

**Policy and Procedures for the Doctoral Comprehensive Examination**  
**Department of Criminal Justice**  
**University of Nevada, Las Vegas**

**GENERAL OBJECTIVES**

The criminal justice doctoral comprehensive examination is designed to help students become experts in their research area of interest, develop an understanding of the strengths and limitations of current research, discover new avenues for scholarly inquiry in their selected research area, and move them closer toward independent learning and scholarship. The examination process will allow students to read *deeply* and *widely* among their areas of interest, establish a focus for their future research agendas, and lay the groundwork for developing productive publication records.

Successful completion of the criminal justice doctoral comprehensive examination will allow students to:

- (1) Work closely with supervising faculty to identify and evaluate the most critical and influential literature surrounding their selected area of expertise
- (2) Produce a comprehensive synthesis of relevant literature and generate new perspectives or integrations of extant findings/concepts/theories to identify new avenues for research
- (3) Demonstrate the ability to produce manuscripts of publishable quality and, through an oral defense, mastery of literature in their area of interest

**REQUIREMENTS**

This document provides guidance for each of the comprehensive examination requirements listed below. If further clarification is needed, please speak directly with your advisor or graduate coordinator.

- A. Committee Structure
- B. Completion Timeline
- C. Manuscript Topic and Focus
- D. Manuscript Format and Length
- E. Oral Defense

**Committee Structure**

Students will select three faculty members – one chair and two members – to serve as their comprehensive examination committee. Students are responsible for identifying faculty members with relevant areas of expertise and requesting/obtaining their service as committee participants. The committee chair must be a tenured or tenure-track UNLV criminal justice faculty member. The committee members must also be tenured or tenure-track UNLV faculty members (one may be from another accredited higher education institution with approval from the committee chair). At least one of the two committee members must be a UNLV criminal

justice faculty member, unless exigent circumstances or reasonable justification exists and prior approval is obtained from the criminal justice graduate coordinator.

### **Completion Timeline**

The doctoral comprehensive examination process must be completed over two academic semesters. Although generally discouraged, this can include summer session registration if reasonable justification exists and with approval from both the committee chair and the graduate coordinator. Students will enroll in 3 credits of CRJ 794 during both semesters. With guidance from their committee chair, most full-time doctoral students should register for their first semester of comprehensive examination credits during the spring semester of their second year or the fall semester of their third academic year. Below are steps for earning an “S” grade to indicate satisfactory progress and completion of the examination process for both semesters:

#### *First Semester*

- (1) Obtain approval from advisor/committee chair and graduate coordinator and enroll in 3 credits of CRJ 794.
- (2) Formalize the committee (chair and two members).
- (3) Obtain topic approval and establish goals of the project in collaboration with the selected committee.
- (4) Compile a comprehensive reading list with committee input.
- (5) Produce a draft manuscript outline for committee review and comment.
- (6) Establish a tentative timeline for draft manuscript submissions to committee chair and members, as well as a target defense date for the subsequent semester.
- (7) Begin the writing process.
- (8) Submit the Doctoral Comprehensive Examination – Topic and Advisory Committee form, obtain committee signatures, and submit the form to the graduate coordinator prior to the last official day of the semester.

#### *Second Semester*

- (1) Obtain approval from advisor/committee chair and graduate coordinator and enroll in 3 credits of CRJ 794.
- (2) Work closely with chair and submit manuscript drafts to committee based on the timeline established in the first semester.
- (3) Submit a final manuscript for committee review after receiving chair approval and at least two weeks prior to the scheduled oral defense.
- (4) Notify the graduate coordinator and department’s Administrative Assistant of the date/time of the scheduled oral defense to reserve a room.
- (5) Complete and pass an oral defense of the manuscript.
- (6) Complete any changes or additions to the manuscript requested by the committee during the oral defense.

- (7) Complete the Doctoral Comprehensive Examination Defense Approval form, obtain committee signatures, and submit the form and an electronic copy of the final manuscript to the graduate coordinator prior to the last official day of the semester.

A grade of "I" will be assigned if a student fails to achieve the required steps before the end of either semester. Students earning an "I" must complete the required steps during the subsequent academic semester, excluding summer. Failure to do so will result in a change of grade to an "F." Students who earn an "F" grade for CRJ 794 will be placed on academic probation. Two "F" grades earned for CRJ 794 will result in the student's separation from the criminal justice doctoral program.

### **Manuscript Topic and Focus**

The manuscript is *not* intended to be a simple literature review; *nor* is it intended to be the first chapter of a dissertation. Students are expected to introduce a new framework from which to interpret existing literature. This might involve, but is not limited to, (1) integrating two or more divergent literatures, (2) using theory from another area or discipline to reexamine criminal justice findings, (3) critiquing existing research frameworks based on recent empirical findings, (4) exploring the potential impact of adopting a new methodology to examine a specific topic, or (5) proposing new definitions of existing concepts or potential theoretical advancements based on research findings.

While the topic and general goals of the manuscript should be agreed upon through student and committee collaboration, all manuscripts should achieve, at minimum, the following five objectives:

- (1) Clearly state the general research area to be explored and the goals of the manuscript. Explain why the topic/goals selected are important and why other scholars or practitioners should care about the purpose of the manuscript.
- (2) Provide a summary and synthesis of the extant literature selected for review. Explain the relevant theoretical and empirical findings as they relate to the identified topic/goals.
- (3) Describe the common methodologies used to explore the topic of interest. Explain any methodological advances and describe the potential limitations of existing methodologies.
- (4) Outline unanswered research questions. Identify the "gaps" in existing knowledge by proposing new avenues for theoretical development or research.
- (5) Offer policy recommendations or practical applications supported by the literature examination. Explain why it is important to consider these recommendations/applications from both a scholarly and justice system perspective.

### **Manuscript Format and Length**

The final written manuscript must follow APA formatting, including one-inch margins, numbered pages, double-spaced formatting, and 12-point Times New Roman font. The document must also include a single-spaced cover page, signature page, table of contents, and abstract. See the Appendix for a sample cover and signature page.

The manuscript length is to be decided by the committee chair based on the topic area and goals of the examination. Typical manuscripts will range between 30 and 50 pages in length, exclusive of references.

### **Oral Defense**

Students must complete an oral defense of their manuscript in front of their committee chair and members. Students will pass the oral defense if all committee members agree that four criteria have been met:

- (1) The goals of the project, as agreed upon by the committee chair and members, are achieved through the literature examination and evaluation.
- (2) The manuscript is written at a level that is considered by the committee to be of publishable quality (i.e., the quality of the writing and presentation of ideas is in line with discipline standards).
- (3) The student can clearly articulate the findings outlined in their manuscript.
- (4) The student demonstrates mastery of their area's literature through responses to questions posed by committee members during the defense.

If one or more of the criteria are not achieved during the oral defense, the committee may ask the student to provide additional information, complete further manuscript revisions, or require that the student redefend their manuscript (while adhering to the completion timeline requirements outlined previously in this document).

APPENDIX: SAMPLE COVER AND SIGNATURE PAGE

Running head: PLACE IN ALL CAPS

Insert Title Here:  
Continue Second Line if Necessary

Student Name  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas  
Department of Criminal Justice

RUNNING HEAD IN ALL CAPS

**UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, LAS VEGAS**

**DEPARTMENT OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE**

We recommend that the manuscript  
prepared under our supervision

by

**Student Name**

entitled

**Insert Title Here:**

**Continue Second Line if Necessary**

be accepted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

**Doctor in Philosophy (Ph.D.), Criminology and Criminal Justice**

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Dr. Name, Committee Chair, Department of Criminal Justice, UNLV

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Dr. Name, Committee Member, Department of Criminal Justice, UNLV

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Dr. Name, Committee Member, Department of Criminal Justice, UNLV