

THESIS AND PROFESSIONAL PAPER GUIDELINES

Revised 8/4/03

Criminal Justice graduate students are required to complete either a thesis or a professional paper. The thesis/professional paper is designed to provide students with an opportunity to display knowledge and skills that have been developed during graduate school. Both the thesis and professional paper require students to analyze either quantitative or qualitative data in some way.

Professional Paper

Students in the professional master's program must complete a professional paper. The professional paper is designed to demonstrate program evaluation skills that students have acquired during their graduate education. For example, students working in professional agencies may conduct an evaluation of some program or policy that is relevant to their agency. Ideally, the professional paper should be a pragmatic study of some issue that is relevant to the student's professional job. A student who is not working at an agency can complete the professional paper by evaluating some public policy issue (e.g., an evaluation of a particular crime prevention program, a measure of the comprehensibility of jury instructions used in Nevada courts, an evaluation of a rehabilitation program used by a local correctional facility, an evaluation of different forms of probation, etc.).

Professional Paper Format

The professional paper format should be in a style relevant to the student's professional background. Typically, this will be as an agency report. However, other styles may also be suitable. For example, the student may write the professional paper as a legal brief. Examples are on reserve in the departmental office. The specific format to be used will be decided upon at the proposal meeting (discussed below).

Thesis

Students in the traditional master's program must complete a thesis. The thesis is designed to be a theoretically guided examination of some criminal justice issue. Thus, the thesis can be similar to a professional paper insofar as it may be an evaluation of a program or policy issue, but the evaluation should be based on predictions derived from a theory. Alternatively, the thesis could involve basic research where a student tests hypotheses that are derived from theories relevant to criminal justice. Ideally, the thesis is similar to a journal article on a topic that makes a contribution to the field.

Thesis Format

The thesis format is that of a journal article. It should begin with a literature review followed by a method section, a results section, and a discussion section.

Additional Formatting Requirements

The Graduate College also has specific formatting guidelines that must be followed. Students should consult the "[Guide To Preparing and Submitting a Thesis or](#)

Dissertation” [production: can you link to the guide that lives on <http://graduatecollege.unlv.edu/current/thesis/>], available from the Graduate College.

Thesis/Professional Paper Committee

Graduate students must select a thesis/professional paper committee. The committee is composed of three members from the Department of Criminal Justice and an additional member who must come from an outside department. One faculty member from the Department of Criminal Justice will serve as chair of the committee. The chair will guide the student through the process of completing their thesis/professional paper. Students should first select the Chair of their committee, who will advise the student on other appropriate members of the committee.

Thesis/Professional Paper Proposal

Graduate students must submit a proposal that briefly describes the project they wish to conduct to all members of their committee. The proposal should address the following issues:

- 1. Purpose of the Study**
 - (a) What exactly do you want to study? Why?
 - (b) What is the theoretical and/or practical significance of your study?
- 2. Literature Review**
 - (a) What other studies have been done that relate to your study? What are the basic findings of those studies?
 - (b) What theories address your research topic? What do they say about it?
- 3. Methodology**
 - (a) If relevant, specific hypotheses to be tested should be clearly stated.
 - (b) What are the independent, dependent, and control variables in your study?
 - (c) How will data be collected (e.g., survey, experiment, field research)?
 - (d) How will you measure the variables in your study?
 - (e) What type of sample will be used? What are your units of analysis?
 - (f) How will human subjects be protected?
 - (g) How will data sets be acquired if secondary data analysis is employed?
- 4. Data Analysis**
 - (a) What kind of statistical analysis do you expect to conduct (e.g., regression, ANOVA, chi-square, etc.)?
- 5. Time Table**
 - (a) A timetable for completing each section of the thesis/professional paper must be included.
- 6. Materials**
 - (a) If relevant, provide copies of proposed materials (e.g., questionnaires to be administered).

Proposal Meeting

After the graduate student submits a copy of the proposal to the committee members, the student will meet with the committee and discuss the proposed project.

All committee members must approve the proposal before the graduate student begins

work on the project. Once consensus has been reached about the proposed research, committee members will sign your *Appointment of Examination Committee* form indicating acceptance of the study as outlined in the proposal.

Schedule for Completing Thesis Professional Paper Requirements

Students must follow the schedule for completion of requirements described below. If a student cannot meet the specified deadlines, they must obtain written approval to extend the deadlines from the Department of Criminal Justice graduate coordinator.

Students who do not complete the requirements by the deadlines (or who do not obtain deadline extension approval from the graduate coordinator) may be separated from the Criminal Justice Program and/or may have their graduate assistantship funding withdrawn.

Deadlines for Completing Thesis/Professional Paper Requirements — Full-Time Graduate

Students and Graduate Assistants

1. Students must form the committee for their thesis/professional paper by the mid-semester mark of their third semester.
2. Students must have their thesis/professional paper proposal meeting before the final day of their third semester.
3. Students must submit their thesis/professional paper to their committee 20 days before the official last day to defend their thesis/professional paper of their fourth semester. This date changes every semester and is published in the official UNLV schedule.

Note: Summer sessions do not count as official semesters.

Deadlines for Completing Thesis/Professional Paper Requirements — Part-Time Graduate Students

1. Students must form the committee for their thesis/professional paper by the mid-semester mark of the semester the student will earn their 24th credit.
2. Students must have their thesis/professional paper proposal meeting before the final day of the semester they will earn their 24th credit.
3. Students must submit their thesis/professional paper to their committee 20 days before the official last day to defend their thesis/professional paper in their final semester (e.g., after completing 30 credits). This date changes every semester and is published in the official UNLV schedule.

Note: Part-time students must complete 30 credits of course work within 5 1/2 years of beginning the graduate program in criminal justice.