

## CRM 797 Policy Analysis Capstone Guidelines

The policy analysis paper provides the capstone experience for graduate students taking the non-thesis option. The goal of this capstone requirement is to demonstrate the ability to a) conduct a thorough and critical review of the research literature on an existing justice-related policy, b) integrate core components of the graduate curriculum into the analysis of the policy, and c) formulate strong recommendations for improving and revising existing policy and framing an agenda for future research. Paper lengths may vary by topic, although a 35 page minimum, including abstract, references, and tables, is expected.

Although students may not take credit hours specifically toward the policy analysis paper until their final semester, students should work to develop this paper through a cumulative and revisionary process throughout their graduate studies. The core courses in the graduate curriculum are designed to equip students with specific abilities and skills to produce a strong policy analysis paper:

***CRM 701 Criminal Justice Policy*** instructs students in techniques for developing, implementing, and evaluating criminal justice policies and introduces techniques for breaking down journal articles.

***CRM 705 Applied Research in Criminal Justice*** provides a basis for evaluating the quality of empirical research, recognizing ways to analyze important research questions relevant to criminal justice policy more effectively, and understanding how to integrate research into agency practice.

***CRM 715 Criminal Justice Management and Leadership*** helps students understand how policies are implemented and sustained at the agency level by criminal justice policymakers, managers and supervisors and illustrates what is required to effectively implement policy into organizational practice.

***CRM 720 Crime Theory and Policy*** gives students a deeper understanding of the theoretical roots of crime-control policies and provides practice in developing logical frameworks for justifying criminal justice policies and programs.

***In addition***, elective graduate courses in criminal justice serve to strengthen policy development and analysis capabilities by focusing on policy and practice issues relevant to specific fields and topics, such as law enforcement, corrections, juvenile justice, terrorism, and gangs.

### **Topic Selection:**

The topic needs to be broad enough to generate an adequately-sized literature review. Gang policy and offender rehabilitation are examples of topics much too broad for the policy analysis paper. Gang suppression through legal strategies (such as nuisance abatement and civil injunction laws) or cognitive programming with sex offenders are examples of more suitable topics.

**Supervisor Selection:**

Students must identify a graduate faculty member willing to supervise the development of the paper. The student and supervising professor should work together to set a timeframe for completing the paper. Please note that certain graduate faculty may not be available during summer months or sabbatical periods.

**Key Sections of the Policy Analysis Paper****Abstract:**

Provide an abstract of approximately 200-300 words which summarizes your policy paper.

**Policy Statement:**

Each policy analysis paper needs an opening section which explains the nature of the policy and its significance in the broader context of criminal justice and crime prevention. Students must provide a clear definition of the policy, explain what the policy intends to accomplish and how it is currently applied, and identify the historical, socio-cultural, and legal context and events which influenced its development, implementation, and sustainability.

**Critical Review of the Research Literature:**

A critical review of the research literature a) defines and explains key concepts and issues relevant to the topic, b) identifies and explains theories guiding the research, c) describes how the research is conducted, d) presents key research findings and conclusions, e) specifies the strengths and weaknesses of methodological designs for the purpose of assessing the value of stated implications, and f) identifies critical gaps in the literature.

A literature review is not a series of study summaries. Key topics and themes emerging from the literature need to be identified and specific readings integrated into a discussion of these topics and themes. As noted above, students will prepare for this phase of their policy paper during the Justice Administration course.

Key questions that should be addressed through a critical literature review include:

- What key issues and research questions are being addressed in the literature, and the issues and questions adequately addressed?
- What theories guide specification of variable relationships? Do these theories make sense, and could alternative theories also account for proposed relationships?
- What are the key concepts in the literature and how are they measured? Are the measures shown to be valid and reliable?
- What are the key findings from research studies? Are they consistent, or do they vary from study to study? How substantive are the sizes of differences or effects

found in the research—in other words, how meaningful are these findings? How do the researchers interpret the magnitude or importance of their results?

- What types of methodological strategies and analytic techniques are employed? Do findings differ based on the methodology and statistical analysis? Do you find limitations with the methodological and analytic approaches?
- Are there gaps in the literature, and, if so, what are these gaps?

### **Research and Policy Recommendations:**

Based on research limitations identified in the critical review section, frame an agenda for future research on the policy. Specify in detail how researchers can more effectively address relevant research questions. For example, what research questions have not been addressed which need to be studied? How can variables be better conceived and operationalized? Are there key concepts and variables missing from the theory and analysis that you think should be added? Do you have recommendations for improvement of research designs and analytic techniques? Does the research need replication? Be specific.

In addition, include a series of detailed policy implications. In other words, what should be done regarding the policy? How can it be improved? Are there alternative policies that would be more effective? Students are encouraged to create numbered lists of policy recommendations. Make sure a descriptive justification accompanies each policy recommendation. Provide clear logic and supporting evidence for each recommendation and feel free to seek ideas from leading professionals in the field. Your knowledge and insights gained from sources within and outside of graduate coursework should be integrated here.

### **Conclusion:**

State your final assessment of the policy's effectiveness and prospects for the future.

### **References and Tables:**

All references and tables must correspond with APA format.