordance with the Student Code of Conduct Policy.

### **Culture**

Each of us brings with us our unique personality and culture. This combination makes us an even stronger educational environment. Culture is not always obvious and can relate as much to the part of the United States you are from, as it can be a home

address in another country. This allows for a wonderful learning process for everyone both inside and outside of the classroom and the lab.

Whether a student if from a different part of the United States, or from another country, VAIGS will do all that it can to make the transition to West Michigan and VAI/VAIGS as smooth as possible. This includes making sure people have options for housing, provide a positive match through peer mentors, provide culture mentors within the organization, and other individualized needs.

### **Time Off and Leave of Absence**

Graduate students are entitled to 20 days of vacation and / or personal time off (PTO), beginning September 1 of each academic year, in addition to the official holidays announced by the Institute. Students should schedule vacations in consultation with their Thesis Adviser, or in the case of first year students, the Academic Adviser. Students should report days taken as personal time off to their Thesis Adviser or Academic Adviser or mentor. Unused vacation / PTO days cannot be carried over into the next academic year.

Students who are unable to continue in their educational and research activities due to illness, personal condition or injury will continue to receive their stipend and benefits for up to thirteen weeks of absence. After an absence of one week, a letter from your physician may be required to verify that any continuing condition prevents a return to normal student activities. The Institute retains the right to request third-party review or confirmation, at the Institute's expense. After thirteen weeks, the student will be placed in inactive status with respect to the graduate program. The student's placement in the graduate program will be assured for an additional twenty-six weeks (without stipend or benefits). If the student is unable to return to normal student activities after this time, the student will be withdrawn from the program. Such students may request re-admission to the program, by written appeal, to the Dean.

### **2017 HOLIDAY SCHEDULE FOR FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES**

Monday, January 2	New Year's Day
Monday, May 29	Memorial Day
Tuesday, July 4	Independence Day
Monday, September 4	Labor Day
Thursday, November 23	Thanksgiving Day
Friday, November 24	Day After Thanksgiving
Friday, December 22	Christmas Holiday
Monday, December 25	Christmas Day
Friday, December 29	New Year's Eve

### **Student Grievances**

Student grievances regarding coursework, grading, academic progress, and VAIGS policies or practices should be directed to the Academic or Thesis Adviser if they cannot be resolved directly with the person involved. If the grievance remains unresolved, the student

should consult the Ombudsman (in most circumstances, the Vice President of Human Resources), who will advise the student and serve as a liaison with the faculty and administration. Unresolved issues or appeals should be presented in writing, to the Dean.

Grievances regarding research should first be directed to the Thesis Adviser. Should further resolution be necessary, the student can appeal to the Thesis Advisory Committee (TAC) and the Dean.

Students who experience or observe sexual harassment or assault, racial or ethnic discrimination, or scientific misconduct are encouraged and expected to address those concerns by following the VAIGS Student Code of Conduct and VAI employment policies and procedures. These policies can be found at the [Human Resources SharePoint site](#).

Academic policies on Probation and Dismissal, Grade Appeals, Remediation, and Incompletes are summarized in the VAIGS Catalog and are available in full at the VAIGS SharePoint site: <https://home.vai.org/sites/VAIGS/Pages/PGP.aspx>.