

Myths and Misconceptions About the Thesis Option

MCJ students frequently wonder if the Thesis Option is a good idea. The following discussion is intended to be of assistance in determining if the Thesis Option is workable for you.

Myth & Misconception #1

The Thesis Option is the Quickest Route to Earning an MCJ

While it is true that the *Thesis Option* requires fewer classroom credits than the *Project Option* or the *Focused Coursework Option*, students average a **minimum** of **six months** from the beginning to completion of the written thesis. Six months is the equivalent of 1 ½ semesters. Many theses require a year's work.

The thesis project requires that a student be able to work independently and in consultation with the **Chair** of the thesis committee. The thesis project is conducted and completed entirely by the student. The project is neither implemented nor completed by the **Chair** of the thesis committee.

The thesis project is not allowed to proceed to a final defense until the **Chair** of the thesis committee determines that the quality of the project is sufficient. The student typically must go through several cycles of the "revise and resubmit" process for each chapter of the thesis in order to bring the entire project to a stage sufficient for a final defense.

Once the student completes the final defense of the thesis there are typically additional revisions requested by the thesis committee before the student is allowed to submit the final thesis project to the Graduate School Editor for format review.

Once the student submits the final thesis project to the Graduate School Editor for format review there is typically some revision required of the thesis student before final approval of the completed thesis project. These revisions are the sole responsibility of the thesis student. All Graduate School forms and timeline requirements for the thesis can be found on the Graduate School web page, <http://gradschool.nmsu.edu>.

Myth & Misconception #2

The Thesis Option is Preferable Because I Do Not Need to Take the Comprehensive Examination.

While it is true that there is no formal requirement to take written comprehensive examination under the ***Thesis Option***, thesis students are required to demonstrate mastery of the material covered in the required core curriculum courses of the MCJ Program. The format for demonstrating mastery of that material is different from the focused coursework option. Each thesis student is required to prepare, in close consultation with the **Chair** of the thesis committee, and present, to all three members of the thesis committee, a formal thesis proposal.

Although all thesis proposals vary according to the specifics of an individual thesis project and the stylistic recommendations of the **Chair** of the thesis committee, the proposal will typically reflect the organizational style found on the “Thesis Proposal Guidelines” link. In addition, the thesis committee uses the thesis proposal document and presentation to evaluate a student’s mastery of the core curriculum course material.

If the thesis committee determines that demonstration of mastery of the core curriculum material is insufficient, several options may be exercised including, but not limited to the following:

- a. The student may be required to rewrite the proposal and present it until the committee is satisfied;
- b. The thesis committee may decide to require the student to take a written comprehensive examination;
- c. The thesis committee may decide that the student’s mastery of the core curriculum material is deficient to the point that a decision is made that the student may not pursue the thesis option.

Myth & Misconception #3

Any Student May Use the Thesis Option to Complete the MCJ Program.

While the ***Thesis Option*** is available to all students admitted into the MCJ Program, ***utilizing that option is not an entitlement.*** There are a variety of reasons why the Department of Criminal Justice faculty may determine that a student may not pursue the thesis option. Those reasons include, but are not limited to, the following:

- a. A thesis involves research in a specialized area within the broad field of Criminal Justice conducted in close consultation with the **Chair** of the thesis committee. Faculty members within the Department of Criminal Justice have various specialization areas within the field of Criminal Justice that may not complement

a student's desired thesis topic. In this situation a student may not be able to find a faculty member willing to serve as **Chair** of the thesis committee and the student will either need to choose a different thesis topic or abandon the thesis option.

- b. Past performance in the classroom as an MCJ student is a major indication to faculty members of a student's ability to successfully complete a thesis project. Students not performing well in the classroom, as determined by one or more faculty members, may not be allowed to pursue the thesis project.
- c. Students failing to demonstrate satisfactory mastery of the core curriculum material may not be allowed to pursue the thesis project.

Myth & Misconception #4

Thesis Research May Start and End Any Time the Student Feels Ready

A student may not formally begin working on a thesis until the following conditions are fulfilled:

- a. Completion of all five required core curriculum courses; and
- b. Securing a commitment from a Criminal Justice faculty member to serve as chair.

Thesis research may end under the following conditions:

- c. The student decides to abandon the Thesis Option; or
- d. The faculty thesis committee determines that the thesis project is complete.

Myth & Misconception #5

I May Select Any Criminal Justice Professor as the Chair of My Thesis Committee.

Although all Criminal Justice faculty members are willing to serve as **Chair** of a thesis committee, a variety of circumstances may prevent an individual faculty member from agreeing to serve as **Chair**.

- a. The faculty member may not be designated by the Graduate School as a member of the Graduate Faculty. A complete list of faculty members approved by the Graduate

School as members of the Graduate Faculty is available on the Graduate School web page, <http://gradschool.nmsu.edu>.

- b. A faculty member may have too many commitments to be able to serve as **Chair** of a thesis committee. Faculty members working on grants or other extended research projects may feel they would not be able to devote the time and effort necessary to serve as **Chair**. In addition, the Criminal Justice faculty policy is that a faculty member may not serve as the **Chair** of more than **two** active theses or **two** Projects (for students pursuing the Project Option).
- c. A faculty member may not feel sufficiently familiar with the research of a particular proposed thesis topic.
- d. A faculty member, based upon prior experience with a student, may not feel that student is sufficiently skilled to conduct thesis research.
- e. A faculty member may be eligible for sabbatical leave during the time period of the thesis project.
- f. A faculty member may have other research commitments.

Myth & Misconception #6

I May Select Any Criminal Justice Professor as a Secondary Member of My Thesis Committee

While it is true that all Criminal Justice faculty members can, and are happy to, serve as members of a thesis committee, a variety of circumstances may prevent an individual faculty member from agreeing to serve.

- a. A faculty member may have too many commitments to be able to serve on a thesis committee. Faculty members working on grants or other extended research projects may feel they would not be able to devote the time and effort necessary to serve. In addition, the Criminal Justice faculty policy is that a faculty member may not serve as the **Chair** of more than **two** active theses or Projects, and may be the secondary member on no more than **four** active theses or Projects.
- b. A faculty member, based upon prior experience with a student, may not feel that student is sufficiently skilled to conduct thesis research.

Myth & Misconception #7

I May Select Any Professor Outside the Department of Criminal Justice as the Outside Member of My Thesis Committee

Important factors in selecting the Outside Member of your thesis committee are familiarity with your thesis topic, completing prior course(s) with the professor, as well as a member of the Graduate Faculty. The **Chair** of your thesis committee will assist you in selecting the Outside Member of your thesis committee. As with Criminal Justice faculty members, there are circumstances that may prevent a professor from serving as the Outside Member of your thesis committee.

- a. faculty member may have too many commitments to be able to serve on a thesis committee. Faculty members working on grants or other extended research projects may feel they would not be able to devote the time and effort necessary to serve.
- b. A faculty member, based upon prior experience with a student, may not feel that student is sufficiently skilled to conduct thesis research.

Myth & Misconception #8

Professors are Available to Guide a Thesis All Year Long

Professors at New Mexico State University work on nine month contracts. During the summer months professors are working on various scholarly projects or importance to research, teaching, and service. Most generally, professors are in and out of town in an irregular pattern. In addition, professors become eligible for sabbatical leave every six years and may not be available for consultation during the sabbatical leave. Students need to make every effort to conclude the thesis project within the Fall/Spring semester academic schedule and to determine if every professor on the Project Committee will be available for the final oral defense. ***Do not assume that all members of your thesis committee will be available to assist your thesis project during the summer months.***

Myth & Misconception #9

The Thesis Chair will Provide the Student with Data for the Thesis Project

Over the years some thesis students have had the good fortune of being able to conduct secondary data analysis on data sets collected by a professor for the thesis project. 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 student seeking to pursue this option for acquiring a data set for secondary data analysis should consult with her/his thesis **Chair**.

Ultimately, a student considering the Thesis Option should assume that she/he will need to gather and analyze all data necessary to complete the thesis project.

Myth & Misconception #10

A Thesis is Just a Longer Research Paper

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 80 to 150 pages.

Myth & Misconception #11

Thesis Research Does Not Require Prior University Approval

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://research.nmsu.edu/docs/human/human.html>.