



**Thesis Guide**  
**Master of Science in Criminal Justice**  
**Department of Criminal Justice & Social Work**  
**University of Houston – Downtown**

Updated February 2022

## MSCJ THESIS GUIDE

### Description of the Thesis

The MSCJ thesis is a written document where students demonstrate the skills learned in the MSCJ program as applied to a specific research topic. The MSCJ program learning outcomes stipulate that at the end of the MSCJ program students will be able to demonstrate the following skills:

1. Identify, describe, and communicate current issues in the criminal justice system.
2. Apply theoretical concepts to the study of crime and justice.
3. Apply knowledge of the operations of the criminal justice system to develop solutions to the specific problems of criminal justice agencies.
4. Design a research plan to evaluate criminal justice programs, policies, or issues in the study of crime and justice.
5. Interpret and apply techniques of statistical analysis to the study of crime and justice.

A thesis provides master's students with the opportunity to engage in research and conduct an in-depth study in a specific area of scholarship. Through the thesis process, students should be able to:

- Critically read the literature,
- Extract principal ideas and concepts,
- Integrate and synthesize information from various sources,
- Develop hypotheses,
- Conduct research using appropriate methodologies and sources,
- Appropriately describe research findings,
- Draw appropriate inferences from the research, and
- Effectively communicate ideas in written and oral form.

Theses are assessed on the degree to which the following criteria have been met:

1. Ability to identify, describe, and communicate an important question or problem in criminal justice with an eye toward clearly stating the problem and describing why it is important,
2. Apply criminological or administrative theory,
3. Apply research methodology to the problem,
4. Interpret and apply statistics to the problem,
5. Develop recommendations and conclusions that apply findings to the problem.

Thesis topics vary, as do most appropriate research methodologies. Methodologies might include:

- Historical or archival research,
- Descriptive research,
- Program evaluations,
- Developmental research,
- Case study and field study research,
- Qualitative research,
- Correlational research,
- Causal – comparative research,
- Experimental or quasi-experimental research,
- Empirical research,
- Theoretical research

## Thesis Process

A thesis is intended to be completed in two consecutive semesters.

Steps 1-5 of the process occur *prior* to enrollment in the Thesis I course.

- 1. Choose a topic.** Each thesis begins informally with students choosing the topic. Students should plan ahead by narrowing in on a topic of interest, researching the topic, documenting sources, and perhaps sketching an outline of important issues related to the chosen topic.
- 2. Choose a chair.** Each student selects an MSCJ graduate faculty member to supervise, or chair, their thesis. Be prepared to discuss your topic area, documented sources, and issues surrounding the topic with more than one faculty member. Approach faculty members that have expertise or experience in your proposed project topic area. The discussion you have with each faculty member will be helpful in selecting a chair. The CJ faculty research interests are listed on the Department's website.

The thesis chair plays an important role in the development of the thesis and is primarily responsible for directing the student throughout the thesis process. Although the student will work with all members of the thesis committee, the thesis chair will coordinate much of the activity surrounding the thesis and its development. You and your thesis chair will be responsible for selecting the other members of your committee.

- 3. Choose a thesis committee.** Each thesis committee is composed of three members. The following positions formulate a thesis committee: 1) the committee chair, 2) a department graduate faculty member, and 3) either a third department graduate faculty member or a faculty member from outside the department who has relevant expertise to your thesis topic. You should work with your thesis chair to select the remaining committee members for your thesis.
- 4. Complete the Thesis Committee Appointment Form.** The student must complete the Thesis Committee Appointment form (Appendix A), obtain all necessary signatures, and submit it to the department chair. Any changes to the structure of the committee must be documented on a new Thesis Committee Appointment form and resigned by all members of the committee.
- 5. Submit online proposal of intent.** After selecting a thesis committee, the student will meet with their committee chair to draft a preliminary proposal. The proposal will be submitted electronically using the following link: [https://uhd.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_bCvBO8GJLQ19zoO](https://uhd.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bCvBO8GJLQ19zoO)

The student and thesis chair will submit the proposal form together. The proposal will include: student's name, thesis chair's name, proposed thesis title, research question/problem statement, proposed methodology, an acknowledgement to seek IRB approval if data is being collected, analyzed, or manipulated, and the names of other committee members.

- 6. Register for CJ6390 (Thesis I).** Once the thesis proposal form is submitted online, it is forwarded to the director of the MSCJ program. After receiving the proposal, the MSCJ director will allow the student to register for the CJ6390 Thesis I course. After the MSCJ director creates the thesis course and grants appropriate approvals, the student will be able to register for the course.

### Thesis 1 Course

**7. Complete your thesis proposal.** During the semester that a student is registered for CJ6390 (Thesis 1), the student should complete their thesis proposal document. The thesis proposal document should include a problem statement, review relevant literature, and describe in detail the proposed methodology for answering the research question. Ideally, this proposal document should provide a comprehensive draft for the first three chapters of the final thesis document (Problem Statement, Literature Review, and Methodology). You should work with your chair to provide a final proposal draft, which you will then share with all three of your thesis committee members. Committee members should have ten days to provide any written feedback, which you should incorporate into your draft *prior* to your proposal defense date.

- a. **Chapter I – Problem Statement:** Discuss the broad problem under which your specific topic lies and narrow the discussion down to your topic. A review of the literature on the general problem is appropriate here. If hypotheses or research questions are part of your thesis, they should be stated here. Explain why this particular piece of research needs to be done, and/or why it is important.
- b. **Chapter II – Literature Review:** In this section of your thesis, you should thoroughly review the literature directly pertinent to your research topic. Your literature review should encompass the conceptual, theoretical, and empirical research on the topic. You should emphasize how your topic and your thesis proposal are related to the literature you are reviewing. An overarching goal of this literature review chapter is to give the reader a sense of your understanding of the existing research surrounding this topic as well as how your research will contribute to this body of knowledge.
- c. **Chapter III – Methodology:** Discuss the way in which you plan to pursue your study. You should include your plan for data collection, your target sample (including a justification for this sample), and your sampling strategy. What are the variables that you plan to collect information on? Explain how they will be operationalized. Describe and justify your choice of research method. If you are planning to use a data collection instrument such as a survey or interview protocol, an appended draft should be included. Determine the limitations of your research design and assess the impact of those limitations on your study. Describe and justify your choice of statistical methods that you plan to use.

**8. Oral defense of thesis proposal.** Working with your thesis chair, select a date prior to the end of the semester for your oral defense of your proposal. The student is responsible for contacting each member of the thesis committee to ensure the date and time is acceptable.

- a. Provide written notification (Appendix B). This notice should be posted as an open invitation to attend the defense by additional faculty and other interested parties in the college. The student must also notify the Dean of the College of Public Service in writing of the date, time, and location of the proposal defense.
- b. Complete a Thesis Proposal Defense form (Appendix C) and present it to the thesis chair at the beginning of the proposal defense. The form serves to notify department administration that the proposal defense was held and to record the outcome.

**Description of Proposal Defense:** The proposal defense is an oral presentation that should take approximately 20 minutes and cover the material from the thesis proposal document. You may find it helpful to use a visual aid such as PowerPoint slides during the oral defense.

Once the student has completed their presentation, the committee members are given the chance to ask questions. The chair will take notes on the questions asked as well as comments and suggestions regarding modification of the proposal. After the committee has finished asking questions, the committee chair will ask invited guests whether they have any questions. When all questions have been addressed, you and all guests will be asked to clear the room. The thesis committee will meet in a closed session to evaluate the thesis proposal and the student's performance during the proposal defense. The committee must reach a unanimous vote on one of three outcomes: failed, passed with modifications, or passed without modifications

- A. **Passed with modifications:** make modifications to your proposal and submit a final version of your proposal to your thesis chair. Most students pass the proposal defense but have to make minor modifications. The chair of the committee is responsible for documenting the required changes and communicating these changes in writing to the student. Further, it is the chair's responsibility to ensure that changes requested by the committee are incorporated into the final copy of the thesis proposal.
- B. **Failed:** Students who fail the proposal defense may be required by the thesis committee to take additional coursework, including independent study, to improve the content of the thesis proposal. A student may only defend a proposal twice. The student may not reschedule a second defense for at least 45 days. When the student is ready to defend the proposal again, they must follow this same procedure regarding scheduling and notification.

9. **Apply for IRB approval, if necessary.** Please see the [UHD Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects website](#) for more information on the types of research that require IRB approval, the types of populations that require special protections, and the processes for submitting this paperwork. You should work with your committee chair on your IRB paperwork. No student is allowed to begin collecting data involving human subjects prior to written IRB approval.

- a. **Complete Human Subjects research training from CITI program.** Register on the site using your UHD affiliation. Complete the Social, Behavioral, and Educational Basic training course. Attach the course completion notice to your IRB proposal.

10. **Register for CJ6391 Thesis II.** You must earn a passing grade in CJ6390 before being allowed to enroll in CJ6391. Students with a grade of Incomplete in Thesis I must complete their required work and earn a grade of A or B before progressing to Thesis II. You should register for CJ6391 during your final semester in the MSCJ program.

### **Thesis II Course**

11. **Collect and analyze your data.** Data collection for a thesis can take many forms, but if your thesis involves human subjects, you cannot begin until IRB approval has been granted.

12. **Complete the manuscript.** This usually entails an iterative process between the student and the committee chair, where multiple drafts are written and revised before a draft is sent to the other committee members. Your final thesis manuscript should be structured as follows:

- a. **Chapter I – Problem Statement** (described above – but be sure to change to past tense, since now you have actually done the research)
- b. **Chapter II – Literature Review** (described above – but be sure to change to past tense, since now you have actually done the research)
- c. **Chapter III – Methodology** (described above – but be sure to change to past tense, since now you have actually done the research)
- d. **Chapter IV – Results:** Depending on how you organize your thesis, you may want to devote more than one chapter to results, but you should have at least one such chapter. Introduce the purpose of your research again at this stage. Examine the frequency distribution of your variables. You should organize your findings in a way that clearly addresses your first research question or hypothesis, then your second, and so on. If appropriate, use appropriate tables and figures to present your data. Make sure your tables are clear and follow APA guidelines. End this chapter by summarizing your overall findings and restating the answers to your research questions.
- e. **Chapter V – Discussion and Conclusions:** In this chapter, write about your results and conclusions in detail. Interpret the meaning of your results and specify the conclusions you can draw from them. Consider the implications of your findings. Discuss the limitations of your research and the impact of these limitations on your findings. Provide recommendations for future research in this area.

**13. Send your thesis manuscript to your committee members.** Your committee chair will advise you as to when you should disseminate your draft to the remaining members of your thesis committee. Upon their recommendation, provide review copies to your committee members. You should allow committee members 14 days to review and provide feedback on your final thesis draft. Once they send their feedback, any requested changes or highlighted issues should be addressed. After you incorporate this feedback, work with your committee chair to arrange for a final defense date, time, and location.

**14. Oral defense of thesis.** Follow the same process from step 8 *Oral Defense of Thesis Proposal*. The only difference is that you need to complete the Final Thesis Defense Form without committee members signature (Appendix C). If the Oral defense is not completed during the first semester of enrollment in CJ6391, you will be given a grade of IP (In Progress) and will be required to re-enroll in CJ6391 until the thesis is defended.

**15. Receive final approval and grade.** Once the thesis committee approves of the final written document, they sign the Final Thesis Defense Form (Appendix C) and submit it to the Department Chair. Once the thesis chair approves of the final document, she or he issues a final letter grade (A, B, C, D, or F).

### Style and Formatting Criteria for Theses

The format and style of the project document (spacing, citations, references, figures, tables, etc.) shall conform to the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 7th edition*, unless otherwise noted below.

1. **Page lengths.** There are no formal criteria for page lengths. The expected page length should reflect the size required for a thorough exploration and description of all the components included above.
2. **Table of contents.** Please include a table of contents indicating the pages on which acknowledgements, chapter beginnings, any figures or tables, references, and any other sections can be located.
3. **Formatting requirements.** To develop a uniform approach, theses must follow the criteria below.
  - a. Margins should be 1 inch on all sides except the left.
  - b. Left side margins must be 1.5 inches (for binding purposes)
  - c. Double-spaced throughout
  - d. Font should be Times New Roman.
  - e. Point size should be 12.
  - f. Tables and figures may have smaller font sizes (point 10), but must remain legible
  - g. Follow the APA citation format
  - h. Printed one-sided
4. **Title page.** The title page of the project shall include the following elements (see Appendix D):
  - a. Title of the project in all caps
  - b. Statement that the project is “A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of the College of Public Service University of Houston – Downtown”
  - c. Statement that the project is “In partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Criminal Justice”
  - d. Name of the candidate
  - e. Month and year of completion

### Deadlines for Theses

Consult the Academic Calendar published in the University class schedule for deadline dates related to completion of a thesis. Failure to meet these deadlines will result in delayed graduation. Also, check with your thesis advisor prior to beginning the thesis for any additional requirements. Any questions not answered by this guide or the current Master’s Student Handbook should be referred to your thesis committee chairperson, the Graduate Program Director, or the Associate Director of Graduate Studies for the College of Public Service.

### UHD Thesis Submission and Binding

See the [UHD Library’s website](https://www.uhd.edu/library/services/Pages/theses.aspx) (<https://www.uhd.edu/library/services/Pages/theses.aspx>) for the most up-to-date information about thesis submission and binding requirements.





**Appendix A:  
Thesis Committee Appointment Form**

**THESIS COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS**

TO: [Insert Dean's Name]  
Dean of the College of Public Service

FROM: Members of the Faculty of the Department of Criminal Justice and Social Work

RE: [Insert your name as it appears on student records]  
Student Identification Number: [Insert your Student ID number]

We, the undersigned members of the faculty of the Department of Criminal Justice and Social Work, agree to serve as members of the thesis committee of the above referenced graduate student.

The topic for the thesis is *[insert a description of your topic here]*.

Signed:

<u>[Insert Committee Chair Name Here, Ph.D.]</u>	<u>Signature</u>	<u>Date</u>
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<u>[Insert Committee Member Name, Ph.D.]</u>	<u>Signature</u>	<u>Date</u>
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<u>[Insert Committee Member Name, Ph.D.]</u>	<u>Signature</u>	<u>Date</u>
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I recommend the appointment of the above thesis committee:

<u>[Insert Department Chair Name, Ph.D.]</u>	<u>Signature</u>	<u>Date</u>
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Approved:

<u>[Insert CPS Dean Name, Ph.D.]</u>	<u>Signature</u>	<u>Date</u>
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**Appendix B:  
Notification of Thesis Proposal Defense or Final Thesis Defense**

**Notification of *[Insert “Thesis Proposal Defense” or “Final Thesis Defense”]***

TO: Dr. *[Insert Dean’s Name Here]*  
Dean of the College of Public Service

FROM: *[Insert Committee Chair’s Name, Ph.D.]*  
Faculty Member, Department of Criminal Justice and Social Work

RE: *[Insert “Thesis Proposal Defense” or “Final Thesis Defense”]*  
*[Insert Your Name as it Appears on University Records]*

TITLE: *[Insert Thesis Title Here]*

This is to advise you of the upcoming *[Insert “Thesis Proposal Defense” or “Final Thesis Defense”]* of the above referenced MSCJ student. Please find attached a copy of the student’s thesis abstract for posting.

DATE OF DEFENSE: *[Insert day of week, month, day, and year]*

TIME: *[Insert time of defense with a.m. or p.m.]*

LOCATION: *[Insert the room that has been reserved]*

Signed:

\_\_\_\_\_  
*[Insert Committee Chair Name Here, Ph.D.]*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date



**Appendix D:  
Sample Thesis Title Page**

[TITLE IN ALL CAPS]

A Thesis Presented to the  
Faculty of the College of Public Service  
University of Houston - Downtown

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Science in Criminal Justice

by

[Student Name]

[Month, Year]