



THE CULTIVATED CONNECTION



February 2025 | Virginia Tech CALS

Graduate Student Spotlight

Highlighting our graduate students that have assisted in the facilitation and coordination of the Engaging Secondary Teachers in CALS Research for Agricultural Literacy. Our graduate students are available to visit with your students via Zoom and help answer any questions about implementing materials in your classroom.



Mary Ali Oliver
PhD Student

Tell us about yourself and your background:

My name is Mary Ali Oliver, and I am currently a 4th year PhD Candidate in the School of Animal Sciences working with Dr. Alan Ealy. I grew up in Union City, Tennessee, and was heavily involved in showing cattle and sheep. This led me to UT Knoxville for my bachelor's in animal science. I quickly fell in love with research and decided to stay at UT for my master's in reproductive physiology. While at UT, I got the opportunity to serve as a teaching assistant for the Farm Animal Anatomy and Physiology class. I realized how much I enjoyed interacting with students, and I ultimately decided to get a PhD. My goal is to become a professor in animal science with a research and teaching appointment.

Why did you choose to work with the Professional Development in Agricultural Literacy (PDAL) Program?:

I chose to work with the PDAL program because this program combines my love of teaching with my passion for agriculture. Promoting ag literacy in the classroom will expose students to the many facets of agriculture, and I hope to inspire students to become involved and develop a passion for in agriculture.

What is one interesting thing about you that people should know?:

I love going to CrossFit and running with my Australian Shepherd, Winnie!

CALS CURRENTS What's happening in VT CALS?



Mr. Chris Kniesly brought his second group of high schoolers to Virginia Tech's campus to engage with CALS faculty and students. Students participated in exciting activities including making banana bacon and learning about bovine reproduction!

Interested in a school visit? Contact Nia McLean at mnia@vt.edu.

Kathryn Sharpe and Matthew Hayes worked with ALCE graduate student William Taylor to host a family engagement night for middle school families in Lynchburg City Schools. Families spent 30-minute rotations at stations adapted from the activities modeled in the 2024 PDAL summer program. Kudos for your initiative and creativity!

Ready, Set, Grow!



Here is a free resource that can be utilized in your classroom:
The Colors We See Make A Difference In The Food We Eat

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS



We are now accepting applications for the 4th Professional Development for Agricultural Literacy Summer program for secondary teachers from **June 23-27** at The Virginia Seafood Agricultural Research and Extension Center in **Hampton, Virginia!** Stay tuned for the program agenda coming soon!

Apply now or share with a friend:
2025 PDAL Application

Contact Us!

We'd love to hear from you! If you have questions about our programs or opportunities to engage with CALS please reach out to **Dr. Donna Westfall-Rudd** at mooredm@vt.edu or **Nia McLean** at mnia@vt.edu