

Texas A&M University-Kingsville
Graduate Program Guidelines
Master of Science (M.S.) in Criminology¹

1. General Program Overview

1.01 Admission Criteria

In order to gain full admission to the Master of Science (M.S.) in Criminology program, applicants must have a minimum 2.6 overall undergraduate GPA and a minimum GRE composite score of 284 or a 388 on the MAT. For conditional admission (full admission with stipulations), applicants are merely required to have the requisite 2.6 overall undergraduate GPA. Applicants who are granted full admission with stipulations must either a.) maintain a 3.0 GPA in the first nine hours of graduate coursework, or b.) take the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) and/or the Miller Analogies (MAT) test prior to the ninth hour of graduate coursework and achieve a minimum composite score of 284 on the GRE or 388 on the MAT.

1.02 Degree Option Selection

The Department of Psychology and Sociology at Texas A&M University-Kingsville offers three separate degree options leading to the M.S. in Criminology—the Courses-Only Option, the Project Option, and the Thesis Option. Every criminology graduate student should select one of these options by the end of her or his second semester of enrollment in the program. For most students, the Courses-Only Option will be the fastest route to obtaining the M.S. degree. However, students who intend to pursue a research doctorate in criminology or a related social science discipline are encouraged to select the Thesis Option.

1.03 Faculty Advisor and Course Selection

Every criminology graduate student should select a faculty advisor by the end of her or his second semester of enrollment in the program. The faculty advisor should be a criminology or sociology faculty member in the Department of Psychology and Sociology and she or he must agree to serve in this capacity. Once a faculty member agrees to advise the student the student is responsible for e-mailing the name of the advisor to the Graduate Coordinator within one week. The faculty advisor can help the graduate student to select her or his courses, but the student is ultimately responsible for enrolling in the courses that will allow her or him to make timely progress toward the degree. Among other requirements, the student must complete a minimum number of graduate credit hours within the major—24 graduate credit hours for courses-only and project option students, and 18 graduate credit hours for thesis option students. For more

information on this requirement, please review the following document:
http://www.tamuk.edu/grad/images/pdfforms/Final_Approved_MS_Options.pdf. To assist students in the course selection process, detailed outlines for each of the three degree options are available on the TAMUK graduate criminology web page:
http://www.tamuk.edu/artsci/psycsoci/faculty_profiles/masters_crim.html.

1.04 TAMUK College of Graduate Studies Requirements

The TAMUK College of Graduate Studies requires degree candidates to submit various forms prior to graduation. The student is responsible for contacting the College of Graduate Studies to find out which forms must be submitted, completing the forms, obtaining the necessary signatures, and submitting the forms in advance of their posted deadlines. Forms that require the Graduate Coordinator's signature should be presented to the Graduate Coordinator at least 10 working days in advance of the posted submission deadline. This is particularly crucial for the Final Degree Plan, the contents of which must be verified by the Graduate Coordinator prior to submission. For more information on the forms that must be submitted and their respective deadlines please visit the TAMUK College of Graduate Studies web page: <http://www.tamuk.edu/grad/>.

2. Comprehensive Exams

2.01 General Comprehensive Exam Requirements

Per TAMUK guidelines, candidates for the M.S. in Criminology must complete a comprehensive exam. Students who choose the Courses-Only or Project Option must complete a written comprehensive exam and Thesis Option students must complete an oral comprehensive exam. The comprehensive exam should be administered during the student's final semester of enrollment in the graduate program and must be completed by a specified date as noted in section 2.02.²

2.02 Scheduling the Comprehensive Exam

Within the first three weeks of the student's final semester of enrollment in the graduate program, the student must schedule the comprehensive exam with her or his faculty advisor. Once the comprehensive exam is scheduled, the student must send the Graduate Coordinator an e-mail within one week stating her or his intentions to take the exam that semester. Per the TAMUK 2015-2017 Graduate Catalog all comprehensive exams "should be completed no later than the first week of April (for May candidates), July (for August candidates) and November (for December graduates)." Also, Thesis Option students must "...make an oral defense of the...comprehensive exam before the [thesis] committee *no later than five weeks before commencement*" (Italics in Original).

2.03 Written Comprehensive Exam Structure and Preparation Guidelines

The written comprehensive exam should be a take-home exam consisting of five sets of questions.³ This includes one set of questions from each of the four required courses that the student has taken and one set of questions from a criminology elective course that the student has taken.⁴

Once the student has scheduled the written comprehensive exam with her or his advisor the student should send the advisor an e-mail, which includes the following information:

1. The titles of the four required courses that the student has taken along with an elective course in criminology from which the student would like to have one set of her or his comprehensive exam questions drawn. (These can include “ongoing” courses from the current academic term.)
2. The names of the faculty members who taught (or are currently teaching) each of the above-listed courses. (These faculty members will write the comprehensive exam questions and grade the student’s responses.)

Once the advisor receives this information from the student, the advisor should inform the participating faculty members that the student is planning to take the written comprehensive exam, when the exam will be given, and the course(s) for which exam questions are needed.⁵ In order to allow the faculty adequate time to prepare their questions, the advisor should provide this information at least one month prior to the date on which the student is scheduled to begin the exam.⁶

As noted above, the set of exam questions for each course should be written, and the responses to those questions graded, by the faculty member who taught the section of the course in which the student was (or is currently) enrolled. If, during the regular semester, a faculty member is unavailable or otherwise unable to do this, the exam question(s) can be written and the response(s) graded by another faculty member who has taught the same course or a similar course.

In each instance, the question type and format will be at the discretion of the faculty member who writes the question. Faculty should note, however, that the university requires students who have chosen the Courses-Only Option to complete “A common written comprehensive examination that illustrates knowledge of the literature of the discipline and ensures student engagement in research and/or appropriate professional practice and training experiences...” Similarly, the exam for Project Option students must “illustrate...knowledge of the literature of the discipline and ensure...student engagement in research and/or appropriate professional practice and training experiences.” Finally, as noted above, Thesis Option students must “...make an oral defense of the...comprehensive exam before the [thesis] committee *no later than five weeks before commencement*” (Italics in Original).

2.04 Written Comprehensive Exam Creation and Distribution

Once the faculty members have written their exam questions they should forward them to the Graduate Coordinator who will create the exam by assembling the questions into a single document, assigning a number to each set of questions, and listing the title of the course to which each set corresponds. The exam will also include directions for its completion. The Graduate Coordinator will then provide the exam to the department secretary who will make it available to the student when the student is ready to begin the exam. When the student is ready to begin the exam, she or he should go to the main office of the Department of Psychology and Sociology during regular business hours to request it.

2.05 Written Comprehensive Exam Student Response Submission

Once the student has the written comprehensive exam in her or his possession she or he is responsible for resubmitting a copy of the exam itself along with her or his responses to the department secretary within seven (7) calendar days. Once the student has submitted these documents the exam will be considered “complete” and the student will no longer be allowed to change her or his responses.

2.06 Question Selection and Response Format for the Written Comprehensive Exam

In order to complete the written comprehensive exam, the student must respond to the set of questions from the elective course and two of the four sets of questions from the required courses. The student should be allowed to choose the two sets of questions from among those pertaining to the required courses to which she or he would like to respond.

The format of the written comprehensive exam questions may vary. However, student responses to essay questions should be double-spaced and typed using 12 point Times New Roman font with one-inch vertical and horizontal margins. Each response should begin on a new page and the student is responsible for clearly indicating the exam question to which each of her or his responses corresponds. The student must also include her or his full name at the top of every page that she or he submits for grading.

2.07 Written Comprehensive Exam Processing, Grading, and Reporting of Results

Once the student has completed her or his written comprehensive exam and submitted the exam documents (including the responses) to the department secretary, the department secretary will notify the Graduate Coordinator who will scan the documents and keep copies on file. The Graduate Coordinator will then distribute the responses to the faculty for grading. As noted above each faculty member should only grade the responses to the

questions that she or he wrote. In grading the responses the faculty should utilize a standard (A-F) grading scale and assign a single letter grade to each set of questions. The grade(s) should then be given to the Graduate Coordinator who will record this information and determine whether or not the student has passed the exam. In order to pass the written comprehensive exam, the student must receive an average grade of “C” or better on two of the three sets of exam questions that she or he answers.⁷ In order to ensure that degrees are conferred in a timely manner, all comprehensive exam grades should be submitted to the Graduate Coordinator at least one week prior to Study Day of the semester during which the exam is administered.

¹ These guidelines are subject to change at the discretion of the Graduate Coordinator.

² The student should take her or his comprehensive exam during the Fall or Spring Semester. However, at the discretion of the Graduate Coordinator and the criminology graduate faculty, a student may be allowed to take her or his comprehensive exam during the first or second summer session. The decision to allow a student to take her or his comprehensive exam during the summer will depend on a variety of factors including the availability and willingness of faculty to assist in the exam process at the time that the exam is to be given. Thus, there are no guarantees that a student will be allowed to take her or his comprehensive exam during the summer.

³ Writing prompts can be included in the written comprehensive exam in addition to or in lieu of questions. The number of questions in each set will be at the discretion of the faculty member responsible for writing the questions.

⁴ The student should be allowed to choose the elective course from which her or his exam question(s) will be drawn.

⁵ In preparation for the oral comprehensive exam, the advisor should provide similar notification to the members of the student’s thesis committee who will, in turn, write the exam questions. The student is responsible for selecting her or his thesis committee and providing the names of the committee members to her or his advisor. The number, type, and format of the oral comprehensive exam questions will be left to the discretion of individual thesis committees. Likewise, each thesis committee will determine the performance standards that the student must meet in order to pass the oral comprehensive exam and, once the student has completed the exam, whether or not she or he has met those standards. As with the written comprehensive exam, each faculty member should only grade or evaluate the responses to the oral comprehensive exam questions that she or he wrote. Students who do not pass the oral comprehensive exam should be allowed to retake the exam the following semester. If the student does not pass the exam on this second attempt, she or he should be allowed to retake it once again the following semester. The student should only be allowed to retake the oral comprehensive exam twice (for a total of three attempts) before she or he must submit a written appeal to the Graduate Coordinator stating the reasons why she or he should be allowed to take the oral comprehensive exam a fourth time. Once the appeal is submitted to the Graduate Coordinator, the Graduate Coordinator will consult with the student’s thesis committee to determine the best course of action. Appeals will be judged on their individual merits. Except

under extraordinary circumstances, students will not be allowed to take the oral comprehensive exam more than four times.

⁶ For both the required and elective courses a “test bank” can be created whereby the questions submitted by faculty members can be archived by the Graduate Coordinator and included in each student’s written comprehensive exam as necessary. This will obviate the need for advisors to solicit test questions for individual students.

⁷ As with the oral comprehensive exam, students who do not pass the written comprehensive exam should be allowed to retake the exam the following semester. If the student does not pass the exam on this second attempt, she or he should be allowed retake it once again the following semester. The student should only be allowed to retake the written comprehensive exam twice (for a total of three attempts) before she or he must submit a written appeal to the Graduate Coordinator stating the reasons why she or he should be allowed to take the written comprehensive exam a fourth time. Once the appeal is submitted to the Graduate Coordinator, the Graduate Coordinator will consult with the student’s advisor to determine the best course of action. Appeals will be judged on their individual merits. Except under extraordinary circumstances, students will not be allowed to take the written comprehensive exam more than four times.

Colin Wark

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