

VIRTUAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE LLC

Student Research Project Completion and Certificate Eligibility Policy

Institutional standards for determining satisfactory completion of mentored research participation and eligibility for VRI recognition.

Organization: Virtual Research Institute LLC

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Applies To: Students, families, mentors, reviewers, contractors, and VRI administrators

Policy Statement. VRI certificates recognize satisfactory completion of an authentic mentored research experience. Enrollment, payment, attendance at a single event, or the production of a favorable research result does not by itself establish completion.

Relationship to Other Documents. This policy works together with the VRI Policies & Procedures Manual, Student Code of Conduct, enrollment acknowledgments, mentor agreements, project-specific expectations, accessibility procedures, and safeguarding requirements.

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1. Purpose and Governing Principles

This policy establishes a consistent, academically defensible, developmentally appropriate, and evidence-based framework for determining whether a student has successfully completed a Virtual Research Institute (VRI) research project and is eligible to receive a certificate or other completion recognition.

- A VRI certificate attests to satisfactory participation and contribution, not merely registration, payment, or presence.
- Research outcomes may be uncertain, partial, negative, or inconclusive. A student may successfully complete a project even when the research question is not fully resolved.
- Students are evaluated relative to reasonable expectations for their age, preparation, pathway, assigned role, project design, and approved accommodations—not against professional researchers or against one another.
- Technical brilliance cannot substitute for sustained nonparticipation, unprofessional conduct, abandonment, or academic misconduct.
- Technical struggle does not by itself establish non-completion when the student participates consistently, makes good-faith efforts, responds to feedback, and contributes work appropriate to the project.
- Every adverse completion recommendation is subject to VRI administrative review before certificate ineligibility becomes final.

2. Scope and Relationship to Other Documents

This policy applies to VRI Research Circles, Research Teams, Research Extensions, one-to-one or small-team projects, workshops that include a formal completion credential, and any other VRI offering designated as certificate-bearing. It works together with the VRI Policies & Procedures Manual, Student Code of Conduct, enrollment acknowledgments, mentor agreements, project-specific expectations, accessibility procedures, and safeguarding requirements.

Where a project-specific written requirement is more specific and does not conflict with this policy, the project-specific requirement may govern. VRI retains final interpretive authority.

3. Nature of Research-Based Completion

VRI research programs are not conventional courses built primarily around multiple-choice examinations or uniform answer keys. Authentic research requires inquiry, ambiguity tolerance, collaboration, iteration, documentation, communication, and responsible response to feedback. Accordingly, successful completion is determined through a holistic review of observable conduct and contributions over time.

Critical distinction. The quality of the final result is relevant, but it is not the sole or controlling measure. A student may complete successfully through rigorous effort on a difficult or unresolved problem, while a student associated with a strong team result may fail to complete if the student did not meaningfully participate.

4. Student Completion Standards

A student ordinarily completes a VRI research project when the available evidence shows that the student, with any approved modifications:

- participated consistently enough to engage meaningfully with the project;
- communicated with reasonable reliability through approved channels;
- made good-faith efforts on assigned readings, analyses, experiments, computations, drafts, or other tasks;

- demonstrated research engagement appropriate to the student's level, including some independent effort between meetings;
- contributed constructively to the team or mentor-student working relationship;
- made at least one identifiable and academically meaningful contribution to the project process or deliverables;
- responded appropriately to feedback and reasonable corrective guidance; and
- complied with academic integrity, conduct, privacy, and safety requirements.

No single missed meeting, delayed message, incomplete task, weak presentation, or unsuccessful line of inquiry ordinarily determines the outcome by itself. VRI considers patterns, materiality, context, prior notice, and opportunities to improve.

5. Evaluation Dimensions

Dimension	Evidence considered
Attendance and reliability	Presence, punctuality, advance notice, follow-through, and dependable fulfillment of commitments.
Communication and responsiveness	Timely and professional responses, questions, progress updates, and communication when blocked or absent.
Preparation and assignment completion	Good-faith completion of readings, exercises, analyses, drafts, code, data work, or other reasonable assignments.
Research engagement and independence	Intellectual effort, initiative, documentation, problem solving, persistence, and independent work appropriate to readiness.
Team contribution and professional conduct	Respect, equitable participation, constructive collaboration, responsible use of shared spaces, and support for collective progress.
Contribution to project deliverables	Identifiable contribution to analysis, literature review, code, computation, writing, figures, presentation, documentation, or another agreed output.

6. Completion and Certificate Statuses

Status	Meaning
Completed – Certificate Eligible	The student satisfactorily met the applicable completion standard.
Completed with Approved Modification – Certificate Eligible	The student completed revised or alternative expectations formally accepted because of accommodation, emergency, VRI-caused disruption, or another documented circumstance.
Partially Completed – Administrative Review Required	The student participated and contributed but material requirements remain unresolved. This is not a final certificate determination.
Did Not Complete – Not Certificate Eligible	The evidence shows material and sustained failure to meet completion standards after appropriate notice and opportunity to improve, unless immediate action was justified.
Withdrew	The student or family ended participation before completion. Certificate eligibility is ordinarily unavailable unless VRI expressly approves otherwise.
Pending Review / Certificate Hold	Additional information, integrity review, safeguarding review, documentation, or administrative determination is required.

The numerical rubric informs, but does not mechanically control, the decision. VRI may depart from a numerical result when the documented evidence establishes abandonment, misconduct, exceptional circumstances, or another material reason. Any departure must be explained in writing.

7. Required Evidence and Documentation

- mentor observations recorded across the project rather than only at the final meeting;
- attendance or meeting records where available;
- approved-channel communications and reasonable response history;
- assignment, file, version-history, notebook, code, writing, analysis, or presentation evidence;
- the student's identifiable role in team work;
- documented corrective guidance and the student's response;
- relevant student, family, co-mentor, or administrator information; and
- the completed VRI Student Research Participation and Completion Rubric with concise evidence notes.

Mentors shall evaluate evidence proportionately. The purpose is not continuous surveillance or excessive record creation; it is to support a fair, reviewable determination.

8. Early Intervention and Notice

Except when immediate action is justified by safety, misconduct, academic dishonesty, or complete abandonment, a student should not first learn at the end of the program that non-completion is being considered.

1. Identify the concern promptly and verify that expectations were clear.
2. Communicate the concern to the student in specific, behavior-based language.
3. State what improvement or missing work is reasonably required and the applicable timeframe.
4. Notify the parent or guardian when appropriate for a minor or when the concern is material.
5. Document the outreach and any response, approved adjustment, or continued nonparticipation.
6. Escalate to VRI when the concern is serious, repeated, disputed, or likely to affect certificate eligibility.

9. Adverse Decisions and Administrative Review

A mentor may recommend, but may not independently finalize, a finding of Did Not Complete, Not Certificate Eligible, or Certificate Hold. VRI shall review the rubric, supporting evidence, notice provided, mitigating circumstances, project expectations, and consistency with comparable decisions.

- VRI may affirm, revise, defer, or remand the recommendation for additional information or a limited completion opportunity.
- The final communication should identify the status and a concise basis without disclosing confidential information about other participants.
- A non-completion decision shall not be used to punish protected reporting, good-faith disagreement, disability, approved absence, or inability to produce a favorable research result.

10. Accommodations, Emergencies, and Approved Modifications

VRI shall consider documented or credibly reported illness, disability, technology failure, family emergency, religious observance, time-zone error caused by VRI, mentor cancellation, platform disruption, safeguarding action, or other material circumstance. Reasonable modifications may include alternative assignments, asynchronous contribution, revised deadlines, an alternative presentation role, excused absences, or a shortened but academically meaningful completion plan.

A modification changes the method or scope of completion; it does not require VRI to certify participation where no meaningful engagement or contribution occurred.

11. Academic Integrity and Disqualifying Conduct

Fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, unauthorized substitution of another person's work, deceptive AI use, sabotage, harassment, serious confidentiality breach, or other material misconduct may result in a certificate hold or non-eligibility even when other rubric scores are satisfactory. VRI shall apply its academic-integrity and review procedures and document the basis for the decision.

12. Final Presentations and Team-Based Work

A final presentation is an important form of research communication but is not always an absolute prerequisite. VRI symposiums and final cohort presentation events are recorded and shared privately with cohort families under the Student Code and Session Recording Policy. A student may be certificate eligible after contributing meaningfully without appearing in the cohort recording when VRI approves camera-off participation, a separate unrecorded presentation, or another equivalent role. Conversely, speaking during a presentation does not establish completion without meaningful participation in the underlying work.

For team projects, mentors shall identify each student's contribution with reasonable specificity. Equal outputs are not required, but passive association with team work is insufficient.

13. Records, Privacy, and Retention

Following final completion approval, VRI provides the student and parent/guardian with the student's individually issued signed or authenticated certificate. Certificates are delivered privately and are not distributed to other cohort families. A completion communication may also include the cohort's restricted symposium recording link, but it must not include another student's certificate.

Completed rubrics, evidence notes, adverse-decision records, and reconsideration materials are confidential student records. VRI retains a permanent completion verification record containing the minimum information needed to verify and reissue a certificate, including student identifier and name, pathway, term, completion date, mentor of record, and certificate identifier. The rendered signed certificate PDF or equivalent is normally retained for 7 years after the end of the calendar year of final participation and may later be regenerated from the verification record. Records shall be stored in approved VRI systems with access limited to authorized personnel and shall not be placed in the public website repository.

14. Appeals and Reconsideration

A student or parent/guardian may request reconsideration within ten calendar days after written notice of an adverse completion decision, unless VRI states another period. The request should identify a material factual error, overlooked evidence, procedural concern, or relevant circumstance. Reconsideration is not a new project evaluation and does not guarantee a different result. VRI's determination after reconsideration is final unless applicable law or a signed agreement requires otherwise.

15. Administration and Amendments

VRI may issue procedures, forms, scoring anchors, examples, and administrative guidance consistent with this policy. VRI may revise this policy prospectively and may apply clarifying or safety-related revisions immediately when appropriate. The version in effect for a project generally governs, except that a later provision may be applied when it is more protective of fairness or safety and does not materially disadvantage the participant.

Appendix A. Decision Matrix

Evidence pattern	Ordinary status
Sustained participation; meaningful contribution; no material integrity concern	Completed – Certificate Eligible
Expectations completed through an approved alternative plan	Completed with Approved Modification – Certificate Eligible
Mixed evidence or unresolved missing work that may be curable	Partially Completed – Administrative Review Required
Repeated nonresponse, abandonment, or material failure after notice	Did Not Complete – Not Certificate Eligible, subject to VRI review
Student formally ends participation	Withdrew
Integrity, safety, or factual issue remains unresolved	Pending Review / Certificate Hold

Appendix B. Minimum Mentor Documentation

- Completed rubric with a score and concise evidence note for each dimension.
- One-sentence description of the student's identifiable contribution.
- Attendance and communication summary.
- Any material concern, notice, improvement plan, and outcome.
- Recommended completion and certificate status.
- Disclosure of any approved modification or unresolved integrity/safety issue.
- Mentor certification that the evaluation is accurate, fair, and based on available evidence.

Document Control and Approval

Approval Authority	Approved by: VRI Executive Director / Authorized Designee
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