



University of Houston-Downtown
College of Public Service
Criminal Justice

Graduate Student Handbook
Master of Science in Criminal Justice
Department of Criminal Justice and Social Work

Effective Summer 2021

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Master of Science in Criminal Justice

INTRODUCTION

This *Handbook* is intended to serve as a guide to successful completion of the MSCJ degree at the University of Houston - Downtown. This guide contains information about degree requirements, transfer credit, academic standards, and planning for and registering for classes. This degree-specific handbook is intended as a supplement to the UHD [Graduate Catalog](#) and the general [UHD Student Handbook](#), which are resources for academic policies, student conduct policy, financial aid, and student services.

The topics below should answer many of your questions about the MSCJ program and the various policies and procedures that guide this program. The University Graduate Catalog requirements supersede this handbook. However, be aware that the program may be changed or policies may be modified by the Departmental Graduate Committee or the Graduate Program Director. In that event, students will have the option of selecting the new program. 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.

It is the student's responsibility to be familiar with the rules, policies, and 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.**

DEGREE REQUIREMENTS

The Master of Science in Criminal Justice 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

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). All 18 core credits must be successfully completed before requesting enrollment in Thesis I. Thesis students must follow the requirements outlined in the Master's Thesis Guide that is available on the MSCJ website.

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). All 18 core credits must be successfully completed before a student will be allowed to enroll in CJ 6301. A Project Guide is provided and available on the MSCJ website.

ADMISSIONS & ENROLLMENT

All admitted students must complete the Academic Honesty Commitment form and receive academic advising prior to registering for their first semester.

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, conditionally admitted 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 Asst. Director of Graduate Studies.

Inactive Students

Students who are inactive (not enrolled in MSCJ courses) for two long (fall or spring) consecutive semesters will be required to reapply to the University to be considered for readmission. Application files will be reviewed by the MSCJ Admissions Committee.

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 Graduate Program Director. A minimum grade of "B" is required in any such courses for transfer credit. Transfer credit will not be granted for courses in which grades of C or lower have been earned. 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 Program Director will consider granting transfer credit based on the recommendations of the evaluating service.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS

A minimum of 3.0 cumulative grade point average is required to graduate. In order to remain in good academic standing graduate students must maintain a 3.0 grade point average or better. Grades earned at other institutions and transferred into the UHD graduate degree program are not calculated when determining a student's academic standing.

All credit hours attempted as part of a graduate degree will be calculated in the GPA and used in determining academic standing. 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.

While course drops and withdrawals do not impact a student's GPA, students are discouraged from repeatedly dropping or withdrawing from courses as it can have negative impacts on degree progress, financial aid, and other aspects of the program (see University Withdrawal Policy on page 10).

Dismissal from the Program

Students who receive a grade of C or lower in 9 cumulative semester hours, or who receive a single grade of “D” or “F” in a graduate class, are ineligible for a master’s degree and will be dismissed from the program. Students can also be dismissed for academic dishonesty. Dismissed students are not permitted to re-enroll at UHD.

Academic Probation & Suspension

Failure to maintain a 3.0 cumulative GPA will result in academic probation. A hold will be placed on the student’s account requiring them to meet and consult with an advisor about their course schedule and degree progress each semester until they return to good academic standing. Students who are on academic probation must earn a minimum 3.0 GPA on 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 have a maximum of 3 terms 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.

Reinstatement is not automatic. Petitioners must submit a written petition to the Graduate 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. Penalties for academic dishonesty range from a zero on an assignment to dismissal from the program.

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.

Appeals

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.

Students wishing to appeal a suspension or dismissal decision must submit their appeal in writing to the Program Director. They must make a clear and convincing case that they have the ability and potential to be successful in graduate school. According to UHD policy [PS 03.B.07](#), an appeal of the Program Director’s final decision must be submitted in writing to the Dean of the College of Public Service.

ADVISEMENT

The MSCJ Program Director and/or Assistant Director of Graduate Studies can assist graduate students in selecting courses and advise them on their progress toward degree completion. New graduate students must meet with the Program Director before beginning course work to establish an academic plan. The Program Director will review graduate transfer hours and address undergraduate preparation work for students who do not hold an undergraduate Criminal Justice degree.

After completing the first semester, graduate students may request advisement from the Program Director or Assistant Director of Graduate Studies as necessary. It is recommended that you consult with the Program Director or the Assistant Director of Graduate Studies prior to each term registration. 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 university generally 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

Students may enroll in up to four courses during any regular semester. 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 and face-to-face modalities.

Several electives in both 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 or face-to-face modalities, or in a combination of both. Students are encouraged to take at least a portion of their courses face-to-face, when feasible. In some cases, scholarships and other tuition funding restrictions, such as students receiving 100 Club scholarships or 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.

Thesis Option

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.

COURSE ROTATION

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

Fall 2020	Face-to-Face	CJ6310	Fall 2021	Face-to-Face	CJ6310			
		CJ6320			CJ6320			
		CJ6330			CJ6324			
		Elective(s)			Elective(s)			
	Online	CJ6321		Online	CJ6321			
		CJ6340			CJ6330			
		CJ6324			CJ6340			
		Elective(s)			Elective(s)			
Spring 2021	Face-to-Face	CJ6321	Spring 2022	Face-to-Face	CJ6321			
		CJ6340			CJ6330			
		CJ6322			CJ6340			
		Elective(s)			Elective(s)			
	Online	CJ6310		Online	CJ6310			
		CJ6320			CJ6320			
		CJ6330			CJ6322			
		Elective(s)			Elective(s)			
		Summer 2021			Online	Summer 2022	Online	Elective(s)
					Face-to-Face		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. You must complete your core courses **before** registering for your project or thesis courses.
3. Summer courses are not guaranteed.
4. 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.