



University of Houston-Downtown
College of Public Service
Criminal Justice

**Graduate Student Handbook
Master of Science in Criminal Justice (MSCJ)
Department of Criminal Justice and Social
Work**

Effective Fall 2023

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Master of Science in Criminal Justice

INTRODUCTION

This handbook serves as a guide to successful completion of the MSCJ degree at the University of Houston - Downtown; containing information about degree requirements, transfer credit, academic standards, and planning for and registering for classes. The handbook contains program-level policies pertaining to the MSCJ degree, supplementing the UHD [Graduate Catalog](#) and the general [UHD Student Handbook](#), which are resources for academic policies, student conduct policy, financial aid, and student services. In cases where the information provided here builds upon, or adds to, the University Graduate Catalog requirements, the information herein represents binding departmental and program policy. University-level graduate policy and the Graduate Catalog requirements supersede this handbook.

MSCJ curricular program requirements may be changed at the direction of the MSCJ Director and approval by the MSCJ Graduate Faculty, the Department Curriculum Committee, the Department Chair, the College of Public Service Dean, and the University Curriculum Committee. In the event of curricular modification while the student is enrolled in the program, the student will have the option of remaining in the degree plan in place at the time of admission or choosing to complete the new degree plan requirements. A student who does not continuously enroll and seeks readmission will be subject to the program curricular requirements in place at the time of readmission.

MSCJ program policies specified in this handbook are subject to change at the direction of the MSCJ Director and approval by the MSCJ Graduate Faculty. Modifications to MSCJ program policy are immediately applicable to all enrolled students. The department will notify enrolled students in a timely manner by emailing the modified handbook to the student's university email account.

It is the student's responsibility to be familiar with the policies and curricular requirements of the MSCJ program, the Department of Criminal Justice and Social Work, and the University of Houston – Downtown. **It is the responsibility of the student to know and follow all policies, timelines, and deadlines to allow for successful completion of the program and a timely graduation.**

CONTACTS

Title	Name	Contact Information
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DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

The MSCJ is a 36-hour degree. Both thesis and non-thesis options require that you complete the following core for a total of 18 credit hours:

- CJ 6310: Issues in Criminal Justice
- CJ 6320: Research Design and Methods
- CJ 6321: Quantitative Analysis in Criminal Justice
- CJ 6330: Advanced Criminology
- CJ 6340: Administration in Criminal Justice
- CJ 6322: Program Evaluation OR CJ 6324 Policy Analysis

NOTE: CJ 6310: Issues in Criminal Justice must be completed within the first two semesters of enrollment.

Thesis Option

Students who elect the thesis option must take 18 credit hours of core courses, 12 credit hours of elective courses, 3 hours of Thesis I (CJ 6390) and 3 hours of Thesis II (CJ 6391).

Thesis I and II require department approval (MSCJ Director authorization and the approval of the faculty member overseeing the thesis). To obtain department approval to enroll in Thesis I and Thesis II a student must be in good standing and completed CJ 6310, and CJ 6320; the student must also complete or co-enroll in CJ 6321. To enroll in Thesis I, the student should be going into the second to last planned semester of enrollment. To enroll in Thesis II, the student should be going into the final semester of planned enrollment.

Additionally, the student's thesis advisor may require other core courses be completed when the courses are pertinent to the approved thesis topic and question. If the student's thesis advisor requires additional

coursework, the student has the option of seeking a different thesis advisor.

Students must follow the guidelines in the MSCJ Thesis Guide for proposal and completion of their thesis. Students completing their thesis are required to register for a minimum of three hours per long semester (Fall and Spring), including the semester in which the thesis is submitted and accepted by the university. Therefore, a student who has completed their proposal and passed Thesis I (CJ 6390), must continuously enroll in Thesis II (CJ 6391) until they successfully defend the thesis. "In progress" is shown without a grade for each semester until the semester in which the thesis is defended. A maximum of 6 semester hours may be applied to the degree plan, although a student may enroll in Thesis II (CJ 6391) a number of times until the degree is granted. A final grade of B or better is required on the completed thesis.

Students who elect to undertake a thesis are expected to complete it. If a student cannot complete their thesis and wishes to change to the project option, they will have to meet the requirements of that degree plan, meaning that they will need to complete 15 credits of elective courses and CJ 6301 Project. Neither CJ 6390 Thesis I nor CJ 6391 Thesis II can be counted as electives for the degree.

Project Option

Students who select the project option must take 18 credit hours of core requirements, 15 credit hours of electives, and 3 hours of the Criminal Justice Project Course (CJ 6301). A student must be in Good Standing (3.0 MSCJ Program GPA), complete CJ 6310 and CJ 6320, and complete or co-enroll in CJ 6321. Additionally, to enroll in Project, the student should be going into the final semester of planned enrollment. The student's project advisor may require other core courses be completed when the courses are pertinent to the approved project topic. If the student's project advisor requires additional coursework, the student has the option of seeking a different project advisor.

A Project Guide is provided and available on the MSCJ website.

ADMISSIONS & ENROLLMENT

Conditional Admission

Students granted conditional admission to the MSCJ degree program must earn grades of B or better in their first 9 credit hours, or they will be dismissed from the program. During those first 9 credit hours, students are limited to core courses and must seek academic advising each semester until their conditional status is removed.

Leave of Absence

Students may request a leave of absence for one or two semesters for any reason by submitting a written request to the CPS Assistant Director of Graduate Studies. A student granted a leave of absence will be able to complete the degree plan in place at the time of the student's admission into the program. A student on leave of absence does not reapply for admission.

Inactive Students

Students who are inactive (not enrolled in MSCJ courses) for one long (fall or spring) semester will be required to reapply to the University to be considered for readmission. Application files will be reviewed by the MSCJ Admissions Committee. A readmitted student must complete the degree requirements in place at the time of readmission.

Transfer Credit

Students must submit official transcripts from all colleges or universities attended as a part of the admission process. An evaluation will be performed upon acceptance to the university. Course work transferred or accepted for credit toward a graduate degree must represent collegiate course work relevant to the MSCJ degree, with course content and level of instruction resulting in student competencies at least equivalent to those students enrolled in the MSCJ degree program.

Acceptance of Transfer Credit

Six semester hours of master's level credit from another regionally accredited institution may be transferred into the MSCJ degree plan, subject to petition to, and approval from, the MSCJ Director. A minimum grade of "B" is required in any such courses for transfer credit. It is the student's responsibility to initiate the petition and justify the acceptance of the courses. Please keep in mind that transfer credit is by permission only and is not a right of the student.

Transferring Credits from Other Countries

Students applying for admission with college credits from other countries must submit an evaluated transcript from a credential evaluation service recognized by the university. The MSCJ Director will consider granting transfer credit based on the recommendations of the evaluating service.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS AND GOOD STANDING

A minimum of 3.0 MSCJ graduate cumulative GPA is required to graduate.

For the purpose of this handbook, “MSCJ graduate cumulative GPA” is the GPA calculated for all UHD graduate program coursework, as defined by [PS 03.B.04](#) and incorporated into [PS 03.B.07](#). Specifically, for operational guidance, UHD graduate cumulative GPA is the GPA of the student calculated from UHD MSCJ courses, including repeated courses, and does not include transfer credits.

In order to remain in good academic standing graduate students must maintain a 3.0 MSCJ graduate cumulative GPA or better, not withdraw excessively from courses, and comply with advising requirements (see below).

Students may repeat any course only once. If a student repeats a course, both grades are calculated in the GPA ([PS 03.B.04](#)). If a student cannot pass any course in the degree program with a grade of B or better on the second attempt, they will be dismissed from the program.

Repeatedly dropping or withdrawing from courses may impact a student’s standing in the MSCJ program, as such behavior has a negative impact on degree progress, financial aid, and other aspects of the program (see University Withdrawal Policy on page 10). The MSCJ Graduate Faculty retain the ability to dismiss a student from the program for repeatedly withdrawing from or dropping courses. Before the department moves to dismiss a student for excessive withdrawal, the department will provide the student a written warning that the student is approaching excessive withdrawal and that the student may not withdraw from any additional courses without prior department approval. A student experiencing life events or circumstances that impedes progress in the program may seek a leave of absence (described above) or may enroll in fewer courses to accommodate difficult circumstances that arise.

Dismissal from the Program

Dismissal for Poor Academic Performance. [PS 03.B.07](#), Section 3.3 provides that “A graduate student who receives grades of ‘C’ in 9 or more graduate semester credit hours is subject to dismissal.” The policy further states, “In addition, a grade of ‘D’ or ‘F’ in a graduate course is grounds for dismissal from the program.” The MSCJ Director will notify a dismissed student by sending a letter by email to the student’s UHD account following the term the adverse grade is issued.

Consequences of a Dismissal. A dismissed student may not take any graduate courses at UHD.

Petition for Stay of Dismissal. A student notified that the MSCJ Director initiated dismissal proceedings may petition the MSCJ Director for a stay of the dismissal proceedings, and, if denied, may formally appeal the dismissal to the Dean of the College of Public Service.

The purpose of a request is to allow the student to show progress and change in a positive direction toward degree completion. To request a stay of the dismissal, a student must submit a detailed letter to the MSCJ Director describing the circumstances that led to the poor academic performance and provide a remediation plan specifically describing what will be different for the student in the subsequent term(s) to ensure success in specific classes and in the program.

The MSCJ Director’s decision concerning the petition for stay of the dismissal proceedings will be based on a) an assessment of the likelihood the student can attain an overall GPA of 3.0 in the remaining program courses in the student’s academic degree plan (without taking additional courses to exceed 36 hours), b) an evaluation of the written remediation plan of the student, and c) an overall evaluation of the student’s capacity to succeed in the program. In the process of assessing the overall capacity of the student to succeed in the program, the MSCJ Director may discuss the student’s performance with faculty members who taught MSCJ classes the student previously completed.

If the MSCJ Director grants the petition, the proceedings will be stayed, and the grades that led to the dismissal will remain a permanent part of the student’s academic and program record. A status of stayed dismissal does not alter the program requirement of 3.0 to earn the MSCJ degree. The MSCJ Director may, upon granting a stay of dismissal, impose reasonable and achievable time-specific academic objectives for the student to meet in subsequent terms to help ensure the student is successful in the program. A student placed on stayed

dismissal who does not have a UHD graduate cumulative GPA of 3.0 will be placed on academic probation and all policies relating to that status will apply to the student (see below).

The program will permanently stop the dismissal proceedings upon the student's successful completion of the degree requirements. A student with a status of stayed dismissal will have the dismissal proceed if a) the student earns a 'C', 'D', or 'F' in any remaining coursework, b) the student withdraws from or drops course(s), c) there is a substantiated finding of academic dishonesty in coursework following the stay of dismissal proceedings, or d) the student fails to achieve one or more time-specific academic objectives that condition remaining in stayed dismissal status (see the third sentence of the preceding paragraph). *Appeal of Dismissal*. According to UHD policy [PS 03.B.07](#), an appeal of the MSCJ Director's dismissal decision must be submitted in writing to the Dean of the College of Public Service. The CPS Dean, prior to deciding the appeal, shall request the student's full MSCJ academic record and a statement from the MSCJ Director explaining why the department denied the student's request for stay of the dismissal.

Academic Probation & Suspension

An MSCJ student who does not achieve a UHD graduate cumulative GPA of 3.0 at the end of any term will be placed on academic probation. Notification of probationary status is the responsibility of the MSCJ Director.

A hold will be placed on the student's account requiring them to meet and consult with the MSCJ Director about their plans, GPA repair, their course schedule for the upcoming term, and degree progress each semester until they return to good academic standing.

An MSCJ student who receives a grade of 'I' (Incomplete) while on probation will remain on probation until all grades of 'I' are resolved.

Students who are on academic probation must earn a minimum 3.0 GPA on MSCJ course work each subsequent semester until the grade point deficiency is removed. Failure to earn a 3.0 semester GPA while on academic probation will result in suspension from the university. Suspended students may not enroll in or audit classes at UHD for at least one year. Academic probation and suspension is noted permanently on a student's academic record. Probationary students who also have the status stayed dismissal and who fail to earn a 3.0 semester GPA while on academic probation will have the dismissal proceedings initiated.

Probationary students have a maximum of one calendar year (3 terms, inclusive of fall, spring, and summer) in which to return to good academic standing by raising the cumulative GPA to a 3.0 or better. Failure to do so will result in dismissal. Failure to make adequate progress toward degree completion can also result in the loss of federal financial aid.

Reinstatement

Students who have been suspended may apply for reinstatement after one year of non-enrollment. Graduate courses completed at another university during a period of suspension at UHD will not be counted for credit at UHD. Students permitted to re-enroll remain on academic probation under the same conditions as previously described. A reinstated student will complete the degree plan in place at the time of initial admission.

Reinstatement is not automatic. Petitioners must submit a written petition to the MSCJ Program Director explaining the reasons they believe they can successfully meet the requirements of the degree.

Academic Honesty

Students read and sign an academic honesty commitment form upon admission to ensure they are aware of the policy and expectations concerning cheating and plagiarism. Per UHD policy [PS 03.A.19](#), violations of this policy are initially handled by course Instructors and reports of such instances are submitted to the Department Chair and the Dean of Students.

Academic Dishonesty

[PS 03.A.19](#) “Academic Dishonesty Policy” defines “cheating” and “plagiarism” and broadly discusses “academic dishonesty.” The policy grants the faculty member teaching the course in which the student is alleged to have cheated, plagiarized, or engaged in academic dishonesty the authority to initiate an Academic Dishonesty Report to the University Dean of Students, notifying the Department Chair of the report, and assign a penalty.

In very serious instances of alleged academic dishonesty, the faculty member “shall also refer the matter to the Office of the Dean of Students for disciplinary action pursuant to the Student’s Rights and Responsibilities Policy.” (PS 03.A.19, 4.3) The faculty member teaching the course in which academic dishonesty is alleged may petition the MSCJ Graduate Faculty for a recommendation on whether to pursue

the matter under the provisions of the “Student Rights and Responsibilities” policy (PS 03.A.19). The MSCJ Graduate Faculty may form a subcommittee of no fewer than three faculty members to make the recommendation. Potential consequences for academic dishonesty referred to the Dean of Students under PS 03.A.19 include, among other options, withholding transcripts, disciplinary probation, non-readmission, suspension, and expulsion.

Incomplete Grades

As stated in the [UHD Student Handbook](#), a grade of Incomplete is given only when students have completed a significant portion of the course requirements and have a documented emergency which prevents them from completing the remaining course requirements. The student and the instructor must enter into a contract that lays out the work to be accomplished and makes note of the timetable for the grade conversion process.

Incomplete coursework must be completed no later than the end of the long semester immediately following the semester in which the grade of Incomplete was given. An Incomplete grade that is not removed by this deadline is automatically converted to an F. If you are enrolled in your final semester, a grade of Incomplete will prevent your graduation.

In Progress Grades

Students who register for the CJ 6301 Criminal Justice Project or CJ 6391 Thesis II, but do not complete the written manuscript as agreed upon by the student and chair or committee, may be issued a grade of “in progress” (IP). If a student receives an IP, they must reenroll in the CJ 6301 or CJ 6391 until course requirements are completed. Students are limited to only one IP while working on the project course (see below for Thesis). Students must be enrolled in order to receive a grade.

Grade Appeal

Students wishing to appeal a course grade must first attempt to reconcile any grading error that might have occurred with the course Instructor. If the student still wishes to appeal a course grade, they can do so by submitting the [Grade Appeal Form](#) to the Department Chair. According to UHD policy, course grades can only be changed due to mistaken grade entry, miscalculation of grade, or misapplication of syllabus criteria.

ADVISING

Advising is a requirement of admission. Ongoing, semesterly advising is required for a student to remain in good standing in the program.

Three phases of advising occurs between MSCJ students, program administrators, and faculty: pre-enrollment advising, developmental advising, and thesis or project advising. The following chart defines the purpose of each advising phase, who conducts the advising with the student, and the expected outcomes of the advising session(s).

Phase	Conducted By	Timing/Duration	Purpose/Outcomes
Pre-enrollment	CPS Assistant Director of Graduate Studies (students who have UG degree in Criminal Justice or Criminology) MSCJ Director (students who have UG degree in discipline other than Criminal Justice or Criminology)	Post-admission; before enrollment in class, first semester in the program	Advise student on classes to take in first semester to ensure timely program completion ¹ ; establish an academic plan
Developmental	MSCJ Director	Each semester of enrollment prior to the designation of a thesis or project advisor ³	Discuss course options for upcoming semester toward timely program completion, discuss thesis and project topics, check in with the student
Thesis/Project ²	Faculty Member Overseeing the Student's Project/ Thesis	Based on plan agreed upon by the student and thesis or project advisor ⁴	Timely completion of the thesis or project requirements

¹ A student who enrolls in courses in the first semester other than those recommended by the CPS Assistant Director of Graduate Studies must seek approval from the MSCJ Program Director.

² A student on academic probation cannot enroll in CJ 6390 Thesis I or CJ 6390 Thesis II. A student on academic probation will remain in the developmental phase of advising until the student reaches academic good standing in the program.

³ In semesters where the number of students needing developmental advising is high, the MSCJ Director may seek assistance from the CPS Graduate Director and the CJ-SW Department Chair.

⁴ A thesis or project advisor with concerns that the student is not on task with the agreed upon plan may reach out to the MSCJ Director and CPS Assistant Graduate Director for assistance communicating expectations to the student. In addition, the MSCJ Director and CPS Assistant Graduate Director may contact the faculty advisor to inquire about student progress and offer assistance.

The MSCJ Director will review graduate transfer hours and address undergraduate preparation work for students who do not hold an undergraduate Criminal Justice degree.

Students are responsible for regularly tracking their progress toward degree completion through the Degree Progress Report available in [MyUHD 2.0](#).

COURSE LOADS

A full course load at the graduate level is considered 3 classes (9 semester credit hours). The MSCJ Director imposes a 9-hour limit for fulltime students. A student seeking to take 12 hours may request permission from the MSCJ Graduate Director. The MSCJ Program recommends a 6-hour course load for part-time graduate students, and due to university financial aid restrictions, MSCJ students seeking financial aid must take a minimum of six semester hours. Full-time or part-time graduate status does not exist during the summer, although the university imposes limits on summer enrollment.

COURSE ENROLLMENT

The table below, outlining the general course rotation, can help you plan out your coursework. Core classes are offered each semester, though they are rotated between online, face-to-face, and hyflex modalities.

Several electives in multiple modalities are offered each semester, however, elective topics will vary and will be announced prior to registration each term, therefore they are not included in the course rotation calendar below.

Students are able to register in either online, face-to-face, or hyflex modalities, or in a combination thereof. Students are encouraged to take at least a portion of their courses face-to-face or via hyflex, when feasible. In some cases, scholarships and other tuition funding restrictions, such as students utilizing veteran benefits, mandate that a portion of their courses be taken face-to-face. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of any such requirements regarding course modality and plan their courses accordingly.

COURSE ROTATION

There are no MSCJ courses offered over the winter or May mini-semesters.

Fall 2023	Face-to-Face	CJ 6310	Fall 2024	Face-to-Face	CJ 6310
		CJ 6320			CJ 6320
		CJ 6322 or 6324			Elective(s)
		Elective(s)			
	Online	CJ 6321		Online	CJ 6321
		CJ 6330			CJ 6322 or 6324
		CJ 6340			CJ 6330
		Elective(s)			CJ 6340
					Elective(s)
Spring 2024	Face-to-Face	CJ 6321	Spring 2025	Face-to-Face	CJ 6321
		CJ 6330			CJ 6322 or 6324
		CJ 6340			CJ 6330
		Elective(s)			CJ 6340
	Online	CJ 6310		Online	CJ 6310
		CJ 6320			CJ 6320
		CJ 6322 or 6324			Elective(s)
		Elective(s)			
Summer 2024	Online	Elective(s)	Summer 2025	Online	Elective(s)
	Face-to-Face	Elective(s)		Face-to-Face	Elective(s)

Additional considerations for degree planning:

1. CJ6320 Research Design and Methods **must** be taken before CJ6321 Quantitative Analysis in Criminal Justice

2. Summer courses are not guaranteed.
3. Should you miss a core class in your preferred modality, you may have to wait a year for it to be offered again, so prioritize the core courses.

ACADEMIC MODIFICATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The University is in compliance with all applicable federal, state, and local laws concerning reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. Any student with a disability should contact the [Office of Disability Services](#) to file the necessary forms to make arrangements for modification to existing academic requirements, such as modifying the maximum time allowed for graded assignments, incorporating necessary adaptive technology, etc.

UNIVERSITY WITHDRAWAL POLICY

Voluntary Withdrawal from a Course

1. Students may drop a course until the official day of record without having the course appear on their permanent record. That date, which is approximately 2 weeks after the start of the semester, appears on the University Academic Calendar. **No course drops will be allowed after that point.**
2. Withdrawal from a course with a grade of “W” is possible after the official day of record until the last day to withdraw from a course. That date, which is in approximately the 10th week of a semester, appears on the University Academic Calendar. The grade of “W” will appear on the student’s official record but will not be calculated in the GPA.

Drops and withdrawals from courses may affect assistantships, scholarships, graduation, financial aid, membership in organizations, or other opportunities.

APPLICATION FOR GRADUATION

Students who plan to graduate from the University of Houston-Downtown must submit a graduation application the semester before their anticipated graduation. Students apply for graduation online through their [MyUHD 2.0](#) account. A graduation fee is charged to the student’s account at the time of submitting the application. If the student does not complete the requirements for the degree within that semester, the application will be denied and application procedures must be repeated. There is no refund of the graduation fee for denied

applications. Graduation application deadlines are found in the University Academic Calendar.

COMMENCEMENT EXERCISES

Once you have successfully completed all of the requirements for the MSCJ degree and have applied for graduation, students should obtain academic regalia (cap, gown, and hood) to wear at the commencement ceremony. UHD academic regalia may be purchased through the university Bookstore. Deadlines for ordering and paying for regalia are announced for each commencement.