

Rochester Institute of Technology

Master's Thesis Guidelines for Students and Faculty

The objective of this document is to provide guidance for students and faculty committees concerning the planning, conduct, and defense of the master's thesis. These guidelines outline the expectations of the Criminal Justice Department and the Rochester Institute of Technology as well as the responsibilities of the student, thesis supervisor, and committee members.

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Why do I have to do a Master's thesis?

A thesis is **required** for completion of the MS degree in Criminal Justice. Planning for the thesis should begin as early as possible.

Your thesis is the culmination of your graduate work and an opportunity to apply the knowledge and skills that you have acquired through course work and research assistantships, etc. It is intended as a guided, constructive learning experience. It is a chance for you to work in collaboration with a number of faculty members on a research project of mutual interest and to possibly publish manuscripts resulting from the thesis.

2. What is acceptable for a Master's thesis?

The expectation of the Criminal Justice Department is that the master's thesis will involve an *empirical* component. While theoretical frameworks or conceptual models may (and should in many cases) guide the research questions, or be the subject of empirical testing, a strictly theoretical paper is not acceptable for a master's thesis. The thesis may involve quantitative data, qualitative data, or a combination of both types of data.

3. How do I get started?

First, you need to explore possible topics and areas of mutual interest through talking with faculty members and reading the relevant published literature. You may become interested in certain areas as a result of course topics or papers. Your advisor or other faculty members may describe current research projects that may be of interested to you. *Since the Master's time line is quite short, it is important to start exploring and discussing possible thesis topics as early as possible, no later than the end of the first year of the program for full-time students.*

4. Who is on the Master's thesis committee?

RIT guidelines stipulate that for degree programs requiring a Master's thesis, the committee must consist of at least three faculty members: *the supervisor from within the home department, and two committee members (at least one of whom has an academic appointment in the home department).* Your supervisor will assist you in selecting and approaching potential committee members for your thesis.

Once your thesis topic has been determined and your committee has been chosen (and agrees to serve), you can proceed with development of the thesis proposal. You need to complete the *Declaration of Topic and Committee Form*, have it signed by your thesis supervisor, and return it to the Criminal Justice Department.

5. What constitutes the Master's thesis proposal and approval process?

The proposal begins as the *blueprint (Preliminary proposal)* or plan for the thesis and evolves into a more *contractual agreement (Written Proposal)* between the student and his or her thesis committee. The intent of the working proposal is to develop the ideas, obtain input and guidance from the committee, and reformulate the ideas as necessary into a workable and feasible thesis or thesis project. A thesis proposal normally goes through a number of drafts prior to the more formal and public presentation. The supervisor provides feedback and guidance on early drafts of the proposal; other committee members may also be involved at this stage. *It is desirable for all committee members to provide feedback on at least one complete draft of the proposal prior to scheduling the proposal presentation.*

6. What is the difference between a thesis and a capstone?

There are some technical differences between the thesis and the capstone option. There are some technical differences between a thesis and the capstone option. The thesis requires a 6 credit course (CRIM-800), therefore requiring only two elective courses (6 credit hours). The capstone requires a 3 credit course (CRIM-775), therefore requiring three elective courses (9 credit hours). In addition, the thesis requires the student to form a committee consisting of three faculty members, with one serving as chairperson or direct advisor. The final thesis must be presented in a public forum and the final product must be formatted according to University criteria. In contrast, the capstone is completed under the supervision of a single Instructor. While the thesis should consist of a single or unified study around a distinct set of research questions and a narrowly focused body of literature, the capstone project typically consists of a portfolio of inter-related working papers, linked together by an overarching theme.

THE PRELIMINARY PROPOSAL

The preliminary proposal constitutes a brief description of your topic and methods. It represents your initial commitment to a research area, methods, and scope of work. The thesis chairperson and committee members work to refine and guide the student in executing the research project. The elements of the preliminary proposal are contained in a form as an appendix to this document and should include the following:

- 1) Working title of your paper.
- 2) A one paragraph description of your topic.
- 3) A paragraph description of your methods, i.e., who is your population (e.g., Rochester police officers, college students); what method(s) will you use (e.g., interviews, surveys); how will you access the data (e.g., interview drug court clients at the Hall of Justice); total number in sample you expect (e.g., N = 20 drug court clients); how you will analyze the data (e.g., utilizing SPSS using cross-tabs and frequencies, and regression).
- 4) A paragraph description of the theoretical framework.

- 5) A paragraph description of the significance of the study (i.e. why is it important) and policy implications.
- 6) A list of fifteen references. The works must from professional periodicals (see instructor for clarification). You will need to have found these in the library/internet but not necessarily read them thoroughly at this point.

THE WRITTEN PROPOSAL

The questions students typically ask are: "*What should be included in the proposal?*" and "*How long should it be?*" Below are detailed guidelines for the sections that must be included in the proposal. With the exception of the abstract, however, the length of each section has not been specified for a number of reasons. What is important is that *sufficient detail and clarity* are provided in each section, particularly concerning the rationale, objectives and methods. As a general guideline, the text of the full proposal should be between 15-25 pages (excluding appendices). Length of each section greatly depends on the particular topic and preferences of the supervisor. For instance, in some cases, the literature review is quite extensive up front (with later searches mostly for the purpose of updates). In other cases, the proposal is shaped based on a few key articles with a more thorough literature search and write up to take place later.

Regardless of length, clarity and conciseness are strongly encouraged. Part of the master's thesis experience is to improve one's writing skills. The written proposal must include the following sections:

Title page The cover page must include the title of the thesis proposal, the student's name, degree sought, department, names of the supervisor and committee members, and date.

Abstract The one page abstract should not exceed 300 words.

Introduction Contains a statement of the problem or issues to be addressed in the proposed study.

Literature The review of relevant literature should provide an overview of the field and demonstrate that the student knows the area under investigation. Equally important, this section should provide supporting evidence concerning the rationale, statement of the problem and/or issues to be addressed by the present study.

Objectives This section describes the overall purpose, as well as the specific objectives of the present study. In some cases, the objectives may be formulated as research questions. In other cases, such as an evaluation project, the study may address program objectives and/or underlying assumptions. This section of the proposal often includes the researcher's hypotheses or a priori expectations and should be closely linked with the literature in the preceding section.

Methods Subsections typically include: study design; sample selection criteria, size, and sampling process; data collection procedures and instruments; and a description of data analysis techniques and statistical software programs to be used. Be as detailed as possible, including the identification of concerns.

Time Line Develop a reasonable time line for each phase of the project, including: pilot testing of instruments or procedures, data collection, data analyses and interpretation, and write-up. Specify the anticipated term/year for final defense. Where applicable, institutional review board (IRB) approval should be considered in your timeline.

References For the proposal, this may include a list of references already obtained and cited in the literature review section, as well as a list of articles to be obtained (listed separately).

Appendices Should contain supporting and descriptive materials, instruments, etc.

CONDUCTING RESEARCH AND WRITING THE THESIS

Once you have received approval (see Approval form in appendix to this document), you are on your way. Students must keep their thesis supervisors informed of their progress. It is very important to inform your supervisor of any problems that may be encountered that could jeopardize the validity of the study. You will address these problems together and find workable compromises. If there are major changes to the study design, sampling or other aspects of methodology along the way, all committee members should be apprised of these changes. Your supervisor will guide you in these matters. Make every effort to meet with your committee on a regular basis.

You should not leave the entire thesis writing until after data collection and data analyses are completed. For instance, when you have breaks in data collection, you may want to work on your literature and methods sections. You are encouraged to refer to published guides for thesis writing (re: outlines, organizing, formatting, etc.).

Discuss with your supervisor whether he or she wishes to see preliminary sections of the thesis prior to production of a full draft. Some committee members may also be willing to provide feedback on specific draft sections in line with their expertise. Typically, however, your supervisor reads and provides comments on preliminary drafts and helps you decide when it is ready to submit to the full committee. Keep in mind that *before* allowing you to proceed to the thesis defense your committee has the prerogative (and will typically exercise it) to request revisions.

ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS

Every thesis must have a title page, signature page, and abstract. Additional elements typically include a table of contents, introduction, literature review, and references. The arrangement and nature of the parts of the thesis body can be varied to improve the clarity of the document. The following listing gives a typical arrangement:

• Title Page	Page i
• Preface or Forward	Page ii
• Abstract	Page iii
• Table of Contents	Page iv
• Table of Appendices	.....
• List of Tables	.....
• List of Figures	.....
• List of Symbols	.....
• Introduction	Page 1
• Chapters Giving	.....
▪ Theory	.....
▪ Data Collection	
▪ Method of Analysis	.....
▪ Results	.....
▪ Discussion	
▪ Policy Implications	.....
• Conclusions	.....
• Summary	.....
• References	
• Appendices	Page A1

GETTING READY FOR THE THESIS DEFENSE

Once your committee decides you are ready to proceed to the thesis defense, there are a number of things that need to be done, similar to the steps taken prior to the proposal presentation.

1. The student must contact all members of the committee to determine available dates and times for the defense. Again try to select a time that allows most faculty and graduate students to attend.
2. The student must provide each member of the committee with a copy of the thesis at least two weeks in advance of the defense date.
3. The student must book a room for the date and time agreed to by all committee members. Book the room for at least a two-hour period. Notify all committee members of room and time.

THE ORAL THESIS PRESENTATION, DEFENSE AND EXAMINATION

It is a public meeting. Faculty members, besides your committee may attend. Students are also invited to attend and are encouraged to attend.

Allow about one and a half hours for the process. Your presentation should take about 30 to 45 minutes with the remaining time for questions. You should have a presentation that explains your topic, the data gathering process, the method of analyses, the theoretical perspectives, results, and policy implications.

You need signature sheets for your committee to sign – one for each copy you intend to have bound. You should have at least three bound copies – one for yourself, one for the department (usually given to your committee chair), and one for the library. If you desire more that is your choice.

The examining committee will deliberate and reach one of the following decisions:

i. Accepted. The thesis requires no change or only minor typographical or editorial changes which will be made to the satisfaction of the thesis supervisor.

ii Accepted with Modifications. The thesis requires minor changes in substance and/or major editorial changes or clarifications. Typically, this category implies that no further work needs to take place. It is more a matter of refinement, clarification or elaboration. The Chair will make notes on the changes requested by the committee, as well as who will take responsibility for examining and approving these changes, and the date by which the changes should be submitted. This list can be produced by both the Chair and the thesis supervisor.

iii. Accepted Conditionally. The thesis required more substantive changes (such as minor additional data analysis or reanalysis, or major rewriting), but will likely be acceptable once these changes are made to the satisfaction of the committee. The report of the Chair will outline the nature of these changes, the date by which the changes are to be completed, who will be responsible for approving these changes, and the consequences if the student fails to comply

iv. Decision Deferred. The thesis requires very substantial modifications (such as additional data collection or major reanalysis); acceptability is in doubt. Similar to ii, the report of the Chair will provide a list of concerns and modifications required, as well as a time line for completion, and consequences should the student fail to comply. **In this case, the revised thesis must be submitted to the entire examining committee and a subsequent defense scheduled.** Normally, the same committee will serve. A decision to defer is permitted only once for each candidate.

v. Rejected: The Chair will provide a written report concerning the reasons for rejection by the examining committee.

Decisions and Signatures

Accepted theses should have the signature sheet signed at the defense. In cases where a thesis is accepted with modification or conditionally, it is the chair's discretion (in consultation with the committee) as to whether the committee will sign the signature sheet at the conclusion of the defense. Deferred decisions and rejected theses require no signature sheet being signed at the defense.

Policy on Absent Committee Members for Master's Thesis Defense The policy is that no more than one committee member, and not the thesis supervisor, may be absent for the MS thesis defense to take place. The absent member must be contacted in advance by the thesis supervisor and submit a list of questions, desired responses, as well as a final recommendation (refer to decision categories), including a list of revisions that need to be made, to the supervisor at least one week prior to the scheduled defense. In contrast to the proposal, feedback from an absent committee member cannot be submitted after the defense has taken place. If the above stipulations cannot be met, the defense will have to be cancelled and rescheduled.

After you have successfully defended your thesis you must submit an electronic digital copy with the library and to UMI/Proquest. You may choose to have a printed bound copy purchased at your own expense but this is not a requirement.

Information regarding this process and final document formatting can be found at

<http://infoguides.rit.edu/thesis-services>

THESIS MILESTONES

DATE	MILESTONES
_____	1. Review Thesis FAQ.
_____	2. Meet with the faculty to discuss potential thesis topic.
_____	3. Decide on the subject and form thesis committee.
_____	4. Carry out detailed literature search and preliminary ‘proof of concept’ experimentation.
_____	5. Obtain thesis Advisor's approval of preliminary thesis proposal.
_____	6. Submit preliminary thesis proposal to other thesis committee members.
_____	7. Obtain approval of preliminary thesis proposal by all committee members.
_____	8. Begin writing a formal thesis proposal based on the approved outline.
_____	9. Submit formal thesis proposal for approval.
_____	10. Proposal defense, upon receiving approval of formal thesis proposal continue the study.
_____	11. Regularly share and discuss the results with your committee.
_____	12. Periodically submit draft of chapters of thesis to the advisor to review
_____	13. Periodically meet with other members of thesis committee and provide draft revisions of completed chapters
_____	14. Submit final draft for thesis committee approval
_____	15. Schedule formal defense of thesis (specific date agreed to in oral defense)
_____	16. Revise your thesis according to comments in the defense and submit to thesis advisor for final approval
_____	17. Submit electronic copy to PROQUEST
_____	18. GRADUATION! :)

Appendices

Department of Criminal Justice Preliminary Thesis Proposal

Name _____

Date _____

Instructions:

Below include a brief description of your topic and methods. Include:

- 1) Working title of your paper.
- 2) A one paragraph description of your topic.
- 3) A paragraph description of your methods, i.e., who is your population (e.g., Rochester police officers, college students); what method(s) will you use (e.g., interviews, surveys); how will you access the data (e.g., interview drug court clients at the Hall of Justice); total number in sample you expect (e.g., N = 20 drug court clients); how you will analyze the data (e.g., utilizing SPSS using cross-tabs and frequencies, and regression).
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- 6) A list of fifteen references. The works must from professional periodicals (see instructor for clarification). You will need to have found these in the library/internet but not necessarily read them thoroughly at this point.

ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

College of Liberal Arts

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

~ Thesis Proposal Approval Form ~

Student Name: _____

Thesis Title: _____

~ MS Thesis Committee ~

Name

Signature

Date

Chair

Committee Member

Committee Member

<Thesis Title>
by
<Student Name>

Committee Members
Committee Member #1
Committee Member #2
Committee Member #3

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Science in Criminal Justice
Rochester Institute of Technology
College of Liberal Arts
<mm/dd/yyyy>