ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am going to cherish my experiences at Virginia Tech for a long time to come. Indeed, this university, along with providing a first class education, has given me several opportunities for both academic and personal growth. In this regard, I am thankful to number of my teachers, colleagues and friends. First and foremost however, I express my gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Garth L. Wilkes, who along with teaching me a great deal about polymer science, also contributed significantly towards my overall professional development. His guidance, patience and encouragement throughout my doctoral work are instrumental in its completion. I am also indebted to him for teaching two marvelous polymer courses.

Thanks are also due to Dr. Hervé Marand for teaching me polymer crystallization and for being a member of my committee. His criticisms, guidance and support have always motivated me to become a better researcher. I also wish to express my gratitude towards Dr. James E. McGrath for giving me a wonderful opportunity to learn more about polymer chemistry, for being able to work with his research group and for serving on my committee. His inputs and support were critical in the successful completion of this work. I am also indebted to Dr. Thomas C. Ward for teaching me two outstanding courses and for being a member of this committee. I also thank him for organizing the NSF summer student program, which provided me an enjoyable opportunity to work with summer students for two successive years. I also express my thanks towards Dr. Richey M. Davis for teaching an excellent course and serving on my committee. I am also grateful to him for several helpful discussions and for allowing me to use his research facilities. I also express my gratitude towards Dr. David. F. Cox for his suggestions and for serving on my committee.

I will also like to acknowledge a number of my friends and colleagues, without whom, this experience would have been incomplete. Firstly, a special thanks to Srivatsan Srinivas for his initial support, friendship and for training me on several research equipment. I specially value the assistance and friendship of many of my colleagues-Amba Ayembem, Ed Stancik, Stefan Williams, Binh Tran, Hari Parvattareddy, Robert
Young, Quin Ji, Rakesh Mehta, Todd Bullions and Slade Gardener. Thanks are also due to several of my friends in our research group including- Chris, Kurt, Hongyi, Ta-Hua, Jianye, David Shelby, Rob, Bryan, Matt Johnson, Matt O’Sickey, David Godshall, Chenghong and now Ashish.

A special thanks to Sandy for all her help in getting things done. I will also like to acknowledge the help of Joyce, Esther, Millie and Laurie in Chemistry. Thanks are also due to Steve McCartney for his help with the AFM and TEM experiments. I also appreciate help of the Department of Chemical Engineering’s staff including Diane Cannady, Diane Patty, Carol Stables, Wendall Brown, Riley Chan and the Department Head, Dr. W.L. Conger. The NSF Science and Technology Center at Virginia Tech and the Department of Chemical Engineering are gratefully acknowledged for their financial support.

I will also thank several of my roommates and friends in Blacksburg- Vikram, Vivek, Rakesh, Indi, Rajeev, Raj, Vidhu, Sukhtej, Arun, Neeraj, Rajesh and Prabhu for a great time I had in Blacksburg.

Finally my most important acknowledgments are towards my family who have been the single biggest motivating force in my life. I thank my sister Ekta, and my parents Reva and D.B. Ratta for their encouragement, advice and for the many sacrifices they have made over a number of years. This dissertation is dedicated to them.