PhD Programs of Research
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC SERVICE LEADERSHIP
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PhD Programs

Program Guidelines

Within the School of Public Service Leadership (PSL) are two doctor of philosophy (PhD) specializations. Each specialization has programs of research, or research topic areas, that are appropriate and relevant to their fields and are represented within that specialization by faculty who have an interest and expertise in those topics. The following document details the programs of research for the following:

- Criminal Justice
- Emergency Management

Definition of Research

Consistent with the educational philosophy to prepare learners to have an immediate impact in the workplace and community, Capella University provides a doctoral educational experience that supports learner development within the scholar-practitioner model. As scholar-practitioners, Capella doctoral learners conduct authentic research. Authentic research is actionable research to advance and/or apply theory to solve social problems. More specifically,

- Capella describes doctoral-level investigation in the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) programs through the utilization of research which extends theory and uses new knowledge to solve a real-world problem.
- Capella describes doctoral-level investigation in the Professional Doctorate programs through the utilization of research which applies existing theory and knowledge to solve a real-world problem.
CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Guidelines

Criminal justice is a social science that attempts to identify and explain the patterns of criminal behavior and to analyze society's ability to manage crime and delinquency. Using a multtiered approach, learners study criminal justice through the context of policing, criminal behavior, corrections, juvenile justice, and the legal process.

As you search for a dissertation topic, rely on the topics and issues covered throughout your coursework. The key element in designing a successful dissertation is aligning the theory, methodological undertaking, and problem statement. You are strongly encouraged to use this guide in choosing an appropriate topic. Other resources available include your professors, colloquium staff, and the numerous topic areas provided throughout courses.

Appropriate Theories/Theoretical Perspectives

Criminal justice is central to the moral fabric and social cohesion of society and as such, the general theoretical paradigms focus on the developmental life-course, psychological, and sociological explanations of crime, and the economic focuses of crime.

Theories that are more specialized include the following:

- anomie/strain theory
- biocriminology theories
- consensus theory
- control/social bond theory
- critical theory and radical theories
  (as related to constitutive criminology, critical criminology, cultural criminology)
- cultural deviance theories
- deterrence/rational choice theories
- evolutionary theories
- feminist theories (limited to the following perspectives—
  traditional/conservative, liberal/mainstream, radical,
  Marxist, postmodern, postcolonial)
- functionalism (as it relates to criminal justice)
- life-course theory
- labeling theory
- Marxist theories
- positivist theory (limited to biological and to psychological sociological positivism)
- power control theory
- routine activity theory
- social bonding/control theories
  (limited to containment theory, drift theory, and self-control theory as it relates to criminal justice)
- social ecology
- social disorganization theory
- social learning theory
- structuralism (as it relates to criminal justice)
- symbolic interactionism (as it relates to criminal justice)

Appropriate Topic Areas

PSL's Criminal Justice program focuses on three independent yet related systems, commonly referred to as policing, courts, and corrections. Another area of study within the Criminal Justice program includes criminal behavior. It is recommended that you choose a research topic from among these general areas.

Throughout the specialization, you will be expected to demonstrate a link to the dissertation topic and one of the areas covered. Again, you are encouraged to work with your Dissertation Research Seminar instructor and consultants in choosing a dissertation topic.
Example topic areas include, but are not limited to the following:

- all levels of law enforcement practices and personnel
- prosecutorial and judicial functions
- courts
- sentencing
- punishment
- correctional systems, both institutional and community based
- treatment/rehabilitation of offenders
- recidivism
- changing crime patterns
- technology
- victimology
- juvenile justice
- role of police in society
- globalization of crime
- domestic preparedness
- first response
- terrorism
- militarization of law enforcement
- Constitutional rights

**Inappropriate Topic Areas**

Because most topics may have the potential to broaden the understanding of the discipline, you have a breadth of subjects from which to choose. However, the burden of identifying a topic falls to you as you clearly demonstrate a gap in the current research literature, a link with public safety (criminal justice), and how the research can be conducted ethically. Inappropriate approaches are those that are essentially political or ideological in intent; biased or prejudicial to or against any group or entity; or unethical in content, method, or application.

Research concerning vulnerable populations (noted below) is more complex and requires additional time and resources to study. In addition, research involving the military is subject to additional levels of permission and review outside of Capella’s IRB. Thus, choosing to conduct research in these areas will increase your overall time, effort, and resources.

The following populations may be considered vulnerable: prisoners, children, elderly, victims, refugees, evacuees, those with limited cognitive ability to provide consent (this includes individuals with substance abuse), and others as defined by the IRB.

You are encouraged to consider the use of secondary data analysis as an option for research in the noted areas and to contact the IRB for additional information.

**Scholarly Journals**

A list of top-rated journals can be found in the Capella Library’s [Topic Exploration Quickstart Literature Guide: Criminal Justice](#).

**Professional Organizations**

The Criminal Justice program examines criminal justice from the perspective of public safety. Thus, you are encouraged to become familiar with the listed organizations and journals. Notable associations are included in the following list:

- [Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS)](#)
- [American Probation and Parole Association (APPA)](#)
- [American Society of Criminology (ASC)](#)
- [American Criminal Justice Association (ACJA)](#)
- [American Correctional Association (ACA)](#)
- [Asian Association of Police Studies (AAPS)](#)
- Center for Research in Crime and Justice (CRCJ)
- European Society of Criminology (ESC)
- International Police Executive Symposium (IPES)
- National Criminal Justice Association (NCJA)
- National Association of Police Organizations (NAPO)
- Southwestern Association of Criminal Justice (SWACJ)
- Sociedad Mexicana de Criminología capítulo Nuevo León, A.C.

This list is by no means exhaustive. Most states also have individual organizations that may be of benefit to you. They can be found with some simple internet searching (e.g., search for criminal justice professional organizations California).
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Appropriate Theories/Theoretical Perspectives

In broad terms, the discipline of emergency management studies how human beings create, interact, and cope with hazards, vulnerability, and disaster events. Thus, the primary focus of research concerns the study of how human beings cope with hazard events through activities related to preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation.

Akin to the field of medicine, emergency management is an applied field that draws on a multitude of disciplines. As such, there are no restrictions concerning the theories/theoretical perspectives that may be used to study the field. However, the theory must align with the problem, research questions, and data collection.

What follows are just a few of the primary theoretical paradigms that are commonly used when studying issues of emergency management:

- symbolic interactionism
- functionalism
- conflict theory
- structuralism
- vulnerability
- social constructionist theories (as related to hazards and disasters)
- organizational behavior theories
- emergent behavior theories
- development theories (as related to economy globalization and complex societies)
- risk perception and communication theories (as related to hazards, disasters, and response)

Appropriate Topic Areas

PSL’s Emergency Management program is organized around historical disasters, the social science literature pertaining to disaster issues and the science of emergency management practices, standards/guidelines, and the four phases of emergency management (response, recovery, preparedness, and mitigation). Dissertation topics must be linked to one of these areas. Examples include, but are not limited to the following areas:

- communications
- command and control
- cooperation and coordination
- disasters
- emergency management profession
- governments
- NIMS
- ICS
- emergency operation centers
- hazard events
- HSEEP
- organizations involved in disasters
- public administration
- mitigation
- preparedness
- policy
- stakeholders
- sustainability
- recovery
- resilience
- response, risk
- training and exercises
- vulnerability

Note: The expectation is that you be able to demonstrate a link to the dissertation topic and one of the four phases areas covered throughout the specialization. Again, work with your Dissertation Research Seminar instructor and consultants in choosing a dissertation topic.
Inappropriate Topic Areas

A variety of topics have the potential in broadening the understanding of the field. The topic must clearly demonstrate a gap in the current research literature, a link with public safety (emergency management) and how the research can be conducted ethically. Approaches that are essentially political or ideological in intent, biased or prejudicial to or against any group or entity, unethical in content, method, or application are not appropriate. Topics exploring the outcomes of patients, clinical research, education, criminal justice, and health administration are not appropriate.

Research concerning vulnerable populations (noted below) is more complex and requires additional time and resources to study. In addition, research involving the military is subject to additional levels of permission and review outside of Capella’s IRB. Thus, choosing to conduct research in these areas will increase your overall time, effort, and resources.

The following populations may be considered vulnerable: prisoners, children, elderly, victims, refugees, evacuees, those with limited cognitive ability to provide consent (this includes individuals with substance abuse), and others as defined by the IRB.

You are encouraged to consider the use of secondary data analysis as an option for research in the noted areas and to contact the IRB for additional information.

Scholarly Journals

The program examines emergency management from the perspective of public safety. Thus, you are encouraged to become familiar with the field’s organizations and journals. A list of top-rated journals can be found in the Capella Library’s Topic Exploration Quickstart Literature Guide: Emergency Management.

Note: Three discontinued journals that published valuable emergency management research are Australasian Journal of Disaster & Trauma Studies (1997–2012), Disaster Management and Response (2003–2007), and Mass Emergencies (1975–1979). All of the volumes and issues of each journal are openly accessible online.

Professional Organizations

The Emergency Management program examines emergency management from the perspective of public safety. Thus, you are encouraged to become familiar with the listed organizations and journals. Notable associations are included in the following list:

- American Society of Public Administration (ASPA)
- Comprehensive Emergency Management Research (CEMR)
- International Association for Disaster Preparedness and Response (DERA)
- International Association of Emergency Management (IAEM)
- The International Network of Women in Emergency Management (inWEM)
- National Emergency Management Association (NEMA)
- National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)

Most states also have individual organizations. Some of the more active ones are listed here:

- Alabama Association of Emergency Managers (AAEM)
- Arizona Emergency Services Association (AESA)
- Arkansas Emergency Management Association (AEMA)
- California Emergency Services Association (CESA)
- Colorado Emergency Management Association (CEMA)
- Connecticut Emergency Management Association (CEMA)
- Florida Emergency Preparedness Association (FEPA)
- Iowa Emergency Management Association (IEMA)
- Emergency Management Alliance of Indiana (EMAI)
- Kansas Emergency Management Association (KEMA)
- Kentucky Emergency Management Association (KEMA)
- Louisiana Emergency Preparedness Association (LEPA)
- Maryland Emergency Management Association (MEMA)
- Association of Minnesota Emergency Managers (AMEM)
- Mississippi Civil Defense Emergency Management Association (MCDEMA)
- New York State Emergency Management Association (NYSEMA)
- North Carolina Emergency Management Association (NCEMA)
- North Dakota Emergency Management Association (NDEMA)
- Emergency Management Association of Ohio (EMAO)
- Oregon Emergency Management Association (OEMA)
- Keystone Emergency Management Association (Pennsylvania) (KEMA)
- South Dakota Emergency Management Association (SDEMA)