



**SAN JOSÉ STATE
UNIVERSITY**

**JUSTICE STUDIES
MASTER'S THESIS HANDBOOK**

"TRANSFORMING JUSTICE AND EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES SINCE 1930"

COLLEGE OF APPLIED SCIENCES AND ARTS

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The MS Thesis Handbook was prepared by Dr. Danielle Harris and presented to the faculty of the Justice Studies Department in Spring 2010. It was completed in Fall 2011 with the cooperation and guidance of Drs Roy Roberg and Mark Correia. The Handbook will be updated periodically by the Department chair, with approval of the faculty.

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DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE STUDIES
POLICY AND PROCEDURES MANUAL AND THESIS HANDBOOK

This handbook is designed to provide helpful information to master's students in the Justice Studies Department at San José State University. This handbook has been developed to provide guidance for students who plan on writing a Thesis (Plan A).

Students are not required to complete a thesis (Plan A) but if a student has a strong academic record in the core requirements (i.e., a B+ overall average) and submits a strong proposal, may be permitted to write a six-unit thesis as part of the 30-unit program. In order to write a thesis, the student must speak with the graduate coordinator and a faculty member knowledgeable in the area of the proposed thesis. If the faculty member agrees to direct the project, the student must write and present a thesis proposal. Students should work with their advisor on the proposal format.

The Plan A program will always require that a research proposal be written and defended prior to conducting research or being allowed to write a thesis. This handbook is intended to guide students through key steps in the process of writing and defending a thesis in the MS program of the JS Department at SJSU. University level requirements and graduate studies specific requirements are beyond the scope of this document and students should be aware that meeting all relevant deadlines are their responsibility (see [Graduate Studies and Research Thesis Resources](#)).

A MS thesis is evidence of an individual's ability to conceptualize and carry out research and to communicate the results of that research in a coherent document. The research should address an important problem of manageable scope in the chosen field of study, and should make a significant contribution to the profession's theory or practice. Most commonly, the work builds on previous research findings and involves the collection, analysis, and interpretation of new data. Some theses focus on the re-examination of previously collected data. A thesis is not ordinarily the effort of one scholar working in isolation. Master's candidates benefit greatly from the input and support of faculty members, advisors, and administrators. Thesis committee members and others can offer important advice to the degree candidate in areas such as the research design, data collection procedures, and use or analysis of data. Ultimately, however, the student remains responsible for the integrity of their research.

Before beginning the thesis process, a student should become familiar with similar theses previously printed and bound by students in the department. Doing so will give the student models of the format and style of theses previously approved by the JS Department.

ADVISORS

All students are expected to identify a MS advisor. If you are doing a thesis your advisor will be your Thesis Committee Chair.

You are entitled to expect regular contact with your advisor. Thesis Chairs should respond promptly to drafts, and should take responsibility for ensuring that you are working effectively and in a timely fashion. It is your responsibility, however, to bring to light any problems you might be experiencing with your advisor, either by discussing them with the advisor concerned, or with the Graduate Coordinator, who has ultimate responsibility for all matters involving research students.

AVAILABLE RESEARCH FUNDS

Funds may be available to full-time Plan A/Thesis MS students to assist with costs associated with attending conferences during their research program. A summary of financial assistance is set out below:

MS students (full-time only): Some research allowance money may be available (contingent on funding) during candidature. This funding may come from the Department of Justice Studies or the College of Applied Sciences and Arts. The department chair and graduate coordinator will distribute funding accordingly.

Use of University funds is strictly regulated, and this transfers into rules and conventions about how you can use your research allowance. The most common items paid for from research allowances include conference registration, reasonable accommodations, and travel expenses associated with active participation in a regional or national conference (such participation includes but is not limited to presenting a paper or poster, for example).

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

THE MASTER'S CANDIDATE WITH THESIS OPTION

A master's candidate is a student in good standing enrolled in a master's program who has been approved to write a thesis as part of his/her requirements for obtaining an M.S. Degree in JS. It is the responsibility of the candidate to seek the cooperation of at least three appropriate, qualified individuals—often within his or her department—to serve on the thesis committee. The candidate must initiate dialogue with committee members, follow recommended timetables, and plan committee meetings in accordance with the recommendations of the Thesis Chair. In working relationships with committee members, the candidate should be mindful that members have many other professional responsibilities. It is emphasized here also that the successful completion of a thesis is only one of the requirements. It is the student's responsibility to understand and satisfy all of the requirements of the individual program and of the University.

THE MASTER'S THESIS COMMITTEE CHAIR (THESIS CHAIR)

The master's thesis committee chair is the master's degree candidate's primary advisor during all phases of the thesis research and writing process. The chair is the leader of the committee and its liaison with the student, the program, and the department. The thesis chair convenes and conducts the thesis defense meeting. In conjunction with other committee members, the chair is responsible for providing technical and content advice and assistance. The thesis chair must be a tenured or tenure-track faculty member of the department, however, otherwise qualified individuals outside the department may serve in a co-chair capacity if such an arrangement is approved by the department.

THE MASTER'S THESIS COMMITTEE

Individuals who hold doctoral degrees or master's degrees in appropriate fields are eligible to serve as members of the master's thesis committee. The master's thesis committee ordinarily should have at least three members, including the thesis chair. At least two of the members should be tenured or tenure-track full time faculty from the department offering the master's program, and it is permissible for all members to be from the same program. The graduate coordinator will serve as the fourth member on all committees. Though continuity of committee membership throughout the thesis process is extremely important, a member of the thesis committee can resign at any time. Replacement members are required if the committee size drops below three. In any case, students should find a replacement for a resigning member, in consultation with the thesis committee chair. Similarly, members can be added at any time during the process.

Thesis committees should be constituted so that a range of expertise is represented that is pertinent to the topic under study and the methodology likely to be used. Committee members will be called on to advise the student throughout the process in areas appropriate to their expertise and interests. Members will also comment on written materials developed by the master's candidate when these are presented in a timely manner. Members are responsible for evaluating and approving the completed thesis. All members should be present during the final defense of the thesis.

THE INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS

The Report of the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects and the Code of Federal Regulations 45 and 46 dictate principles of conduct for research with human subjects. In compliance with these dictates, all research projects involving SJSU faculty, staff, or students—either as investigators or as participants—must be submitted to the SJSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) for review prior to data collection. Master's candidates writing a thesis involving human subjects must submit an IRB submission form, including an abstract of their proposed project. IRB procedures protect the rights and welfare of research subjects and assure their informed consent to research procedures. Although some research may, upon examination, be found to be exempt from IRB review, all proposals must be evaluated by the Review Board. Information on

submission procedures and how to contact the current chair of the IRB is available online. For additional information on IRB's policies and procedures, please see [Graduate Studies and Research IRB](#).

PATHWAY TO COMPLETING THESIS

ATTEND GRADUATE SCHOOL INFORMATION SESSIONS

Students are strongly encouraged to attend [Graduate Studies and Research](#) information sessions offered at the beginning of each semester. These sessions include information on the [Thesis process](#) and [IRB protocols](#).

DEVELOPING THE RESEARCH IDEA

It is assumed that by the time students are ready to begin a thesis or project, they already have strong areas of interest that can be developed into research. Still, converting an area of interest into a researchable project is often the most daunting step in the MS process. When selecting the thesis topic, candidates should keep several key points in mind. First, theses should be manageable in scope and possible to complete with the time and resources available to the student. The JS department reserves the right to determine whether a student's proposed area of study is sufficiently relevant to the student's program of studies to be approved. Student's interested in writing a Thesis must consult with the graduate coordinator prior to starting the process.

WRITING THE THESIS CONCEPT PAPER

Before selecting members for a Thesis Committee or proceeding with a full proposal, students are advised to develop a research concept paper, which is used for discussion purposes. This paper should include approximately 3 – 5 pages of text and an initial reference list to assist in the selection of committee members as well as a basis for further development of the proposal itself. Its purpose is to describe the research idea, present a brief commentary on the literature, and propose an appropriate methodology to conduct the inquiry. Discussing the research concept paper with a potential committee chair or with other potential committee members will enable the student to obtain advice early in the MS process as to the suitability of the topic as a worthwhile study and as to whether or not the research questions and methods are appropriate. Students are strongly encouraged to write this document during their first semester, in consultation with their JS202 or JS203 instructor.

ESTABLISHING A THESIS COMMITTEE

During the process of selecting a topic, the student should find an appropriate faculty member from the JS department who is willing to assume the role of Thesis Chair. A co-chair arrangement is also possible. Master's students taking a thesis option will work with their Thesis Chair to decide upon the thesis topic and to identify two additional committee members. The candidate will complete a "Nomination of Thesis Committee" form, including signatures from all who agree to become committee members. The form

is submitted to the Graduate Coordinator who obtains a signature from the department chair then submits the form to the department to be filed. This form affirms the willingness of a group of people to work with the student in a general topic area; it does not bind the committee or student to a specific study, nor does it imply approval for the student to collect data. That approval, for studies involving human subjects, must await a successful proposal defense and IRB clearance.

WRITING THE THESIS PROPOSAL

See the next section for a description of the components of a formal thesis research proposal. The proposal is generally written in several drafts, each revised in response to feedback from the Thesis Chair. When the chair and the student agree that the proposal is ready for defense, the committee chair will schedule the defense.

If the proposal is found to be acceptable during a defense, a “Thesis Research Proposal Approval Form” is signed by all committee members. Both committee approval and IRB approval (if data is going to be collected at this stage) are required before work can proceed. A copy of the approved proposal and the approved IRB form must be attached to the original copy (with original signatures) of this form.

PRESENTING THE THESIS PROPOSAL

Each thesis proposal will be presented as a poster at the College of Applied Sciences and Arts Research Showcase, held every year during the spring semester. Students are encouraged (although not required) to present the results of their final thesis at a regional or national conference.

CONDUCTING THE RESEARCH

It should be pointed out that data collection should not begin until the proposal is approved by the committee and IRB approval has been obtained. The committee is under no obligation to sanction the use of data collected prior to approval of the proposal. Pilot data may be collected before the proposal is approved, but note that pilot studies involving human subjects must be reviewed by the IRB before data collection begins. Also, it cannot be overemphasized that the student is responsible for maintaining high standards of ethical behavior and integrity in conducting the research project.

SCHEDULING A DEFENSE

Once the candidate has completed the research process, has written a thesis, and has had its final version reviewed and deemed ready for defense by the thesis chair and the other committee members, the chair will request a thesis defense. A master’s candidate should not ask the chair to schedule a defense until the thesis represents the candidate’s best effort to create a final document, incorporating all the content and stylistic requirements set forth in the graduate studies handbook and those recommended by the candidate’s committee. The candidate should be defending a final document, not a draft. (This does not mean that revisions will not be requested at or

after the defense. It simply means that every effort to create a final document should be made by the candidate prior to the defense.) No later than three weeks before the established defense date, the candidate should deliver three printed copies of the document to the Graduate Coordinator with an “Authorization to Schedule Masters Defense” form including signatures of all committee members.

DEFENSE PROCEDURES

The Thesis Committee Chair leads the defense meeting, in which the candidate presents and defends the thesis in the presence of the members of the thesis committee, the Graduate Coordinator, and other individuals (observers) who choose to attend. The chair first introduces the principal members present, including the candidate. The candidate is then expected to provide an overview of the research, lasting no more than 30 minutes, which highlights significant aspects of the work. Committee members may ask questions at any time during the defense. At the discretion of the chair, observers may be invited to ask questions. After the overview, observers are excused, and further questions may be posed by the committee. Only members of the committee and the Graduate Coordinator may participate during the final deliberations on the candidate's performance. The candidate is excused for the final deliberations, and is then brought back before the committee which shares its decision and comments. If the committee decides that the defense was successful, multiple copies of a signature page (which will later be bound into copies of the thesis) are signed by the committee members.

FINAL SUBMISSION OF THE THESIS

It is probable that further suggestions for revision will be made during the defense, so candidates must expect to continue the process of revising the final document even after the thesis has been successfully defended. During its deliberations at the conclusion of the defense, the committee will establish a deadline for submission of the final document. Once the thesis has been accepted and all committee members have approved the content of the final thesis draft, the draft must be prepared in accordance with [Graduate Studies and Research's requirements](#) of style and format, by following its style sheet for manuscript preparation. **It is strongly advised that, unless there is a compelling reason not to do so, candidates complete all minor revisions by two weeks after the defense.**

COMPONENTS OF THE THESIS PROPOSAL AND THESIS

The document should follow in sequence the steps of the research process. The JS department requires that students abide by the writing styles described in the most recent editions of the [American Sociological Association](#) or [Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association](#). It is strongly advised that students refer to the [Graduate Studies and Research thesis web pages](#) to familiarize themselves with Graduate Studies requirements.

FORMAL RESEARCH PROPOSAL

After the committee chair approves the research concept, work on the formal research proposal can begin. This proposal, in which the author's project is typically described in the future tense, includes information that will form the basis of the first three chapters of the Final thesis and should be 6-10 pages in length.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The introduction presents the problem to be addressed by the research. The introduction should describe a critical issue in a field of investigation and explain the importance of conducting a study to help resolve that issue. Terms likely to be used throughout the proposal should be defined in this chapter.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

A review of literature concerning the topic places the thesis in the context of previous research. The review should focus only on literature and conclusions directly pertinent to the subject and the problem addressed in the thesis. Any pilot work done should be described in this chapter. This chapter should also present the specific hypotheses or research questions to be addressed by the thesis clearly relating these to lines of investigation and conjecture detailed in current literature.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODS

The research design and methodology section describes in detail how the study will be conducted. This chapter is typically divided into labeled subsections. Often a subsection describing participants or subjects is followed by subsections describing specific hypotheses and identifying independent variables, dependent variables, and control variables used in the study. The next section should include testing or other measurement procedures to be undertaken with the participants and a subsection describing how the resulting measurements will be analyzed to help resolve the problems stated in the introduction. At this point, a short discussion of any likely methodological limitations should also be provided.

REFERENCES

The reference list at the end of the proposal should include all works cited in the proposal; conversely, all items listed as references must have been cited in the text of the proposal.

APPENDICES

Appendices of the proposal should include data-collection tools, such as IRB materials, consent forms, letters of introduction to subjects, questionnaires, survey forms, and the like. The appendices section should begin with its own cover page, followed by its own table of contents page. Each appendix may have its own cover page. The word "appendix" should appear in all capital letters.

THE THESIS

In general, the proposal is used as the basis for the first chapters of the final thesis, with modifications and additions as appropriate. For example, the proposal's literature review is likely to need updating. On the other hand, research questions and hypotheses should not be modified or "retrofitted" to match later findings. Care should be taken to ensure that the proper grammatical tenses are used in the final document. In the literature review, for example, discussions of reported research activities are generally described in the past tense (e.g., "When the same test was administered three months later, 7 of the 10 subjects received significantly higher scores..."), but authors' general conclusions, as stated in research reports, are typically described in the present tense (e.g., "Smith and Jones conclude that the test is a reliable indicator of visual acuity and spatial perception..."). As was stated earlier, prose from the proposal described in the future tense methods to be used in the research will need to be changed in the thesis to past tense, as appropriate, when describing work that has been completed.

THESIS TITLE

The title of the thesis should summarize the project, should not generally exceed 15 words, but should include relationships between or among key variables. It may be appropriate for the title to change from the proposal to the thesis draft to account for major changes that occurred prior to the completion of the research or for other reasons suggested by the committee. A title change requires the consent of the committee. The title should include a statement of the relationships between or among the key research variables.

SIGNATURE PAGE

On the signature page the following should appear, in order: the title of the thesis, the author's name, the words "Approved by," and blank underlines, below which should appear the names of the thesis committee members, followed by their degrees. Committee members (beginning with the chair) sign their names on these lines and indicate the dates of approval.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

As in the proposal, the introduction presents the problem addressed by the research. The subject of the thesis is described in such a way that readers will know in a general way the current status of research conclusions on the topic, as well as some theoretical implications associated with the results of previous research on the subject. As in the proposal, the introduction should describe the nature and purpose of the study and explain the significance of and justification for conducting the study. Terms likely to be used throughout the thesis should be defined in this chapter. As an option, a brief summary of the introduction may appear at the end of the chapter. Summaries may also optionally be used to conclude the subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The review of the literature in the thesis places the present study in the context of previous research. The review should be similar to the review of literature in the proposal but should reflect any change of focus or direction that resulted from the research process. Again, this chapter should present the hypothesis or research questions and the relationship of these to previous findings.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODS

The method section of the thesis should build on the description of methods outlined in the proposal. Labeled subsections similar to those in the proposal should be included. These may include a section describing participants or subjects, a section describing the hypothesis and identifying independent, dependent and control variables, testing or other measurement procedures undertaken with the participants, and a section discussing limitations of the methodology. (The descriptions of the analyses which appeared in the proposal are usually incorporated in the results section of the final thesis.)

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

The results section summarizes the data collected and details the statistical treatment of that data. After a brief statement of the main results or findings of the study, the data are reported in sufficient detail to justify the conclusions. Tables and illustrations (e.g., figures et al.) may be used to report data when these methods are seen to present the data more clearly and economically. All tables and illustrations used should be mentioned in the text, with appropriate titles or captions and enough explanation to make them readily identifiable.

CHAPTER V: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In the discussion section, the results are summarized, evaluated, and interpreted with respect to the original research questions and hypotheses. In this section, the investigator is free to examine, interpret, and qualify the results, as well as to draw inferences from them. Theoretical and practical consequences of the results and the validity of conclusions may appropriately be discussed in this section. The limitations of the study and suggestions for future work may also be included.

REFERENCES

The reference list at the end of the thesis should list all works cited in the thesis, and all items listed as references must have been cited in the thesis text. Special attention should be given to ensure appropriate citations of less common sources, such as unpublished manuscripts.

APPENDICES

Materials that document important components of the thesis research process that would be too lengthy, awkward, or distracting to include within the text should be included as appendices in the final document. These materials may include pertinent

raw data, and—as in the proposal—IRB materials, consent forms, letters of introduction to subjects, questionnaires, survey forms, and the like. The appendix section should begin with its own cover page. Each appendix may have its own cover page. The word “APPENDIX” should appear in all capital letters.

MS THESIS STUDENT CHECKLIST

The following checklist, based on a two-year program, specifies thesis requirements, in chronological order:

Item	Date Completed
Selection of thesis chair advisor	(SEMESTER 2) _____
Submission of research concept paper	_____
Tentative approval of topic	_____
Formation of committee	_____
Committee approval of concept paper	(SEMESTER 2/3) _____
Schedule proposal defense date	_____
Proposal draft to chair/committee*	_____
Corrected draft to committee*	_____
Proposal defense	_____
Committee approval of proposal defense	_____
Institutional Review Board approval	(SEMESTER 2/3) _____
Begin thesis study	_____
Completion of study	_____
Initial draft of thesis to chair*	(SEMESTER 3) _____
File application for degree	_____
Corrected first draft to committee*	(SEMESTER 4) _____
Corrected second draft to committee*	_____
Additional draft revisions*	_____
Chair gives approval of changes	_____
Schedule Thesis defense date	(Upon final approval of committee) _____
Final draft to committee (3 weeks prior to defense)	_____
Thesis Defense	_____
Make minor changes required by committee at defense (within 2 weeks)	_____
Obtain signatures of committee	_____

*Allow 2 weeks turnaround from committee; candidate has 2 weeks upon receiving comments to submit revisions.

Students are required to pay the Justice Studies Department to bind 2 copies of the thesis (1 for the Department and 1 for the Committee Chair). The cost of each copy is \$75.00, for a total of \$150.00.

PLEASE NOTE: graduate studies and university specific requirements are not on this list. Please refer to [Graduate Studies and Research for University](#) specific requirements.