

NMSU Department of Criminal Justice Master of Criminal Justice Degree Graduate Handbook

The faculty and staff of the Department of Criminal Justice welcome you to the Master of Criminal Justice (MCJ) Program at New Mexico State University. We hope you find your experience with us to be of value in attaining your academic and professional goals.

You are embarking on an incredible opportunity to expand your knowledge and develop your ability to work with the complexity of the interrelated social problems and policies around which the criminal justice system is organized. We encourage you to take advantage of the depth and breadth of knowledge your professors and peers will expose you to in the MCJ program.

Graduate studies are considerably different from the undergraduate experience. Some of the more important skills acquired while earning the MCJ is the ability to write well and work independently to solve complex and in some cases abstract problems and assignments. *Graduate students, unlike undergraduates, should not expect to obtain a degree merely by passing courses.* Development of research skills requires a student to perform an open-minded, systematic, critical analysis of all available information in an attempt to synthesize new patterns.

TWO OPTIONS FOR THE MCJ DEGREE

There are two options to complete the MCJ degree, and one of these options is offered both online and through campus-based courses. The **Coursework Option** culminates in a Comprehensive Exam (“Comps”), typically during the second year. This option is available to both Global and main campus students. The **Thesis Option** can only be completed through traditional, on-campus coursework culminating in a thesis defense. Both of these options are designed to be completed within two years (four semesters), though in some cases students may take longer.

The following rules apply:

1. Students will designate their interest in either the Global or the main campus program in their application.
2. Students may switch between the Global and the main Campus-Based program upon written request and approval of the MCJ Program Director.
3. Students accepted into the MCJ Campus-Based program enroll in campus-based courses, unless the course is only offered online, in which case they may enroll if there is room in the course after the online students have enrolled.
4. The **Thesis option** is typically only available to campus-based students. Only under unique circumstances may online students petition to write a thesis. Otherwise, they utilize the

Coursework option.

5. The degree designation on the final transcript is a Master of Criminal Justice. There is no designation indicating the Global or Campus-Based program.
6. The Director of the MCJ serves as the advisor for all students pursuing the MCJ degree coursework.
7. Campus-based students are typically only available to select the thesis option. Students pursuing the thesis option must choose a faculty advisor. This option can only be completed through traditional, on-campus coursework culminating in a thesis defense. *The detailed information about the thesis option is in Appendix 1.*

MCJ DEGREE COURSEWORK

Students choosing the **Coursework option (see the curriculum below)** are required to pass two formal written comprehensive examinations, one on research methods and one on criminological theory. Only those students who have completed all core/required courses are eligible to take the written comprehensive examination, but in some cases the students can be simultaneously enrolled in a course (pending MCJ Program Director approval). Students may not take the exam earlier than their third semester in the program.

Students must take a series of Core and Elective courses. Graduate students must earn a “B” in all core classes, and at least a 3.0 cumulative average on all graduate work to stay in the graduate program. See the Graduate Catalog for information about coursework requirements.

Coursework Option – 36 Total Credits

- Core Classes: 15 Credits

Analysis: Methods & Policy Sequence (6 credits)

CJ 501 – Research Methods in Criminal Justice (3 credits)

CJ 502 – Criminal Justice Statistics (3 credits)

Theory: Criminology, Diversity & Ethics (9 credits)

CJ 511 – Nature of Crime (3 credits)

CJ 514 – Race, Crime and Justice (3 credits)

CJ 525 – Issues in Ethics, Law, and CJ (3 credits)

- CJ Electives: 12 Credits

Students are required to take 12 credits from the CJ curriculum (e.g., CJUS 532, CJUS 537, CJUS 545, and CJUS 581). In addition, one of the following classes, Directed Readings (CJ

591), Internship (CJ 593), or Independent Research (CJ 592), may be used as CJ electives; only 3 credits are admitted among them.

- General Electives: 9 Credits

These may be selected entirely from the Criminal Justice curriculum or may be selected from the graduate curriculum of any other department at NMSU. Also, one of the following classes, Directed Readings (CJ 591), Internship (CJ 593), or Independent Research (CJ 592), may be used as general electives; only 3 credits are admitted among them.

COMPREHENSIVE EXAM

Comps is given electronically once each semester over consecutive weekends and are typically scheduled in October or November of the Fall semester and February or March of the Spring semester. Students are responsible for being aware of the formal announcement of Comps, applying to take Comps, and successfully Comps. Thus it is critical that you maintain an official NMSU email address. A call goes out to the graduate student listserv and the Graduate Program Canvas page early in both semesters. Students that apply to take Comps will receive instructions from the MCJ Program Director outlining tips for preparing, exam date(s), expectations for a passing grade, and other information relative to that particular examination.

Comps Canvas page contains study materials with general guidelines, grading rubrics, etc. Notify the graduate student coordinator of your intention to take the exam when the call goes out over the listserv to be added to the Canvas page.

Comps has two components reflecting the primary areas of the core curriculum: Research Methods and Criminological Theory. Each student must write a passing answer to the provided exam component from each core curriculum area in order to pass the exam.

All students taking Comps at a scheduled date will answer the same questions. Student answers to the questions are blind graded by three professors for each exam component. Exams are graded as either pass or not pass by 2/3 majority "vote".

A student receiving a grade of *not passing* on any component of the exam is provided with feedback from the grading committee on how to improve their responses. The student is required to retake that portion of the exam at the next regularly scheduled Comps.

Students may only take each section of Comps two times. After two failing attempts, the student will not obtain a MCJ degree.

MCJ INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

Any MCJ Graduate student with a 3.0 GPA or better who would like to explore some aspect of the criminal justice system in more depth and receive on-the-job experience can enroll in this

program. Internships are encouraged.

This program is run through the department via the CJ 593 “Criminal Justice Internship” course, and it is overseen by the Internship Coordinator. This course can be taken as a full semester course or as a second-half Mini-semester. It can be taken for 1-3 credits and may be repeated one time. These credits can be used as elective credits for the MCJ degree.

There is an application form to fill out for this option. These are available to you only after you have secured the internship site and have completed the internship contract (the contract must be signed by you, your internship supervisor, and the Department Internship Coordinator). If you are in the Online program, you will need to make arrangements with the Internship Coordinator to assist you in the completing the forms needed for course registration. ***More information is shown in Appendix 2.***

DUAL MASTER’S DEGREE OPTIONS

Some students are interested in dual Master’s degree programs. Options include: MPA/MCJ. Please see <https://deptofgov.nmsu.edu/academic-programs/mpa-joint-degree-programs.html> for more information.

GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS

The Department of Criminal Justice has a small number of teaching assistantships (TAs) available each year for Traditional (not online) MCJ students. The allocation of TAs (and their hours) typically occurs late in the Spring semester or in the early Summer but must be in place by the beginning of August. TAs will be assigned to specific professors, to cover the number of hours assigned per week (either a 10 or 20 hours per week appointment). An attempt will be made to match thesis students with their thesis advisor’s classes, but this cannot be guaranteed.

TA appointments are awarded to students on a competitive basis, but need-based criteria can also be used. We use undergraduate and current GPA, the quality of the writing sample or progress in the program, and in some cases a short interview with the MCJ Program Director to rank the students interested in a TA position. Thesis students and returning (2nd year) students may be given priority but this cannot be guaranteed. Note that poor performance in TA duties is grounds for non-renewal of the TA position, even after only one semester.

TAs must report for duty on the Monday of the week that classes start. There will be a group meeting with the MCJ Program Director and other required graduate school orientations.

STUDENT CODE OF CONDUCT

Students are expected to follow the University's Student Code of Conduct. Faculty take the issue of academic dishonesty in all of its forms seriously. It is important for each student to be familiar

with the definitions and procedures outlined in the section of the NMSU Graduate Catalog titled “Disciplinary Issues for Graduate Students”. Of specific note in the C.J. Department: while we encourage students to use a single topic area as the basis for papers in different classes, the papers must be substantially different for each class. If a student is preparing or has prepared papers on the same general topic area in other courses, he or she must inform the instructor of this fact when he or she submits a paper. Ultimately it is the responsibility of the student to be certain that work turned in for a class assignment is appropriate for that assignment.

The highest standards of professionalism and collegiality are also observed and expected of students, faculty, and staff associated with the graduate program. Incivilities toward peers or other members of this community are not tolerated and may be reported to the dean of students. Online students should be respectful with their comments in class discussion posts for example, as should campus students in their personal and online interactions with relevant others.

Appendix 1

THESIS OPTION

Students interested in the thesis option typically decide to pursue this during their first or second semester. All students pursuing the Thesis option must choose a major faculty advisor who will serve as the Chair of the student's thesis committee. The faculty member is not required to accept a student's request to pursue a thesis option. Students can make inquiries to individual faculty members or they can discuss their interests with the MCJ Program Director, who may suggest options for advisors.

The thesis project requires that a student be able to work independently and in consultation with their advisor. The project is conducted and completed entirely by the student. Ultimately, a student considering the Thesis Option should assume that they will need to gather and analyze all data necessary to complete it. It is important for students to understand that the thesis is finished when the chair and committee agree that the thesis is complete. The Thesis option requires a great deal of self-discipline on the part of the student. The chair and committee are there to provide advice and assistance while guiding and helping students learn the research process, not to do the project for the student.

Students may use a pre-assembled dataset for their analysis. These may come from local, state or federal agencies or from the University of Michigan Interuniversity Consortium of Political and Social Research (ICPSR) for example (see <http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/>). Your advisor will notify you of other sources of data available for use. Original data collection is also an option in some cases, depending on the topic, approach, and context of the research.

A thesis is an extended in-depth analysis that ultimately contributes to the body of research knowledge about the chosen thesis topic. A common organization of a written thesis involves several chapters that should include the following: Introduction, Literature Review, Data and Research Method, Analysis, Discussion, and Conclusion. Each one of these chapters are thematically related and build to a conclusion communicating the significance of the entire project to the scholarly understanding about the thesis topic. There is no clearly definable upper limit on the number of pages that might be necessary to satisfactorily achieve this goal. In the past, completed theses have ranged in length from 50 to 150 pages.

*** IRB Approval is Required**

Social science research in the field of Criminal Justice frequently involves the systematic analysis of human behavior(s). As such, a thesis project frequently falls within the category of "Human Subjects Research" that must satisfy criterion established by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of New Mexico State University. The IRB process is typically lengthy, and a student's thesis research may not formally proceed until IRB approval is granted. This is especially true when one is using data with identifying information on human subjects. Information about the IRB process and requirements can be found at

<https://research.nmsu.edu/RIC/IRB/index.html>

Students choosing the Thesis option must complete 6 credits of CJ 599, an independent research course directed by the chair of your thesis committee for the purpose of working toward completion of your thesis. Three credits are taken in the fall semester of the second year, and three credits are taken in the spring.

Thesis Option - MCJ Curriculum

- Core Classes: 15 Credits

CJUS 501 – Research Methods in Criminal Justice (3 credits)

CJUS 502 – Statistics in Criminal Justice (3 credits)

CJUS 511 – Nature of Crime (3 credits)

CJUS 514 - Race, Crime, and Justice (3 credits)

CJUS 525 – Issues in Ethics, Law and CJ (3 credits)

- General Electives: 12 Credits

At least three (3) of the 12 credits must be from the Criminal Justice Curriculum. The other nine (9) can either come from the CJ Curriculum or grad courses in other departments. In addition, one of the following classes, Directed Readings (CJ 591), Internship (CJ 593), or Independent Research (CJ 592), may be used as general electives; only 3 credits are admitted among them.

- Thesis Hours: 6 Credits (CJUS 599)

The 6 credits cannot be taken in the same semester. Request registration for thesis hours from your thesis advisor. See the Graduate Student Handbook for Details about the thesis requirements and process.

The official Graduate School process and form for applying to defend the thesis can be found at <https://gradschool.nmsu.edu/Current%20Students/thesis-and-dissertation.html>. A thesis defense cannot be scheduled without the permission of the Chair of your thesis committee. There are additional deadlines related to the editing, binding, and depositing of a final copy of the thesis in the Library. Information about the process and all deadlines for each semester, can be found at <https://gradschool.nmsu.edu/index.html>.

Process & Timeline

- First or Second Semester:

- Select a topic and advisor, typically based on coursework completed in his/her class.
- Write a pre-proposal (2 to 3 pages)
- Discuss committee composition
- Submit the completed, signed Thesis Approval Form to the MCJ Director
- Begin IRB approval process

- Third Semester:

- Enroll in 3 credit hours of the Thesis course (CJ 599)

- Draft a written proposal (10 – 20 pages).
- Conduct a formal proposal presentation to your committee.
- If approved, submit the signed proposal form and the written proposal to MCJ Director and Department Head.
- Data collection, analysis and writing up results.
 - Select the Dean's faculty representative from outside the department, typically someone who is familiar with your topic/line of research
- Fourth Semester:
 - Enroll in 3 credit hours of the Thesis course (CJ 599)
 - Finish writing the thesis
 - schedule and pass the final thesis defense
 - format and submit your completed thesis to the graduate school

****Note: The proposal defense and final defense cannot occur in the same semester.***

Thesis Committee

A thesis committee has a minimum of three faculty members: the advisor, the secondary reader, and the outside member. The advisor and secondary reader must be Criminal Justice faculty members who are also on the Graduate Faculty of NMSU. The outside member, the Dean's Representative, must reside in a department other than Criminal Justice and must also be a member of the Graduate Faculty of NMSU. This outside member should be chosen for their familiarity or expertise with the thesis topic, as they will read the thesis and participate in the defense. While this person does not have to be involved in the research or the proposal hearing, it is strongly encouraged. The secondary and outside members will be chosen in consultation with the advisor.

In rare circumstances, the student may wish to change advisors. In this case, the student should set up a meeting with the MCJ Program Director to discuss the concerns. If the MCJ Program Director is the advisor, then the student should set up a meeting with the Department Head instead. All parties will try to reach a mutually agreeable course of action.

Thesis Proposal and Hearing

Thesis students must submit a thesis proposal to their faculty committee for approval. An approved thesis proposal is one wherein the faculty committee determines that the student demonstrates a comprehensive understanding of the nexus of theory, method, and policy as it applies to the proposed thesis project. The proposal contains a description of the data and analysis plan for approval.

This information will be presented to the committee at a proposal hearing. At the discretion of the faculty committee the proposal may be considered inadequate and the student will be required to revise and resubmit the thesis proposal until the committee determines the proposal is satisfactory. The proposal will be signed by the committee to indicate that it is ready to go forward.

Thesis Defense

The final examination involves a student presentation to the committee. The defense will normally be open to the public and should be announced to the criminal justice faculty and graduate students. The defense is followed by a question and answer session mainly covering the thesis topic, but may also include questions that cover the candidate's program of study. After Q&A, the student and audience exit the room and a closed session is held with only the committee.

Students must be enrolled in one (1) credit hour or pay an examination fee to the Graduate School during the semester or summer session they wish to graduate. Students may not schedule a formal thesis defense without the permission of the advisor. Students are encouraged to schedule the defense during the normal work days of the faculty (which do not include Summer or Winter Breaks). If the committee agrees to meet, the exam can occur during these times. Students must be continually enrolled for at least one credit each semester (not including summer) until their defense. After seven years, coursework at NMSU "expires" and thus this can be considered the maximum time allowed to obtain the MCJ degree.

Appendix 2

How do I find a place to do my internship?

The Department Internship Coordinator can provide you with information on which agencies in the local Las Cruces area typically accept MCJ interns. You can also consult with other students, other faculty, CJ career guides, the web, etc. for ideas about possible internship opportunities in your area of interest. It is also possible to organize an internship placement at your current place of employment providing that the internship experience is above and beyond your normal workplace activities and responsibilities. Once you have an idea of a place or places to contact, you are responsible for making the contact, securing the agreement, and getting the contract signed by your internship supervisor.

What does the internship involve?

To earn three credits of CJ 593 an intern must be on site and involved in the internship for 10 hours per week for 14 weeks of the 16-week semester, or for 20 hours per week during one of the short summer sessions. Each intern must also create an internship log where you regularly record your hours, days, and activities. You are also required to write a reflective paper at the end of the semester describing your experiences, what you learned, and integrating your coursework with your “real world” experience in the internship. These materials must be submitted to the Department Internship Coordinator by the due date specified by the Coordinator.

Can I get paid for being an intern?

There are very few paid internships in the local area. Some students have sought internship opportunities through the co-op office in Garcia Annex and have completed paid internships out of state. You may complete your internship anywhere, as long as it is a criminal justice or related agency approved by the Department Internship Coordinator.

Can I do an internship where I work?

Generally, no. But if the organization you work with is large enough that you can be assigned to another unit or program for internship purposes, you may discuss this possibility with the Department Internship Coordinator.

Does the internship count as an MCJ Criminal Justice elective?

Yes. Remember that there are two options for completing the MCJ program.

The *thesis option* requires you to complete 12 additional elective credits beyond the 15 credit core course requirement, of which 3 credits must be graduate Criminal Justice courses. Three of those credits may be selected from CJ 591* Directed Readings, CJ 592 Independent Research, or CJ 593 Internship. Remember that only one of these courses (3 credits) will count toward completion of our MCJ program curriculum and CJ 593 may be one of those courses.

The *coursework option* requires you to complete 21 additional elective credits beyond the 15

credit core course requirement. Twelve of those credits must be graduate Criminal Justice courses and 9 credits may come from any academic department, including Criminal Justice. Up to 6 credits of CJ 591, CJ 592, or CJ 593 may be used to satisfy the elective credit requirement. So, under this option a student may earn up to 6 credit hours of Internship credit.

Steps to Seeking an Internship:

1. Determine whether the internship fits with your chosen degree plan option.
2. Determine whether an internship fits in your schedule for a given semester.
3. Determine what kind of work-related experience you'd like to have and the kind of agency in which you'd like to be placed.
4. Locate an agency willing to work with you.
5. Meet with the agency representative, discuss the parameters of the internship, go through their process for becoming an intern (some agencies may require a background check), and have them sign the contract.
6. Forward the signed contract to the Department Internship Coordinator and register for the course.