Joint Master's Degree

Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Development (CD)
&
Department of Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning (UEP)

The joint CD/UEP master’s degree is a 14-credit graduate program. Students matriculate into two departments at Tufts University – Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Development (CD) and Department of Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning (UEP) – and fulfill the general requirements for each. Students will receive an MA degree upon completion.

Course Requirements

Students in the CD/UEP joint degree complete a 14-credit program of study that includes the core requirements of both departments, and also particular courses that focus on child and family policy and programs. Since a number of the core courses are offered in both departments, students can choose between the comparable offerings in each. Core courses are as follows:

- **UEP core requirements (5 courses)**
  - UEP 250 Foundations of Public Policy and Planning (*a “cohort” course, and must be taken the first fall semester*)
  - UEP 251 Economics for Planning and Policy Analysis
  - UEP 252 Cities in Space, Place, and Time
  - UEP 254 Quantitative Reasoning for Policy and Planning (*CD 140 or CD 146 may be substituted for this course*)
  - UEP 255 Field Projects (*a cohort course, and must be taken the first spring semester*)
  - Non-credit internship: 150 hours of supervised work in a policy/program setting

- **CD core requirements (3 courses)**
  - Two graduate-level developmental theory courses, chosen from the following options:
    - CD 211 Contemporary Perspective on Child Development (*recommended for joint degree students*)
    - CD 151 Advanced Intellectual Development of Young Children
    - CD 155 Development of Language
    - CD 161 Advanced Personal/Social Development
    - CD 261 Seminar in Personal/Social Development
    - Another appropriate child development course, as recommended and approved by the faculty advisor (*generally for students who enter the program with undergraduate and/or graduate degrees in child development*).
  - One research methods course (taken prior to, or in concert with, submitting a thesis proposal), chosen from the following options:
    - UEP 256/CD 247 Program Evaluation
    - CD 142 Problems in Research: Design and Methods
    - CD 144 Qualitative and Ethnographic Method
    - CD 285 Advanced Research Methods in Applied Developmental Science (w/consent)
- Other CD or UEP research methods course, with appropriate approval from departmental faculty committee(s).

- **Child and family policy area core requirements (3 courses)**
  - CD/UEP 282 Social Policies for Children and Families *(must be taken first fall semester)*
  - CD/UEP 188 Seminar in Government and Families
  - Third child and family policy course, approved by program advisor.

- **Elective courses in child, family, community development, programming or policy (2 courses), approved by program advisor**
  - For students entering without an undergraduate or graduate degree in child development, a third child development theory course is required.

- **Thesis (1 course credit)**
  - Additional guidelines for the joint degree thesis follow below.
  - Note that this thesis can only be taken for one credit.

**Thesis Preparation Process**

All CD/UEP joint MA students are required to write theses. To make the thesis committee selection an orderly and equitable one, then, there is a UEP “thesis match” procedure in which students and faculty engage in the first weeks of the fall semester. The policy is that, except in rare instances, students do not attempt to “sign up” the faculty members they would like as their committee chairs/primary thesis advisor; rather they (students) submit a few possible choices to be considered at an early faculty meeting. Students in the thesis program in Child Development are free to discuss thesis chairing at any time with their desired committee chairs. Because joint degree students have a somewhat more complicated thesis process to undertake than any of the other MA thesis students in either department, it is reasonable that they begin this primary advisor selection process whenever they are ready (in the Child Development mode), even if it is before the UEP “match” faculty meeting.

_Thesis committee._ Three people sit on the joint CD/UEP thesis committee: The chair must be a core faculty member of either department, with expertise and/or interest in child and family/social policy issues. The second reader must be a core faculty member of the “other” department, and the third reader must be an “outside” person (outside both departments) with at least an MA degree. This “outside” person should be a person with deep knowledge of the topic at hand, and in fact, is often a policy practitioner.

_Thesis prospectus._ Once the committee chair has been selected, the student produces, under her/his advisor’s guidance, a *thesis prospectus* to concretize the thesis topic and approach and to use as a “shopping document” to engage the remaining committee members. The prospectus is generally 6-8 pages in length, and typically includes the following:

- Statement of the problem
- Thesis focus (a statement of the precise topic, how it is related to the problem detailed earlier, and why it is an important topic to address)
- Literature review preview (a brief discussion of the scope of the literature that will be contained in the thesis’ literature review)
- Research questions
- Methods (the essential elements of the research design)
- Tentative timeline (including interval necessary for review by IRB)
- Proposed secondary readers
- Initial list of reference

After the prospectus has been “accepted” by the primary advisor and readers, the student is ready to begin writing the *thesis proposal*.

*Thesis content.* Because joint degree students are receiving MA degrees from two departments, their theses should reflect, to some extent, the core disciplines represented in each. So, for example, both developmental theory and research, and policy analysis, should inform the student’s treatment of the topic in the thesis; the committee member representing either CD or UEP should take primary responsibility for insuring that the thesis pays sufficient, appropriate attention to the content of that discipline. Committee composition is critical here, so that the breadth of content advice that is necessary for a successful thesis is readily available.

It is not a requirement that CD/UEP theses have an empirical component [data (quantitative or qualitative) collected by the students themselves, or by another entity, and then analyzed by them]; nonetheless, most joint degree theses have been of this genre, since data gathering and analysis are considered a critical the development of policy expertise. Of course, theses should employ empirical methods that best suit the research questions and that are commensurate with students’ skills.

*Thesis proposal.* The thesis proposal elaborates the prospectus, and is typically 25 – 35 pages in length. It refines the problem statement, thesis focus, and research questions; expands – to its full length – the literature review; and provides considerably more detail on research methods. It also includes whatever materials need to be submitted to the IRB, including the actual IRB application (e.g., draft data collection instruments, informed consent forms, etc.) As a rough guideline, the problem statement should be 3 – 4 pages (ending with the research questions), the literature review 18 – 20 pages, and the methods section 5 – 7 pages. (The IRB materials, draft instruments, etc., are considered appendices.) The thesis proposal is distributed to the committee only after the primary thesis advisor has agreed that it is sufficiently “polished” to warrant the scheduling of the *thesis proposal meeting*. This meeting should not be scheduled until at least 10 days after the proposal has been received by committee members.

*Thesis proposal meeting.* The purpose of this meeting, attended by the student and all committee members, is to arrive at a consensus about precisely how the remaining work on the thesis is to be conducted. The student begins the meeting with a brief Powerpoint presentation, after which committee members offer their views on the proposed study; they may, for example, question the student, offer suggestions about changes to the study design, or recommend additional literature to include. The committee deliberates without the student present to decide whether she/he can proceed as proposed, and if not, what modifications are necessary. The student records the modifications (if they are required by the committee), and sends a memo to
the committee detailing these changes. The student then makes the revisions to the proposal as requested and submits the final version to the committee (or sometimes to the chair only, if the modifications are minor). This final version then constitutes a “contract” of sorts between the student and the committee; any significant changes to the thesis from that point on must receive written approval by the committee. A thesis proposal review form is also completed.

**Completing a thesis draft.** Following final approval of the proposal, students embark on data collection, analysis, and writing the final draft of the thesis. Students should remain in close touch with their thesis advisors for guidance and feedback. The thesis advisor decides when a completed draft is ready to be submitted to the committee for review. It is the student’s responsibility to schedule the thesis defense; committee members should be given at least two weeks to critically review the draft and prepare for the thesis defense.

**Thesis defense meeting.** Although called a “defense,” this meeting is more of an opportunity to discuss the thesis with interested individuals who have invested their time and effort in its development. The process is similar to that of the proposal review meeting. It begins with a brief presentation by the student, accompanied by Powerpoint slides, of the basic architecture of the thesis (e.g., research questions, methods, etc.), the significant findings or results of the analysis that was undertaken, and the implications of those results. Committee members are invited to ask the student questions, engage her/him in discussion of particular points, and likely suggest revisions. After the conversation, the student is asked to step out of the room, and the committee decides whether the student has passed this requirement, and if so, agrees to whatever slate of revisions is appropriate. Thesis defense meetings are open to the public. Committee members also sign a thesis approval form, either at that meeting, or after necessary modifications have been made.

**Resources for Students**

Each department designates a faculty member as the program advisor for the joint degree; students should feel free to consult him/her with program or thesis-related questions. In addition, the department administrators are able to help students negotiate the administrative challenges of a joint degree (e.g., thesis credit registration). Some students organize thesis support groups that meet regularly to help participants meet research and writing deadlines; department space may certainly be used for this purpose. Finally, there are several avenues available within Tufts for obtaining modest financial support for conducting thesis research; individual faculty advisors, department support staff, and staff at the Graduate School may be able to direct students toward these opportunities.