

Department of Sociology & Criminal Justice
Criminal Justice Program
Master's Thesis Guidelines

The objective of the master's thesis is to have students critically analyze a specific criminological issue in depth, drawing upon their comprehensive knowledge of criminal justice and related fields. Students will answer an original research question by conducting an extensive review of the relevant literature, establishing appropriate methodology, analyzing data, discussing findings, and evaluating the results in light of the larger disciplines of criminology and criminal justice. Upon completion of the thesis, students will have developed expertise in their specific area of research.

Students electing the master's thesis option will write a thesis in the general format of a scholarly journal article (that is, it should include a comprehensive review of the literature, data and method, findings, and conclusions). With the advice of the thesis committee and approval of the thesis chair, each student will select a journal considered most appropriate to his/her area of interest, and write a research paper of the type normally considered by that journal. The length and style is left to the discretion of the chair. Where appropriate, students are encouraged to develop their theses from research conducted for their graduate-level coursework and/or from existing databases.

The thesis option is 6 credit component of the Program that should be completed over two consecutive semesters. Students without a thesis committee may not register for thesis credits.

A. Selection of Master's Thesis Committee

It is the responsibility of the student to form a master's thesis committee consisting of a chairperson who is a member of the faculty of the Criminal Justice Program and two additional members—one of whom may be from outside the Program. The thesis committee shall be formed no later than the end of the student's second semester in the Program, unless an exception is granted by the Graduate Program Director. Upon obtaining written consent of all members of the committee, the student must notify him/her of the composition of the thesis committee.

Students are expected to work closely with their chair and committee to identify a suitable topic for study. As a general guideline, students should spend time prior to their third semester investigating possible topics and consulting with committee members. Students should keep in mind that faculty availability will be limited during the summer. They must have a viable topic selected for their thesis proposal no later than the end of the first week of their third semester.

B. Thesis Proposal Procedures

Students will write a thesis proposal that identifies the topic of study, details the research question(s) that will serve to guide data collection and analysis, and provide comprehensive review of relevant research literature.

Each student will submit drafts of their thesis proposal to their committee for review and feedback. At the discretion of the thesis chair, students will schedule an oral presentation of their thesis proposal for members of their committee. Fellow students considering writing a master's thesis will also be invited to observe. Completion of the written proposal and oral presentation must take place no later than the last day of classes during the student's third semester.

Upon approval of the thesis proposal by the student's committee, the student will submit one copy (signed by the committee) to the Graduate Program Director. Students may not begin work on their theses until they have received this approval.

C. Master's Thesis and Oral Defense

Each student should submit a final draft of their thesis to their chair and committee no later than four weeks prior to oral thesis defense. The student must secure the approval of his/her committee prior to scheduling an oral thesis defense.

The oral defense shall be administered by the thesis committee. The chair of the committee shall be responsible for notifying faculty and criminal justice graduate students of the oral defense and ensure that a copy of the thesis is on file in the department office five days prior to the scheduled defense.

The defense is a public event. Any member of the faculty may attend and participate if desired, but the right of voting is reserved to members of the thesis committee. All graduate students, even those not electing the thesis option, are strongly encouraged to attend oral defenses.

A majority vote is required for any action. The written thesis and oral defense will be evaluated as a combined effort. There are three possible outcomes: Pass (no revisions), Pass (with revisions) or Fail. Upon failure, the written thesis and oral defense may be repeated within one semester of the first attempt. It is the responsibility of the chairperson of the thesis committee to notify the Graduate Program Director in writing of the action taken by the committee.

Successful candidates must provide copies of the completed thesis to the Office of Graduate Studies, one copy for Departmental archives, and one copy for the chair of his/her committee. Students are responsible for consulting the Graduate Studies Office regarding requirements, specifications, and regulations for the graduate thesis.

D. Deadlines

Students should have each of the following completed on or before the dates listed below.

Formation of the Thesis Committee – Last day of student's second semester

Be registered for Thesis credits (3) – Student's third semester

Selection and Approval of Thesis Topic – By end of the first week of student's third semester

Submit Granting of Master's Degree form with Graduate Studies Office – Deadline determined annually

Committee Approval of Thesis Proposal – Last day of classes of student's third semester

Be registered for Thesis credits (3) – Student's fourth semester

Final Draft of Thesis submitted to Committee – Four weeks prior to Oral Thesis Defense during student's fourth semester

Oral Defense of Thesis – No later than one week prior to deadline determined annually by Graduate Office during student's fourth semester

Final submission to Graduate Studies Office – Deadline determined annually