



Project Guide
Master of Science in Criminal Justice
Department of Criminal Justice & Social Work
University of Houston – Downtown

Updated for Fall 2019

MSCJ PROJECT GUIDE

Description of the Project

The MSCJ capstone project (hereinafter “project”) is a written document where students demonstrate the skills learned in the MSCJ program as applied to a specific topic. The MSCJ program learning outcomes stipulate that at the end of the MSCJ program students will be able to demonstrate the following skills:

1. Identify, describe, and communicate current issues in the criminal justice system.
2. Apply theoretical concepts to the study of crime and justice.
3. Apply knowledge of the operations of the criminal justice system to develop solutions to the specific problems of criminal justice agencies.
4. Design a research plan to evaluate criminal justice programs, policies, or issues in the study of crime and justice.
5. Interpret and apply techniques of statistical analysis to the study of crime and justice.

The project serves as the culminating experience for student to demonstrate many of those skills, specifically the first three of those listed above. There is no requirement for students to collect or analyze data when completing the project. However, students completing a project are allowed to collect data and/or analyze data if the student and project chair agree.

Projects are assessed on the degree to which the following criteria have been met:

1. Ability to identify, describe, and communicate an important question or problem in criminal justice with an eye toward clearly stating the problem and describing why it is important
2. Apply the scholarly research literature to the problem
3. Analyze the problem
4. Develop solutions, recommendations, and conclusions that directly apply scholarly knowledge to the problem

Project topics vary, and take many forms. A typical project topic focuses on a criminal justice agency or system issues. Students describe the importance of the issues, analyze the problem, provide a comprehensive literature review, and recommend a solution to the problem based on the analysis. Based on the topic, the student and project chair can negotiate a different format for the project that may be a policy analysis, legal paper/note, criminological problems and prospects paper, grant application, original data collection and analysis, etc. and still meet the four assessment criteria named above.

Project Process

Steps 1-4 of the process occur prior to enrollment in the project course.

1. **Choose a topic.** Each project begins informally with students choosing the topic. Students should plan ahead, prior to registering for the CJ 6301 Criminal Justice Project course, by narrowing in on a topic of interest, researching the topic, documenting sources, and perhaps sketching an outline of important issues related to the chosen topic.
2. **Choose a chair.** Each student selects an MSCJ graduate faculty member to supervise, or chair, his or her project. Be prepared to discuss your topic area, documented sources, and issues surrounding the topic with more than one faculty member. Approach faculty members that have expertise or experience in your proposed project topic. The discussion you have with each faculty member will be helpful in selecting a

chair. After selecting the chair, you will need to begin meeting with your new chair to further refine the topic and develop the proposal.

3. **Submit a proposal.** After selecting a project chair, the student will meet with their chair to draft a preliminary proposal. The proposal will be submitted electronically using the following link:
<https://forms.gle/cgmhMC2rwazeKNAD7>

The student and project chair will submit the proposal form together. The proposal will include: student's name, project chair's name, proposed project title, research question/problem statement, method/strategies to write the project manuscript, whether the project requires IRB approval, and a proposed timeline. Once the project proposal is submitted, it is forwarded to the MSCJ Coordinator. After receiving the proposal, the coordinator will allow the student to register for the CJ 6301 Criminal Justice Project course.

4. **Register for CJ 6301 Criminal Justice Project.** After the MSCJ coordinator creates the project course and grants appropriate approvals, the student will be able to register for the course. Students must be registered for the course in the semester in which they successfully complete the project.

Steps 5-6 occur during the semester in which the project is completed.

5. **Write the project manuscript.** Once the topic and chair have been selected, students begin drafting their manuscript. This usually entails an iterative process between the student and the project chair, where multiple drafts are written and revised before final approval is granted.
6. **Receive final approval and grade.** Once the project chair approves of the final written document, she or he completes the MSCJ Project Completion form (Appendix A) and submits it to the Department Chair. Once the project chair approves of the final document, she or he issues a final letter grade (A, B, C, D, or F).

Style and Formatting Criteria for the Project

The format and style of the project document (spacing, citations, references, figures, tables, etc.) shall conform to the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 6th edition*, unless otherwise noted below.

1. **Page lengths.** There are no formal criteria for page lengths. The expected page length should reflect the size required for a thorough exploration and description of the problem, review of the existing literature on the problem, analysis of the problem, and any proposed solutions.
2. **Formatting requirements.** In order to develop a uniform approach, projects must follow the below criteria.
 - a. Margins should be 1 inch on all sides.
 - b. Double-spaced throughout
 - c. Font should be Times New Roman.
 - d. Point size should be 12.
 - e. Tables and figures may have smaller font sizes (point 10), but must remain legible
 - f. Follow the APA citation format
3. **Title page.** The title page of the project shall include the following elements (see Appendix B):

- a. Title of the project in all caps
- b. Statement that the project is “A Project Presented to the Faculty of the College of Public Service
University of Houston – Downtown”
- c. Statement that the project is “In fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Master of Science in
Criminal Justice”
- d. Name of the candidate
- e. Month and year of completion

Appendix A

MSCJ PROJECT COMPLETION

TO: [Name of Dean], Ph.D.
Dean, College of Public Service

FROM: [Insert Name of Professor], Ph.D.
Project Supervisor, CJ 6301 CJ Project

RE: (Student name), (Student No.)

TITLE: [Title of Project]

(Student name) successfully completed the course requirements for CJ 6360 CJ Project.

Signed:

(Faculty name), Project Supervisor

Date

[Name of Chair], Ph.D.
Chair, Criminal Justice Department

Date

Cc: Dean, Chair, Project Supervisor, Student file, Graduate coordinator, Student

Appendix B

Sample Project Title Page

[TITLE IN ALL CAPS]

A Project Presented to the
Faculty of the College of Public Service
University of Houston - Downtown

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science in Criminal Justice

by

[Student Name]

[Month, Year]