

**UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA RENO**

**DEPARTMENT OF CIVIL AND  
ENVIRONMENTAL ENGINEERING**

**GRADUATE STUDENT HANDBOOK**

**LAST UPDATE: MARCH 2018**

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## **1. Program Description**

The Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering (CEE) offers a broad fundamental graduate education that emphasizes the creative and analytical skills necessary for the advancement and protection of the world's infrastructure and environment. CEE Graduate students will be faced with supplying clean water, controlling pollution, and designing and building the transportation and public works system to support the growing world. Students from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds will be needed for their unique perspectives in developing viable solutions to our infrastructure challenges. The CEE graduate program provides the opportunity to work with faculty who specialize in various areas and prepares our graduates to take full advantage of the diverse job opportunities available in the infrastructure development area.

### **2.1. Program/Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs)**

Our CEE Graduates will have:

1. An ability to apply engineering research and theory to advance the practice of the discipline.
2. An ability to design and conduct experiments as well as to analyze, interpret, apply and disseminate the data.
3. An understanding of research methodology and knowledge of state-of-the art design practice and tools to develop safe and economical design solutions to infrastructure and environmental concerns.

### **2.2. Graduate Degrees and Tracks Offered**

The CEE Department offers the following degree programs:

- Master of Science (MS) in Civil and Environmental Engineering
  - Thesis option (Plan A)
  - Non- thesis option (Plan B)
- Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Civil and Environmental Engineering

The graduate program offers research opportunities in the following five subareas of specialization: Earthquake and Structural Engineering, Environmental Engineering, Geotechnical Engineering, Pavements Engineering and Science, and Transportation Engineering.

### **2.3. Graduate Director and Contact Information**

The CEE Graduate Director oversees all aspects of graduate education within the department. Some of the Graduate Director's activities include:

- Overseeing (a) the admissions process; (b) ensuring admission of highly qualified applicants with due consideration given to CEE Graduate Admission requirements; and (c) requesting and justifying admission of applicants not meeting minimum university and CEE requirements;
- Reviewing and approving programs of study and the composition of Advisory/Examining Committees;
- Reviewing and approving acceptance of transfer credits;

- Graduate student recruitment and promotion of the graduate program; and
- Mediating in conflicts between graduate students and their advisor.

**Contact Information of the CEE Graduate Director:**

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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**

**2.1. MS in Civil and Environmental Engineering**

The CEE Department offers an integrated course of study covering the theory, implementation, and design for those seeking the degree of MS in CEE. Graduate students seeking the MS degree are given the opportunity with the help of a graduate advisor to focus on specific/focus areas in CEE and perform research through the “thesis” option (Plan A) or to study CEE subjects with some level of specialization on a few specific focus areas through the “courses-only” option (Plan B). It is advised that a graduate advisor be selected by the end of the first semester. The credit requirements in each of the option is provided below.

While it is not necessary for students to immediately decide which option to take, it is important that the students pursuing both options meet frequently with their graduate advisor to seek advice and consultation as they proceed in their endeavors. If an assistantship has been assigned, the person who is responsible for your assistantship is often the graduate advisor (Thesis Committee chair). Those without an assistantship or Plan B students should also select a graduate advisor (Examination Committee Chair) from their chosen subarea of specialization. By the end of second semester the student should submit – *Declaration of Advisor/Major Advisor/Committee Chair* form to the Graduate School. The students should work very closely with their graduate advisors when selecting the needed courses (core and electives) as they proceed with the requirements of the programs of study. The core and elective courses vary depending on the subarea of specialization selected within the CEE Department. The graduate advisor

will help with the selection of those courses. More details on the timeline of various activities that need to be undertaken are described in Section 4.0 and summarized in Appendix A.

For both options of MS degree, the following UNR policies/requirements apply: (1) Maximum of 3 credits may be taken as S/U grading; (2) Maximum of 9 credits (including transfer credits) may be completed prior to admission to the graduate program; (3) All requirements (credits) for degree (including transfer credits) must be completed within six years immediately preceding the awarding of the MS degree; and (4) Students should be continuously enrolled with a minimum of 3 graduate course credits in each of the fall and spring semesters. See Section 8.0 for more specific details on UNR policies.

The student's Examination Committee should be formed with the input of the graduate advisor and details on the composition of the Examination Committee and their role are presented in Section 5.0.

### **2.1.1. MS Plan A: Thesis Option**

This option requires a minimum 30 credits that includes:

- 24 course credits and
- 6.0 thesis credits

To comply with the Graduate School's requirements, students must take:

- 12 course credits or more at the 700-level
- 12 credits or less at the 600 level.

Additionally among the course credits, the students must have taken at least 21 credits at UNR.

### **2.1.2. MS Plan B: Courses-only Option**

This option requires a minimum 32 credits.

To comply with the Graduate School's requirements, students must take:

- 15 credits or more at the 700-level
- 17 credits or less at the 600 level.

Additionally among the course credits, the students must have taken at least 23 credits at UNR.

The CEE Department requires that students pass an oral comprehensive exam (CEE 795 - 1 credit) conducted by the examination committee.

### **2.1.3 MS Thesis and Defense**

When MS Plan A is chosen, a thesis covering 6 credits involving research in CEE topics needs to be submitted and defended. A Thesis can also consist of a number of professional papers either previously published or being published concurrently with the submission of the thesis. CEE Guidelines for thesis using papers option is presented in Appendix B. A defense must be held as a public oral examination, which is announced via posting or electronic mail at least one week in advance. The announcement must

include the title and abstract of the work, the date, time and place of the exam, and the names of the student and of the committee chair.

Graduate School forms and resources related to thesis and dissertations:

- [Master's Thesis Filing Guidelines](#)<sup>1</sup>
- [Doctoral Dissertation Filing Guidelines](#)<sup>2</sup>
- (Doctoral students only) [Dissertation Title Form](#)<sup>3</sup>

Once all requirements have been met, students need to 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](#)<sup>4</sup>
- [Doctoral Final Review Approval](#)<sup>5</sup>

Notice of completion – completed form should be submitted after all requirements have been met.

- [Master's Notice of completion](#)<sup>6</sup>
- [Doctoral Notice of completion](#)<sup>7</sup>

## **2.2. Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Civil and Environmental Engineering**

A PhD Degree emphasizes an advanced knowledge of Civil and Environmental Engineering. The CEE Department offers an in-depth, cutting-edge curriculum for those graduate students seeking the PhD degree. Students are involved in substantial original research, and in advancing scientific knowledge in specific areas.

It is important that the students pursuing a PhD meet frequently with their graduate advisor (PhD Committee Chair) to seek advice and consultation as they proceed in their endeavors. If an assistantship has been assigned, the person who is responsible for your assistantship is often the graduate advisor (PhD Committee Chair). The students without an assistantship also should select a graduate advisor from their chosen subarea of specialization. The student should work very closely with the graduate advisor when selecting the needed courses and proceeding with the requirements of the program of study.

### **2.2.1 PhD Credit Requirements**

The credit requirements for the doctoral program in CEE are the following:

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.unr.edu/grad/forms/thesis-filing-guidelines>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.unr.edu/grad/forms/dissertation-filing-guidelines>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.unr.edu/grad/graduation-and-deadlines/dissertation-title-form>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.unr.edu/Documents/graduate-school/thesis-final-review-approval-form.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.unr.edu/Documents/graduate-school/dissertation-final-review-approval-form.pdf>

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

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.unr.edu/Documents/graduate-school/notice-of-completion-doctoral-degree.pdf>

- A PhD requires a minimum of 72 graduate credits beyond a BS degree and the requirements include:
  - Minimum of 48 of those credits are from course work;
  - Maximum of 24 graduate credits (grade B or better) from a completed master's degree program or previous post-baccalaureate work may be applied towards the program (this includes grad special and transfer, with the total cannot be more than 24 credits);
  - 30 course credits of 700-level courses, exclusive of dissertation credits. As many as 18 of these credits may be used from a masters degree program;
  - Students must complete a minimum of 24 dissertation credits.

For PhD, the following additional UNR requirements apply: (1) Full residency requirement that specifies two consecutive semesters (fall/spring or spring/fall) of at least 9 graduate credits each (students on 20hr/week assistantship require 6 credits each semester); (2) All requirements (credits) for degree, excluding prerequisite graduate course work or masters degree, must be completed within eight years immediately preceding the awarding of the degree; and (3) Students should be continuously enrolled with a minimum of 3 graduate course credits in each of the fall and spring semesters.

### **2.2.2 Elements of PhD Program of Study**

PhD program has important elements that include: (1) Qualifying exam; and (2) Comprehensive exam. The student should work with the graduate advisor and complete the PhD Qualifying exam, preferably within the first year. The student's PhD Dissertation Committee should be formed after the successful completion of the Qualifying exam and after the completion of about 12 credits. Details on the composition of the PhD Dissertation Committee and their role are presented in Section 5.0. The committee will be responsible for:

- Program of study.
- Directing the student towards the written and oral requirement of their comprehensive exam and admission to candidacy.
- Direction of student's research.

According to UNR regulations, admission to candidacy confirms that a student has successfully completed the departmental course requirements and university residency requirements. In order to gain admission to candidacy, a student must meet all the following requirements:

1. Hold at least a "B" average in all graduate work;
2. Pass the comprehensive exam;
3. Gain the Advisory/Examining Committee's formal approval for the program of study, including dissertation development.

The [Doctoral Degree Admission to Candidacy Form](#)<sup>8</sup> needs to be submitted to the graduate school with the approval of the student's advisory committee, graduate director

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.unr.edu/Documents/graduate-school/17doctoral-degree-admission-to-candidacy-updated.pdf>



of the program and the Graduate Dean must approve the form.

### 2.2.3 PhD Comprehensive Exam

- A. **Written** – The PhD Committee Chair (Primary Advisor), working with the PhD Dissertation Committee, selects one of the following options:
- a) **Dissertation Proposal** – The proposal provides the committee with a comprehensive presentation of the dissertation objectives, background and justification, the work completed to date, and a plan for future work. The proposal must contain substantial original work completed by the student.
  - b) **Written Exam**
    - i. *Content*: Core program areas with questions from examining committee and program faculty (determined at the discretion of primary advisor);
    - ii. *Format*: 7-day, open book/notes, passing score  $\geq 70\%$  for each section; for sections with a grade  $< 70\%$ , remedial work or additional requirements determined by the examining committee; only 1 re-take will be allowed on sections of the exam with grades  $< 70\%$ ; student must receive  $\geq 75\%$  on the re-take sections.
  - c) **Research Proposal** – An original research proposal developed and written by the student that has been prepared for an agency.
  - d) **Research Paper** - An original research paper developed and written by the student for a journal or conference where the paper will be reviewed. The paper may be part of the student's PhD dissertation.

**Note:** If the written exam, research proposal or research paper option is selected, the student must still write a document that provides the committee with the project objectives, subject, and plans for future work. These options do not require the original work component that is essential in the Dissertation Proposal.

B. Oral

- a) Presentation of Dissertation Proposal (May be open to the public)
- b) Questions on Dissertation Proposal and area of general study (Committee members only)

For easy review and follow up, above information is included in the summary entitled *CEE MS and PhD Graduate Program Guidelines* and presented in Appendix A.

### 2.2.4 PhD Dissertation and Defense

A dissertation involving original research in CEE completes the Ph.D. program. A dissertation can consist of a number of professional papers either previously published or being published concurrently with the submission of the dissertation. CEE Guidelines for dissertation using papers option is presented in Appendix B. A dissertation defense must be held as a public oral examination, which is announced via posting and electronic mail at least one week in advance. The announcement must include the title and abstract of the work, the date, time and place of the exam, and the names of the student and of the committee chair. A successful dissertation defense is reflected by no more than one negative vote from a member of the Advisory/Examining Committee. If two negative

votes are cast – regardless of the total number of committee members – the defense is unsuccessful. At the discretion of the committee, the candidate may be permitted one additional attempt to conduct a successful defense.

### 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 is requested on the [Graduate Credit Transfer Evaluation Request Form](#)<sup>9</sup> available at the Graduate School website and must be signed by the student, major advisor, and graduate director. Only courses with a grade of "C" or better may be transferred to a master's program; only courses with a grade of "B" or better may be transferred to a doctoral program. Transfer credits applied to a master's program must comply with the time limitation on master's program (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. No more than nine (9) credits completed either prior to admission to a graduate program or transferred from another institution may be applied to a master's degree. For doctoral programs a maximum of twenty-four (24) credits from a previously completed master's program or other post BS degree program may be applied. Doctoral students who have completed a master's degree in an appropriate discipline from an accredited institution may, with the approval of their graduate director, receive up to twenty-four (24) credits toward a Ph.D. degree. Students must list each course for which they wish to receive transfer credit on the *Graduate Credit Transfer Evaluation Request* form. All credits used to satisfy degree requirements for the master's degree, except thesis credits, may be acceptable for transfer.

### 4. Timeline for Degree Completion

- Meet with graduate advisor during or at the latest by the end of the first semester and select courses
- [Declaration of Advisor/Major Advisor/Committee Chair form](#)<sup>10</sup>
  - For MS students, completed form must be submitted to Graduate School by the end of the student's second semester
  - For PhD students completed form must be submitted to Graduate School by the end of the student's third semester
- [Program of Study form](#)<sup>11</sup>
  - For MS students, completed form must be submitted to Graduate School by the end of the student's third semester
  - For PhD students, completed form must be submitted to Graduate School by the end of the student's fourth semester
- [Doctoral degree admission to candidacy form](#)<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.unr.edu/Documents/graduate-school/GraduateCreditTransferEvaluationRequest.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.unr.edu/Documents/graduate-school/Declaration-of-Advisor.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.unr.edu/Documents/graduate-school/program-of-study.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.unr.edu/Documents/graduate-school/17doctoral-degree-admission-to-candidacy-updated.pdf>

- For PhD students who completed all requirements except for the dissertation
- [Graduation Application deadlines](#)<sup>13</sup>. MS and PhD students must submit this to the graduate school several weeks in advance
  - May Graduation Deadline: March 1
  - August Graduation Deadline: June 1
  - December Graduation Deadline: October 1
- *Notice of Completion* – completed form should be submitted for both MS and PhD programs after all requirements have been met. See [UNR Graduate School website](#)<sup>14</sup> for exact dates
  - [Master’s form](#)<sup>15</sup>
  - [Doctoral form](#)<sup>16</sup>
- [Exit Survey](#)<sup>17</sup>

The above forms are regularly updated and they can be accessed through UNR Graduate School website.

To facilitate easy review and follow up, above information is included in the summary sheet titled “*CEE MS and PhD Graduate Program Guidelines*” and is presented in Appendix A.

#### **4.1. Program of Study**

A program of study describes the student’s specific plan of courses, research, and timeline of activities. The graduate student’s Advisor, the Graduate Director of the program, and the Advisory/Examining Committee determine the program of study for each degree candidate. This includes the thesis/professional paper option and the acceptable courses for completion of the degree. The Graduate Dean has final approval of the program of study. Only graduate courses are applicable toward the graduate degree (graduate courses are those with numbers in the 600 and 700 ranges). The approved *Program of Study Requirements Form*, indicating the members of the Advisory/Examining Committee and the courses used to fulfill the degree requirements, must be filed with the Graduate School. The program of study must be approved by the Graduate Dean prior to the student applying for graduation. MS students that do a courses only option (i.e., Plan B) only have to list the graduate director as their advisor on their program of study (no advising committee is required). Changes to the program of study can be made using the [Change in Program of Study Form](#)<sup>18</sup> or [Change of Advisory Form](#)<sup>19</sup> with approval from the graduate director. It is the responsibility of the student and the Advisory/Examining Committee to ensure that the graduate courses in the proposed program of study are consistent with the requirements of the Graduate School and the department.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.unr.edu/grad/graduation-and-deadlines>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.unr.edu/grad/graduation-and-deadlines>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.unr.edu/Documents/graduate-school/notice-of-completion-master-degree-updated.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.unr.edu/Documents/graduate-school/notice-of-completion-doctoral-degree.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.unr.edu/grad/forms-and-deadlines/exit-survey>

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.unr.edu/Documents/graduate-school/2change-of-program-of-study.pdf>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.unr.edu/Documents/graduate-school/3change-of-advisory-committee.pdf>

## 4.2. Apply for Graduation

Completing all the requirements for your degree may then involve:

- Completing all course work and having final grades filed;
- Successfully completing your comprehensive examination;
- Defending your thesis or dissertation, making all necessary modifications and submitted the final work to the Graduate School;
- Filing all outstanding paperwork (notice of completion, etc.).

After you've completed all requirements and submitted all necessary documents, you should check your transcript after the semester ends to ensure that grades have been received for all course work. If, for example, you take a course in your final semester that does not apply to your degree requirements and received an "I – Incomplete" grade in that course, you will NOT be able to graduate: grades must be received for all course work regardless of whether or not the course applies to fulfilling degree requirements. If you've finished work for a previously received "I" grade, you should check your transcript to ensure that the instructor has actually filed a final grade for that course. There are cases where courses exceed the time limit for the degree or that grades received for particular courses do not meet minimum university standards (i.e. receiving a "C-" in a course). In these instances, the student must meet with their graduate director to explore corrective measures such as petitioning for an extension of the time limit or substituting an appropriate graduate course for another.

## 4.3. Commencement

Graduating doctoral students are accorded special recognition during commencement exercises by participating in a Hooding Ceremony. They receive their doctoral hoods from their faculty mentor and the Dean of the Graduating School. To participate in this ceremony, students must have:

1. Filed an application for graduation for the appropriate semester (fall or spring); and
2. Successfully defended their dissertation and filed the *Notice of Completion* with the Graduate School at least one week prior to the commencement exercises. Students who complete their degree during the summer session are eligible to attend either the fall or spring commencement exercises.

Commencement exercises are held each December and May. There is a separate commencement ceremony held for advanced degrees conferred in May of each year. The December exercises are combined graduate/undergraduate ceremonies. Doctoral students may be "hooded" by their academic advisors.

## 5. Committee Selection Guidelines

### 5.1. MS Thesis Advisory Committee

Courses only MS student (i.e., Plan B) do not need to assemble an advisory committee. For the thesis option (i.e., Plan A), the committee should consist of at least 3 members and the committee must be formed no later than at the end of 3<sup>rd</sup> semester. The MS

Advisory/Examining committees should consist of members of the Graduate Faculty. Two (2) faculty members, not necessarily from the student's department, represent the student's area of specialization and one (1) faculty member is selected to serve as the Graduate School Representative.

The Graduate School Representative must be from outside the candidate's department, not necessarily outside the college. For each member of the Graduate School faculty (please refer to: [Faculty Website](#)<sup>20</sup>), an affiliated department(s) is listed and the faculty member may not be the Graduate School Representative for the candidate's department.

Students may request the appointment of a committee member from the faculty of another university or from a relevant discipline or profession, provided the prospective member has achieved a record of distinction. They are approved as an "additional inside member." Any member outside of UNR may not serve as the Graduate School Representative. Formal approval of the student's advisory/examining committee is made by the Graduate Dean.

In the case of Interdisciplinary/Inter-department degree programs, the committee may consist entirely of faculty from that Interdisciplinary/Inter-department provided that the role of the Graduate School Representative can be filled by a graduate faculty member who holds an academic appointment in a department different from that of the chair of the committee.

The Advisory/Examining Committee approves the student's program of study and guides the students through their graduate program. The students should maintain close contact with their committee, keeping them informed of the progress and allowing them ample time to review drafts of the student's thesis. The students should be aware of their schedules when trying to arrange committee meetings and thesis defense. Note that it is the student's responsibility to make these arrangements.

## **5.2. PhD Advisory/Examining Committee**

The committee must be formed no later than end of 4<sup>th</sup> semester. Advisory/Examining committees consist of at least five (5) members of the Graduate Faculty and they are: the committee chair/ primary advisory; at least two (2) faculty members from the student's major department; at least one (1) faculty member from a department in a field related to the student's major; and at least one (1) Graduate School Representative.

For students going directly from the bachelor's degree to the PhD, the Advisory/Examining Committee should be formed prior to the completion of 24 units in graduate courses. Students entering a PhD program with a master's degree should form the Advisory/Examining Committee within the third semester of enrollment.

The Graduate School Representative must be from outside the candidate's department, not necessarily outside the college. For each member of the Graduate School faculty (please refer to: [www.unr.edu/grad/graduate-faculty](http://www.unr.edu/grad/graduate-faculty)), an affiliated department(s) is listed

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<sup>20</sup> [www.unr.edu/grad/graduate-faculty](http://www.unr.edu/grad/graduate-faculty)

and the faculty member may not be the Graduate School Representative for the candidate's department. For Doctoral Degree, the "faculty member from a department in a field related to the student's major department" could be from the CEE Department but must be outside the candidate's subarea of the CEE Department.

Students may request the appointment of a committee member from the faculty of another university or from a relevant discipline or profession, provided the prospective member has achieved a record of distinction. They are approved as an "additional inside member." Any member outside of UNR may not serve as the Graduate School Representative. Formal approval of the student's Advisory/Examining Committee is made by the Graduate Dean.

The Advisory/Examining Committee approves the student's program of study and guides the students through his or her graduate program. The students should maintain close contact with their committee, keeping them informed of the progress and allowing them ample time to review drafts of the student's dissertation. The students should be aware of their schedules when trying to arrange committee meetings and thesis defense. Note that it is the student's responsibility to make these arrangements.

For easy review and follow up, above information is included in the summary titled *CEE MS and PhD Graduate Program Guidelines* and presented in Appendix A.

## **6. Graduate Assistantships**

Graduate Assistantship positions are offered through various departments and are paid by grants or state funds. During the time of the evaluation of your graduate study application you will be automatically considered for a possible assistantship (TA or RA) based on the relative merit of your application. Factors such as: being not placed well above the minimum criteria, relative merit with other applicants, lack of funding or an advisor, lack of fit with existing program scope etc. will be considered. The CEE department does not offer any other opportunities such as internship or partial support etc.

Students interested in TA or RA positions can also contact the CEE faculty for specific requirements. Information on CEE faculty's research areas is available on the [Department's Website](#)<sup>21</sup>. The Graduate School is responsible for approval of graduate assistantships after a department has requested the initiation of a contract. All positions are contingent upon available funding.

Graduate Assistants perform a variety of duties from teaching undergraduate classes to grading papers, to conducting research. Teaching Assistants receive special teaching-skills training through the [Excellence in Teaching Program Website](#)<sup>22</sup>.

All graduate students holding an assistantship (teaching GTA or GRA) are considered Nevada residents for tuition purposes. Non-resident tuition is only waived for the

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<sup>21</sup> <https://www.unr.edu/cse/people>

<sup>22</sup> <https://library.unr.edu/TLT>

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 and five (5) years for doctoral degree students.

Please also refer to the most updated information on graduate assistantships from the Graduate School: [General information](#)<sup>23</sup> and the [Graduate Assistantship handbook](#)<sup>24</sup>.

### **6.1. Graduate Employment: Rights and Responsibilities**

Graduate Assistants play an invaluable role in the university's instruction and research endeavors. In their roles as Graduate Assistants, graduate students are treated with respect as junior colleagues, and receive guidance in the performance of their duties as necessary. Graduate Assistants are classified as professional employees, as such they do not work according to the clock, but rather, according to performance of a specified job. Graduate Assistants work on average 20 hours per week for a 0.5 FTE employee.

#### **6.1.1. Rights**

Graduate students have the right to fair and equitable treatment as employees (**UNR general catalog -Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity statement**). Graduate Assistants have the right to discuss and clarify the conditions of their employment and expected workload with their supervisor. Graduate Assistants have the right to expect the work requirements to be consistent with professional expectations. Consequently Graduate Assistants should not be assigned, as part of their employment, inappropriate work tasks as house-sitting, babysitting, etc. by their supervisor.

#### **6.1.2. Responsibilities**

As professional employees, Graduate Assistants should conduct themselves appropriately (dress, collegial relations, punctuality, dependability, etc.) in the work situation. As professional employees, Graduate Assistants will strive to fulfill the agreed upon work obligations. As professional employees, Graduate Assistants have the responsibility to report inappropriate work expectations or working conditions to the Associate Dean of the Graduate School and/or other appropriate campus entities.

## **7. 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

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.unr.edu/grad/funding/graduate-assistantships>

<sup>24</sup> [http://www.unr.edu/Documents/administration-finance/hr/hr-graduate/GA\\_handbook.pdf](http://www.unr.edu/Documents/administration-finance/hr/hr-graduate/GA_handbook.pdf)

the [University online waiver form](#) <sup>25</sup> 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 \(OISS\)](#) <sup>26</sup> directly.

See also: [Information on Graduate health insurance](#) <sup>27</sup>.

## 8. Policies

### 8.1. Academic Status

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.

- **Probation:** students whose cumulative graduate GPA is between 2.99 and 2.31 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 2.30 or lower are dismissed from graduate standing. 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).

### 8.2. 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.

### 8.3. Enrollment Limitations

In each fall and spring semester graduate students may not enroll in more than 16 graduate credits. In each summer session graduate students may not enroll in more than 6 graduate credits. In each semester they hold an assistantship graduate assistants must enroll in at least 6 and may not enroll in more than 12 graduate credits.

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<sup>25</sup> <https://studentinsurance.usi.com/UNR/unr-grad>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.unr.edu/oiss>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.unr.edu/grad/health-insurance>



#### **8.4. Leave of Absence**

Students in good standing may request a leave of absence by completing a [Leave of Absence form](#)<sup>28</sup> 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. Time spent on an approved leave is included in the time allowed to complete the degree, i.e. six calendar years for the master’s degree and eight calendar years for the doctoral degree. That is, the clock doesn’t stop.

#### **8.5. 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](#)<sup>29</sup>. 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.

#### **8.6. Good Standing**

Each graduate course must be completed with a grade of “C” or better for the credit to be acceptable toward an advanced degree. In addition, students must maintain good standing with an overall graduate credit GPA of at least 3.0 on a scale of 4.0.

#### **8.7. Probation**

Students whose cumulative graduate GPA is between 2.99 and 2.31 are placed on 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. Students placed on probation receive a letter from the Graduate School explaining exactly how many credits of “A” are required to raise their GPA to 3.0. Thesis, dissertation, S/U graded credits, and transfer credits have no impact on a student’s GPA.

#### **8.8. Dismissal**

If the graduate grade-point total is lower than 2.30, the student is dismissed from graduate standing. Also, if the graduate GPA remains below 3.0 for two consecutive semesters the student is dismissed from graduate standing. Dismissed students are no longer in a graduate program and may not take graduate-level courses without the written approval of the course instructor and the Graduate Dean. 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 their graduate program. Any courses taken to raise their

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<sup>28</sup> [http://www.unr.edu/Documents/graduate-school/leaveofabsencer\\_9.23.pdf](http://www.unr.edu/Documents/graduate-school/leaveofabsencer_9.23.pdf)

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.unr.edu/Documents/graduate-school/Notice-of-Reinstatement-Graduate-Standing.pdf>

GPA will be included in the graduate special/transfer credit limitation (9 credits for master's degrees).

### **8.9. Getting an MS while Pursuing a PhD.**

If a student who is currently enrolled in the PhD program wants to earn an MS en route then the student needs to complete a master's degree program of study. The graduate director will then send a memo to the grad school informing them of this request and the student can then apply for graduation. For either option (thesis, non-thesis) students will only be able to use 24 credits towards the PhD. If they take the thesis option (i.e., Plan B), the 6 thesis credits cannot be used towards dissertation credits.

### **8.10. Completing Two Degrees Simultaneously**

Students may choose to complete two master's degrees at the same time, or complete a master's degree while working on a doctoral program in a different discipline. Students may *not* complete two doctoral programs simultaneously. When completing two master's degrees at the same time, the student must apply and be accepted to each graduate program; must submit a separate program of study for each degree; must form two separate advisory committees with no more than one member in common; and have no more than 9 credits in common with each program of study.

### **8.11. Changing Advisors**

It can happen that your research interests change over time or that the relationship with your current advisor has changed. Any student is free to change advisors, but changing earlier in your career is generally easier than later. If you are thinking about switching advisors, you can accomplish this the best if you adopt an attitude of respect for the person who initially advised you or recruited you to come to UNR.

The following are general guidelines for switching advisors:

1. Talk to the graduate director. The graduate director represents the interests of the graduate students and s/he can help you make a better decision whether switching advisors would be good for you. The graduate director can also try to mediate between you and your advisor and help you better understand the pros and cons of changing advisors. This advice is especially important if you are attempting to change advisors near the final phase of your graduate program.
2. Decide whether you want to switch advisors (do not approach other faculty before deciding).
3. Decide whether you could work with two advisors.
4. Try to work through any differences with your current advisor. Express to your advisor why you are considering a change, discuss whether his/her expectations of you are realistic, and whether they are open to adjusting.
5. Carefully consider the pros and cons of switching advisors as this may involve:
  - a. You can lose your RA or TA position (if your existing advisor provided you with a 10 hour RA ship). Switching advisors is not a guarantee you can maintain your TA ship.
  - b. You need to find a new research topic as continuing your existing research with a new advisor is only acceptable with permission of your old advisor.
  - c. You may receive an unsatisfactory on thesis/dissertation credits that you

- are currently taking or a failing grade on an independent study with your current advisor if you do not complete your advisors' expectation for that semester.
- d. If you are a PhD student and you have enough credits you may consider graduating with a MS degree on your old research topic before starting a new research topic with a new advisor.
6. After your decision, approach another faculty member about being an (co-) advisor for you.
    - a. Frame your approach with positive information, such as new interests and new possibilities. Be professional at all times.
    - b. Focus discussions on your interests and goals and not on negative incidents or difficulties.
    - c. Avoid doing or saying anything that could have negative ramifications for your future career.
  7. Notify your current advisor and discuss and arrange a timeframe for completing any remaining work with your current advisor before the switch takes place.
  8. Arrange a meeting with your new and old advisor to discuss your new topic of research and or overlap on publications in your thesis/dissertation.
  9. Regarding Intellectual property claims, carefully consider UNR's intellectual property policy ( [IP Website](#)<sup>30</sup>).
  10. Complete or update any formal paperwork that contains information about your advisor, e.g., advisory forms etc.

### **8.12. Academic Dishonesty**

In order to maintain an academic climate conducive to each member's success in the pursuit and transmission of knowledge, the University of Nevada, Reno, has established a set of policies and standards for all of its members to adhere to. For student members of this community, enrollment at the university carries certain obligations related to activities in the academic setting, including behavior inside and outside the classroom. Specific details can be found on the [Student Code of Conduct Website](#)<sup>31</sup>.

### **9. Graduate Student Association**

The [Graduate Student Association \(GSA\) Website](#)<sup>32</sup> 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.

Graduate students have the right to form clubs and organizations within their programs, departments, colleges, ethnicities, shared interests, or any other constituencies, for the purposes of academic, professional, or social networking, sharing, and advocacy.

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<sup>30</sup> <https://www.unr.edu/Documents/research/oei/ip-ownership.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.unr.edu/student-conduct/policies/student-code-of-conduct>

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.unr.edu/gsa/>

## **10. Acknowledgments**

Parts of this handbook's text have been taken and adapted from UNR's Graduate Student's Guide to University, the UNR Graduate School website, and the UNR Graduate Student Association website.

## **11. APPENDICES (A and B)**

## APPENDIX A

### CEE MS and PhD Graduate Program Guidelines & Timelines

**NOTE:** The above UNR Graduate School forms are regularly updated and they can be accessed through UNR Graduate School website at: [Forms Website](#)<sup>33</sup>

#### **MS Degree**

**Plan A - Thesis:** 30 total credits - 6 thesis and 24 course credits, minimum of 12 course credits at 700 level

1. Meet advisor about courses (select permanent advisor by end of 1<sup>st</sup> semester) – *Declaration of Advisor/Major Advisor/Committee Chair* form must be submitted to the Graduate School no later than the end of the second semester.
2. Establish Advisory Committee – necessary for *Program of Study* form.
3. Submit *Program of Study* form (no later than the 3<sup>rd</sup> semester and 1 semester prior to graduation).
4. Complete courses and research requirements.
5. Apply for graduation (early in final semester).
6. Defend thesis (during final semester), submit *Notice of Completion* form.

**Plan B – Course Work Only:** 32 total course credits -minimum of 15 course credits at 700 level

1. Meet advisor about courses (select permanent advisor by end of 1<sup>st</sup> semester) – *Declaration of Advisor/Major Advisor/Committee Chair* form must be submitted to the Graduate School no later than the end of the second semester.
2. Establish Examining Committee (after completion of 12 credits) – necessary for *Program of Student* form.
3. Submit *Program of Study* form (no later than the 3<sup>rd</sup> semester and 1 semester prior to graduation).
4. Complete course requirements.
5. Apply for graduation (early in final semester).
6. Complete oral comprehensive exam (during final semester), work with Advisor – CEE 795 (only 1-credit may be applied to MS degree) (Examining committee only), submit *Notice of Completion* form.

#### **PhD Degree**

1. Complete PhD Qualifying exam within 1<sup>st</sup> year (fall & spring dates for each program area).
2. *Content:* Core program areas with questions from appropriate program faculty (determined at discretion of primary advisor).
3. *Format:* 1-day (8 hours), open book/notes, passing score  $\geq 70\%$  for each section; only 1 re-take allowed with passing score  $\geq 75\%$  required for failed sections.

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<sup>33</sup> <https://www.unr.edu/grad/forms-and-deadlines>

4. Establish Advisory/Examining Committee (after completing step 1 and completion of 12 credits) – *Declaration of Advisor/Major Advisor/Committee Chair* form must be submitted to the Graduate School no later than the 3<sup>rd</sup> semester.
5. Submit *Program of Study* form (no later than 4th semester and 1 semester prior to graduation).
6. Complete Comprehensive Exam for admission to candidacy (after completion of 75% of required courses), a written and oral portion is required, see attached (not required to take CEE 795).
7. Complete course requirements. Submit the *Doctoral Degree Admission to Candidacy/Comprehensive Examination Report* form,
8. Complete research requirements.
9. Apply for Graduation (early in final semester).
10. Defend Dissertation (during final semester), submit *Notice of Completion* form.

See University of Nevada, Reno Graduate School website for deadline dates and forms. Most forms are interactive and must be completed online.

### **PhD Comprehensive Exam**

**Written** – The PhD Committee Chair (Advisor), working with the PhD Committee, selects one of the following options.

- a) **Dissertation Proposal** – The proposal provides the committee with a comprehensive presentation of the dissertation objectives, background and justification, the work completed to date, and a plan for future work. The proposal must contain substantial original work completed by the student.
- b) **Written Exam**
  - iii. *Content*: Core program areas with questions from Examining Committee and program faculty (determined at discretion of primary advisor)
  - iv. *Format*: 7-day, open book/notes, passing score  $\geq 70\%$  for each section; for sections with a grade  $< 70\%$ , remedial work or additional requirements determined by Examining Committee; only 1 re-take will be allowed on sections of the exam with grades  $< 70\%$ ; student must receive  $\geq 75\%$  on the re-take sections
- c) **Research Proposal** – An original research proposal developed and written by the student that has been prepared for an agency.
- d) **Research Paper** - An original research paper developed and written by the student for a journal or conference where the paper will be reviewed. The paper may be part of the student's PhD dissertation.

**Note:** If the written exam, research proposal or research paper option is selected, the student must still write a document that provides the committee with the project objectives, subject, and plans for future work. This option does not require the original work component in the Dissertation Proposal.

### **Oral**

- c) Presentation of Dissertation Proposal (May be open to the public)
- d) Questions on Dissertation Proposal and area of general study (Committee members only)

### **Composition of Graduate Committee**

**Master of Science:** Advisory/Examining Committees consist of at least three (3) members of the Graduate Faculty. Two (2) faculty members, not necessarily from the student's department, represent the student's area of specialization and one (1) faculty member is selected to serve as the Graduate School Representative.

**Doctoral Degree:** Advisory/Examining Committees consist of at least five (5) members of the Graduate Faculty and they are: the committee chair/ primary advisory; at least two (2) faculty members from the student's major department; at least one (1) faculty member from a department in a field related to the student's major; and at least one (1) Graduate School Representative.

For students going directly from the bachelor's degree to the PhD, the Advisory/Examining Committee should be formed prior to the completion of 24 units in graduate courses. Students entering a PhD program with a master's degree should form the Advisory/Examining Committee during their first semester of enrollment.

**Committee Members:** The Graduate School Representative must be from outside the candidate's department, not necessarily outside the college. For each member of the Graduate School faculty (please refer to: [www.unr.edu/grad/graduate-faculty](http://www.unr.edu/grad/graduate-faculty)), an affiliated department(s) is listed and the faculty member may not be the Graduate School Representative for the candidate's department. For Doctoral Degree, the "faculty member from a department in a field related to the student's major department" could be from the CEE Department but must be outside the candidate's subarea of the CEE Department.

Students may request the appointment of a committee member from the faculty of another university or from a relevant discipline or profession, provided the prospective member has achieved a record of distinction. They are approved as an "additional inside member." Any member outside of UNR may not serve as the Graduate School Representative. Formal approval of the student's Advisory/Examining Committee is made by the Graduate Dean.

## APPENDIX B

### CEE Guidelines for MS Thesis and PhD Dissertation using Papers

- (1) The Introductory chapter of the Thesis/Dissertation should include: (1) Introduction to Thesis topic, objective and justification; (2) Brief Literature Review that puts the work in the context of past work; (3) Brief Description and Methodology; (4) Clearly indicate the status of the papers; (5) Contribution of the student should be clear and substantial (preferably as a percentage above 65 or so) for those papers that have multiple authors; and (5) Discussion of the “Connecting Theme” as to how the papers are interrelated and at the same time are distinct in their nature of the contents (i.e., limited overlap) of the papers.
- (2) It is recommended that a subsequent chapter be included that provides a complete literature review, description of methodology, and as needed further details of “Connecting Theme” shall be presented.
- (3) **All published and submitted papers should be either Peer-Reviewed Journal or highly-regarded “Complete Paper Peer-Reviewed Conference” publications.** These papers shall be included as individual chapters of the thesis/dissertation. Papers shall have a submission date after the admission to UNR Grad School. All papers must have been submitted for review at the time of thesis/dissertation submission. The order of the authors is not relevant, but the level of contribution (indicated by percentage of contribution) by the student is important.

Total number of papers should be at least *three* for PhD, of which one of them must have been published or accepted in a Peer-Reviewed Journal. The other two should have been submitted.

For the MS Thesis, total number of papers should be at least one and it should have been submitted.

The Student’s Graduate Thesis Committee must approve the Journals and highly-regarded Peer-Reviewed Conferences to which the papers have been submitted. The committee needs to appraise the quality of unpublished papers and the overlap.

When applicable, responsibility for follow-up, revisions, etc., should be identified in a section at the end of such papers and this should be agreed upon by the student, co-authors involved, and the Thesis/Dissertation Committee members.

- (4) In the case of PhD, the Graduate Dissertation Committee should be informed by Dissertation Advisor (Chair) about the plan to submit the dissertation using the papers (preferably during the Comprehensive Exam time) along with the CEE Guidelines relative to this approach. If there are any changes, the committee should be informed by the primary advisor.
- (5) As noted above, the MS or PhD Thesis/Dissertation Committee needs to approve the quality of the published and submitted papers. A Checklist listed below needs to be submitted to CEE Graduate Director when seeking signature on the *Notice of Completion of Graduate Program Form*.



**CEE Guidelines: Checklist MS/PhD Thesis/Dissertation using Papers  
(To be submitted with Degree Completion Form to CEE Graduate Director)**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Degree Sought: MS  PhD

<p><b>ITEM 1: Do the Contents of Introductory Chapter include:</b>            (1) Introduction to Thesis/Dissertation topic, objective and justification;            (2) Literature Review that puts the work in the context of past work;            (3) Description of Methodology;            (4) Clearly indicate the status of the papers; and            (5) Discussion of the “Connecting Theme” as to how the papers are interrelated and at the same time are distinct in their contents (i.e., limited overlap).</p>	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>ITEM 2: Notification to PhD Thesis/ Dissertation Committee (if applicable):</b>            Was the Thesis/ Dissertation Committee informed by Advisor(s) about the plan to submit the thesis/ dissertation using papers (preferably during the Comprehensive Exam time) along with this CEE Guidelines?</p>	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>ITEM 3: Contribution of the student in each paper:</b>            Is it substantial (preferably as a <u>percentage above 65 or so</u>) for all papers?</p>	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>ITEM 4: Papers should have been <u>submitted</u> to Peer-Reviewed Journals or highly-regarded “Complete Paper Peer-Reviewed Conference” publications.</b>  <b>PhD:</b> Is total number of papers submitted <i>three or more</i>, out of which at least one has been published or accepted in a Peer-Reviewed Journal?  <b>MS:</b> Is total number of papers submitted at least <i>one</i>?</p>	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>ITEM 5: Does the Graduate Committee approve that the conference papers are highly-regarded “Complete Paper Peer-Reviewed Conference” publications (if applicable)</b></p>	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
<p><b>ITEM 6: Follow-up of Papers under Review (if applicable)</b>            (1) Has the responsibility for follow-up, revisions, etc., been identified in a section at the end of such papers and this has been agreed upon by: the student, co-authors involved; and             (2) Does this follow-up plan have the Thesis/ Dissertation Committee approval?</p>	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>