

Justice Studies Ph.D. Program Handbook

Program Overview

New Orleans has a long history of activism in the struggle for justice. Today, New Orleans is ground-zero for issues related to social, criminal, educational, and environmental justice. As the only public urban research university in the city, the University of New Orleans has a binding obligation to catalyze change. The Ph.D. in Justice Studies does just that. Our program contributes to the University of New Orleans' mission as an urban research university and commitment to collaboration, community engagement, diversity, equity, and inclusion.

The Ph.D. in Justice Studies prepares students to advance justice in their communities and beyond. The program consists of core courses in justice theory and research methods alongside an individualized plan of study related to one of four concentrations. In addition to coursework, students complete a comprehensive exam, prospectus, dissertation, and defense.

The Justice Ph.D. is a collaborative, interdisciplinary program led by a Program Coordinator and Advisory Committee. The Advisory Committee consists of faculty with expertise in justice theory, methods, or one or more concentrations. Faculty affiliated with the program represent graduate programs across campus, including Anthropology, Sociology, Fine Arts, Arts Administration, Business Administration, Economics, Finance, Education, English, History, Philosophy, Planning and Urban Studies, Political Science, and Public Administration.

Program Goals

1. Create an academic setting to foster greater knowledge of and solutions regarding issues related to social, criminal, educational, and environmental (in)justice
2. Provide UNO students and faculty with opportunities to develop justice-focused relationships and partnerships within the greater New Orleans community and Gulf South
3. Develop students' and faculty's knowledge and skills in areas and projects aimed at improving the region's socio-cultural, educational, and environmental conditions

Program Governance

The Program Coordinator and Faculty Advisory Committee lead the Justice Ph.D. The Coordinator's home department, with support from the College of Liberal Arts, Education and Human Development (COLAEHD), administers the program. The program invites the external guidance of a Community Advisory Group. Each contributes the following to the program:

- **Program Coordinator**

In addition to managing the program and planning events to create a sense of community among students, the Program Coordinator initially serves as the primary advisor for students. Upon enrolment, the Program Coordinator meets with each student to identify academic interests and concentration, account for prior coursework, develop an individualized plan of study, and determine a schedule. The Dean of COLAEHD appoints the Program Coordinator.

- **Faculty Advisory Committee**

The Dean of COLAEHD appoints regular, full-time faculty at UNO as members of the Faculty Advisory Committee. The program's website lists active committee members. The committee provides oversight and assists the Program Coordinator on administration of the program. Committee members make themselves available to serve on comprehensive exam, prospectus, and dissertation committees. At least once a semester, the Program Coordinator convenes and directs a committee meeting for faculty to discuss issues pertinent to the program, set priorities, maintain the handbook and policies, review curricula, review assessments (e.g., comprehensive exams), and strategize recruitment. Each spring, a subgroup of members make admissions and award decisions. Student representatives may be invited to attend meetings and contribute to decisions at the committee's discretion.

- **Community Advisory Group**

With support from the Faculty Advisory Committee, the Program Coordinator annually convenes an external Community Advisory Group. This group of regionally-based community members with particular interest and expertise in justice issues serves as a bridge between the program and the community. The Community Advisory Group helps identify opportunities for funding and community collaboration, recruit prospective students, create internships and career support for current and graduating students, and plan events. Members may also perform important research functions. For example, they may assist with dissemination and use of research products created by faculty and students involved in the program. The group may provide input regarding program structure in an advisory capacity.

Student Admission

In addition to meeting the minimum standards for admission to the Graduate School, applicants must provide a 1,000 to 1,500-word statement of purpose and three letters of recommendation. The GRE is not required. Applications are due on **April 1**. At that point, members of the Faculty Advisory Committee review applications and make admissions decisions for the following Fall semester. Students may not enter the program at other times during the academic year.

The statement of purpose should describe relevant academic and professional experiences, the intended concentration, specific faculty members the applicant hopes to engage in advising and committee service, aptitude for conducting rigorous research, and passion for addressing issues of (in)justice. From reading the statement, faculty should have a clear sense of how a Ph.D. in Justice will enable the applicant to achieve their professional and educational goals. Preferably, letters of recommendation should speak to an applicant's academic ability and experience.

Learning Objectives

1. Knowledge of major theoretical frameworks around concepts of justice and injustice
2. Facility with diverse methods of research
3. Expertise in a selected area of justice
4. Capacity for advanced-level research in Justice Studies

Degree Requirements

The PhD in Justice Studies requires a minimum of **57 credit hours** of graduate-level coursework:

- **12 credit hours** of core courses with a grade of “B” or higher
- **33 credit hours** of elective graduate coursework, of which at least 6 hours are directly related to a concentration (i.e., social, criminal, educational, or environmental justice)
- **Comprehensive exam** based on core courses and two designated concentration courses
- **12 credit hours** of supervised dissertation research, including a required three-credit course on developing the prospectus, successful completion and defense of the prospectus, and successful completion and defense of the final dissertation
- **At least half** of the courses must be at the 6000-level or above

The Justice Studies Ph.D. follows the general regulations and procedures governing UNO programs for obtaining a Doctor of Philosophy. Per Graduate School policy, no more than half of required credits (27 credit hours maximum) may be transferred from a prior graduate program towards elective requirements. The Program Coordinator must approve all transfers based on the courses’ relevance to the student’s concentration, ideally through review of course syllabi.

Core Courses

The three-credit courses listed below, taken in sequential order, cover justice-related theories and research methods. All students in the Ph.D. in Justice Studies complete four courses at UNO.

Students without prior graduate-level research methods or statistics coursework should expect to complete at least three credits in methods or statistics, within any discipline, before enrolling in the two-course core methods sequence. These credits count towards elective requirements.

- **JUST 6810 Theories of Justice**

This survey course covers major theoretical approaches to justice from classical antiquity to the present. Students explore diverse visions for a just society and relations between the individual and collective. Students also consider foundational ways thinkers across disciplines have tried to understand justice and analytic approaches for pursuing this knowledge.

- **JUST 6820 Justice and Law**

This course connects theories of justice to jurisprudence and political decision-making procedures. Students consider complicated ways law intersects with notions of a just society. Students also gain practice applying ideas from legal theory to concrete issues of (in)justice.

- **JUST 6830 Justice Research I**

This methods course familiarizes students with conducting doctoral-level research on justice-related topics in the social sciences, humanities, and arts. Particular emphasis is placed on epistemological theories guiding empirical research across disciplines. Students gain practice formulating research questions, reviewing existing literature, and developing a research plan.

- **JUST 6840 Justice Research II**

This second methods course guides students through the process of identifying potential strategies to answer interdisciplinary research questions related to justice. The course reviews qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methodologies and practical research strategies.

Concentration Courses

With the Program Coordinator's approval, and following an individualized plan of study developed upon enrolment in the program, students select concentration coursework from courses available throughout the university. As noted above, at least six credit hours (two courses) must relate directly to the student's declared concentration and will form the basis for the tailored concentration section of the student's comprehensive exam, explained below. Courses may be chosen based on interest but should fit within one of four concentrations:

- **Social Justice**

Students pursuing this concentration focus their study on systemic disparities and structural inequities that disadvantage populations and underserve communities, including the distribution of and access to opportunity, privileges, and resources among people of different races, ethnicities, classes, genders, sexualities, ages, abilities, and belief systems.

Students might grapple with comparative and case studies of social justice issues, actors, and agendas worldwide. Studies of anti-colonial and anti-racist thought and activism are encouraged. Concentration coursework ideally affords students opportunities to learn from peers, practitioners, and the public, whose expertise and experiences offer diverse perspectives and pathways to social justice.

- **Criminal Justice**

Students pursuing this concentration focus on advanced research and practice in criminal justice and criminal justice reform. These areas of justice are especially pressing in the state of Louisiana, which ranks among the world's incarceration capitals; students are thus encouraged to develop a local focus.

Students may address questions such as: What are the histories, motivations, operations, and effects of institutions making up the criminal justice system? How do effects differ across demographics? What is the (proper) scope of the criminal legal code? How should we enforce laws, treat persons who break them, and spend law enforcement resources? What does it mean for victims of crimes to be restored to justice? How might we enhance justice and equity in current institutions, policies, and processes?

- **Educational Justice**

Students pursuing this concentration develop and evaluate strategies to overcome inequities created and reproduced through educational policies and systems. Concentration coursework ideally guides students through policies and systems at multiple levels to enhance the experiences of underrepresented and marginalized students.

Students consider urgent issues, such as the need for equal access to education and the importance of disability studies to such discussions, while working to generate innovative strategies to influence policy and facilitate meaningful change advancing an equitable educational system. Students are encouraged to address the mass incarceration crisis by examining the educational opportunities for currently or formerly incarcerated persons.

- **Environmental Justice**

Students pursuing this concentration connect social, cultural, economic, historic, and political inequalities to environmental, ecological, anthropogenic, and natural challenges.

Concentration coursework may focus on access to resources, vulnerability to nature-induced and human-made disasters, sustainability of communities and infrastructures, and access to food and water. Students may also analyze and develop public policies that address questions of environmental justice.

Students ideally examine questions of environmental justice in global and domestic contexts and gain the capacity to understand and deploy research methods across natural and social science methods. Students should consider how questions of environmental justice are deeply entwined with other areas of justice, requiring a holistic approach combining social, cultural, economic, historic, and political perspectives.

Comprehensive Exam

Upon completion of at least 18 credit hours at UNO, including four required core courses and at least two concentration courses, students may take the comprehensive exam. Students recruit two faculty members to serve on the exam committee alongside the Program Coordinator.

The committee collaboratively develops, administers, and scores a take-home exam consisting of three essay questions: (1) a justice theory question, (2) a question related to justice research methods (e.g., review of a relevant peer-reviewed research article), and (3) a question tailored to a common theme across the student's two selected concentration courses completed at UNO. Each essay must not exceed 20 double-spaced pages or 5,000 words excluding references.

The exam is due by the conclusion of the initiated semester. Committee members score each essay as pass or fail by consensus. Students must pass all three essays to advance to candidacy. Students can resubmit each failed essay one time before the subsequent semester concludes.

Additional Electives

Each student's individualized plan of study may include electives offered across UNO relevant to their research and professional interests. Beyond additional concentration coursework, electives may cover advanced methods, skills such as technical writing, and pedagogy. Students interested in enrolling in an optional independent study or practicum should meet with the Program Coordinator as early as possible to plan details and gain approvals. Program-specific elective offerings include:

- **JUST 6900 Special Topics in Justice**

This course may feature any UNO faculty to focus on particular topics related to justice and one or more concentration. Topics, arranged by the Program Coordinator, vary by semester.

- **JUST 6980 Independent Study**

Under the direction of faculty, the student develops a course on a topic related to their area of specific interest. Requires approval of the Program Coordinator and faculty advisor.

- **JUST 6990 Justice Practicum**

This course supervises the research and practice of justice in applied settings. Requires approval of the Program Coordinator, faculty advisor, and client organization representative.

Prospectus

After initiating the comprehensive exam, students may enroll in the required three-credit Justice Prospectus course, which counts towards the 12 dissertation credits. At this stage, students work with the Program Coordinator to recruit a dissertation committee consisting of three scholars with doctorates in their field. One scholar designated as chair must be a UNO faculty member.

- **JUST 7030 Justice Prospectus**

In this course, students learn about the dissertation process and expectations, plan their research, form the dissertation committee, and write the prospectus. Students also explore strategies for disseminating their research and navigating the post-graduation job market.

The prospectus serves as a dissertation proposal. It should not exceed 50 double-spaced pages or about 15,000 words excluding references. The prospectus typically includes an introduction outlining the research questions and their significance, a review of the literature related to the research questions, and a proposed methodology for addressing the research questions.

When completed, the student submits the prospectus to their dissertation committee for review and schedules an oral defense. The committee must unanimously pass the prospectus before the student can proceed with dissertation research. If the committee does not unanimously agree to pass, the student may revise and resubmit, repeating the submission and defense process after completing revisions. Students may only revise and resubmit a prospectus once.

Dissertation

Finally, the student enrolls in the remaining 9 required dissertation credits, or more as needed, to complete and defend the dissertation, contributing scholarly, original research to the field of Justice Studies. The dissertation represents the culmination of the Ph.D. The final product typically consists of a written product of at least 150 double-spaced pages or about 50,000 words excluding citations. Formatting must adhere to UNO Graduate School requirements.

Dissertation coursework is divided into two course numbers:

- **JUST 7050 Dissertation Research**

In coordination with the dissertation chair and Program Coordinator, the student conducts research and drafts their dissertation. May be repeated for credit.

- **JUST 7040 Exam or Report Only**

This is the final step in the dissertation process. The course is open to students with only (other than application for graduation) the final submission and acceptance by the Graduate School of their dissertation to complete graduation requirements.

After submitting a complete dissertation to the committee and gaining approval of all members, a student may schedule the dissertation defense. Upon completion of the defense, committee members must unanimously pass the dissertation before the student can apply to graduate.

If the committee does not unanimously agree to pass, the student may revise and resubmit the dissertation one time. In this case, the student must repeat the defense process. After successful defense and submission of the final dissertation, the student may apply to graduate.

Additional Policies

All other program policies not discussed above follow policies outlined by UNO's Graduate School, including in such areas as:

- Tuition and fees
- Satisfactory academic progress (minimum 3.0 GPA)
- Time to degree (six calendar years after completing the comprehensive exam)
- Academic grievances & Code of Conduct
- Advancing to candidacy
- Graduation

Additionally, students are encouraged to consult the Graduate School for scholarships and other funding opportunities. Program-specific opportunities for funding or assistantships are shared with current and prospective students as they become available.

Sample Plan of Study

Here is a sample sequence of coursework for full-time students (i.e., 9 credits per semester) in the Ph.D. in Justice Studies. This plan assumes the student does not transfer credits towards the program or enroll in summer courses. The plan also assumes the student did not previously complete graduate coursework in research methods or statistics.

As seen below, students can earn a Ph.D. in Justice Studies after three years of full-time study, and an additional semester of part-time dissertation research. Students must enroll during the semesters of the comprehensive exam, prospectus and dissertation defenses, and graduation.

Many students will not follow this exact sequence, especially if they enroll part-time or need more time to complete their dissertation research. UNO Graduate School policy requires PhD students to enroll for at least 9 credits for two consecutive semesters, or 6 credits for three non-consecutive semesters, to meet the residency requirement.

Academic Year 1	
Fall	Spring
<input type="checkbox"/> JUST 6810 Theories of Justice (3 credits) <input type="checkbox"/> Concentration course (3 credits) <input type="checkbox"/> Methods or statistics elective (3 credits)	<input type="checkbox"/> JUST 6820 Justice and Law (3 credits) <input type="checkbox"/> Concentration course (3 credits) <input type="checkbox"/> Elective (3 credits)
Academic Year 2	
Fall	Spring
<input type="checkbox"/> JUST 6830 Justice Research I (3 credits) <input type="checkbox"/> Elective (3 credits) <input type="checkbox"/> Elective (3 credits)	<input type="checkbox"/> JUST 6830 Justice Research II (3 credits) <input type="checkbox"/> Elective (3 credits) <input type="checkbox"/> Elective (3 credits)
Academic Year 3	
Fall	Spring
<input type="checkbox"/> JUST 7030 Justice Prospectus (3 credits) <input type="checkbox"/> Elective (3 credits) <input type="checkbox"/> Elective (3 credits) <input type="checkbox"/> Initiate and submit comprehensive exam	<input type="checkbox"/> JUST 7050 Dissertation Research (6 credits) <input type="checkbox"/> Elective (3 credits) <input type="checkbox"/> Submit and defend prospectus
Academic Year 4	
Fall	
<input type="checkbox"/> JUST 7040 Exam (3 credits) <input type="checkbox"/> Submit and defend dissertation	