

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI

SCHOOL OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE, FORENSIC SCIENCE AND SECURITY

MS IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE PROGRAM GUIDELINES

Welcome to the Master of Science program in Criminal Justice! This document is intended as a starting point for students to answer common questions about the logistics, pace, and regulations governing enrollment in the program. Please keep this guide as a reference point for program guidelines as you navigate the program here at Southern Miss. As always, additional questions may be directed to the Graduate Director, Dr. Annabelle Frazier, at annabelle.frazier@usm.edu.

GENERAL REQUIREMENTS

REQUIRED COURSEWORK

- Completion of a minimum of 30 hours of coursework
- Pass comprehensive exams
- Approval of Capstone Project Proposal or Thesis Proposal
- Successful defense of Capstone Project or Thesis

Courses Required

- CJ 600 - Seminar in Theory of Criminal Justice 3 hrs.
- CJ 620 - Applied Research Methods for Criminal Justice 3 hrs.
- CJ 625 - Applied Statistical Methods for Criminal Justice 3 hrs.
- CJ 630 - Seminar in Civil Liberties and Criminal Law 3 hrs.
- CJ 640 - Seminar in Policing 3 hrs.
- CJ 650 - Seminar in Corrections 3 hrs.
- CJ 670 - Seminar in Criminal Justice Policy 3 hrs.
- Electives - 9 hrs. of any relevant 500/600 level course across the university

Grade Requirements

- A minimum of a 3.0 GPA is required in the program for graduation. It is expected that as students navigate the program, they communicate to faculty and monitor their grades and successes to help streamline their progress.
- If a grade is in jeopardy, please begin communication with that faculty member well in advance of grades being issued to ensure open lines of communication. If a grade of C is earned, communicate directly with that faculty member and the graduate director to clarify next steps. The Graduate School allows you to receive six hours of “C’s” or “C+’s” and remain in any graduate program. Any grade below a “C” means the course must be retaken. You only receive one “repeat” course. If you receive more than one “C” in total, you will be dismissed from the program.

Coursework for Thesis or Capstone Project:

- Students should register for CJ 698 when working on their thesis project.
- Students should register for CJ 690 when working on their capstone project.
- CJ 698 and CJ 690 are graded as Satisfactory (S), Unsatisfactory (U), or Pass (P).
 - **Satisfactory**- indicates satisfactory progress in research. The major advisor must provide a written set of expectations for research progress in writing, discuss these expectations within the first week of class, and collect signature of student acknowledging that he/she understands the requirements.
 - **Unsatisfactory**- indicates unsatisfactory progress in research. A student that earns a “U” will be placed on probation the following semester enrolled. The student will return to good standing if they receive an “S” in the course during the probationary period. Earning two consecutive “S” grades will result in removal of the “U” from the transcript.
 - **Pass**- indicates that the student successfully passed their thesis or capstone project defense.

** Students can reroll in CJ 698 or CJ 690 in their one of their last two semesters.*

Fall Semester- Yr 1

CJ 600
CJ 620
CJ 630
Identify advisor and committee
Submit committee form with Grad School

Spring Semester- Yr 1

CJ 625
CJ 640
Submit proposal for capstone project or thesis

Fall Semester- Yr 2

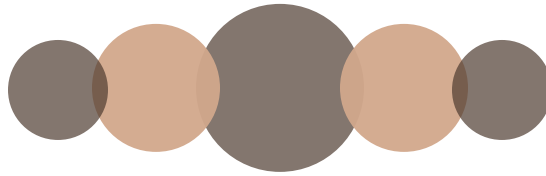
CJ 650
CJ 670
CJ 580 (optional)
CJ 698 or 690
Begin writing capstone project or thesis
Comprehensive exams

Spring Semester- Yr 2

CJ 660
CJ 698 or 690
Defend capstone project or thesis

COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT

- A comprehensive assessment is required of all MS students. The comprehensive assessment is a portfolio of three different projects from your graduate-level (500+) courses.
- Students submit the portfolio with their assignment and grade. The grade on the assignment becomes the grade on the assessment for each topic.
- The comprehensive written exam consists of 3 topics:
 - **Law and Policy:** Shows your knowledge of criminal justice law and policy and should demonstrate growing expertise in a legal or policy area (e.g., criminal law, civil liberties, juvenile justice, etc.).
 - **Theory:** Shows your ability to understand and evaluate criminal justice theories or policies.
 - **Research Methods:** Shows your skills in research design, data analysis, or proposing a research study in criminal justice.



CAPSTONE PROJECT OR THESIS

Each student completing a thesis project must successfully write and defend their thesis on an approved topic.

- ***What's the difference between a thesis and capstone project?***
 - A master's thesis is an original document, similar to a published article in style and format, which requires the student to either acquire original data or analyze previous datasets in a novel and unique manner. The question being asked should be unique, and developed in conjunction with a thesis advisor, and move the discipline forward. The end result of the thesis is a defensible and unique body of work which could potentially be submitted to a published peer-reviewed journal article.
 - Capstone projects are designed to be original empirical projects, often conducted with an external entity, where original research is developed and put into practice to affect a specific research or organizational goal. Examples of a capstone project may include: creating or developing a new justice-focused program, augmenting or improving an existing program, or testing or evaluating the effectiveness of an existing program. Theses require students to analyze data whereas capstone projects do not necessarily require data analysis. The graduate capstone project is an *alternative* to a master's thesis; thus, students opting to complete a capstone project must deliver a product that is *comparable both in quality and rigor* to a thesis.

- ***Suggested Timeline for Thesis:***
 1. **First semester:** Students are encouraged to identify their thesis chair and committee members (2-3 graduate faculty members). *Once committee is identified, submit committee request form to Graduate School.*
 2. **Second semester:** Students are encouraged to identify their thesis topic. This topic should be written in the form of a proposal that will then be approved by the student's committee before the third semester. *Once the proposal is approved, submit required paperwork with the Graduate School.*
 3. **Third semester:** Students are encouraged to begin writing their thesis.
 4. **Fourth semester:** Students are encouraged to submit and defend their thesis. *Please refer to the Graduate School website for deadlines regarding the thesis defense.*
- ***Thesis Proposal Guidelines:***
 - A proposal for the capstone project or thesis should be submitted and approved by the student's committee no later than the third semester (ideally in 2nd semester).
- ***Thesis Format:***
 - Thesis formats are found on the Graduate School webpage of Graduate Student Success ([Guidelines for Dissertations, Theses, and Doctoral Projects](#)).
 - *Thesis should include Literature Review and hypothesis; Methods; Results; Conclusions; and References*
- ***Capstone Project Format:***
 - *Format for the capstone project will vary depending on the type of project provided. In general, the format should follow the thesis guideline provided by the Graduate School.*

GRADUATE ASSISTANTSHIPS

- *The School of Criminal Justice, Forensic Science, and Security has a limited number of assistantships available on a competitive basis.*
- *To be considered for an assistantship, your application must be submitted by April 15 (for fall admission) or November 15 (for spring admission) and you must contact the graduate coordinator to express your interest.*
- *Assistantships will be assigned based on merit and need of the School. All assistantships require assisting or instructing laboratories and/or courses on campus.*
- *Assistantships require 20 hrs. of work per week for 9 months (August 15-May 15) and provide a tuition waiver for 9-13 credits a semester.*
- *Graduate assistants are required to maintain a minimum cumulative GPA of 3.0.*