3.1 Nature of Research

Area
The project may be carried out in any area relevant to forensic psychology. The data may be collected in a forensic setting or be concerned with how people within the general population respond to issues of a forensic nature. Research into basic psychological processes (e.g., conceptual development, attitude change, social decision-making) is appropriate, provided the forensic significance of the findings is clearly indicated. Other thesis topics may address forensic program evaluation, innovative approaches to forensic investigation, individual assessment, strategies for interviewing and counselling, and policy formulation.

Design
A wide variety of research strategies may be employed to meet the specific scientific aims of the project. Common strategies include experimental, quasi-experimental and correlational designs. The research may be theory-driven or exploratory, but in the latter case it is still necessary to spell out the theoretical context and indicate the significance of various potential outcomes. Qualitative data may be generated in some projects, requiring specific strategies (e.g., content analysis) to condense and organise the results and to allow conclusions to be drawn. Often quantitative measures may be extracted from qualitative data (e.g., ratings by judges), which facilitate analysis. We require that the primary analyses be quantitative rather than qualitative.

Single case designs and case series would normally be presented as part of a larger study in order to illustrate a particular issue. Theoretical or historical analyses are generally not appropriate since the intention of the project is to provide experience in the practicalities of carrying out a research or evaluation project in an applied area. Research based on existing data sets may be permitted where a case can be made that 1) the question of interest is best addressed by existing data, and 2) other aspects of the research process (e.g., theoretical analysis, data analysis) can be expanded to compensate for the absence of any contribution to the procedure and data collection. In all cases, care should be taken to ensure that there is sufficient scope in the project to satisfy thesis requirements. For example, mere norming of a psychological test would not constitute a thesis.

Participants
Participants (aka “subjects”) may be drawn from a variety of forensic settings, other special populations (e.g., schools), the general community, or from the Psychology 1 participant pool. Access to sufficient participants from the desired population within the time frame of the project is crucial to its viability. The School cannot guarantee access to the targeted population, although assistance will be given if possible to students who wish to collect data from specialised groups of participants.

Investigators
Often it is beneficial for a research project to be conducted in collaboration with other researchers. Firstly, it may be possible to work within an ongoing project, either within or outside of the School. While this arrangement may reduce the scope for determining the aims of the project, and to some extent the design and procedure employed, these costs may be offset by other benefits such as access to participants or payment of a salary. In most instances it should be possible to play a role in determining some aspects of design and implementation, and a primary role in analysis. Where aspects of the design have been constrained, it is important to spell these out in the thesis, provide a critical analysis of the design, and consider alternative approaches that might have been used.
A second example of collaborative research involves contracting to conduct a project commissioned or requested by some organisation. The benefits of such an arrangement are similar to those described above, but there is generally greater scope in determining the research strategy to meet the specified aims.

Finally, it may be advantageous in some projects for the research to be carried out by a small group (e.g., 2-3) of Masters students. This arrangement is particularly useful where a great deal of data collection and analysis is involved. Design and implementation of the project is shared, but each student writes an independent thesis.

**Supervision**

Each project has a primary supervisor and a co-supervisor, who liaise with the Masters Committee. The supervisor and co-supervisor are normally members of the academic staff of the School. However, one (but not both) may be a person with an academic, research or clinical position in another University unit (e.g., Law School) or community/Government forensic agency (e.g., Corrective Services NSW). In cases where one supervisor is based in an external School or forensic agency there should be close cooperation between external and internal (academic) supervisors. The academic supervisor will act on your behalf with the external supervisor, providing guidance or assistance regarding the negotiation of projects which will meet the necessary requirements of the thesis.

The completed thesis is marked by two members of the academic staff of the School. The supervisor is not involved in marking the thesis but does provide the Marking Committee with an assessment of student contribution and competence throughout the project.

**Statistical consultation**

The supervisor has primary responsibility for advising on research design and data analysis. However, a supervisor who feels that additional advice is necessary can organise a meeting with an appropriate statistical consultant. Both the supervisor and student should attend such a meeting.

**Resources**

*Computing:* The Masters computer lab is located in Mathews Room 1101. Additional computers and printing facilities are in Mathews Rooms 209, 209A, 422 as well as on Level 8. Students are given their own Psychology account and are assigned a print quota. Students have access 24 hours a day/7days a week to these facilities.

In addition there are 3 bookable labs (907, 1002 and 1022) which are available to conduct research. Computer labs are booked through Camilla Leung (c.y.leung@unsw.edu.au).

*Equipment:* Students may use School equipment available for loan from the Technical Support Unit in Mathews Room 148 (e.g., tape recorders, slide projectors), tests available from the Test Library in Mathews Room 803, and equipment under the control of their supervisor.

*Consumables:* Normally, photocopying and other consumables are paid for by the student or by other parties involved in the project.

**Ethical issues**

All research must comply with University ethical standards, regardless of the source of your participants. Ethics application procedures are described here:

http://www.psy.unsw.edu.au/research/resources/researchparticipation.html

Details on ethics approval are available here including the application form. You must have an approved and signed copy of the application form back from the Head of School and an email confirming approval from the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research) before you can commence your research. In addition to School and University approval (via the DVC-R), you may need approval from
other bodies. This will be so, for example, if your research is supported by ARC or NHMRC funds. Your supervisor can help you to identify the Committees relevant for your project.

In the case of collaborative research – particularly with external forensic agencies - it is important to clarify in advance the nature of the research relationship (for example, the issue of “ownership” of the project and of the data). In some cases it may be appropriate to spell out these issues in writing. In the case where supervision is being provided by external agencies, your academic supervisor can assist you to formalise an “ownership” agreement.

Publications

The thesis is to be prepared as a journal article suitable for publication in a specified journal. The document itself is to be consistent with the publication recommendations and requirements except where they conflict with explicit requirements stated in this document. Students are encouraged to submit their research for publication in that journal and to present the research at relevant conferences. Order of authorship should be determined by the degree of contribution to the final product, including design, data collection, analysis and writing of the manuscript.

Research Conference

Students are required to give a 20 minute presentation of their thesis at the Annual Forensic Psychology Research Conference which is usually held in Week 13 of Semester 2. Current Masters students, program graduates, internal and external supervisors and members of the Forensic community are invited to attend (attendance is compulsory for students on the program). This conference provides a showcase of the work of program graduates as well as an opportunity for students to impress potential future employers.

3.2 Detailed Timeline

Students, whether part-time or full-time, are normally required to enrol in PSYC7413 Research Thesis (Forensic) 1 (Semester 1) and PSYC7414 Research Thesis (Forensic) 2 (Semester 2) and submit the thesis by the end of Semester 2 of that year. The timetable for research projects is outlined below and at the end of this document. Applications for extensions will only be considered by the Masters Committee (the Program Director) when:

1. the application is in writing,
2. the delay is due to circumstances beyond your control (e.g., illness, equipment breakdown, constraints on collaborative research),
3. the circumstances are documented (medical certificate, statement by supervisor), and
4. the circumstances are notified as soon as they arise.

It is in your interest to control the scope of the project so as to be able to meet the research deadlines as well as other commitments (e.g., coursework, field placements).

Stage 1 (October / November of the year before you will enrol for your thesis)

October/November: A list of potential academic supervisors from within the School of Psychology will be made available to students. Upon receipt of this information students are advised to: begin seriously considering possible research areas from those suggested by supervisors; begin reading in areas identified by potential supervisors; and speaking with possible supervisors about potential projects.

November: Complete form detailing preferences for topics and supervisors and return it to the Psychology General Office. The School attempts to achieve an equitable distribution of staff thesis supervision loads across Fourth Year, and Clinical and Forensic Masters. In order to achieve this it will not usually be possible for all students to receive their first preference; however, if you have been in communication with a supervisor and an agreement has already been reached regarding their willingness to supervise you it is possible for this to be taken into consideration during the allocation process. In order for this information to be considered it must be documented on the preference form.
December-February: In December the School will write to you advising of supervision arrangements. As soon as you are notified you should begin liaising closely with your supervisor in designing the project, including finalising the topic, determining relevant theoretical background, designing the procedure, and sourcing of participants. You are advised to communicate with your supervisor using the Brief Research Proposal format demonstrated in PSYC7402 – Applications in Forensic Psychology. Ultimately a version of this BRP (described in detail below) will be submitted for assessment by the Masters Committee. Details of the format of the final BRP to be submitted can be found below.

Stage 2 (The year you enrol for your thesis)

Week 2 Semester 1: Students will be allocated to a Thesis Panel Presentation week. During two PEP3 workshop sessions in Weeks 5 and 6 of Semester 1 all students will be required to present a 20 minute version of their BRP to their colleagues and their supervisors (internal and external).

Week 4 & Week 5 Semester 1: Students will be required to submit their BRP to the Masters Committee via the Psychology General Office (Mathews Building Room 1011). This proposal will be reviewed by the Committee. The due date for your BRP is 7-days prior to the date scheduled for your Thesis Panel Presentation in Week 5 or 6.

Week 5 & Week 6 Semester 1: Students will give their Thesis Panel Presentation (described in detail below) in Weeks 5 and 6. Ideally a student will arrange for both their internal and external supervisors to attend this presentation. Where that is possible this presentation will serve as a formal review of the thesis proposal upon the conclusion of which formal approval to proceed can be given by the Masters Committee. In the event that a students’ supervisor is unable to attend the Thesis Panel Presentation, a formal panel meeting including all supervisors will need to be scheduled before the Masters Committee can approve the proposal. Research should not begin until formal approval has been given by the Masters Committee. In the event that a student feels they are ready to begin collecting data before their Thesis Panel Presentation is scheduled, upon consultation with the Program Director they may submit their BRP for early approval by the Masters Committee. Having done so does not free a student from the obligation to make a Thesis Panel Presentation during Week 5/6.

Late June: You should be in regular contact with your primary supervisory throughout the course of your project. In late June you should undertake a review with your supervisor to ensure that your progress is satisfactory. If your supervisor is concerned that progress is unsatisfactory, your project will be reviewed by the Program Director and, in consultation with your supervisors, a course of action will be decided to ensure completion of your project within the designated time. A second panel meeting can be arranged at this time to discuss progress and deal with any problems that may have arisen if you or your supervisor believe this would be of benefit. By this time the literature review should be completed, data collection is well underway, and a draft of the Method section is complete.

Week 4 Semester 2: Provide the Annual Forensic Research Conference organisers with the proposed title of your thesis and supervisors names for the conference program and related communications.

Early September: Data collection should be completed, a draft of the Introduction written, and analysis commenced.

Week 10 Semester 2: Provide the Annual Forensic Research Conference organisers with an abstract for inclusion in the Conference program and guide. It is understood that results and interpretation are likely to change before final submission. Guidance regarding the content of the abstract is provided below.


October 16: Present your thesis research at the Annual Forensic Research Conference (guidance provided below).
3.3 Preparing Your Brief Research Proposal

Following the example given in PSYC7402 – Applications in Forensic Psychology - you are required to write a Brief Research Proposal describing your proposed research project. Like the BRPs completed in PSYC7402, the purpose of this document is to convince your reader (ultimately the Masters Committee) that you have formulated an interesting and achievable research plan which will address explicit and refined research questions.

Your proposals should be clear, concise, fully referenced, and easy to read. You should be making a compelling case for the Masters Committee to approve your proposal. As before your BRP should include the following sections:

- **Aims** – these should be clear, appropriate and match with method.
- **Background** – demonstrates your knowledge of the field of research, critically analyses previous research clearly identifies gap in literature, has a good smooth and logical progression towards the identification of your specific research questions, and has a narrowing or funneling structure which leaves the reader in no doubt that what you propose is the best and most obvious next step in your field of research.
- **Proposed Research (method)** – details an appropriate, clear method matching with aims, describes the population of interest, the recruitment procedure, identifies appropriate ethics bodies, operationalizes key variables, and convinces the reader that you know what you are doing and that it can be achieved.
- **Significance & Innovation** – brief statement of the applications and benefits of the research contextualised appropriately.
- **References (not included in character count)**

The brief research proposal should be no more than 20,000 characters (roughly 5 pages single spaced) excluding references. You should consider readability when formatting your document. References may be endnoted in this document but the full reference included at the end should comply with APA referencing standards. The amount of content presented under each heading should be distributed as is appropriate for your project. For example, if you are using a complex experimental design or sampling procedure be sure to take the space to convince your reader that you know what you are doing, have thought through the details, and have proposed something which is achievable. If your study is relatively straightforward your characters may be better used in the background and significance sections. Irrespective of the nature of your project you must present sufficient background information to explain why your project is necessary and appropriate.

Also similar to PSYC7402 we encourage you to get feedback on your BRP from your primary supervisor and your colleagues prior to submission during Week 4 or 5 of Semester 1. We suggest that you start developing your BRP early (and briefly at first) as a means to clearly communicate your research directions to your (potential or actual) supervisor. Thus the BRP is a living document that changes with the development and refinement of your ideas. To that end, consider sending your supervisor a one page BRP in preparation for your early (but not necessarily first) meetings. Suggest after you have spoken to them initially that you send them one or two BRPs that you can choose between, discuss and refine at future meetings. This forces you to think practically and refine your ideas rather than putting your supervisor in a position where they have critique nebulous and ill-defined research questions and designs. It will also show you to be well prepared, thoughtful and have initiative – using the document to set a framework for your future discussions and providing a mechanism for quickly bringing your supervisor up to speed prior to your meetings.

3.4 Preparing Your Thesis Panel Presentation

Your Thesis Panel Presentation is a brief presentation outlining the rationale and method of your proposed research. This presentation (before the Masters Committee, your supervisors and colleagues) is an excellent opportunity to receive feedback on your project and answer any questions
the Committee might have regarding the proposal. These presentations often raise issues that have been missed during the planning stages, or helps to troubleshoot methodological challenges.

It is intended that this presentation – together with the review of your BRP - constitute the formal review process which results in the final approval of your research idea as something achievable and appropriate. If, however, all your supervisors are unable to attend this presentation a separate panel meeting will need to be held to facilitate the final approval of the project by the Masters Committee. Research cannot commence until either a Panel Presentation or Panel Meeting has occurred and resulted in project approval from the Masters Committee.

3.5 Preparing Your Annual Research Conference Abstract
Please provide the following information to conference organisers:

- Title (up to 20 words)
- Abstract (up to 200 words)
- Full Name
- Supervisors (include both internal and external supervisors with affiliations)

Your abstract should cover the following:

1. Specify the issue being studied – why is it important / interesting
2. Explain the methods used / details of population etc
3. Summarise the main findings / results (if you don’t have these yet indicate what results will be presented)
4. Major conclusions (if you don’t have results or conclusions yet you can say something broadly about the frame of reference within which your results will be discussed i.e., implications for treatment efficacy will be discussed).

Wherever possible use simple, non-technical language.

Below is an example of an Abstract from a previous conference.

**Title:** The Domestic Abusers Program: An Evaluation of its effect on recidivism.

**Author:** Jordan Delaney

**Supervisors:** Richard Kemp (Psychology, UNSW) & Chris Blatch (Corrective Services NSW)

**Abstract:** Domestic violence is a type of crime with unique features, high potential for harm and significant cost to the community. As part of the response from Corrective Services New South Wales (CSNSW) the Domestic Abusers Program (DAP) was developed to address the treatment needs of offenders convicted of crimes relating to domestic violence. The program runs in a group format and is conducted in accordance with CBT principals at a number of Community Offender Services district offices throughout NSW. To evaluate the program's effectiveness in reducing recidivism, DAP participants were compared to a matched control group and participants from an alternative domestic violence intervention previously run on an ad hoc basis. Survival analysis techniques were used to compare groups on general reoffending and violent reoffending. Preliminary results suggest the DAP significantly reduced general and violent recidivism rates compared to both the comparison and control group. Additionally, multiple regression analyses were used to examine factors predictive of recidivism and program completion. The implications of these findings are discussed.

3.6 Preparing Your Thesis
1. Your thesis should be prepared as a submission for a named journal, and you should follow the recommendations of the journal except where they conflict with these guidelines
   - Identify a journal which would be an appropriate home for your thesis (your target journal). In most cases there are several journals which would be suitable - it doesn’t matter which you select provided it is appropriate for the subject material.
Read the “guidelines for authors” provided by the target journal. For many journals the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed. 2009) will be your bible in the preparation of the manuscript. See [http://apastyle.org/](http://apastyle.org/) for further details.

Include in your thesis a mock letter of submission to the editor of the target journal (the APA publication guidelines may help with this letter).

Copies of recent Masters theses written as a journal article are available from the School Test Library (Mathews Building Room 803). Given that your Fourth Year Honours thesis will normally have been written in the conventional format for an empirical dissertation you are advised to look at submitted Masters theses to see what is required.

2. Your thesis should be approximately 7,000 words in length (including abstract but excluding references and appendices). In practice we recommend you aim for between 7000 and 8000 words. Ignore any word limit imposed by your target journal. Examiners are told to reward clear and concise writing.

- Include all figures and tables in the text of the document (many journals ask you to submit these separately)
- Your thesis should be either double-spaced or 1.5-spaced and all referencing should be in APA format. Print on only one side of the paper and set wide margins.
- You should include a title page indicating that what follows is a thesis submitted for your degree and giving the name of your supervisor(s) and their affiliation.
- You should include the Certificate of Originality (see below).
- Printed appendices should only include materials which would normally be printed in the journal. If you wish to provide other materials you can include these on a DVD in a folder in the back of the thesis but be aware that the examiner might not look at these.
- It’s isn’t necessary to provide the examiner with all SPSS data files, output etc (but see below)
- You may also include a separate Acknowledgments page if you wish. Long and sentimental tributes should be avoided, but you may feel that you wish to include acknowledgments which are slightly longer than those normally given within the manuscript, although the latter should be included as appropriate.

3. You are required to provide your supervisor with a printed copy of your thesis and an electronic copy. In addition you must provide your supervisor with a copy of all materials, and data files.

- You are required to provide the School thesis library with an electronic copy of your thesis. The preferred format is pdf, but a Word document is also acceptable. Email the thesis to Heather Proudfoot (h.proudfoot@unsw.edu.au). This should be sent to Heather on the day you submit your thesis.
- Print at least three copies of your thesis. Two of these must be submitted to the General Office and one to your supervisor. Where appropriate you should also supply copies to your external supervisor or partner organisation.
- The General Office will supply binders for the two copies of the thesis you submit.
- **Your thesis must be submitted to the General Office before 4.00pm on the due date (Friday of Week 12).** Please note that we do not normally allow extensions to the thesis deadline and the standard penalty (2% per day) will apply for late submissions.

**Certificate of originality**

The following statement signed by the student should be included on a separate page between the title and acknowledgment pages:

I declare that:
This assessment item is entirely my own original work, except where I have acknowledged use of source material such as books, journal articles, other published material, the Internet, and the work of other student/s or any other person/s. This assessment item has not been submitted for assessment for academic credit in this, or any other course, at UNSW or elsewhere.

I understand that:
3.7 Assessment
Once marked you will receive a percentage mark and corresponding grade for your thesis. It contributes 25 percent to the overall grading for the Master of Psychology (Forensic) degree.