

Graduate Student Handbook for the Master of Science in Criminology and Criminal Justice

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

Master of Science in Criminology and Criminal Justice
DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE | EDUCATION BUILDING, SUITE 111

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Purpose of this Handbook

Welcome to the Master of Science in Criminology and Criminal Justice (MSCCJ) program in the Department of Criminal Justice at The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP). This Handbook will acquaint you with the policies and procedures of the Department of Criminal Justice and facilitate your progress toward applying for the program and earning the MSCCJ degree. Read this handbook carefully and consult with the graduate advisor whenever you have questions. Be aware that the policies and procedures described herein are subject to change and can be affected by changes in the policies of the university. University-wide policies take priority over the policies of the Department of Criminal Justice. Check the campus catalog, the College of Liberal Art's website, and the Graduate School for the most up-to-date information.

Graduate School of the University of Texas at El Paso

The MSCCJ program is overseen by the Graduate School of The University of Texas at El Paso. For more information about the Graduate School, please visit the following website:

<https://www.utep.edu/graduate/>

Overview of the Master of Science in Criminology and Criminal Justice (MSCCJ)

The MSCCJ is designed to prepare students to identify crime-related problems and develop solutions to these problems through the application of criminological theories and methodologies as academics or criminal-justice professionals.

The MSCCJ degree is a 36-credit program offered via a combination of on-campus, hybrid, and online courses. All students in the program will be required to take 9 hours of core courses: Proseminar in CCJ, Criminological Theory, and Criminal Justice Policy. Following the core, two tracks are available to appeal to students with different educational goals: a professional track and a thesis track.

The professional track will appeal to the student who is seeking entrance to, or promotion within, a justice-related agency and who desires the master's degree as a terminal degree. This track requires a capstone course where students will produce a major paper and demonstrate their mastery of knowledge through a comprehensive exam. The thesis track will prepare students who later aspire to enter a Ph.D. program by enhancing their theoretical knowledge, research, and statistical skills. Students in this track will produce a formal scholarly thesis.

Program's Mission

The mission of the MSCCJ program is to:

- (a) Provide an intellectually stimulating academic and professional environment in which students grow and develop to their full potential
- (b) Contribute to knowledge and excellence of practice in the field of criminal justice through teaching, research, and service to local and state, communities, and agencies.

- (c) Develop deep and comprehensive substantive knowledge about the field and critical thinking skills, strong analytic and communication skills, and high ethical and professional standards

Program's Objectives

Objectives of the MSCCJ program are to:

- a) Provide students with a broad-based knowledge of theory and practice concerning criminal justice administration, management, and policy
- b) Provide students with decision-making and problem-solving skills required in criminal justice administration, management, and policy
- c) Provide students with substantive expertise required for positions in police administration, judicial administration, or correctional administration or in private sector organizations concerned with criminal justice administration
- d) Provide theoretical, analytical, and research skills necessary for criminal justice administration, management, and policy analysis and/or as preparation for doctoral level graduate study
- e) Provide students with a comprehensive, integrated model of criminal justice administration theory and practice, stressing conceptual, methodological, and contextual knowledge development and application.

New Student Orientation

Upon acceptance into the program, all new criminal justice graduate students are required to attend the orientation session for the criminal justice graduate program and those provided by the Graduate School.

Conference Attendance and Travel Funding

The Department of Criminal Justice encourages on-campus graduate students to travel to scholarly conferences and meetings. Conferences are a primary means of sharing research and building professional and scholarly networks and are valuable for students who later wish to earn a Ph.D. The Department encourages attendance at criminology and criminal justice conferences that range in scope from regional (e.g., Southwest Association of Criminal Justice) to national (e.g., American Society of Criminology, Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences) organizations. While students may travel at their own expense, travel can be reimbursed for students making a research presentation at a conference within the United States. Students should investigate professional organization websites for conference deadlines and requirements for submitting papers.

There are three sources of funding for student travel—students are encouraged to apply to all 3 sources. There are separate deadlines for the first 2 funding sources:

- a) The UTEP Graduate School offers a “Travel Grant” at the following website:
<https://www.utep.edu/graduate/funding/internal-funding.html> (application and reimbursement is through the UTEP Graduate School)
- b) Dodson Funds through the UTEP College of Liberal Arts
https://www.utep.edu/liberalarts/_Files/docs/departement-chair-resources/types-dodson_funding.pdf (application and reimbursement is through the College of Liberal Arts)
- c) Department of Criminal Justice funding (details of Dept of CJ Travel grants are provided below):

Department of CJ Graduate Student Travel Grants

The research paper abstract or poster session abstract must be accepted by the conference organizers and by a faculty mentor in the Department of Criminal Justice before applying for funding. Applications for Department of Criminal Justice funding must be received after abstract acceptance and at least 10 weeks in advance of travel dates. Graduate students eligible for travel grants must be enrolled in an on-campus graduate program, in good academic standing, (not on Academic Probation), enrolled in at least 3 credits in the semester of travel, and be presenting a research paper or a poster session at the conference. The Department of Criminal Justice will fund each eligible graduate student up to \$600 per person per academic year of eligible travel expenses per UTEP policy <https://www.utep.edu/travel/> and pending Department budget availability. In years that funds are limited, preference will be given to INSS and CRIJ on-campus students on the thesis track. The Department of Criminal Justice will also agree to purchase short-term Student Field Trip/Medical Insurance only for dates of domestic travel on behalf of students who do not have current medical coverage.

To apply for Department travel funding, send an email request to the Department Chair, and include electronic copies of the following 6 items (AKA, “the travel application packet”):

1. The submitted and accepted conference paper title/abstract
2. A Student Travel Request that includes:
 - a) Student legal name, UTEP student ID, complete local address, phone numbers, and UTEP email
 - b) The organization sponsoring the conference, the location of the conference (hotel, city, state)
 - c) Proposed travel dates
 - d) 1-2 names and phone numbers of persons to contact in case of an emergency, and

e) The name and phone number for the responsible University employee(s) who will be available to the Students at all time during the travel or activity regardless of whether or not that person will be attending the activity or event (either your faculty mentor or the Department Chair)

3. Scanned Copies of current medical insurance certificates, or a copy of both sides of a current group insurance membership card valid for use at medical facilities in the United States for domestic travel. If you have no insurance, a statement saying that “I have no medical insurance and short-term medical insurance is needed for this trip.”

4. Completed and signed Release and Indemnification Agreements.

5. Completed and signed Authorization for Medical Treatment form

https://www.utep.edu/travel/_Files/docs/student-travel/ST-3-Emergency-Medical-Treatment.pdf

6. If the student is driving, copies of valid driver’s licenses issued by the state where the licensees permanently reside. Driver’s licenses cannot be expired, suspended, or revoked.

Once the Criminal Justice Department Chair approves, the travel application packet information will be forwarded to StudentTravel@utep.edu and student information will be entered into: <https://minerstravel.utep.edu/login>

With the exception of airfare, all approved travel grants will be reimbursed per UTEP travel rules after travel has been completed. Students must use the Request for Reimbursement form at: <https://www.utep.edu/travel/resources/index.html> and submit receipts. UTEP Travel policies include:

- Alcohol and souvenirs are NOT reimbursable.
- Airfare is NOT reimbursable. A student requesting that University funds be put toward airfare must work with the Dept. of CJ Administrative Assistant to allow the Dept. to make all air travel reservations through a UTEP-Approved vendor with the student’s name and date of birth.
- Students must collect and save all receipts for expenses in which reimbursement is requested (e.g., meals, ground transportation, taxi, Uber, airport parking fees)—it is recommended that they can show proof of payment through a credit card receipt and not pay cash.
- Lodging receipt must be in the student’s name and show a zero balance with proof of payment. Taxes on Texas hotels are not eligible for reimbursement (but taxes are reimbursed for all out of state hotels).
- Travel reimbursement for other sources of funding (grad school, Dodson funds) can be used on the same trip, but each travel expense can only be submitted to ONE source (e.g., if the Department covers lodging that expense cannot be claimed a second time to a different funding source).

Graduate Student Assembly (GSA)

The GSA is the representative body for all graduate students on UTEP's campus. GSA contributes to a collegial, collaborative, and interdisciplinary community of graduate students. More broadly, GSA shares the Graduate School's commitment to fostering an inclusive, safe, and diverse culture of graduate education. GSA wants to ensure the success of UTEP graduate students. You can help, too. All UTEP graduate students are automatically members of the Graduate Student Assembly, and each College/School and the graduate program can name a representative to the Graduate Student Advisory Board.

If you would like to become more active in the group, attend the next meeting or event, email: gradsa@utep.edu or visit:

<https://www.utep.edu/graduate/PD/Graduate%20Student%20Assembly.html>

The UTEP Graduate School also offers professional workshops for Graduate Students. Visit: <https://www.utep.edu/graduate/PD/workshops-and-events.html> for the complete topic list and schedule.

Admissions to the MSCCJ program

Admission Requirements

- (a) Completed application (UTEP Graduate School <http://graduate.utep.edu>)
- (b) Proof of B.A. or B.S. degree in criminal justice, criminology, or related field. Other fields are acceptable, but may require leveling classes as part of admission. Leveling classes are not counted toward graduate program credits.
- (c) Minimum of 3.0 GPA in the last 60 hours of classes.
- (d) Professional Resume

This document should provide information on your educational attainment and employment experiences. When describing your educational attainment, please provide your major, minor, and GPA for each institution attended, as well as any honors, awards, or extracurricular activities. When describing your employment history, please provide contact information for your immediate supervisor(s) and your job duties and responsibilities for each position. Please also provide information on past experiences with volunteer work, if any. Be sure to include any skills and accomplishments you have accrued, as well as any other information you think is relevant as you describe your experiences.

- (e) Statement of purpose

This is a 3-4 page, well-written essay, that explains who you are and how you would benefit from, and contribute to, the MSCCJ. Describe yourself, your motivations for pursuing the MSCCJ, and your expectations of the program. Discuss relevant past experiences, such as your education, jobs, community activities, leadership roles, awards

and honors. Write about how these experiences have shaped you and prepared you for the MSCJJ. Describe why you want to study criminology and criminal justice at UTEP.

(f) Two letters of recommendation

(a) The letters must be from individuals who are qualified to assess your potential for academic success and are not related to you. Ask individuals who know you well and can enthusiastically describe your talents, accomplishments, and potential. Typically, these letters are from a current or former work supervisor, a professor, or a mentor from an internship, community organization, or similar activity.

(b) For applicants who have completed their bachelor's degree in the last two years, at least one of the letters must come from the applicant's former academic institution. These letters can come from faculty in any department.

(g) International students must pass the TOEFL Exam (or equivalent) with a minimum score of 250 (or 600 on the paper-based exam).

The Graduate Record Exam (GRE) is not required.

Regular Admission

Applicants must have graduated with a bachelor's degree from an accredited institution. Applicants must have a minimum of 3.0 GPA in the last 60 hours of classes.

Conditional Admission

Applicants who lack the required GPA or who lack undergraduate course preparation may be considered for conditional admission. Conditional admission means that in order to be fully admitted, a student may be required to earn a 3.0 or above in the first 9 hours and/or may be required to complete undergraduate preparation courses (CRIJ 3300, CRIJ 3313, or PSYC 4317) that will not count for graduate credit. Once the conditions are fulfilled, the student is fully admitted into the MSCCJ program.

Admission Deadlines

Admission to the MSCCJ program is made on a rolling basis and applicants are admitted for the fall or spring semester. The calendar for submission of admission materials is as follows:

Semester	Preferred Deadline	Final Deadline
Fall	May 1 st	July 15 th
Spring	November 1 st	November 15 th

In addition to fulfilling departmental requirements, students must also meet those set forth by the Graduate School in terms of grades, class attendance, academic probation, etc. More information can be found on the following website:

<https://www.utep.edu/liberalarts/resources/student-resources/academic-standing.html>

It is the student's responsibility to keep informed of all Graduate School requirements, to obtain all necessary forms, to initiate required actions, and to meet the filing dates listed by the Graduate School.

Graduate Teaching and Research Assistantships

Paid "Master's Teaching Assistantships" are available each year pending budget approval, and do involve a combination of both teaching and research duties. Teaching assistantships require approximately 20 hours of work per week, both on and off campus. Students on assistantships must remain in "good academic standing" with a GPA of 3.0 and above, and also be enrolled in a minimum of 9 credit hours per semester, except in the last semester when finishing the capstone or thesis.

Teaching assistants typically work under the supervision of two faculty members or lecturers (sometimes up to 3 faculty) and assist them in teaching preparations/uploading course materials, grading of assignments, and proctoring exams in undergraduate courses. It is expected that teaching assistants will perform all work duties as required by the supervising faculty member or lecturer, and these duties will vary by individual faculty member. Teaching assistantships can also involve some research assistance to include library research, literature reviews, creating charts, and coding of data as part of the 20 hours.

The title of "Research Assistant" is funded by a faculty member's research grant, and involves 20 hours per week assignment to specific research projects and work directly under the supervision of one principal investigator responsible for the project. It is expected that research assistants will perform the work duties required by the principal investigator at a satisfactory level.

Students that are awarded an assistantship can expect to receive funding for 9 months or 2 regular semesters at a time from Sept 1 to May 31. Teaching Assistantships do not extend into the summer. Renewal of a second academic year for an assistantship is evaluated each academic year and is contingent upon a student making normal degree progress and performing his or her work duties as a teaching or research assistant at a satisfactory level as determined by the supervising faculty member and the graduate director. Unsatisfactory performance of these work duties or failure to make normal degree progress may result in the loss of the assistantship. Teaching Assistantships may not extend past two academic years. Research Assistantships are more flexible, and can involve 12 month appointments and summer employment for as long as the student remains full-time.

Academic Advising

Upon entering the graduate program, new graduate students will meet with the graduate program coordinator, who will review the student's interests and background, evaluate any graduate transfer courses taken in criminal justice (up to 6 hours), discuss the student's objectives, and

assist in developing an initial program of study. Each semester, students are required to be advised by the graduate program coordinator before registering for classes to discuss progress and timelines and address any concerns or questions. Advising can be done via email.

Professional Track

The professional track will appeal to the student who seeks employment in a criminal justice agency or who already holds such a position and is seeking a promotion. In both cases, this track enhances knowledge, application, and critical thinking about criminal justice policy and social issues that affect crime.

In addition to 9 hours of core courses (Proseminar in CCJ, Criminological Theory, and Criminal Justice Policy), the professional track will require 9 credits in Criminal Justice Administration, Management, and Organizations, Program Evaluation and Capstone. Students taking the capstone course will produce a major paper and demonstrate their mastery of knowledge through a comprehensive exam. Skills acquired in previous courses in the areas of critical thinking, problem-solving, and professional writing will be demonstrated. The remaining 18 credit hours of courses will be taken as electives, 9 of these credits must be CRIJ-designated.

CRIJ 5305	Proseminar in Criminology and Criminal Justice
CRIJ 5310	Advance Criminological Theory
CRIJ 5315	Seminar in Criminal Justice Policy
CRIJ 5300	Criminal Justice Administration, Management, and Organization
CRIJ 5350	Program Evaluation and Evidence-Based Practices
CRIJ 5390	Capstone in Criminology and Criminal Justice

Whenever possible CRIJ 5390 should be taken during the last semester of the student's degree plan and all core graduate courses should be completed before the capstone course is taken. All professional track students must be enrolled during the semester of graduation.

Thesis Track (more information on the thesis can be found later in this Handbook)

The thesis track will prepare students who later aspire to enter a Ph.D. program by enhancing their theoretical knowledge, research, and statistical skills. In addition to 9 hours of core courses (Proseminar in CCJ, Criminological Theory, and Criminal Justice Policy), the thesis track will require 6 credits in graduate-level Research Methods and Statistics, and 6 credits for the completion of the Thesis.

Students must enroll in CRIJ 5302 Research Methods in Intelligence and Criminal Justice and CRIJ 5361 Statistical Analysis in Intelligence and Criminal Justice to meet the research methods and statistics requirements. Applicants who lack an undergraduate statistic course are required to complete an undergraduate preparation course (STAT 2480 or INSS 2304) that will not count for graduate credit before enrolling in CRIJ 5361. The remaining 15 credit hours of courses for the

thesis track will be taken as electives, 9 of these credits must be CRIJ-designated, and the remaining 3 credits may be CRIJ electives or specific courses designated in the list below. Students should begin thinking about thesis topics and their major professor during the first year of the program. Students are free to talk with any potential major professor during the first year of the program.

CRIJ 5305	Proseminar in Criminology and Criminal Justice
CRIJ 5310	Advance Criminological Theory
CRIJ 5315	Seminar in Criminal Justice Policy
CRIJ 5302	Research Methods in Intelligence and Criminal Justice
CRIJ 5361	Statistical Analysis in Intelligence and Criminal Justice
CRIJ 5397	Master's Thesis I
CRIJ 5399	Master's Thesis II

A student must decide whether they will embark in either the professional track or the thesis track at the completion of 18 credit hours.

Forming a Graduate Thesis Supervisory Committee

The MSCCJ supervisory committee consists of three graduate faculty members: two from the Department of Criminal Justice and one academic professor from outside the department or University. The first step in forming a supervisory committee is for the student to ask a faculty member to serve as the thesis committee chair. The major professor is designated as the chair of the student's graduate committee and serves as the student's primary academic advisor for the remainder of the program. The primary responsibility of the major professor is to provide guidance to the student in completing the remaining requirements for the MSCCJ degree. While the thesis must be chaired by a full-time tenured or tenure-tracked faculty within the Department of Criminal Justice, at least one of the other two committee members must come from a related discipline at UTEP (e.g., Political Science, Psychology, Sociology, and Women's Studies) or from a criminal justice or criminology department at another university. The two remaining faculty members are usually identified based on the advice of the thesis chair. Other members of the supervisory committee should be consulted when necessary and kept informed of degree progress by the student.

Only faculty who are designated as members of the "graduate faculty" by the university are eligible to serve as a major professor or member of a MSCCJ supervisory committee. Faculty who are not members of the graduate faculty can be temporarily added to the graduate faculty via a form that requires approval from the Graduate Director of the Department of Criminal Justice, the Department Chair, Dean of the College of Liberal Arts, and the Graduate School. A list of departmental graduate faculty and their areas of interest are listed near the end of this handbook.

Oral Examination of the Thesis Proposal

While the expectations of major professors may vary somewhat, proposals are typically 12-15 pages of text, plus references. The proposal should serve as a roadmap to the thesis and, thus, do the following things:

1. Introduce the topic
 - a. Clearly describe the research topic
 - b. Present the central questions that drive the thesis
2. Explain how the thesis will contribute to the field
 - a. Discuss the importance in the relevant fields or subfields
 - b. In the discussion of how the work will be situated within the extant literature, explain how it will contribute to the literature
 - c. Cite relevant authors, books, and arguments
3. Describe research methods and theoretical framework
 - a. What theoretical and/or conceptual approaches will inform the work?
 - b. What is the methodology or methodologies employed?
4. Outline the remainder of the thesis
 - a. Provide a preliminary breakdown of each section of the thesis.
5. Present a timeline for completion of work
6. End with a reference page of published sources

Ideally, the oral examination of the thesis proposal should be scheduled no later than the beginning of the fourth semester of enrollment (e.g., no later than January 31 for most students). The supervisory committee will read and evaluate the proposal in terms of three criteria: (1) adequate methods, (2) theory, and (3) subject area competence. At the oral examination, the student will be subject to questions by the committee. After the presentation, the student and those attending will be dismissed from the room while the committee members deliberate. Then, the student will be brought back into the room and the student will learn the outcome of their proposal. At this point, the committee meets privately with the student to discuss revisions or other relevant matters. The oral examination will be graded on a pass/fail basis. A grade of pass indicates that the research project has been approved for completion. A grade of fail indicates that revisions to the proposed research project are required. Oral examination of the thesis proposal is open to anyone who wishes to attend.

Students must bring a completed proposal form to the thesis proposal defense. The form can be found at https://www.utep.edu/graduate/Files/docs/forms/forms-for-masters-students/Thesis_Proposal_Form1.pdf

Completion of the Thesis

Once the oral examination of the research proposal has been passed, the student must complete the research project described in the proposal and write the thesis. This is done in consultation with the major professor and members of the supervisory committee. It is the student's

responsibility to keep committee members informed of his or her progress and to schedule meetings with them for consultation.

The UTEP thesis formatting guidelines are available in a Word file at: <https://www.utep.edu/graduate/forms.html> in which it is recommended that you use the Word file to format your title page, signature pages, headers, and reference page.

More details on these guidelines are in a 21-page PDF file at the following link:

<https://www.utep.edu/graduate/Files/docs/admission-and-enrollment/ThesisDissertationFormat.pdf>

Once the thesis is completed and the major professor has determined that it is ready for final defense, the student must distribute typewritten or electronic copies of the thesis to members of the supervisory committee. The scheduling of the date for the final oral defense must occur only after two weeks has passed since sending typewritten or electronic copies of the thesis to the members of the committee. If the supervisory committee determines that the draft copy of a student's thesis has met their requirements for acceptance, several steps must be taken.

First, the student must complete an Approval to Schedule Final Examination form. This form must be signed by all members of the supervisory committee and the department chair, then filed with the Graduate School. This certifies that the supervisory committee approves the thesis as being ready for a final oral defense.

In consultation with members of the supervisory committee and the administrative assistant in the department, the student must set a date, time, and place for the final examination to occur. All defenses will occur in the Criminal Justice Conference Room in Suite 111.

The Final Defense

The final defense is an oral examination of the completed thesis. The student is subjected to questions about the research by members of the supervisory committee. After the presentation, the student and those attending will be dismissed from the room while the committee members deliberate. Then, the student will be brought back into the room and the student will learn the outcome of their final defense. At this point, the committee meets privately with the student to discuss revisions or other relevant matters. This oral examination is graded on a pass, conditional pass, or fail basis. A grade of pass indicates that the student has successfully completed the MSCCJ degree. A grade of conditional pass indicates that the student will pass if he or she makes revisions or alterations to their thesis. The final defense is open to anyone who wishes to attend.

The student is responsible for bringing the final defense forms for signature to the final defense. This form can be found at: https://www.utep.edu/graduate/Files/docs/forms/forms-for-masters-students/completion_defense_masters_form1.pdf

Failures and Retakes

A student who fails the oral examination for either the thesis proposal or the final thesis defense must retake the exam by rescheduling the defense. Thesis students must be enrolled in thesis hours during the semester the thesis is defended and during the semester of graduation.

Submission of Final Typed Copy of Thesis

The final requirement for obtaining the MSCCJ degree is the submission to the Graduate School of the final draft of the thesis as approved by the student's supervisory committee. Please email your approved thesis to: gradschoolgraduation@utep.edu for format check.

Applying for Graduation

A student must first meet with the graduate advisor of the MSCCJ program to make sure that the student has completed all the degree requirements for your degree plan and track. A sample graduate degree plan form is available at:

https://www.utep.edu/graduate/Files/docs/forms/forms/Graduation_Final_Degree_Plan_Form1.pdf

Submit the graduate advisor-approved Application for Graduate Degree to the Graduate School. The student will receive email notification from the Graduate School once the application is approved. The diploma fee and the UMI online publication fee are billed to the student's UTEP Goldmine account upon approval of the Application for Graduate Degree. Do not submit payment with the application and do not pay the diploma fee until the Application for Graduate Degree has been approved by the Graduate School.

Ordering Regalia

For Master's candidates wishing to participate in commencement, a black graduation gown, a hat/black tassel, and a dark/royal purple hood is required, and can be purchased through the UTEP bookstore at T at: <https://www.utep.edu/graduate/Current%20Students/how-to-graduate.html> The commencement schedule can be found at:

<https://www.utep.edu/commencement/>

What is a Thesis?

A thesis is the culminating moment of a graduate student's career. At its most basic level, a thesis is a research project that produces new knowledge about some topic or issue. The thesis need not be especially long, 50-100 pages is a rough guideline (though not a guarantee), depending on the topic, method, and committee. But the thesis will require more time, effort, and desire on the part of the student than any comparable graduate-level term paper. However, students are not sent out on their own to write their thesis. Rather, the thesis will be written with a substantial amount of guidance and assistance from each student's thesis committee (usually 3-4 faculty members), especially the thesis committee chair.

Basic Thesis Requirements

As discussed in more detail below, students pursuing a thesis need to: develop a thesis topic, compose a thesis committee, complete a thesis proposal, and then defend a thesis. Because the thesis is a large and time-consuming project, students should consider making a timeline of the various stages necessary for completing the thesis and tailor this timeline to their own needs and expectations.

Thesis Topic

The topic for your thesis may be spurred by course readings and seminars, discussions with faculty and other students, or preexisting interests.

Identifying a topic and developing it into a clearly defined thesis topic will entail a considerable amount of reading, and perhaps several periods of trial and error. My best piece of advice here is to focus like a laser beam on one highly specific issue. Do not set out to research the world. If you do it well, your thesis will contribute one small but important piece to a larger puzzle pertaining to scholarly knowledge.

One fruitful way to develop a thesis topic is to learn about faculty members' current research interests and base your thesis on an ongoing research project or the current interest of a faculty member. This strategy is highly encouraged because it will better ensure students the kind of training they need to identify viable research questions, formulate hypotheses and methods, and analyze data. This approach is more likely to produce a desirable outcome in terms of finishing the thesis on time and getting the results published.

To learn about the interests of faculty members, consult their CVs (or "vitas") on the CJ Department's website and read some of their publications. Then, reach out to faculty whose research interests appeal to you and ask to meet with them. Ask about what projects they are currently involved in. Tell them about what issues you are interested in and that you

are on the thesis track. Meet with several faculty members. Take your time. You don't have to meet with all of us, but you want to get a sense of the faculty members and let them get to know you as well. In your meetings, ask for recent publications that perhaps are not on their CVs yet and for suggestions for articles by other researchers to read. You may then, after doing some more readings, wish to meet again with some faculty to keep the conversation rolling. As you do this, viable thesis topics will eventually emerge.

Thesis Committee

The thesis committee consists of the thesis chair and two or three committee members, one of whom must be from outside the department (the "outside member"). To identify a chair, students should learn as much as possible about the research interests and expertise of all departmental faculty members and identify a chair based on these issues and having developed a comfortable working relationship with the faculty member in question. The thesis chair should be compatible with the student, mindful of their career objectives, and should cooperate with students when selecting other members to minimize potential difficulties. Committee members should be identified based on similar criteria. Please recognize that any given faculty member may be unavailable to participate in thesis committee work for a variety of reasons. After composing their thesis committee, students will submit the "Preliminary Program of Study" to the graduate school.

Thesis Proposal

The formal “thesis proposal” is simply a hearing or meeting between the student, all of the thesis committee members, *and the graduate program coordinator* that formalizes the specific requirements for each student’s thesis. The thesis proposal document must be sent to all committee members and the graduate program coordinator at least two weeks before the proposal hearing is scheduled. At this time the student will have written the first part of the thesis, or “front end,” which typically includes the following chapters:

1. **Statement of the research problem.** This chapter should (a) identify the subject of the thesis, (b) make a cogent argument as to why this subject is worthy of scholarly attention, (c) briefly summarize prior research that is most relevant to the current project, and (d) identify how the thesis will “fit” into the corpus of existing research and what contributions to scholarship it will make. As an example of such statements, students could examine the introductory chapter of a scholarly book, the opening sections of a research article, or previous successfully defended theses.
2. **Review of relevant research (“lit review”).** This chapter will typically contain several sections that summarize existing knowledge about issues relevant to the thesis, gaps in knowledge, and limitations to existing research methods – typically shortcomings in data, measurement, or

analytical techniques.

3. **Hypotheses.** This chapter is usually quite short and consists of an enumeration of the hypotheses that will be tested.
4. **Research methods.** This chapter identifies the data that will be used to test the hypothesis, and how the dependent, independent, and control variables will be measured.
5. **Plan of Analysis.** This chapter discusses how the hypotheses will be tested and the type of statistical analyses that will be used.

While the first part of the thesis proposal addresses “why” the thesis research will be undertaken, the second part of the thesis proposal pertains to “how” this research will be performed – in essence, a statement of the “research method.” Importantly, most theses will not employ “primary data,” that is data collected by the student for the express purposes of testing hypotheses in the thesis. Such efforts are often very difficult, fraught with trial and error, and above all too time-consuming for master’s level students. Instead, the typical thesis will employ “secondary data,” that is data that is already collected and available to the student which they will then use to test hypotheses, etc. Such data may be available from governmental agencies, for example, or come from datasets collected by your professors, or through data clearing houses, such as ICSPR (Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research). For guidance regarding such statements, students should look at previous theses or the

methods sections/chapters of research articles or scholarly books.

Students should realize that writing the thesis proposal will usually take several drafts and a great deal of verbal and written communication with all committee members, especially the thesis chair. Two weeks before the thesis proposal hearing, the student must send a complete document to all committee members to give them ample opportunity to read and comment on the proposal. **All committee members should be in basic consent to the thesis proposal in advance of the student's scheduling of the hearing, meaning that they agree with the research intentions of the thesis, the method, and all other parts of the thesis as to this point.** Therefore, the thesis committee members should communicate any major problems with the proposal to the student and the thesis chair in advance of the thesis proposal hearing, and perhaps a new draft will be written before the thesis is actually formally proposed (and the proposal hearing rescheduled).

Students should be advised that this process requires close and careful communication with all committee members and cannot be squeezed into the final days of the semester.

The purpose of the thesis proposal is to clearly and unambiguously identify for both students and committee members the specific requirements for a given student's thesis and to frankly discuss any issues of concern. After the student presents their thesis proposal, the committee members will meet privately to discuss the proposal and to vote on whether or not to accept

the proposal. If the vote is to accept, then there may be small modifications to the proposal document with the approval of all concerned parties; however, extensive revisions should not be made. If major revisions are required, then a new proposal hearing should be scheduled once the revisions are successfully made. At the completion of a “successful” thesis proposal meeting, the student, thesis committee members, and graduate director will sign a statement to the effect that the proposal has taken place and is acceptable, and this statement as well as a copy of the thesis proposal will be placed on file with the graduate director and the graduate school. Successful proposals cannot be substantially revised or changed without the approval of the graduate director to ensure that the thesis process is fair to the student. Typically, students are enrolled in Thesis I at the time of their thesis proposal.

Thesis Defense

The thesis defense is the final milestone for completing the master’s degree, and it is here that the criteria established at the thesis proposal stage are fulfilled. Students must remember that writing the thesis will entail several drafts, many revisions, and close contact with all committee members, especially the thesis committee chair. Typically, students will work primarily with the thesis chair as new chapters are written and revisions are made. Periodically, and depending on their expertise and desires, students

should supply preliminary thesis drafts to the other committee members as well and incorporate their feedback into subsequent revisions.

Once the thesis chair feels that all requirements for the thesis have been adequately addressed, the students should submit this draft to the remaining committee members and address any concerns these members have (perhaps with written revisions to the thesis). The thesis document must be sent to all committee members and the graduate program coordinator at least two weeks before the proposal hearing is scheduled.

Students cannot squeeze this process into the final days of the semester.

When all committee members are satisfied with the thesis, a formal hearing called a “thesis defense” will be scheduled and held. The thesis defense consists of a meeting between the student, thesis chair, all other thesis committee members, the graduate advisor, and any other interested faculty or students. The thesis defense must be publicized through email and flyers to all CJ faculty and graduate students. At the defense hearing, after the student has given their presentation, the faculty members present who are not on the committee as well as other attendees will be given the opportunity to ask questions and comment on the thesis. Once this process is completed, the committee members will meet privately with the student to discuss their questions and concerns. Then the committee members will meet in private to vote on whether to accept the thesis or not. If all thesis committee members deem the thesis as acceptable, then the “Thesis

Defense” form will be completed and submitted to the graduate school. Committee members may ask for minor revisions to the thesis document before the student submits it to the graduate school and the thesis chair should ensure that these revisions are completed. Students must be enrolled in Thesis II at the time of their thesis defense.

Thesis Proposal and Defense Information and Policies

1. The UTEP Graduate School has a [Complete Your Degree](#) timeline that contains the various forms you will need.
2. Thesis Proposal
 - a. A closed hearing where all thesis committee members will attend, and the Graduate Program Coordinator may attend.
 - b. The proposal document must be sent to the thesis committee members and the Graduate Program Coordinator at least two weeks before the proposal hearing is scheduled.
 - c. The proposal hearing may be held virtually (e.g., via Zoom).
3. Thesis Defense
 - a. An open hearing where all thesis committee members will attend, the Graduate Program Coordinator will attend, and other faculty and students, both graduate and undergraduate, are encouraged to attend. Members of the public including family members may also attend.
 - b. The completed thesis must be sent to the thesis committee

members and the Graduate Program Coordinator at least two weeks before the defense hearing is scheduled.

- c. The thesis defense must be advertised, and notice given to all CJ faculty and graduate students, at least two weeks before the defense hearing is scheduled. This can be accomplished by simply sending an email to the Graduate Coordinator who will forward the information.
- d. If these conditions are not met, the Graduate Program Coordinator will not sign the Thesis Defense Form and the defense will need to be rescheduled, and this may entail enrolling in Thesis II for an additional semester.
- e. The defense hearing may be held virtually (e.g., via Zoom).

The University of Texas at El Paso
 Department of Criminal Justice
 Master of Science-Criminology and Criminal Justice
 Professional/Non-Thesis Track

Name:
 Student ID:
 Email:

M.S. in Criminology and Criminal Justice			
Required Courses (18 Credit Hours--3 Core and 3 Track)	Semester/Year	Hours	Grade
Core Courses			
CRIJ 5305—Proseminar in Criminology and Criminal Justice	Fall Only	3	
CRIJ 5310—Advanced Criminological Theory	Spring Only	3	
CRIJ 5315—Seminar in Criminal Justice Policy	Fall Only	3	
Track Courses			
CRIJ 5300—Criminal Justice Administration, Management, & Organizations	Fall Only	3	
CRIJ 5350—Program Evaluation and Evidence-Based Practices	Spring Only	3	
CRIJ 5390—Capstone in Criminology and Criminal Justice	Spring Only	3	
Electives (18 Credit Hours) 9 Credit Hours must be CRIJ-Designated			
CRIJ 5302—Research Methods in Intelligence and Criminal Justice		3	
CRIJ 5322—Seminar in Policing and Law Enforcement		3	
CRIJ 5324—Seminar in Courts and Sentencing		3	
CRIJ 5326—Correctional Policy and Management		3	
CRIJ 5331—Communities and Crime		3	
CRIJ 5333—Immigration and Crime		3	
CRIJ 5335—Transnational Criminal Organization		3	
CRIJ 5337—Drugs, Crime, and Criminal Justice Policy		3	
CRIJ 5339—Race/Ethnicity in the Criminal Justice System		3	
CRIJ 5340—Seminar in Selected Criminal Justice Topics ¹		3	
CRIJ 5341—Violence and Victimization		3	
CRIJ 5343—Crime and Border Security (Cross-Listed INSS 5343)		3	
CRIJ 5360—Independent Study in Criminology and Criminal Justice		3	
CRIJ 5385—Graduate Study Abroad in Criminal Justice ²		3	
Other Courses			

¹ This course may be repeated for credit, provided there is a different topic/instructor.

² This course requires international travel.

The University of Texas at El Paso
 Department of Criminal Justice
 Master of Science-Criminology and Criminal Justice
Thesis Track

Name:
 Student ID:
 Email:

M.S. in Criminology and Criminal Justice			
Required Courses (21 Credit Hours--3 Core & 4 Track Courses)	Semester/Year	Hours	Grade
Core Courses			
(1) CRIJ 5305—Proseminar in Criminology and Criminal Justice	Fall Only	3	
(2) CRIJ 5310—Advanced Criminological Theory	Spring Only	3	
(3) CRIJ 5315—Seminar in Criminal Justice Policy	Fall Only	3	
Track Courses			
<i>One Research Methods Course:</i>			
(1) CRIJ 5302 Research Methods in Intelligence and Criminal Justice	Fall Only	3	
<i>One Statistics Course:</i>			
(2) CRIJ 5361 Statistical Analysis in Intelligence and Criminal Justice	Spring Only	3	
(3) CRIJ 5397—Master’s Thesis I		3	
(4) CRIJ 5399—Master’s Thesis II		3	
Electives (15 Credit Hours) 9 Credit Hours must be CRIJ-Designated			
CRIJ 5300—Criminal Justice Administration, Management, & Organizations	Fall Only	3	
CRIJ 5322—Seminar in Policing and Law Enforcement		3	
CRIJ 5324—Seminar in Courts and Sentencing		3	
CRIJ 5326—Correctional Policy and Management		3	
CRIJ 5331—Communities and Crime		3	
CRIJ 5333—Immigration, Crime, and Criminal Justice		3	
CRIJ 5335—Transnational Criminal Organization		3	
CRIJ 5337—Drugs, Crime, and Criminal Justice Policy		3	
CRIJ 5339—Race/Ethnicity in the Criminal Justice System		3	
CRIJ 5340—Seminar in Selected Criminal Justice Topics ³		3	
CRIJ 5341—Violence and Victimization		3	
CRIJ 5343—Crime and Border Security (Cross-Listed INSS 5343)		3	
CRIJ 5360—Independent Study in Criminology and Criminal Justice		3	
CRIJ 5385—Graduate Study Abroad in Criminal Justice ⁴		3	

³ This course may be repeated for credit, provided there is a different topic/instructor.

⁴ This course requires international travel.