

EXPECTATIONS FOR THE MASTER'S THESIS

Overview

The completion of a thesis is not required to obtain a Masters of Arts degree in the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice at UMSL. However, students interested in applying to doctoral programs are encouraged to complete a thesis, as it can provide a number of advantages. First, completing a thesis is a research-intensive process that can provide valuable insight into the challenges associated with doctoral studies. Second, thesis documents are often submitted as writing samples when applying to doctoral programs; a well-written thesis will provide for much stronger application material than a course paper. Finally, many students turn their theses into publications. These are becoming increasingly important when graduate students begin searching for academic positions.

The thesis option for the MA program substitutes six required credit hours of course work for six hours of supervised "thesis credits." These credits are to be completed during the final two semesters of course work in the program. As described in greater detail below, successful completion of the thesis credit hours requires students to meet a number of benchmarks during their final two semesters in the MA program. The remainder of the MA program requirements is identical to those advertised in the course bulletin. Students should consult with the Graduate Director to discuss the MA thesis option prior to forming a committee.

Committee Formation

The University of Missouri-St. Louis Graduate School requires the formation of a committee comprised of at least **three** graduate faculty members. The committee is comprised of one chair and at least two regular committee members.

Chair: The chair serves as your primary advisor throughout the thesis process. The chair must be a full-time graduate faculty member in the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice. Students are expected to consult with their chair regularly throughout the thesis process. The chair is responsible for approving the concept paper, proposal, and final thesis *before* students are allowed to move forward at each stage of the thesis process. It is the student's responsibility to select an appropriate thesis chair (e.g., based on substantive interests, methodological expertise) and there is no obligation for faculty to agree to serve as chair.

Regular Committee Members: The thesis committee must consist of at least two additional graduate faculty members. These faculty members can be any member of the UMSL graduate faculty, as long as a voting majority of the committee consists of full-time graduate faculty in the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice. The department strongly encourages students to consult with their chair before selecting their committee members.

Expectations for Successfully Completing Thesis Credits

Students who pursue the thesis option will be required to register for three credit hours with their chair per semester in their final two semesters in the program. For most students, this will involve taking the first three credit hours in the fall of their graduating year and the final three credits the following spring semester.

Semester 1: The benchmarks of the first semester are as follows:

- 1) Student develops a research question(s) that forms the basis of their thesis. The research question is expected to be both relevant and feasible. An initial prospectus outlining these research questions should take the form of a short concept paper to be submitted to the thesis chair *prior to* enrolling for thesis credits. It is therefore critical students have a strong idea of their thesis project *prior to* the semester they plan to begin their research.
- 2) Once the chair has approved the topic, the student can formally select a committee and enroll in thesis credits.
- 3) Student conducts background research on the topic of interest.
- 4) Student identifies available data (if applicable) that allow for an assessment of the research question(s).
- 5) Student writes a thesis proposal that reviews the extant literature, identifies the research question, describes the proposed data, and offers an analytic strategy to assess the research question. The student submits the proposed project to the Institutional Review Board for approval.
- 6) Student defends the thesis proposal to the thesis committee. The proposal must be defended prior to the end of the semester. At this point in time, the committee assesses whether reasonable progress has been made on the project and whether the proposed research is likely to be completed during the following semester. If the committee responds favorably to the proposal, the student will receive a “satisfactory” grade for the first semester thesis credits and permission to enroll in the second set of credit hours.

Failing to Meet First Semester Benchmarks: Students who do not meet the requirements for the first semester will receive an “unsatisfactory” grade for the thesis credit hours and will be denied the opportunity to complete the rest of the thesis. As a result, the three thesis credits will not be counted toward the 33 credits of the MA degree and students will be required to complete the non-thesis option (e.g., register for an additional course during the following semester in order to graduate on time).

Semester 2:

- 1) Student revises the thesis based on the feedback provided in the proposal defense.
- 2) Student analyzes data.
- 3) Student completes the first draft of the thesis which, at minimum, should include the introduction, literature review, data/methods, results and discussion sections.

- 4) Student distributes *draft* in step 3 to the chair for review. Upon approval from the chair, the student submits the full draft to the committee for review.
- 5) Once the committee approves the draft, the student has permission to schedule a defense. The student is responsible for submitting all forms and meeting all Graduate School deadlines regarding the MA degree.
- 6) The student orally defends his/her thesis to the committee. Defenses are announced in advance and open to the public.
- 7) At the conclusion of the defense, students are expected to work closely with their committee to finalize the thesis for submission to the graduate school.
- 8) The thesis is not considered complete until ALL committee members have reviewed and approved the final document.

NOTE: There are deadlines for each of these processes outlined by the University of Missouri-St. Louis Graduate School (<https://www.umsl.edu/gradschool/admitted/graduation.html>). It is the responsibility of the students to ensure that all deadlines are met on time.

Failing to meet Second Semester Benchmarks: Students who do not meet the requirements outlined above for the second semester will receive an “unsatisfactory” grade for the thesis credit hours. Further, such students will not have completed all of the requirements to graduate when choosing the thesis option, and will be required to register for additional thesis credit hours in the summer or a subsequent semester and may need to re-defend the thesis in order to graduate with the Masters of Arts degree. Alternatively, students may choose to take an additional course and graduate with the non-thesis option.