

Senior Awards Nomination Guide

The **College of Agriculture and Life Sciences (CALS) Senior Awards** recognize graduating students whose achievements, character, and contributions embody the highest ideals of Virginia Tech and the land-grant mission. These awards celebrate the many ways in which CALS students excel, through service, leadership, innovation, resilience, scholarship, collaboration, and the advancement of their communities.

CALS students make meaningful impacts across classrooms, laboratories, farms, communities, internships, research teams, student organizations, and global experiences. The Senior Awards honor those students whose accomplishments distinguish them as leaders and contributors to the future of agriculture, life sciences, health, natural resources, and community development.

Each award highlights a different dimension of student excellence and is grounded in the college's commitment to experiential learning and in the university motto, "*Ut Prosim, That I May Serve*." The awards recognize not only visible achievements, but also the dedication, integrity, perseverance, and growth that characterize the CALS student experience.

Faculty, staff, peers, and community partners are encouraged to nominate exceptional students. **Self-nominations are also welcome and encouraged**, ensuring all students, including those with less access to faculty networks or less traditional pathways, have equitable opportunities to be recognized.

Eligibility Requirements

All nominees must:

- **Be graduating in the current award year, including Spring, Summer, Fall, or Winter terms.**
- **Have a primary major within the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences** (including the Agricultural Technology Program).
- **Be in good academic standing** and not on academic or honor probation at the time of nomination or graduation.
- **Demonstrate qualities aligned with the specific award criteria** as defined in this guide and rubric.

Students from all CALS disciplines, pathways, and program structures, including transfer students, Ag Tech students, first-generation students, nontraditional students, and those engaged primarily in applied or experiential contexts, are eligible and encouraged to be nominated.

About the Awards and Rubrics

CALS uses a **hybrid rubric model** to evaluate all nominations. This model provides structure and clarity for reviewers while allowing space for the unique qualities and stories of each student to emerge. Rubrics include four consistent evaluation areas:

1. **Core Qualities** specific to each award
2. **Impact** (personal, relational, group, programmatic, academic, or community)
3. **Growth and Reflection** (resilience, learning, adaptability, curiosity, leadership development)
4. **Clarity and Strength of Evidence in Nomination Materials**
(evaluates clarity of examples, not writing skill)

This rubric promotes fairness, transparency, and equity across departments and nomination sources, especially for students with varied backgrounds and supports.

Who Can Nominate?

Nominations may be submitted by:

- Faculty
- Academic advisors
- Staff
- Research mentors
- Internship or experiential learning supervisors
- Community partners
- Peer leaders
- **Students themselves (self-nominations encouraged)**

Self-nominations elevate equity and ensure all students have the chance to share their own story, especially those whose contributions may not be readily visible to others.

Award Descriptions, Criteria, and Nomination Rubrics

The following pages include:

- Detailed descriptions of each award
- Key qualities and areas of distinction
- Eligibility within the 5-category award structure
- Hybrid rubric scoring criteria for reviewers
- Nomination prompts and guidelines for providing strong evidence

These materials are designed to help nominators identify students whose achievements and growth align closely with each award's purpose.

Ut Prosim Award

Honoring Service, Integrity, and Community Commitment

What the Award Recognizes

The *Ut Prosim* Award honors a CALS student who exemplifies the university motto, *That I May Serve*. This award celebrates students who demonstrate exceptional commitment to service, values-driven leadership, and contributions that strengthen the CALS, local, or global community.

Students in any CALS major or program, including the Agricultural Technology Program, are eligible and encouraged to be nominated.

Who the Award Is Designed For

Students who have engaged in service-oriented activities, formal or informal, academic or applied, that make a meaningful difference. This award is appropriate for students whose impact may not always be publicly visible but is deeply felt by peers, community partners, or the college.

What Makes a Strong Nominee

A strong nominee will have:

- Documented and sustained **service contributions** through volunteerism, outreach, mentorship, peer support, or community-engaged learning
- Demonstrated integrity, reliability, compassion, and **value-based leadership**
- A clear **positive impact** on individuals, organizations, or the broader community
- Alignment with the spirit of *Ut Prosim* as demonstrated in actions, choices, and personal growth with a consistent orientation toward service across academic, applied, or experiential settings.

Who Can Nominate

Students, faculty, advisors, staff, mentors, or community partners who are directly familiar with the student's service activities. Self-nominations are welcome and encouraged.

***Ut Prosim* Award Selection Criteria (Rubric)**

Focus: Service, integrity, community contribution

Category 1: Commitment to Service & Value-Based Leadership (0–3 pts)

- **3 – Exemplary:** Demonstrates sustained, meaningful service; clear pattern of responsible decision-making; impact evident across academic, applied, or community settings.
- **2 – Proficient:** Regular involvement in service with some evidence of value-based leadership; contributions are meaningful but limited in scope or duration.
- **1 – Developing:** Emerging engagement in service; contributions are positive but limited or not yet sustained.

Category 2: Community Impact (0–3 pts)

- **3 – Exemplary:** Service activities produced a significant or measurable impact on individuals, groups, or organizations.
- **2 – Proficient:** Service positively affected others; impact is moderate or localized.
- **1 – Developing:** Impact described but limited, informal, or not fully articulated.

Category 3: Growth, Learning, & Reflection (0–3 pts)

- **3 – Exemplary:** Clear evidence of personal growth, reflection, and purpose-driven engagement with *Ut Prosim*.
- **2 – Proficient:** Some reflection and growth evident.
- **1 – Developing:** Limited reflection or demonstrated connection to personal development.

Category 4: Clarity & Strength of Evidence in the Nomination (0–3 pts)

- **3 – Exemplary:** The nomination provides clear, specific, and relevant examples that strongly support the award criteria. Evidence is easy to understand, regardless of writing style or nominator role.
- **2 – Proficient:** The nomination includes some relevant examples or context, though details may be partial or moderately developed. Enough information is provided to fairly evaluate the student.
- **1 – Developing:** The nomination offers minimal or vague information, making it difficult to fully assess the student's alignment with the award criteria.

Trailblazer Award

Honors Innovation, Bold Leadership, and Pioneering Contributions

What the Award Recognizes

The CALS Trailblazer Award recognizes a student who demonstrates imaginative thinking, forward-looking leadership, and a willingness to challenge norms to create positive change within CALS or the broader field of agriculture and life sciences.

Students in any CALS major or program, including the Agricultural Technology Program, are eligible and encouraged to be nominated.

Who the Award Is Designed For

Students who pursue innovative ideas, initiate new programs or solutions, or break new ground as leaders, researchers, creators, or advocates.

What Makes a Strong Nominee

A strong nominee will have:

- Evidence of **innovation**, creativity, or entrepreneurial thinking
- Examples of **pioneering action** such as launching a project, leading new initiatives, or shaping meaningful improvements
- Demonstrated **courage and resilience** in navigating challenges, taking risks, or advocating for new ideas
- Impact that shows potential for long-term benefit to CALS, their field, or the community

Who Can Nominate

Students, faculty, advisors, staff, mentors, organizational leaders, or community partners familiar with the student's innovative or trailblazing contributions. Self-nominations are welcome and encouraged.

Trailblazer Award Selection Criteria (Rubric)

Focus: Innovation, creative leadership, pioneering action

Category 1: Innovation & Creativity (0–3 pts)

- **3 – Exemplary:** Introduces novel ideas, methods, or solutions; demonstrates creativity across academic, applied, or hands-on contexts.
- **2 – Proficient:** Demonstrates creative thinking with some new ideas or improvements.
- **1 – Developing:** Emerging creativity; limited evidence of innovation.

Category 2: Initiative, Courage, & Risk-Taking (0–3 pts)

- **3 – Exemplary:** Shows bold leadership, takes meaningful risks, and overcomes challenges in pursuit of new ideas.
- **2 – Proficient:** Takes initiative with moderate courage or risk-taking.
- **1 – Developing:** Limited initiative or willingness to take risks.

Category 3: Impact & Potential for Future Influence (0–3 pts)

- **3 – Exemplary:** Clear and lasting impact; potential to influence field, program, or community.
- **2 – Proficient:** Impact evident but moderate or emerging.
- **1 – Developing:** Minimal or unclear impact.

Category 4: Clarity & Strength of Evidence in the Nomination (0–3 pts)

- **3 – Exemplary:** The nomination provides clear, specific, and relevant examples that strongly support the award criteria. Evidence is easy to understand, regardless of writing style or nominator role.
- **2 – Proficient:** The nomination includes some relevant examples or context, though details may be partial or moderately developed. Enough information is provided to fairly evaluate the student.
- **1 – Developing:** The nomination offers minimal or vague information, making it difficult to fully assess the student's alignment with the award criteria.

Champion Award

Honoring resilience, transition excellence, and students who uplift others while overcoming challenges.

What the Award Recognizes

The CALS Champion Award recognizes students who demonstrate exceptional resilience and persistence in the face of adversity, significant transitions, or personal challenges—while still actively supporting and encouraging their peers. This award honors individuals who rise strong and help others rise with them.

Students in any CALS major or program, including the Agricultural Technology Program, are eligible and encouraged to be nominated.

Who the Award Is Designed For

Students who:

- Overcame notable personal, academic, health, financial, or life challenges
- Demonstrated strength, perseverance, and determination
- Navigated major transitions (including transfer students or students returning after time away)
- Continued to uplift classmates and contribute positively to their community despite personal obstacles

What Makes a Strong Nominee

A strong nominee will have:

- A compelling story of **resilience, recovery, or adaptation**
- Evidence of **personal growth** and persistence through barriers
- Examples of **supporting or championing peers**, whether formally or informally
- Contributions that show courage, compassion, and community-mindedness

Who Can Nominate

Students, faculty, advisors, staff, mentors, organizational leaders, or community partners. Self-nominations are welcome and encouraged.

Champion Award Selection Criteria (Rubric)

Focus: Resilience, personal transformation, peer support

Category 1: Resilience, Persistence & Overcoming Challenges (0–3 pts)

- **3 – Exemplary:** Demonstrates significant adversity and exceptional persistence; the story of resilience is compelling, well-documented, and transformative.
- **2 – Proficient:** Clear challenges and evidence of persistence; impact is more moderate.
- **1 – Developing:** Some barriers are described, but limited clarity about persistence or growth.

Category 2: Peer Support, Encouragement & Advocacy (0–3 pts)

- **3 – Exemplary:** Consistently uplifts others; provides meaningful or ongoing support; strongly influences peers' sense of belonging or success.
- **2 – Proficient:** Offers peer support in several instances; positive but limited influence.
- **1 – Developing:** Some peer support mentioned; limited examples.

Category 3: Transition Excellence & Adaptability (0–3 pts)

(Award honors transfer students *and* any student navigating major transitions.)

- **3 – Exemplary:** Demonstrates exceptional adaptation, integration, or success during a significant transition (transfer, program shift, returning student, life event).
- **2 – Proficient:** Solid adjustment to transition with some evidence of adaptability.
- **1 – Developing:** Limited or emerging evidence of adjustment or transition leadership.

Category 4: Clarity & Strength of Evidence in the Nomination (0–3 pts)

- **3 – Exemplary:** The nomination provides clear, specific, and relevant examples that strongly support the award criteria. Evidence is easy to understand, regardless of writing style or nominator role.
- **2 – Proficient:** The nomination includes some relevant examples or context, though details may be partial or moderately developed. Enough information is provided to fairly evaluate the student.
- **1 – Developing:** The nomination offers minimal or vague information, making it difficult to fully assess the student's alignment with the award criteria.

Catalyst Award

Honors students who spark collective impact through leadership, collaboration, and mentorship.

What the Award Recognizes

The CALS Catalyst Award honors students who ignite positive change by energizing others, strengthening organizations or teams, and advancing shared goals. This award recognizes collaborative leaders who mentor peers, build partnerships, and elevate the work of groups, clubs, or programs across CALS.

Students in any CALS major or program, including the Agricultural Technology Program, are eligible and encouraged to be nominated.

Who the Award Is Designed For

Students who:

- Demonstrate strong **leadership in student clubs, teams, or programs**
- Foster collaboration and shared success
- Mentor peers or guide others' development
- Lead initiatives that improve processes, programs, organizations, or community efforts

What Makes a Strong Nominee

A strong nominee will have:

- Evidence of **programmatic or group impact** (e.g., improving a club, leading a team, launching an initiative)
- Demonstrated **collaboration, communication, and partnership-building**
- Examples of **mentoring others** or building leadership capacity in their peers
- A track record of **mobilizing people**, strengthening group culture, or improving systems

Who Can Nominate

Students, faculty, advisors, staff, mentors, organizational leaders, or community partners. Self-nominations are welcome and encouraged.

Catalyst Award Selection Criteria (Rubric)

Focus: Collective impact, collaboration, organizational leadership, mentorship

Category 1: Leadership in Groups, Teams, or Organizations (0–3 pts)

- **3 – Exemplary:** Demonstrates strong, effective leadership that clearly strengthens an organization, project, cohort, lab, or club.
- **2 – Proficient:** Solid leadership with moderate group influence.
- **1 – Developing:** Limited leadership roles; early signs of group engagement.

Category 2: Collaboration & Partnership-Building (0–3 pts)

- **3 – Exemplary:** Builds strong, effective partnerships; fosters collective action; enhances teamwork culture.
- **2 – Proficient:** Evidence of collaboration; moderate contributions to group dynamics.
- **1 – Developing:** Limited collaboration or examples.

Category 3: Mentorship & Developing Others (0–3 pts)

- **3 – Exemplary:** Provides consistent, transformational mentorship; helps peers grow personally or academically; builds community capacity.
- **2 – Proficient:** Mentors or supports others in meaningful but limited ways.
- **1 – Developing:** Minimal or informal mentorship; few examples.

Category 4: Clarity & Strength of Evidence in the Nomination (0–3 pts)

- **3 – Exemplary:** The nomination provides clear, specific, and relevant examples that strongly support the award criteria. Evidence is easy to understand, regardless of writing style or nominator role.
- **2 – Proficient:** The nomination includes some relevant examples or context, though details may be partial or moderately developed. Enough information is provided to fairly evaluate the student.
- **1 – Developing:** The nomination offers minimal or vague information, making it difficult to fully assess the student's **alignment** with the award criteria.

Emerging Scholar Award

Honors intellectual curiosity, early inquiry, and promise for future scholarly or professional impact.

What the Award Recognizes

The CALS Emerging Scholar Award recognizes a student who demonstrates exceptional intellectual curiosity, a strong desire to learn, and meaningful early engagement in scholarly, applied, or inquiry-based work. This award celebrates students who are beginning to explore their academic or professional field in deeper ways and show clear potential for future contribution.

Students in any CALS major or program, including the Agricultural Technology Program, are eligible and encouraged to be nominated.

Who the Award Is Designed For

Students who:

- Appreciate learning for its own sake and pursue knowledge beyond required coursework
- Engage in early-stage research, inquiry, applied projects, technical investigations, or academic enrichment
- Take initiative to ask thoughtful questions, explore ideas, or try new forms of scholarly or applied work.
- Show a promising trajectory toward future academic, technical, or professional impact even if still early in experience

What Makes a Strong Nominee

A strong nominee will have:

- Clear evidence of **intellectual curiosity**, seeking out learning opportunities, asking insightful questions, or exploring ideas independently
- Demonstrated **engagement in inquiry**, whether through research, applied learning, technical projects, creative problem-solving, or community-engaged scholarship
- A visible **growth trajectory** that indicates promise for future contribution in their field, profession, or community
- A developing but distinctive scholarly voice or set of interests, even if their academic record is not yet fully established.

Emerging Scholar Award (cont.)

Key Clarification:

This award does not recognize high GPA alone. Academic excellence may support a nomination, but the emphasis is on curiosity, inquiry, initiative, and future potential.

Who Can Nominate

Faculty members, research mentors, advisors, graduate assistants, or experiential learning supervisors.

Emerging Scholar Award Selection Criteria (Rubric)

Focus: Rising academic excellence, intellectual curiosity, research potential

Category 1: Intellectual Curiosity & Inquiry Mindset (0–3 pts)

- **3 – Exemplary:** Demonstrates outstanding curiosity and a clear inquiry mindset; consistently seeks opportunities to learn beyond coursework; asks thoughtful questions; shows genuine enthusiasm for understanding their field in deeper ways.
- **2 – Proficient:** Shows curiosity and interest in exploring topics; occasionally seeks learning opportunities beyond requirements; demonstrates emerging engagement in inquiry.
- **1 – Developing:** Displays light or inconsistent curiosity; limited evidence of exploring ideas or engaging in independent inquiry.

Category 2: Engagement in Scholarly, Applied, or Inquiry-Based Work (0–3 pts)

- **3 – Exemplary:** Actively engages in early-stage research, applied projects, technical investigation, or other inquiry-driven work. Takes initiative to participate meaningfully and shows emerging competence or insight.
- **2 – Proficient:** Participates in inquiry activities with moderate engagement; demonstrates interest but with limited depth or initiative.
- **1 – Developing:** Minimal or emerging involvement in inquiry-based or applied learning experiences.

Category 3: Growth Trajectory & Potential for Future Contribution (0–3 pts)

- **3 – Exemplary:** Shows clear and significant growth; articulates or demonstrates a compelling trajectory toward future scholarly, professional, or technical contribution. Potential is visible and distinctive.
- **2 – Proficient:** Shows steady growth; potential for future contribution is present but emerging.
- **1 – Developing:** Growth is minimal or unclear; potential for future contribution not well demonstrated.

Category 4: Clarity & Strength of Evidence in the Nomination (0–3 pts)

- **3 – Exemplary:** The nomination provides clear, specific, and relevant examples that strongly support the award criteria. Evidence is easy to understand, regardless of writing style or nominator role.
- **2 – Proficient:** The nomination includes some relevant examples or context, though details may be partial or moderately developed. Enough information is provided to fairly evaluate the student.
- **1 – Developing:** The nomination offers minimal or vague information, making it difficult to fully assess the student's **alignment** with the award criteria.