

NATURAL RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE MASTER OF SCIENCE (M.S.)

GRADUATE PROGRAM HANDBOOK Revised May 2018

1. Program Description

The Natural Resources and Environmental Science (NRES) M.S. degree offers graduate study of the ecology, management, and restoration of rangeland, forest, and wildlife ecosystems. Areas of specialization include (but are not limited to):

- Ecohydrology and hydrology
- Environmental science
- Forest ecology, management, and restoration
- Rangeland ecology, management, and restoration
- Wildlife ecology and conservation biology
- Watershed science

The NRES Master's degree program is inherently multidisciplinary and capitalizes upon the broad spectrum of expertise offered by NRES departmental faculty. Student learning outcomes include:

1. Students will be able to demonstrate critical thinking, writing, and communication skills that will enable them to succeed after graduation.
2. Students will be able to demonstrate knowledge of the theoretical basis and experimental methods used for study of natural resources and environmental science.
3. Students will be able to demonstrate knowledge of experimental design; field/laboratory instrumentation and procedures; computer models; and data analyses used in natural resource and environmental science research.

For more information about the NRES MS program, contact:

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Students are encouraged to contact NRES faculty directly to inquire about graduate opportunities and research interests.

Note: This handbook lists graduate program academic policies and procedures. It includes information on graduate school policies, degree requirements, timeline for degree completion, committee selection guidelines and comprehensive exam/thesis requirements. Every effort has been made to make this handbook accurate as of the date of publication; however, this handbook does not constitute a contractual commitment. Graduate programs may not offer all of the courses as described, and policies are subject to yearly review and changes with program

director and Graduate Council approval.

2. Degree Requirements

The NRES MS degree is intended to be “committee-driven” where the student has flexibility to select courses and develop a program of study under the guidance of an advisory committee. It has no program-specific degree requirements, there are no required courses and there is no comprehensive exam. However, students must meet the standard requirements of the Graduate School. These can be found on the [Program of Study form](#)¹ and are reproduced here:

Thesis (Plan A)

- Minimum of 30 graduate credits
- Minimum of 21 of these credits earned at UNR
- Minimum of 18 credits (including thesis credits) taken at 700-level
- Masters Students must enroll in 6 thesis credits for degree completion
- Maximum of 3 credits may be taken with S/U grading
- Maximum of 9 credits completed prior to admission (including transfer credits)
- All requirements (credits) for degree (including transfer credits) must be completed within the period of six years (6) immediately preceding the granting of the degree.

Non-Thesis (Plan B)

- Minimum of 32 graduate credits
- Minimum of 23 of these 32 graduate credits earned at UNR
- Minimum of 15 credits taken at 700-level
- Maximum of 3 credits may be taken with S/U grading (including transfer credits)
- Maximum of 9 credits completed prior to admission (including transfer credits)
- All requirements for degree must be completed within the period of 6 years immediately preceding the granting of the degree.

For both Thesis and Non-Thesis degrees, the Graduate School requires continuous enrollment of at least 3 graduate credits each fall and spring semester.

Plan A vs. Plan B

The vast majority of incoming NRES Master’s students are admitted to the Plan A degree program. In this option, the student is expected to write a thesis making an original contribution to the research field of a quality acceptable to a major, peer-reviewed scientific journal. A small number of students, primarily those without research funding and/or who have a full-time job commitment, are admitted to the Plan B degree program. This program requires the writing of a professional paper of a quality demonstrating a high level of scholarship. Occasionally, Plan B students transfer to Plan A if research funding becomes available. Only under very special circumstances is a Plan A student allowed to transfer to Plan B.

Graduate School Academic Requirements

All graduate students must maintain a cumulative graduate GPA of 3.0. If their GPA drops below 3.0 they are either placed on probation or dismissed. Undergraduate courses will not count towards graduate GPA.

¹ <http://www.unr.edu/Documents/graduate-school/program-of-study.pdf>

Probation: Students whose cumulative graduate GPA is .1 to .6 points below that needed for a 3.0 GPA are put on probation. Students are placed on academic probation for one semester. If they fail to raise their cumulative GPA to 3.0 by the end of one semester, they are dismissed from their graduate program. Thesis, dissertation, S/U graded credits, and transfer credits have **no** impact on a student's GPA.

Dismissal: Students whose cumulative graduate GPA is .7 or more grade points below that needed for a 3.0 GPA are dismissed. Dismissed students are no longer in a graduate program but may take graduate-level courses as a Grad Special. Students wishing to complete their degree must obtain approval to take graduate-level courses, raise their graduate GPA to at least 3.0 and then re-apply to a graduate program. Any courses taken to raise their GPA will be included in the graduate special/ transfer credit limitation (9 credits for master's degrees).

Please refer to Nevada System of Higher Education CODE on Student Program Dismissal Procedures (SPDP) and review conference policies: (NSHE CODE, Chapter 11, Sections 1-3). If program dismissal is based upon failure to maintain required grades or a required GPA as described above, SPDP does not apply and the student may be summarily dismissed from the graduate program.

3. Transfer Credits

These are credits transferred from another institution. Credits completed at UNR in another program or as a graduate special do not need to be transferred. Transfer credit can be requested on the [Graduate Credit Transfer Evaluation Request form](#)² available on Graduate School website, and must be signed by the student, major advisor, and graduate director. Transfer credits applied to a master's program must comply with the time limitation on master's work (6 years). Thus, if a student took a course five years prior to admission, they would have to complete the degree within one year for the course to apply to the degree. Credits from a completed master's degree will be exempt from the 8-year time limitation for those students pursuing a doctoral degree.

4. Timeline for Degree Completion

The following timeline is based on expectations of the Graduate School and the NRES Master's Program. While every student does not progress through their graduate program at the same rate and often more than 4 semesters are required to complete the M.S. degree, students should seek to minimize substantial delays. Please note the Graduate School requirement that all course work must be completed within six years preceding the awarding of the degree (i.e. course work from more than six years ago cannot be applied towards the M.S. degree).

Recommended Timeline:

| <u>Suggested Deadline</u> | <u>Milestone</u> |
|---------------------------|------------------|
|---------------------------|------------------|

² <http://www.unr.edu/Documents/graduate-school/GraduateCreditTransferEvaluationRequest.pdf>

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|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End of first semester | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Completion of thesis advisor form: Declaration of Advisor/Major Advisor/Committee Chair form³ • Schedule Entrance Interview with the NRES Graduate Program Director • Formation of advisory committee |
| End of second semester | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First committee meeting. Discuss research plan (proposal) and develop program of study (form: Program of Study form⁴) • <i>Graduate school deadline for declaration of advisor form</i> |
| End of third semester | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graduate school deadline for program of study form • Second committee meeting: update committee on thesis research progress |
| End of fourth semester (or final semester) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schedule a date for a thesis defense. The date of the defense should be at least three weeks prior to graduate school deadline for graduation • Submit graduation application form, at least several weeks in advance of the deadline for graduation; Graduation Application deadlines⁵ • Submit draft of complete thesis to committee members at least one month before scheduled thesis defense date • Defend thesis (public presentation and third committee meeting); revise thesis as needed • Submit Notice of Completion form after all requirements have been met (Master's form⁶) • Schedule Exit Interview with the NRES Graduate Program Director • Upon graduation, take the Graduate School's Exit Survey⁷ |

Notes:

1. Although three committee meetings are indicated in the suggested timeline, more can be scheduled as needed at the discretion of the student, advisor and committee.
2. You can find an updated list of Graduate School forms and requirements here: [Forms Website](#)⁸

5. Committee Selection Guidelines

³ <https://www.unr.edu/Documents/graduate-school/Declaration-of-Advisor.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.unr.edu/Documents/graduate-school/program-of-study.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.unr.edu/grad/graduation-and-deadlines>

⁶ <https://www.unr.edu/Documents/graduate-school/notice-of-completion-master-degree-updated.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.unr.edu/grad/forms-and-deadlines/exit-survey>

⁸ <https://www.unr.edu/grad/forms-and-deadlines>

Because there are no required courses and there is no core curriculum, the graduate advisory committee plays a particularly important role in the NRES Master's program. The committee is responsible for assisting the student in designing a program of study that is tailored to career goals of the student, fills in any academic gaps that may exist in the student's prior academic background, and provides the needed knowledge for successful completion of the thesis research. The committee is also responsible for guiding the thesis research and ensuring that it meets the standards of the graduate program. Therefore, the committee should be carefully selected by the student in close coordination with the advisor.

Consistent with rules of the Graduate School, each NRES Master's committee requires at least three advisory committee members, including the advisor. The advisor must be an NRES graduate faculty member. All members of the committee must be listed as members of the UNR graduate faculty. At least one (the graduate school representative or "outside" member) must be from a department or program different from the department or program from which the student is graduating. As stated on the Graduate School website, *"The Graduate School Representative protects the interests of the student, the advisory committee, and the Graduate School. The Graduate School Representative should also act as an "unbiased person" to whom the Dean may turn for judgment and counsel. The primary responsibility of the Graduate School Representative is that of an observer."* However, the Graduate School Representative may also play an important role in guiding the student, particularly if he/she has expertise in the student's area of specialization.

The membership of the committee should be finalized by the end of the second semester, and is indicated to the Graduate School through the signing of the student's Program of Study form. Formal approval of all student advisory committees is made by the Graduate Dean.

6. Thesis Requirements

The objective of writing a thesis (Plan A) or professional paper (Plan B) is to demonstrate the ability of a student to complete kinds of tasks he or she will be expected to perform in their professional career. While these typically include novel research, they can also include synthesis or re-evaluation of existing material. In sum, the thesis must demonstrate the ability to independently utilize the scientific method to address questions and hypotheses.

In general, the thesis must be of a quality that is publishable in a peer-reviewed journal of a scientific field relevant to the student's area of expertise, as judged by the advisory committee or demonstrated by acceptance for publication in such a journal. While there is no length requirement to the Master's thesis, the thesis must consist of at least one chapter suitable for publication, plus Introductory and Concluding chapters. The professional paper produced by the Plan B (non-thesis) student will be of sufficient quality to demonstrate a high degree of scholarship, as judged by the student's advisory committee.

The thesis should include note of chapter authorship and journals to which chapters will be submitted. This may be done on the title page or via footnotes, or by including a Preface between the Table of Contents and the introductory chapter.

The formatting and other guidelines for the thesis are dictated by the Graduate School and must

be followed precisely, as indicated on their website: [Master's Thesis Filing Guidelines](#)⁹. The NRES Master's program does not maintain its own requirements for the thesis format. Students should consult with their advisor and advisory committee.

Once all requirements have been met, students must submit a Final Review Approval and Notice of Completion form in order to graduate.

- Final Review Approval – Obtain sign-off from advisory committee chair
 - [Master's Final Review Approval](#)¹⁰
- Notice of completion – completed form should be submitted after all requirements have been met.
 - [Master's Notice of completion](#)¹¹

Successfully completing a thesis will typically include meeting the following guidelines:

1. The first draft of the thesis should be provided to the Committee Chair or Major Advisor at least eight weeks prior to the date the thesis is due to the Graduate College. The Advisor will work with the student directly to revise the thesis, which may take several revisions.
2. Submit the revised thesis to the Committee at least 6 weeks prior to the date the thesis is due to the graduate college. The Committee should review the thesis and return any comments, criticisms, or suggestions to the student within two weeks.
3. The student should carefully and thoroughly address comments made by the Committee and return the revised thesis to the Committee four weeks prior to the date the thesis is due.
4. This timeline represents the minimum acceptable time for each step, and can be modified given consent of student, committee, and advisor.

7. Graduate Assistantships

Research Assistantships: Most NRES Master's students are supported by graduate research assistantships derived from research grants administered by individual faculty members. Therefore, it is important that prospective students contact potential advisors early in their application process, to identify NRES graduate faculty members with both willingness to serve as mentors, and with grant funding for research assistantships.

Teaching Assistantships: Opportunities for NRES Master's students to be supported by teaching assistantships are fairly limited, but sometimes are made available through the NRES department to help teach NRES courses. These are usually part-time teaching assistantships that are offered in combination with part-time research assistantships.

Graduate students are also encouraged to apply for outside funding to help support their graduate research. Many such opportunities are listed here, [Funding Website](#)¹².

⁹ <http://www.unr.edu/grad/forms/thesis-filing-guidelines>

¹⁰ <http://www.unr.edu/Documents/graduate-school/thesis-final-review-approval-form.pdf>

¹¹ <https://www.unr.edu/Documents/graduate-school/notice-of-completion-master-degree-updated.pdf>

¹² <https://www.unr.edu/eecb/research/funding>

UNR's Graduate School Association also provides scholarships, small grants and other funding opportunities (including for travel to conferences): [Awards Website](#)¹³

Per policy of the Graduate School, all graduate students holding an assistantship (teaching GTA or research GRA) are considered Nevada residents for tuition purposes. Non-resident tuition is only waived for the duration of the assistantship. To be eligible for an assistantship, students must be admitted to a degree-granting program and be in good academic standing. The student must have an overall GPA of at least 3.0 and must be continuously enrolled in at least 6 graduate level credits (600-700) throughout the duration of the assistantship.

State-funded assistantships (GTA/GRA) may be held for a maximum of three (3) years for master's degree students.

Refer to the Graduate School website for the most updated information on graduate assistantships:

[General information](#) ¹⁴[Graduate Assistantship handbook](#) ¹⁵.

8. Health Insurance

All domestic degree seeking graduate students, who are enrolled in six or more credits (regardless of the course level) in a semester, will be automatically enrolled and billed for the University sponsored health insurance for each term they are eligible (fall & spring/summer). If a student has other comparable coverage and would like to waive out of the student health insurance, it is the student's responsibility to complete the [University online waiver form](#) ¹⁶ prior to the deadline. If approved, a health insurance waiver is good for the current academic year only. A new waiver must be submitted each academic year. All international graduate students are required to carry student health insurance, and the cost will be automatically added to your student account. Any international graduate students with insurance questions must contact the [Office of International Students and Scholars \(OISS\)](#) ¹⁷ directly.

[Information on Graduate health insurance](#) ¹⁸.

9. Enrollment Requirements and Leave of Absence

Continuous Enrollment: To maintain "good standing" all graduate students are required to enroll in a minimum of three (3) graduate credits each fall and spring semester until they graduate. International students may be required to enroll in nine graduate credits each fall and spring semester depending on the requirements of their visa. All students holding assistantships (whether teaching or research assistantships) are required to enroll in a minimum of six (6) graduate credits each semester they hold the assistantship.

Leave of Absence: Students in good standing may request a leave of absence by completing a

¹³ <https://www.unr.edu/gsa/gsa-student-services/spring-awards>

¹⁴ <http://www.unr.edu/grad/funding/graduate-assistantships>

¹⁵ http://www.unr.edu/Documents/administration-finance/hr/hr-graduate/GA_handbook.pdf

¹⁶ <https://studentinsurance.usi.com/UNR/unr-grad>

¹⁷ <https://www.unr.edu/oiss>

¹⁸ <http://www.unr.edu/grad/health-insurance>

[Leave of Absence form](#)¹⁹ during which time they are not required to maintain continuous registration. Usually, a leave of absence is approved for one or two semesters. The leave of absence request may be extended by the student filing an additional leave of absence form. Students applying for a leave of absence should not have any “incomplete” grades which could be changed to “F” and have a detrimental impact on their cumulative GPA. Requests for leave of absences must be received by the Graduate School no later than the last day of enrollment for the semester the leave is to begin.

Reinstatement: When a student has been absent for one semester or more without an approved leave of absence, he or she may request reinstatement via the [Reinstatement form](#)²⁰. This form allows the program the option to recommend the student be re-admitted to their graduate program based on their previous admission OR require the student to re-apply for admission which would require students to submit a new application for admission and pay the application fee. The Notice of Reinstatement to Graduate Standing must be received by the Graduate School no later than the last day of enrollment for the semester the reinstatement is to begin.

10. Graduate Student Association

The [Graduate Student Association \(GSA\)](#)²¹ represents all graduate students and promotes the welfare and interests of the graduate students at the University of Nevada, Reno. The GSA works closely with appropriate university administrative offices, including the Graduate School and Student Services and reports to the President of the University. The GSA government functions through the Council of Representatives, Executive Council and established committees.

11. Graduate School Forms

Please refer to [Forms Website](#)²² for all forms available at The Graduate School.

¹⁹ http://www.unr.edu/Documents/graduate-school/leaveofabsencer_9.23.pdf

²⁰ <https://www.unr.edu/Documents/graduate-school/Notice-of-Reinstatement-Graduate-Standing.pdf>

²¹ <https://www.unr.edu/gsa/>

²² <https://www.unr.edu/grad/forms-and-deadlines>