Glossary of Terms

When starting at UNSW, some of the terms used at the university may be new to you!
That's ok - check out our glossary of terms to find answers to the most common 'uni talk' that students will need to know.

A-C

A

Academic Standing
Your Academic Standing is an indication of your current progress toward completion of your Program.

- Good academic standing means that you are passing all or most of your courses and demonstrating satisfactory progress;
- Poor academic standing is assigned to students who fail to meet the criteria for satisfactory academic performance.

Advanced Standing
Sometimes referred to as Credit Transfer or Recognition of Prior Learning. At undergraduate level it is recognition of prior study at University or TAFE. At postgraduate level it is recognition of either prior postgraduate study in a university, or relevant professional experience.

Arc@UNSW
Arc is the student organisation for UNSW students. Their mission is to make student life outside the lecture hall enjoyable and rewarding.

Argument
At uni, you are often asked to present an argument in your assignments. An argument is sequence of linked ideas that supports a particular point of view or 'thesis'. Giving your opinion is much easier than providing an argument.
Award
An award is a degree, diploma or certificate obtained when a student graduates from a program.

Bachelor
A Bachelor degree is the formal award a student receives when they successfully complete an undergraduate university degree program, ordinarily of three or more years duration.

Bibliography
A list of all the sources you read in order to produce your assignment. Appears at the end of your assignment.

Campus
A teaching and administrative centre. Programs and students are both linked to a particular campus.

Census date
If you wish to discontinue your studies, the Census date is the last day you may withdraw without academic or financial penalty.

Commonwealth supported place
A Commonwealth supported place is a higher education place for which the Commonwealth makes a contribution towards the cost of the student's education. Students pay a student contribution amount (previously known as HECS charge), which varies depending on courses undertaken.

Convenor
The course convenor is the particular academic responsible for the teaching of a particular course. Often the convenor will take a number of lectures and may also tutor. If you have queries about the course as a whole you can ask the convenor.

Course
Refers to the Semester or year-long subject in which you are enrolled.

Course Reader
A collection of book chapters and journal articles compiled by the course convenor. A reader is compiled by the course convenor in order to provide the basic reading material for your course. Many are available from the university bookshop.
Coursework

A mode of study which is largely or wholly constituted of courses involving face-to-face class instruction. It is a term which is commonly used with regard to undergraduate and postgraduate study. The other mode of postgraduate study is research.

Credit Point

See Unit of Credit

Credit transfer

The ability to count subjects completed as part of another qualification towards a new degree.

Critical Thinking

At university you will be asked to be more critical of your course content than you may have been at school. Being critical at uni means much more than just being negative. In a uni context, being critical is all about asking questions, challenging assumptions, drawing informed conclusions and making judgements based on evidence.

D-E

D

Dean

Usually the head of a faculty. This term is also used to refer to the head of an important activity, such as the dean of research, or the dean of students.

Dr

Doctor. At university, this title usually refers to someone who holds a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), a high level degree.

Deferment

Deferral/deferment is an official delay to commencement of a tertiary program. Once you have gained entry to an Undergraduate degree program at UNSW you can defer for up to two academic years; however, in that time you cannot study at any other university or tertiary institution.

Degree

The qualification awarded when a student graduates from an undergraduate Bachelor program or a postgraduate Masters or PhD program. A degree program is a program for which a degree is awarded.
Doctorate/Doctoral Degree

A postgraduate research program of three or more years. Requires students to undertake a substantial independent research project and make an original contribution to knowledge. Students work under the guidance of a supervisor to produce a thesis. Also called a PhD.

Domestic Student (Local Student)

A student who is an Australian citizen, New Zealand citizen or holder of an Australian permanent visa. Domestic students may be offered a place as either a Commonwealth supported student or a fee paying student.

Double Degree

The concurrent study of two (or more) disciplines as a single award.

Double Major

A major studied in conjunction with another major in a Program. The two majors can be from two Faculties, provided they are approved. In combined degree programs (such as Arts Law) students typically undertake a major in each program.

E

Essay

An essay is an extended piece of writing that answers a specific question. Its length may vary between 1,000 and 5,000 words, depending on your level of study; essays get longer as you progress through your program.  

More about essay writing.

Elective

Some subjects are compulsory, but others you may choose. These subjects are called electives.

ELISE

An acronym for ‘Enabling Library & Information Skills for Everyone’. ELISE helps to develop an understanding of how to find, use and evaluate information for academic purposes. Completing ELISE and achieving a pass in the ELISE quiz is a mandatory requirement for all commencing undergraduate students at UNSW.

Exams

A formal test that students sit in order to demonstrate your knowledge and ability in a particular area.

- Open Book As their name suggests, in open book exams you may take helpful texts into the examination room. However, in return your teachers require a higher quality of answer. More about Open Book Exams.
• Closed Book In these exams, like in the HSC, you are not permitted to take any material into the lecture hall. They may take the form of short answers, essays, or multiple choice.

More about exams

F-H

F

Faculty

The organisation of several schools into an academic area responsible for the administration of courses.

Field Trip

Sometimes you'll be required to go 'off campus' to further your investigations. The places that you visit will vary according to your course.

Flexible Delivery

An alternative to on-campus study. Forms of flexible delivery include: external or distance studies; combination of external study with on-campus workshops; intensive block studies; the use of new learning technologies.

G

Gateway Course

A Gateway Course is the entry-level course for a major or program. It is a foundation course that introduces students to the scholarly conventions, concepts and skills/techniques of the discipline community/field of study that are necessary to complete the major or program.

General Education

UNSW requires that undergraduate students undertake a structured program in General Education as an integral part of studies for their degree. The University believes that a general education complements the more specialised learning undertaken in a student’s chosen field of study and contributes to the flexibility which graduates are increasingly required to demonstrate.

Grades

Each course undertaken by a student at UNSW is assessed using a variety of methods, usually culminating in the award of a single final mark out of 100.

A Guide to UNSW Grades.
Graduate
A person who has fulfilled the requirements of an award and has had the award conferred.

H
HECS-HELP assistance
HECS-HELP assistance helps eligible Commonwealth supported students pay their student contributions.
Student fees homepage.

Head of School
A senior member of faculty who manages a school's teaching and research activities.

Honours
The highest level of learning in an undergraduate program within the Australian tertiary education system. In some programs it is an optional fourth year of intensive study after three years of basic undergraduate study and often has a research training focus. In some programs Honours is awarded on the basis of a student's entire program of study rather than on the results of a separate Honours year. Honours is awarded at: Class 1, Division 2 Class 1, Division 2 Class 2, and Class 3.

I-N

I
Independent Study
One of the things that makes university study different from high school is the expectation that you will become an independent learner. Being an independent learner means being in control of your own learning.

International Student (Overseas Student)
A student who is a citizen of a country other than Australia or New Zealand, and not an Australian permanent resident.

J
Journal, reflective
An informal mode of assessment that requires you to keep an account of your developing relationship with your course, not unlike keeping a diary. Journals give you a great deal of freedom to express your ideas and thoughts about the course.
Lab
The labs are usually designed to augment the lecture and tutorial material. In labs, students run hands-on experiments to validate principles discussed in lectures.

Late Penalty
All assignments have to be submitted on a particular, or 'due', date. Submission after this moment normally incurs a reduction in marks.

Lecture
Lectures are methods of teaching that usually consist of a prepared talk given by a lecturer. Lectures provide the skeleton of most subjects offered at uni. Lectures vary in levels of formality and may be one or two hours in length. Most are given in quite large rooms with anything up to 500 students in the audience. Students are expected to listen and to take notes.

Lecturer
A Lecturer is a university academic ranking as well as someone who delivers lectures.

M ? N

Major
Many programs require students to complete a major. A major is an area of concentration or specialisation within a program of study (eg majoring in Anatomy in a Science course or History in an Arts course). In some courses it is possible to major in more than one area. Sometimes also called a plan.

Masters Degree
A program designed to enhance specific skills and equip graduates with in-depth understanding in a specific area of knowledge or professional practice. Usually at least 2 semesters duration.

Non-Award
Non-award enrolment refers to all enrolments in courses or a sequence of courses which do not lead to or count towards a formal award (e.g. degree or diploma) of the University of New South Wales.

O
Online Delivery
This indicates that some, a lot, or all of your course will be conducted through the internet.

For more information, see the TELT gateway
Orientation
Orientation, is often called 'O-Week', and takes place the week before Semester 1 and 2 teaching periods begin. Orientation gives commencing students the opportunity to explore the campus, attend faculty welcomes, meet other new students, do heaps of fun activities and learn about the university and campus life before classes begin.

Oral Presentation
A spoken-word presentation of a topic delivered by an individual student. You may be required to give a presentation to your tutorial class sometime in your first year. Like written work, presentations vary in length and have a particular structure.

More about oral presentations

P-R
P
Paraphrase
When writing university assignments you will frequently draw on the ideas and writings of others, and incorporate them into your own work. A paraphrase is one method of doing this.

More about paraphrasing

Participation
Some courses assess your participation beyond the production of written assignments. You'll be marked on your verbal contribution to tutorials, your engagement with other students, and your reading as it reveals itself in your discussions.

Password (formerly known as UniPass/zPass)
This is your ongoing password as a UNSW student to access all university online services.
You will create your password during the acceptance process. Keep reference of it in a safe place.
Your password will not activate until you have enrolled in at least 1 class.
You will need to update your password every 6 months for security reasons.
For further information please click here.

Plagiarism
The unacknowledged borrowing of other people's words and/or ideas, with the intention of passing them off as your own.
More about plagiarism

Postgraduate
Study undertaken for a higher degree (e.g. a Masters or PhD). Usually follows a completion of a Bachelor or Bachelor with Honours degree.

Plan
A plan is a sequence of study within a program focused on a particular study area, usually requiring students to complete an approved sequence of ‘core’ and ‘elective’ courses. Majors and co-majors are examples of plans.

Prerequisite
A requirement that you need to complete before you can proceed to the next stage of your program.

Program
Study leading to an academic award like a degree or diploma. Also refers to the degree in which you are enrolled: Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science.

Referencing
When you borrow the ideas and/or words of others, and use them in your own essays, you have to acknowledge their original source: you have to reference it. Referencing has two separate elements: the in-text citation or footnote, and the list of references or bibliography.

More about referencing

Report
A report is a highly structured piece of writing that is presented in a way different from essays.

More about reports

Research programs
Research programs are postgraduate programs of study which involve a student independently researching a specific topic under the guidance of a supervisor and producing a thesis or report. Some research programs also involve a coursework component.

S-Z

School
A unit of academic organisation within a faculty, usually containing several disciplines which have related teaching and research responsibilities.
Semester/ Session

The academic year is divided into semesters (sometimes also called sessions). A semester is a teaching period for which students enrol, and for which they are charged fees or student contributions. UNSW has two main 13-week semesters per year, as well as the eight-week Summer semester in December/January.

Seminar

A discussion-based class facilitated by a student of a group of students.

Stage

Programs are generally structured in a number of 'stages' of study, requiring students to complete a specified number of units of credit and/or a particular sequence of courses at each stage. Generally, when a student completes their degree program full-time, the different stages will correspond with the different years of enrolment.

Study Load

The total number of units of credit (UOC) taken in a Semester.

T

Thesis

In an academic context, the word thesis is used in two senses:

1. A thesis is a long piece of academic writing based on a prolonged research program
2. A thesis is a proposition or idea.

Tutorial

Small discussion-based classes where you have the opportunity to discuss particular aspects of the course in more detail. Tutorials are structured classes and require students to prepare for them.

More about tutorials

Tutor

In taking a particular course you may be taught by a number of people. Your tutor oversees your tutorial class.

U?V

Undergraduate

A student studying for a Bachelor degree, Diploma or Certificate.
Unit of Credit/ Credit Point
A measure of the workload of a subject. This is a unit of study in certain UNSW courses. Some courses require a student to complete a set total of credit points to satisfy the conditions for the award of the degree or diploma.

User ID
Your User ID is your student number, so your login ID for zMail and myUNSW will be in the form of z1234567.

Vice Chancellor
The Chief Executive Officer overseeing the University.

W-X-Y-Z

WAM
Weighted Average Mark. The WAM is calculated by multiplying the mark you receive for each course by the units of credit of the particular course, adding up the products and dividing by the total number of units of credit for the relevant courses. A 'Term WAM' is calculated for a semester, and a separate cumulative WAM is calculated for relevant results over the student's entire program.

zMail
zMail is the UNSW email service for UNSW undergraduate, postgraduate coursework students and alumni. zMail emails can be accessed and managed via a web interface.

For further information please click here.