

University of New England
School of Environmental and Rural Science

**ERS594 – Coursework Masters Thesis in Agricultural or
Environmental Science**

Unit Handbook 2025

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Unit information

ERS594 has been designed to allow students to pursue individual research interests by undertaking an agreed program of detailed independent study under academic supervision within a disciplinary area relevant to the School of Environmental and Rural Science. Your thesis will comprise the results of your research project and must show independence of thought and critical evaluation of your own work and published work in your field of study. Critiquing both published work in the field and your own work gives you the opportunity to develop advanced subject matter expertise in your chosen area of research. You may also conduct a detailed literature review and prepare one or more papers of a publishable standard, written in the style of an appropriate peer reviewed journal, in lieu of a thesis.

Your thesis should not normally exceed 20,000 words, excluding tables, figures, references and appendices.

ERS594 will be graded by two examiners. You may complete either a 20,000-word research project report, or one or more papers of a publishable standard for a peer reviewed journal. As a general guide, students will be required to:

- Prepare and complete a 6,000-word literature review for your independent research project
- Develop and write up the study design and methods (e.g., data collection, quantitative and qualitative analytical techniques and ethics approval) for your independent research project
- Report the results of the research and data analysis for your independent research project
- Write a critical discussion and conclusions for your independent research project and submit the completed report for examination to the University.

Enrolment in ERS594 must be approved by the Unit Coordinator and the Course Coordinator or their nominee. To study this unit you will be required to negotiate a topic with one or more supervisors and submit a satisfactory summary proposal. Approval is dependent on the availability of supervision and resources.

Unit coordinator

Dr Jamie Barwick
School of Environmental & Rural Science
Phone: 00428 694 239
Email: jbarwic2@une.edu.au

Student Central

Student Central provides you with a focal point of contact for all your administrative enquiries during your study at UNE, including selecting units and managing your enrolment. If you have administrative enquiries relating to your study at UNE, go to AskUNE: <https://www.une.edu.au/askune>

Pre-requisites

Students must be enrolled in a postgraduate award and satisfy the following requirements:
At least a grade of Credit in both ERS501 and ERS502 **or** 24 credit points, with an average grade of Credit in ERS501 and ERS502, plus an overall GPA of 5 or greater at the time of enrolment

Procedure for enrolment

The procedure for enrolment in ERS594 is outlined below. Students are required to:

1. Identify an area of research in which you are interested.
2. Identify one or more members of academic staff as potential supervisors. Co-supervisors from other institutions may also be involved. The Principal supervisor must be a UNE academic staff member.
3. With the assistance of your supervisor(s), negotiate a research proposal.
4. With the assistance of your supervisor(s), develop a research project report outline (1-2 paragraphs) indicating:
 - the project title
 - your name and student number
 - your supervisor(s)
 - background to the research problem (include references)
 - proposed research aims and objectives
 - brief description of the methods (include references)
 - brief description of expected findings
 - timeline of research, i.e. dates for the expected completion of chapters and sections
5. Note that the project report outline is only a plan. With the approval of your supervisor, you may diverge from the plan as the research unfolds.
6. Send the research project report outline to the Unit Coordinator requesting approval to enrol in ERS594.
7. Send the unit coordinator a copy of your academic transcript.
8. Arrange your supervisor to email the unit coordinator indicating they are happy to supervise you.

These documents (academic transcript, supervisor approval and research summary) should be forwarded to Unit Co-ordinator of ERS594, who will recommend to the Course Coordinator and Student Central that you be enrolled in ERS594.

Students with supervisors in the School of Environmental and Rural Science have a research budget to meet research expenses, such as fieldwork costs, travel to field sites and laboratory analyses. Your supervisor(s) must first approve any expenditure before funds are accessed or committed. Students with supervisors in other Schools need to determine the research funds available to support 24-credit point research projects in those Schools and make the necessary arrangements as instructed by their supervisor(s).

There are no set classes or teaching material provided for these units.

The enrolment option selected will determine how long you are enrolled in the unit and when your final thesis is due. Note a yearlong enrolment (for example YL1) refers to two trimesters of study.

Prescribed text

There is no prescribed text for ERS594.

Recommended reading

There are no specific recommended readings for ERS594. However, students are strongly encouraged to read refereed journal articles, book chapters and relevant online material relating to their chosen research topic, in consultation with their supervisor(s).

How to study ERS594

As a guide, the unit represents 600 hours of participation for the average student in order to achieve the learning outcomes.

You must work under the academic supervision of your supervisor(s) to:

1. complete a literature review on your topic,
2. Design your research and develop your methods
3. Collect, analyse and report the results of your research,
4. Interpret and discuss your research findings, prepare a written discussion setting your findings in the context of the existing literature and draw pertinent and non-trivial conclusions, and
5. Compile the outputs into a research project report either as a standard thesis or as a thesis-by-papers format.

You must aim to contact your supervisor(s) frequently in each trimester (at least every three weeks, probably more frequently at the start and end of your research. In response, your supervisor(s) will answer your questions and provide feedback on your progress if you provide them with regular updates and queries.

Research Project Report write-up

The work submitted for examination must embody the results of your completed research project. Success depends on the examination of the project report. It is important that every action is taken to ensure that examiners are presented with a high-quality product. For the write-up stage, there are several publications or online services available that students may find helpful in the University Library and/or from your supervisor(s). One tip is to examine copies of successful theses/portfolios that are either kept by supervisors or Dixon Library.

Standards of preparation

Either: a 20,000-word research project report, or one or more papers of a publishable standard, and written in a peer reviewed journal style.

Page layout and text format

The research project report should be clearly typewritten in A4 size pages. The spacing between lines should be either one and a half spaces with a font size of 12 points for the main text. The left margin should be at least 30 mm and top, right and bottom margins should be at least 15 mm.

Length

The nominated word limit (20,000 words provided in the degree rules) is not suggested as the lower limit that you should aim for in your research project report. A briefer report may well be acceptable; the rules state your research project report must be concise (and written in English). A project report requiring personal collection of raw data and complicated analysis may result in a substantial piece of excellent research that is considerably shorter than the word limit. More discursive studies may result in greater difficulty in reducing the content to a clear concise form.

Style

Your thesis should be written in English. The use of points within the text as in this section, adoption of subheadings and the choice of referencing systems are left to your discretion in consultation with your supervisor(s).

Arrangement

If you choose to write up your research as a traditional thesis (i.e. research project report), the number and nature of chapter headings will vary, but most studies will include the following:

1. An Abstract. The project report should contain, before the main contents, an abstract or summary. It is suggested that this should not be more than 350 words in length.
2. An introductory chapter stating the problem and approach adopted
3. A review of literature linking it to the problem in question
4. The method of approach or analysis adopted
5. A chapter or chapters describing the results or analysis
6. A discussion chapter that explains the findings in light of what is already known, and highlights the significance or importance of the research in terms of current understanding
7. A concluding chapter highlighting the main findings, recommendations and indications for further research.

Appendices

Items such as raw data, summary statistics, details about questionnaire schedules and explanation of how you performed various types of analysis etc. can be included as an appendix. Supportive material of this nature can confuse and detract narration of the research project report and, to avoid this problem, are often better relegated to appendices. Your supervisor(s) should be able to give you advice on what should be in the main body of work and what can be included in the appendix.

Title Page

The title page should show:

1. The title of the research project report.
2. Your full name together with degrees and other qualifications, and their institutions of origin.
3. The following statement, "A research project report submitted in partial fulfilment of requirements for the degree of"
4. The month and year of submission of the research project report for examination.

Certification page

In each copy of the research report, the candidate is required to sign the following certification on the page immediately after the Title page:

"I certify that the substance of this research project report has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.
I certify that any help received in preparing this project report and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this research report.

Candidate's signature: _____ "

Use of the Work of Others

You must state, generally in the preface, acknowledgements and specifically in the research project report itself, the sources from which the information given is derived, the extent to which the work of others has been used, and the portion of the work claimed as original.

Work which has been presented for a degree or other qualification at this or another university or similar institution may not be presented as the research project report but may be included in the report, provided that it is clearly indicated as such through appropriate reference.

Assessment information

Due date: last day of trimester in which the student is enrolled in ERS594.

Weight: 100%

Length: Approximately 20,000 words

Submission method

You are required to submit your project report electronically in PDF format to your principal supervisor, unit coordinator and to the Course Academic Coordinator via email ers-cam@une.edu.au

Your supervisor must also submit a Submission for Examination form and a Recommendation of Examiners Form which you must provide to them. These are available on your Moodle site or via contacting the unit coordinator.

Selection of examiners

The thesis must be examined by at least two examiners, who may be internal or external to UNE and cannot be the student's supervisor. Your supervisor is responsible for sourcing 2 examiners and completing the "Recommendation of Examiners Form" and sending the completed form to the unit coordinator.

Word limits

The research project report word limit is 20,000 words. Examiners may take the fact of an overly long report into account in deciding upon a recommendation.

Referencing

The School of Environmental and Rural Science mandates the APA referencing style for theses and research projects. Check with your supervisor as to what style is acceptable for your particular research project report.

Extensions for research students

Requests for extensions in coursework units are processed according to the University's Special Assessment Policy (Annex B to the Assessment Policy). You can apply for a special extension of time under this policy for a period up to the last day of teaching in the trimester after the one in which you are enrolled.

Marking Policy for ERS594 Reports

All research project reports (thesis) are assessed by two examiners appointed by the School on the recommendation of the relevant Head of School or Chair of the School Teaching and Learning Committee. While it is common to discuss possible examiners with your supervisor, all examiners are advised that they can report in confidence on your research project report. You will therefore, not be informed of the names of the examiners finally appointed by the School.

Students will be provided with a copy of each examiner's report (Appendix II. Examiner's assessment) with the grade and the percentage marks, and recommendations made by the examiners.

Examiners consider the following when preparing their report:

- Abstract or summary
- Adequacy in defining the aim or objectives
- Value, accuracy and criticism offered in the literature review or background of the study
- Failure to cite key research papers
- Accuracy in using facts and logic
- Experimental and/or survey design (where applicable)
- Originality of approach and analysis (where applicable)

- Data analysis and presentation of results
- Discussion of findings and justification of conclusions
- Adequacy of proof-reading
- Correctness of reference citations
- Overall organisation and presentation

Moderation of marks

A Third Examiner or Arbiter may be utilised where there is a mark discrepancy of 10 or more marks between examiners, the ERS594 Unit Coordinator may take one or more of the following actions:

- Invite the examiners to confer with each other and/or with the ERS594 Unit Coordinator with a view to presenting a consolidated recommendation; and/or
- Appoint a third examiner who will mark the thesis, all three marks will be averaged; this is the final examination result to be reported; or
- Appoint an experienced marker of Masters by coursework thesis as a third examiner who will act as an arbiter; following review of the thesis and the other examiners' reports the arbiter determines the mark and grade on the basis of the published criteria and standards for the thesis; this is the final examination result to be reported.

The examiners of the Research Project Reports are issued with a marking proforma containing the criteria they should consider in arriving at their decision (Appendix II. Examiner's assessment). The examiners will provide a mark and grade.

Return of examined research project reports

Although the School places a time limit (usually two months) on examiners for the examination of theses and research project reports, some examiners are slow in providing recommendations. In addition, if there is a disagreement between the examiners, delays will be experienced while the School asks the examiners to consult or has to appoint a third examiner. While we take every step to ensure that project reports are examined as quickly as possible, some delays may occur.

Remarking of research project reports

Students may request that the research project report be remarked, in its original form, in circumstances where the student presents a case arguing that the original marking was unfair or inconsistent with marking guidelines. This request must be directly addressed to the unit coordinator, with a copy to the Head of School, by the student within ten (10) working days of receipt of the original marked report.

Assessment Policy

Information regarding all aspects of assessment can be found at:

<https://policies.une.edu.au/document/view-current.php?id=290>

Plagiarism

When you submit your research project report electronically you will be deemed, in effect, to have agreed to the UNE plagiarism policy. You must comply with the University's rules on plagiarism and academic misconduct. Your work will be checked for originality. You should be familiar with the policy on how to avoid plagiarism found at: <https://policies.une.edu.au/document/view-current.php?id=121&version=1>

The student academic integrity policy provides valuable information on your responsibilities as an academic student and breaches to academic integrity. I would encourage you to read through the policy found at: <https://policies.une.edu.au/document/view-current.php?id=304&version=4#part2>

Plagiarism is the action or practice of taking and using as one's own the thoughts or writings of another without acknowledgment. The following practices constitute acts of plagiarism and are a major infringement of UNE's academic values:

- where paragraphs, sentences, a single sentence or significant parts of a sentence are copied directly, are not enclosed in quotation marks and appropriately referenced,
- where direct quotations are not used, but are paraphrased or summarised, and the source of the material is not referenced within the text of the paper, and/or
- where an idea which appears elsewhere in any form is used or developed without reference being made to the author or the source of that idea. Some examples of this are books, journals, internet material, theses, computer stored data and software, lecture notes or tapes.

It is your responsibility to:

- Read, understand and comply with the policy on Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct found at the website above
- Familiarise yourself with the conventions of referencing for your discipline(s)
- Avoid all acts which could be considered plagiarism or academic misconduct
- Seek assistance from appropriate sources if you become aware that you need more knowledge and skills in relation to academic writing
- Be aware that when you submit an assignment through the university's e-Submission system, you are deemed to have signed the plagiarism declaration form.
- Submit a separate signed and dated plagiarism declaration form with every task, report or dissertation submitted in hard copy for assessment or examination.

To avoid plagiarism, you should refer to the following websites for further advice and assistance:

- Avoiding Coursework Plagiarism and Academic Misconduct: Advice for Students: <https://policies.une.edu.au/document/view-current.php?id=121&version=1>
- This information explains the principles of good scholarship and has guidelines to help you avoid plagiarism.
- The Academic Skills Office has a variety of support materials to assist you with referencing and avoiding plagiarism. <http://www.une.edu.au/current-students/resources/academic-skills>

Appeals

Students wishing to lodge an appeal in relation to unit assessment, should consult the University's Academic Assessment Appeals Policy at: <https://policies.une.edu.au/document/view-current.php?id=199>

AskUNE

If you have questions that are not answered by this Unit Outline, go to AskUNE: <http://askune.custhelp.com/app/answers/list/kw/> At AskUNE you can find answers to many common enquiries or submit an enquiry of your own by clicking on the 'Contact Us' tab.

Learning support

Library Services

This guide provides easy pathways to UNE's vast online resources and shows how the library can help you with your studies. Find out at <http://www.une.edu.au/library>. You can borrow books, obtain copies of articles and exam papers, and request advice from librarians on search strategies and information tools to use.

Academic Skills Office

The Academic Skills Office (ASO) is UNE's learning support unit. The ASO has a wealth of print and online resources to help you with your academic study skills development or problems. They can be found at: <http://www.une.edu.au/current-students/resources/academic-skills>

Student Support

Student Services provides a range of services to meet your needs and ensure your success whilst studying at UNE. Services include disability and special needs support, counselling, and career development. To see the range of services they offer, go to www.une.edu.au/student-assist/

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

The Oorala Aboriginal Centre is a study support and advisory centre for internal and external Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at UNE. To find out more about the services Oorala offers, go to: www.une.edu.au/oorala/

International students

International Services provides support for international students and provides a link between the administrative and academic functions at UNE. For more information about the services offered, go to: <http://www.une.edu.au/current-students/support/international-students>

Appendix I. Submission for examination form

School of Environmental and Rural Science, University of New England Submission of ERS594 Research Project Report for Examination

Candidate: _____

Student number: _____

Research Project
Report Title: _____

This is to certify that the Research Project Report by the above candidate:

1. Is, after discussions with the co-supervisor(s) and the candidate about the academic content of the report in its final form and, while neither expressing nor implying a judgement about the merit of the work, in our opinion, ready for submission for examination.
2. Is in a physical form and presentation appropriate to the discipline.
3. Has met all applicable requirements of the University, in regard to the deposition of museum material, herbarium vouchers and any other supporting material.
4. Does not exceed the maximum word limit specified in the relevant course rules (exclusive of any appendices), unless prior approval to exceed the word limit has been obtained from Chair of the School Teaching and Learning Committee.
5. The title of the report, as described above, complies with the adopted protocols for the relevant discipline.
6. The electronic copy of the report submitted for examination is an exact replica of the last final copy submitted to the Principal Supervisor.
7. An electronic copy of the report has been submitted through Turnitin.

Signature of Principal Supervisor: _____

Date: _____

Note: If you consider you cannot sign this certificate, the Course Coordinator and School Teaching and Learning Committee will expect a report from you as to why this cannot be done.

Please send completed form to the course admin team via email ers-cam@une.edu.au and the unit coordinator via email jbarwic2@une.edu.au

Appendix II. Examiner's assessment

**THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND
SCHOOL OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND RURAL SCIENCE
ERS594
SUMMARY OF EXAMINER'S ASSESSMENT**

Candidate _____

Examiner _____

ASSESSMENT (double click box to add/remove cross)

	Excellent HD (85% +)	Very good D (75-84%)	Good C (65-74%)	Satisfactory P (50-64%)	Unsatisfactory N (< 50%)
1. Definition of objectives	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Literature review	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Methodology/ experimental design	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Presentation of Results	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Data Analysis	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Interpretation of Results	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. Discussion of Results	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. Standard of Overall Form and Presentation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

RECOMMENDATION

Please see University Grading System (attached) for descriptors of performance at each grade, and equivalent marks.

Grade _____ Mark (%) _____

Please attach a brief examiner report if you would like to provide more detailed feedback.

EXAMINER'S INSTRUCTIONS ON USE OF REPORT

I instruct:

1. That the whole of my report be made available to the candidate and that my name be:
withheld disclosed

2. That only those parts of my report that have been indicated should be withheld from the candidate and that my name be:
withheld disclosed

3. That no part of my report be made available to the candidate

Signature _____

Date _____

Appendix III. Examiner Nomination form

**UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND
POSTGRADUATE COURSEWORK RESEARCH THESIS
CONFIDENTIAL RECOMMENDATION OF EXAMINERS FORM**
Please return completed document electronically to: ers-cam@une.edu.au

Conflicts of Interest:

A person should **not** be nominated as an examiner if s/he:

- has had any involvement in the student's research, including supervision of the candidate in field or laboratory work or elsewhere during candidature;
- is a close associate (spouse/partner, other relative, friend or business partner) of either the candidate or the supervisor of the candidate.

A conflict of interest needs to be declared if an examiner:

- has been a student under supervision of the supervisor either at UNE or elsewhere
- has co-published or co-edited or conducted any research with the candidate
- has co-published or co-edited with any member of the supervision panel in the last 5 years.
- has had any other working or supervisor relationship with the candidate or supervisor that could be perceived as a conflict of interest. Refer to [Conflicts of Interest](#) Policy for guidance.

Any likely conflict of interest must be declared on this form. The existence of a conflict of interest does not automatically preclude a nominee being approved as a thesis examiner. When considering a nominee, the SEC Committee looks at the nature and severity of any conflict(s) of interest.

Student Name:	
Student Number:	
School:	
Thesis Title:	
Expected Date of Submission:	
Research Coursework Master: Please list the full degree name.	
Supervisors: All supervisors, including any adjunct or honorary staff, who have been associated with this student's thesis, portfolio or creative work during candidature <u>MUST</u> be listed.	

Examiner 1	
Title:	
Surname or Family Name:	
Given or Personal Name(s):	
Position:	
Institution:	
Examiner Email Address:	
Why is this examiner suitable? (Please include an outline of her/his areas of expertise and/or relevant industry professional experience or their profile link)	
Have you confirmed that this examiner will be available to complete their report within 6 weeks from the date of receipt of the electronic thesis?	
If the examiner requires a physical copy of the thesis, portfolio or creative work, please provide a full address and phone number. NOTE: PO Box and GPO numbers are NOT accepted.	
Address	Phone Number

Examiner 2	
Title:	
Surname or Family Name:	
Given or Personal Name(s):	
Position:	
Institution:	
Examiner Email Address:	
Why is this examiner suitable? (Please include an outline of her/his areas of expertise and/or relevant industry professional experience or their profile link)	
Have you confirmed that this examiner will be available to complete their report within 6 weeks from the date of receipt of the electronic thesis?	
If the examiner requires a physical copy of the thesis, portfolio or creative work, please provide a full address and phone number. NOTE: PO Box and GPO numbers are NOT accepted.	
Address	Phone Number

Principal Supervisor:

I confirm that the identity of these recommended examiners has not been revealed to the candidate.

If any of the nominated examiners are UNE staff, I confirm that they have not been involved in supervision of the candidate.

Conflict of Interest Declaration

Is there the potential for a perceived or actual Conflict of Interest in the nomination of these examiners	Yes		No	
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If you answered yes to the above, please provide an explanation as to why you are still nominating this examiner.

(Principal Supervisor)

____/____/_____
(Date)