

VERTICALLY INTEGRATED PROJECTS PROGRAM

Through the Vertically Integrated Projects (VIP) Program, students work with faculty on large-scale, long term multidisciplinary project teams. Students earn academic credit and can participate for multiple semesters, with returning students taking on mentoring, leadership, and/or additional responsibilities relevant to their fields of study. "Vertical Integration" refers to team composition, with teams including sophomores, juniors, seniors, graduate students, post-doctoral researchers, and faculty. Faculty build VIP teams around their own interests, so they bring their expertise and enthusiasm to their teams. In turn, VIP teams attract students from many disciplines and enable the completion of ambitious projects, which strengthen and expand faculty portfolios. Teams are established by faculty request and last many years (if not indefinitely). Because each team lasts longer than any single student, new students get up to speed on the project each semester, and returning students help mentor newcomers. The long-term nature of the program provides the time and context for students to gain deeper insights into their field of study, acquire breadth by working with people from other disciplines and backgrounds, learn and practice professional skills, make substantial contributions to real-world projects and experience different roles and responsibilities on a team.

VIP is offered as a set of courses, with new students joining at the beginning of each semester. Students must apply to VIP before they can register for the appropriate courses. This ensures that returning students are able to register, and it allows VIP to maintain a balance of sophomores, juniors, seniors and graduate students as well as a balance of different majors on each team. The program actively recruits students prior to Phase I registration. Students can apply the semester before they join a team (for example, applying before Phase I registration to join a team the following semester), or as late as the first week of class for on-campus students or the month before class for online students (see www.vip.gatech.edu for deadlines). Teams do fill up, so students are encouraged to apply before Phase I registration if they are interested in a specific team.

In the application, students are asked to indicate which team they would like to join and how many credit-hours they would like to take. Sophomores are limited to 1 credit-hour. Juniors and seniors can take 1 to 2 credit-hours. Students using VIP to fulfill a multi-semester design sequence can take 3 credit-hours in their third semester of the sequence.

Graduate students can take 1-3 credit-hours. Students who are being paid by an instructor to participate, such as undergraduate student employees and graduate student mentors, register for zero credits. This appears on the student schedules as a 1-credit audit courses. Students using VIP for the President's Undergraduate Research Award program should indicate this on the application, and will register for 1-3 audit credits. Each applicant can only apply to one team at a time. If the team is unable to accept them, the student can apply to another team. If a student applies to another team while an application is pending, the new application will overwrite the previous application.

The VIP Program does not allow students to freely switch from team to team. As a disincentive, students are typically asked to take a one-semester break between participation on one team and another. Students seeking an exception to this rule should provide a detailed explanation in the comments section in the online application.

After students are accepted, the VIP Program will issue a registration permit. One-credit-hour students will need only one course registration number (CRN), which they will receive via email when their permit is issued. Two and 3-credit-hour students will need two CRNs, one for the scheduled meeting (1 credit, CRN emailed when the permit is issued), and another CRN for a 1 or 2-credit unsupervised lab. The lab CRNs are listed each semester on the VIP webpage.

Each VIP team meets once weekly, typically for 50 minutes. Teams also schedule subteam meetings, allowing smaller groups working on a specific topic to collaborate at other times during the week. Students in their first semester of VIP cannot have a time-conflict with the scheduled team meeting. Returning VIP students can have a time conflict with instructor approval, if subteam meetings outside of regular meetings would allow the student to fully participate and contribute. It is the student's responsibility to confirm with the instructor if a time-conflict is acceptable (regardless of whether a time-conflict permit was issued), to ensure the time conflict is manageable, and to actively engage with their team.

Some VIP teams allow online students to participate. This is most common in the Online Master of Science in Computer Science (OMSCS) program. Team listings on the VIP webpage indicate which teams will consider OMSCS students, either in general (synchronously), asynchronously or on a case-by-case basis. Online students interested in a team considering OMSCS applicants on a case-by-case basis should contact the instructor to discuss their interest and options. In other situations, students already associated with a VIP team might participate while doing a co-op, internship, or study abroad. These requests should be made to instructors. Then with instructor approval, the special sections will be created by the VIP Program.

Many departments have policies about how VIP credits can be applied to degree requirements. Some departments incentivize multiple semesters of participation, allowing VIP credits to count in a more useful way once a minimum number of credits are earned (e.g., all VIP credits might count as in-major electives once 6 VIP credits are earned). In some departments, VIP projects can be used to fulfill multi-semester design sequences such as Junior Design, Senior Design, or Studio. While departments develop and approve the policies, the VIP Program lists the policies at www.vip.gatech.edu for students' convenience. It is important for each student to understand their department's policy. Students with questions about their departments' policies should contact their academic advisors in their home departments. Appeals to department policies are handled by students' home departments.