

# NEW MEXICO STATE UNIVERSITY



## Department of Criminal Justice

MCJ Program Graduate Handbook

2017

## **NMSU Department of Criminal Justice**

### **Master's 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 sincerely 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 dramatically 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 will expose you to as well as the knowledge you will acquire from your peers and colleagues in the MCJ program.

Graduate studies are considerably different from the undergraduate experience. One of the more important skills acquired while earning the MCJ is the ability to work independently and in groups to solve complex and in some cases abstract problems and assignments. Graduate students, unlike their undergraduate cohort, 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) during their second year. This option can be taken either completely online or “live” with traditional campus-based classes. The **Thesis option** can only be completed through traditional 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 online or campus-based program in their application.
2. Students accepted into the MCJ Online program are only allowed to enroll in online courses.
3. Students may switch between the Online and Campus-Based program upon written request and approval of the MCJ Program Director.
4. Students accepted into the MCJ Campus-Based program are only allowed to 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.
5. Online graduate courses offered in the Summer may be taken by online or campus-based students, with online students receiving priority for registration.

6. The **Thesis option** is only available to campus-based students. Online students must take the **Coursework option**.
7. The degree designation on the final transcript is a Master of Criminal Justice. There is no designation indicating the Online or Campus-Based program.
8. The Director of the MCJ serves as the advisor for all students pursuing the **Coursework option**.
9. Students pursuing the **Thesis option** must choose a faculty advisor.

THESIS OPTION

|  
Campus only

COURSEWORK OPTION

/ \  
Campus Online

### **THESIS OPTION**

Students interested in the thesis option typically decide to pursue this during their first or second semester. All campus-based students pursuing the Thesis option for earning the MCJ 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 thesis 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 the thesis project. 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.

Some students have been able to conduct secondary data analysis for their thesis project on data sets collected by a professor. This situation is the exception, not the norm. Secondary data sets are available from the University of Michigan Interuniversity Consortium of Political and Social Research (ICPSR) that may be appropriate for students seeking to do a thesis project.

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 may include some combination of the following topics: Introduction, Literature Review, Research Method, Analysis, Discussion, and Conclusion. Each one of these chapter topics may effectively constitute a large research paper, with the added dimension that the various chapters of a thesis 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.

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 process required by the IRB can potentially require a great deal of time, and a student’s thesis research may not proceed until formal IRB approval is granted. Information about the IRB process and requirements can be found at

<http://compliance.research.nmsu.edu/IRB>

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.

### **Recommended Timeline**

- First or Second Semester: Select a topic and advisor; preliminary research, write proposal, begin IRB approval process
- Second or Third Semester: Have a proposal hearing with your committee. Submit signed proposal to Department Head
- Third and Fourth Semesters: Data collection and writing of the thesis
- Fourth Semester: Finish thesis, pass thesis defense, submit completed thesis to graduate school

### **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 will read the thesis and participate in the defense, but does not have to be involved in the research or the proposal hearing. The secondary member 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 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 advisor and the second reader. The outside member is not required to attend the proposal hearing, but if this member is involved in helping with the project they may participate.

### **Thesis Defense**

The final examination involves a student presentation to the committee. The defense will be open to the public. However, if the advisor and student are interested in having a closed defense (committee and student only), they can present their justification to the Department Head, who will make the decision. Even if the defense is open to the public, it will be followed by a closed question and answer session with only the committee and the student. The questions from the committee will mainly cover the thesis topic, but they may also include questions from the committee that cover the candidate's program of study. Students must be enrolled in 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 eight years, coursework at NMSU "expires" and thus this can be considered the maximum time allowed to obtain the MCJ degree.

### **COURSEWORK OPTION**

Only those students choosing the **Coursework** option are required to pass two formal written comprehensive examinations, one on methods and one on 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.

The comprehensive examinations are given electronically once each semester over consecutive weekends and are typically scheduled in October or November of the Fall semester and March or April of the Spring semester. Students are responsible for being aware of the formal announcement of the comprehensive examination, applying to take the comprehensive examination, and successfully completing the comprehensive examination. Thus it is critical that you maintain an official NMSU email address. Students that apply to take the comprehensive examination 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.

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

All students taking the examination at a scheduled date will answer the same questions. Student

answers to the questions are blind-graded by two professors for each exam component. Exams are graded as either pass with distinction; pass; or not pass.

A student receiving a grade of *not passing* on any component of the examination is required to retake that portion of the exam at the next regularly scheduled comprehensive examination.

As a point of reference, *passing with distinction* requires the equivalent of an “A” grade. A *passing* grade requires a “B” or “C” effort. An effort of “D” or lower receives a grade of *not passing*.

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

### **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 MCJ Program Director will, in the Spring semester, email all of the applicants and returning second-year students to determine if they are interested in the TA position. 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 classes, taught by different professors, to cover the amount of hours (typically 10-20 hours). An attempt will be made to match thesis students with their thesis advisor’s classes, but this cannot be guaranteed.

TAs are awarded to students on a competitive basis, but need-based criteria can also be used. We use undergraduate GPA, the quality of the writing sample, and in some cases a short interview with the MCJ Program Director to rank the students interested in a TA. 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 at 9 a.m. 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.

### **COURSEWORK INFORMATION**

Students must take a series of Core and Elective courses. Graduate students must earn 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.

### **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/mpa-joint-degree-program/> for more information.

### **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.

### **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-Mester. 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.

#### ***How do I find a place to do my internship?***

The Department Internship Coordinator can provide you with information as to which agencies in the local Las Cruces area typically accept MCJ interns. You can also consult 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 *focused 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 12 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.

**Resources:**

Department Website: <http://crimjust.nmsu.edu>

Graduate Catalog: [http://catalog.nmsu.edu/16\\_17\\_graduate\\_catalog.pdf](http://catalog.nmsu.edu/16_17_graduate_catalog.pdf)

IRB: <http://compliance.research.nmsu.edu/IRB>

MPA/MCJ Program:

<https://deptofgov.nmsu.edu/academic-programs/mpa/mpa-joint-degree-program/>

MCJ Program Director: Francisco Alatorre ([falatorr@nmsu.edu](mailto:falatorr@nmsu.edu); Breland 105; 646-5159)

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