

Cumulative Essay Guidance

Students pursuing the Master of Science in Criminal Justice with Concentration in Theory and Research that opt for the non-thesis option are required to write a reflective essay following the completion of the following core courses: Advanced Criminological Theory, Evaluation and Research Methodologies, and Criminal Justice Statistics. This is done in order to fulfill the capstone experience requirement. Each essay should be a 2.5- to 3-page reflective discussion of your experience in these courses. This discussion requires students to elaborate on what they learned in each course and how the course relates to their academic and/or professional practice goals.

Reflective writing requires students to make connections between experience and theoretical concepts, both while considering implications for the future. Using readings, class discussions, and course work, students are expected to write about the topics that seem most relevant to these experiences and how new knowledge of the criminal justice system and criminology has resulted. The following questions should guide your discussion:

- What are your thoughts on your course experience in general and was it a useful learning experience?
- In what specific ways do you believe the content of this course will impact your academic/professional career?
- What specific skills or perspectives did you acquire as a result of taking this course?

Remember!¹

1. The reflective essay is not a summary or description of course readings or assignments. Instead, the reflective paper involves the identification of the main themes of readings integrated with coursework experiences, and how they affected your thinking and practice.
2. The reflective essay is your opportunity to add your thoughts and analysis to what you have read and experienced.
3. Consider how what you have read and learned changes, or changed, your understanding of the topic or how you would apply course concepts in academic and/or professional settings.
4. While the reflective essay may adopt an informal tone, it should still have an identifiable introduction, body, and conclusion.
5. Your essay should be well organized. Consider the use of subheadings to designate themes and provide structure.
6. Use of the singular person “I” is appropriate in a reflective paper.
7. In order to be considered for credit, your essay must be 2.5-3 full pages (excluding a title page/heading or any references), typed in Times New Roman, 12 pt font, and double-spaced. Include in-text references and a reference page for any materials you cite using APA citation formatting (however, references are not required).

¹ Adapted from <https://www.oxbridgeessays.com/blog/complete-guide-to-writing-a-reflective-essay/> and <https://www.iirp.edu/images/pdf/IIRPReflectionPaperTips091617a.pdf>