

Tregle and Magnuson4REVIEW

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SPEAKERS

Shannon Magnuson, Jenn Tostlebe, Brandon Tregle, Jose Sanchez



Jose Sanchez 00:00

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Jose Sanchez 00:33

Hi, everyone, welcome back to The Criminology Academy where we're criminally academic. My name is Jose Sanchez.



Jenn Tostlebe 00:39

And my name is Jenn Tostlebe.



Jose Sanchez 00:41


And today we have two guests on the podcast Shannon Magnuson and Brandon Tregle to talk with us about the dissertation proposal and prospectus defense. This episode is a part of our Grad Life Series.




Jenn Tostlebe 00:54

Shannon Magnuson is a doctoral candidate at George Mason University. While completing her dissertation, she worked as a research associate at the National Institute of Justice before taking her full time position with the Justice System Partners. Currently, she has completed and defended her dissertation while working as a research associate for justice system partners,

where she works on several large grants, investigating deflection, pretrial, custody, and community corrections strategies and interventions. Her interests focus on building content and tools for practitioners to improve their understanding, willingness to adopt, and use of evidence-based practices.

 Jose Sanchez 01:33


Brandon Tregle is a former police officer and legal adviser for a large police department in Louisiana. Currently, he is a doctoral candidate at the University of Nebraska Omaha school of criminology and criminal justice. He has a Juris Doctor from the Law Center at Louisiana State University. Brandon's research interests are focused on policing specifically evidence based practices, body worn cameras and use of force and exciting news. Brandon has accepted an assistant professor position at the University of Texas San Antonio starting this fall. Congrats, Brandon.

 Brandon Tregle 02:06

Thank you.

 Jose Sanchez 02:07

We know a few people at UT Austin. So that's a great landing spot. Thank you both for joining us. Congratulations to Shannon once again for defending her dissertation. That's super exciting.

 Shannon Magnuson 02:21

Yes. Thank you so much.



Jenn Tostlebe 02:24

All right. Well, we're excited to have you both on here. Well, Jose and I are currently in the process of writing our proposals. So this conversation is very relevant for us. So we will start with questions on writing the dissertation proposal, and then move into questions related to the actual defense. And then end the episode asking Shannon and Brandon questions about the steps they took after their prospectus defense. So Jose, why don't you get us started?

 Jose Sanchez 02:52

Okay, thank you, Jenn. So we've finally arrived at the point where you have to write and proposal dissertation, right, and you have to defend this proposal in front of your committee. So let's start by talking about what the requirements were for you both regarding your proposal?



Brandon Tregle 03:13



Brandon Tregle 03:13

In my program, you have to complete your comps, first. We have two comps. And so you complete both of those, and then you select the topic, select a committee. And then you need to have written, before you defend your proposal, you need to have written chapters one, two and three, which for me looked like intro and background was chapter one. Literature review for chapter two. And then my analytical approach method for chapter three. So once you have that approved by your committee, you can go ahead and defend your proposal.



Jenn Tostlebe 03:40

And were the like chapters complete for you, or were they more like rough drafts.



Brandon Tregle 03:44

By this time, my committee had mostly approved them, everything was in place, I still got a little feedback after the proposal where I went back in and kind of cleaned up. But for the most part, they were ready to go.



Shannon Magnuson 03:55

Similarly, comps happen at George Mason, and then you pick a committee. And the writing process looks slightly different depending on who your chair is at George Mason. And depending on what style of dissertation you want to do. So you can do a traditional long form. It sounds kind of like what Brandon did. A long form dissertation, where you would have basically one data source answering multiple questions. You can also at George Mason do a three paper series instead, where you effectively write three publishable papers instead of three chapters. And because of that, the form and function and format is distinctly different. So it depends kind of on two things then. First is which way you're going at Mason if you're going long form if you're going three publishable papers, and then on top of that, who your chair is and what they prefer to see. So some of my colleagues at Mason sound like very much like Brandon, they had all three papers written for kind of your intro, your lit review, methods and analytical approach. For my specific dissertation it looked a little bit different because I chose the three paper option. And the point in which, what I developed essentially was an overview of the statement of the problem. The questions I was asking and the distinctly different data sources, I was using. The lit review for each of those three questions, and then analytic approach for each of those three questions. So, in total, it probably looks the same size as Brandon's. But I would say each of the actual three part series are much shorter, think more of the size of a publishable paper than a full dissertation.



Jenn Tostlebe 05:40

Did you use three different data sources, then?



Shannon Magnuson 05:43

Yes, well, I had a total of five. Um, sure, we'll get to that here in a minute. But yes, I did

res, well, I had a total of five. I'm sure we'll get to that here in a minute. But yes, I did.



Jenn Tostlebe 05:50

Okay.



Jose Sanchez 05:52

I can feel my anxiety going up just thinking about that. Yeah, I think it well, at least in our department, we have a little, I think it's more like how it is at Mason, we kind of can choose our own, like how we want to do it. And yeah, it really is gonna depend on your advisor. Like, I know, ours is like, don't give me like this 300 page behemoth. But we have students that were basically writing books, and so their dissertations were like 400 pages, which is a lot.



Shannon Magnuson 06:25

I would not want to write 400 pages. But yes, I think, to your point was, I think it was a little bit of choose your own adventure, so to speak at Mason, and a little bit about the presentation of what you ultimately wrote was very organic to the questions you were asking in the data that you were asking that there was no real form or format that was expected it was just for you to work it out with your chair, and then when you presented it to your committee, it then just needed to make sense. And as part of your defense of your prospectus, explaining why that form makes sense.



Jenn Tostlebe 07:01

Alright, so how far in advance then did you start to actually think about your dissertation topic and what your dissertation may actually look like?



Brandon Tregle 07:11

I started after my second comp, I had a few other projects lined up. I think we'll probably get into that too. But I started for this topic that I settled on January 2021, which feels like a long time ago now. But yeah, it's been a little over a year now.



Shannon Magnuson 07:26

I'm gonna say maybe the year before. So my dissertation topic was fairly iterative off of the research I had been doing with my advisor, Dr. Rudes, so she and I had, collectively, and another faculty member at Mason, collectively had an undergraduate research grant, which effectively means you hire undergraduate students, you teach them the process of research. That project was in solitary confinement. And prior to that, there was another project we were working on, in just general population of prison. So the two projects while I was doing that work, and helping to lead that work and do data collection there, things started percolating in

the institutions and prisons I was in that I thought were really interesting. Things were happening, the organization was changing. And then ultimately, I think I said to my advisor, Dr. Rudes, hey, that was really interesting. I think I'd like to go do that as my dissertation topic. And then she's like, okay, let's find a way to make that happen. So it feels like maybe a couple of years. But it wasn't like I woke up one moment, where I walked in the door saying, I really want to do this for the next four years of my life. I think I just became a real iterative process of saying, this seems really interesting. This seems like unexplored. No one's talking about this. I think that's what I want to go to.



Jenn Tostlebe 08:46

Yeah, it makes me feel better, because planning on defending next year, and I'm like, just working on the proposal and everything. So there are some people that I've heard be like, Oh, I don't know, I've been working on it for four years, I'm like, okay. So on that note, have either of you had to change or kind of modify your idea as you've been working, or as you were working on your proposal?



Brandon Tregle 09:12


I had a few other ideas first, and I had a few projects in place with some police departments that I was working with. And then when COVID hit, those projects kind of went away, people weren't going into the office, funding was lost, things like that. So this program evaluation that I ended up settling on kind of fell into my lap right at the tail end. And they asked our university to do a program evaluation for one of the police departments' new community outreach programs. And so I settled on that and like I said, it started around January 2021. But within this topic, I think I got from my dissertation, I got a little carried away, and I was just trying to evaluate everything. So when I showed up to my proposal defense, they said, you know, you need to narrow down your idea. You can still do the program evaluation, but for this purpose, why don't you reduce your number of research questions and then move forward that way? And so my ideas kind of changed and modified as I went along. And I think I have a very narrow focus product now. So really helped me out to give it that little extra space.



Shannon Magnuson 10:10

That's awesome. No, I think the answer is no, for me. I think the answer is definitely yes on the other side. But during the defense, or during the proposal writing process, I had a pretty good understanding of what it was I wanted to do and the questions I wanted to ask. The things I had to kind of go back, it sounds a little bit like Brandon's committee may have given him some comments about the draft in full. My committee gave me some comments about how to hang the questions together better. So they thought each of the questions themselves were really thoughtful, and important, but they wanted more umph about how they all hang together, collectively, and why they all mattered collectively, and the story they can tell collectively. For me, that was challenging to also tell them not knowing what the data would say. I think on the other end, I have a very clear and narrow point of view about how they all hang together. So if I changed anything, it might be about the framing of why the questions hang together. But the actual topic itself, not really. But it took me a very long time to write my dissertation. And so

I'm sure we'll maybe talk about that. But because of that I did my data collection in 2018. So this was well before COVID. So I didn't experience the kind of COVID issues to data collection that I'm sure other people like Brandon have experienced.

 Jose Sanchez 11:35

Yeah, Jenn and I were kind of in that boat too. So like when I started the program back in 2018, like, I came in having this vague idea. I didn't know what my dissertation was going to be on. But I came in, like I got thrust into this evaluation, NIJ evaluation. And so it was kind of set that that was what my dissertation was going to come out of. But COVID almost completely derailed, well it derailed my first idea for my dissertation. And so I had to quickly sort of pivot and come up with, what can I do with the data that I have. And so, now I'm on like, version two, or 2.5 of what my original idea was gonna be. And I know, Jenn is kind of...

 Jenn Tostlebe 12:24

I got smacked around by COVID.

 Jose Sanchez 12:28


Mine almost got derailed by COVID, Jenn's was absolutely completely nuked by COVID.

 Jenn Tostlebe 12:33


Three times. So now I'm like, I'm using secondary data. And this is just where I'm at.

 Jose Sanchez 12:40


So we've talked about having to defend your proposal. And we've talked about committees. So can you walk us through what the committee requirements are in your program?

 Brandon Tregle 12:52

I have three members inside of my program, and then one outside member who needs to be within the university, but external to the school of criminology and criminal justice.

 Jenn Tostlebe 13:02

Was it challenging to find that external person?

 Brandon Tregle 13:06

Yeah. And I would recommend you start that pretty early, it's very time consuming to, you know, research and try to find someone. And then there's a lot of non responses to emails, or, you know, they get back to you a long time, you don't know what the other program schedules look like. And so you're kind of cold calling people, Hey, do you want to be on my dissertation committee? And so, you know, if they say no, or they don't respond, you've got to research someone else. And that's something that I selected my internal committee first before I selected the external member, and I wish that I would have started to select the external member a little earlier because of that, but I ended up with a great one. And so um, she's really contributed. She's knowledgeable about the project that I'm working on and around that area. And so it all worked out. But for anyone, I would recommend you start that whenever you start to piece your community together, because I've heard a lot of people say, you know, just do that on the back end, get your committee that's who's really going to provide the feedback. But it did, it was kind of burdensome to try and find someone.

S

Shannon Magnuson 14:05

I did not have the same experience. And I'm sorry, Brandon, that happened. At Mason in the criminology, law, and society department, the rule...what you need, and what is typical are not the same, which is important. So what is typical is that you have three inside members and an outside chair. So you have four members of your committee, but you can only have a committee of three, but that's typically not normal. I ultimately ended in a committee of three, but that was through a series of very unfortunate events for my committee members. And so my outside chair, I don't know if it could have been someone at Mason. I guess I hadn't really thought about that. But my outside chair, and typically I think at our school, we see outside chairs as outside of the university. So my outside chair was Dr. Reiter out of UC Irvine. She was on board almost as soon as everyone else was on board if not one of the very first people. For two reasons. One, my advisor Dr. Rudes was excellent about helping me navigate, kind of the structure of putting together a committee, and then two, kind of need the asked on my behalf. But because I had already worked with Dr. Reiter in some capacities, we do a lot of presentations together between our school and UC Irvine's team of students, she's seen me present before, we have similar interests, she previously she did a book tour at Mason, where we had long, extensive conversations. So I already had somewhat of a working relationship with Dr. Reiter. And so it felt like a natural fit for somebody who specializes in solitary confinement to then be on my solitary confinement dissertation. So that wasn't, I would actually say, selecting an outside chair was significantly easier than selecting the inside committee members. For me, that process involved being thoughtful about navigating people in your department and how they might work together. So it might be challenging to select committee members who themselves as general people don't necessarily get along, or don't necessarily work well together. And having those dynamics on your committee is not going to be helpful to you, it might, in fact, derail you or push you into weird spaces. And so it was helpful to have a chair help me navigate those dynamics. So that way, I was creating the easiest path forward with the path of least resistance for myself.

B

Brandon Tregle 16:41

We're similar in one part here, I selected my chair first, Dr. Justin Nix, he's a person I worked closely with during my whole time, and he had a heavy hand and helping me select the rest of my committee, including the external member, and he ultimately made the ask as well. But you

know, it's just like, we've had a great faculty culture, and they work really well together. And so I didn't experience that part. A lot of times, I would get feedback from one person, and then immediately feedback from someone else, and it was the same. So it really kind of streamlined how I went through the whole process. But yeah, I just wanted to add, you know, if you can lean on your chair, and have them help you, it really helps to streamline when you start to get feedback and start to make corrections and things like that.

J Jose Sanchez 17:23

Yeah, I think that's great advice. So I have my committee set too. And our requirement is we need minimum three inside the department, and at least one outside person. And then you have, I guess you could call it one wildcard, like, inside or outside. And so the problem that I ran into, because I'm in a sociology department, we only really have two criminologist David Pyrooz and Kyle Thomas. And so finding that third inside person was something that was on the back of my mind, basically, since the moment I got to CU Boulder. And ultimately, what I ended up doing is, so my third inside person does not do anything related to criminology, their research is actually on people's interaction with animals. But she knows the method that I'm using really well. So she's basically there as like a methods person. And she's familiar with the project that I'm working on because I took a class of hers, and wrote a paper on that project for her. So you know, she's familiar with the project. And she basically taught me the qualitative methods that I'm using. So like, she basically became a good fit. And then I ended up with two outside people, just because getting a fourth inside person was going to be a little tricky. But I basically sent David a list of people that I was considering through email, and he gave me a call and he was like, I think this person would be great, because I cover a lot of bases for you, this person, like is substantively a match, but their methods are not in line whatsoever with what you do or what you're doing, so maybe drop them from consideration. And so really, you know, he knows these people way better than I do. So getting his input was key to putting my committee together.

S Shannon Magnuson 19:18

I think you bring up a really interesting point, though, that someone can not have the same substantive topic areas as you and understand your methods really well. And that's something that's highlighted a lot at Mason is choosing at least one committee member, whether that's your chair or otherwise, sometimes it's not your chair, who really understands your methods, and that can be your guiding person. So the person to kind of walk you through or help you out and troubleshoot when your analysis is getting a little hairy and you're not sure if things are going the way they're supposed to be going. That there's that lifeline that understands your methods. That's something that I don't think was really discussed or explicit to me really in the beginning. But after going through the process, and now watching others going through it, really finding someone who understands your primary methods is really, I think important, even if they're not in your substantive area.

J Jose Sanchez 20:15

The next thing we wanted to ask you is, how did you, and Brandon you kind of mentioned this a little bit, but how did you manage balancing writing your proposal, and also the other projects that you might have had going on at the same time?

 B

Brandon Tregle 20:29

Yeah, and I was collecting data at the same time, too, while I was writing my proposal, just because it was a program evaluation. And that's when it had to be done. So it was a six month pilot. And so but yeah, I mean, I tried to schedule time to write on it. And I wouldn't let that, there was no way to override that. And so, Dr. Nix always says, writing is a habit, touch it every day, even falling for 30 minutes, a lot of times, it'll turn into more, but I treated almost like a class, because at this point, you're not taking classes anymore. But you're not going to not go to Stats class, and you're not going to sit in stats class and collect data or write other papers or anything like that. So you know, from nine in the morning until 12, one o'clock in the afternoon, I'm just writing and that's non negotiable. And so if it needed to be moved, you know, COVID times my kids were home from school and stuff like that. So be it. But it would still have to be, you know, at least a little bit every day. And if I needed to shift the time around, I would do that. But I think if you can block out time, and make it non negotiable. It's really, you know, writing is a habit, like I said, and it's easy to let it slip by. And so as long as you're in it every day, and you keep that going, it's much easier to come back and pick up every day.

 S

Shannon Magnuson 21:38

I think we should go with his answer, because mine is not as good at all. I'm the opposite side of Brandon, Brandon seems very diligent, very routine oriented. Mine was not like that. Mine was mostly like, I bought a sleeve of Redbull and spent a weekend, two weekends, three weekends in a friend's house and just got it done. It did take me I think, ultimately took me two semesters, it took me a little bit longer than I anticipated to do. But I think that was in part because I was trying to negotiate all of the data that the Department of Corrections was going to give to me. So I wanted to have a better understanding of what was going to be in the final administrative data that they provided. But I was not routine oriented. At the same time I was working at NIJ. I was also leading, ultimately, my dissertation is a small part of a larger team project that I lead with a collection of 13 to 15-17 ish researchers. And so I like Brandon was kind of doing data collection ish at the same time or training students on how to go into prisons and collect data. While I was trying to write this while working at NIJ. I think it just was I worked on it when I could when I picked it up. I binge watch TV often to avoid it. I did all of the things that Brandon probably would tell somebody not to do. I did them all. So I think for me working on it, 30 minutes a day is just not sustainable. My brain can't walk in and out of writing like that. So for me, it was about saying to myself, Okay, I'm going to lose this weekend, once a month, I'm going to spend all three days doing nothing but this and then focusing and then moving forward. But I think Brandon's answer is the better answer.



Jenn Tostlebe 23:28

Yeah, and that's the answer that I have been hearing a lot is write a little bit every day. And I feel like Shannon, I'm more like you and I'm trying to work my way into brand and strategy. So we'll see how that goes. But, yeah.

 B

Brandon Tregle 23:42

Brandon Tregle 23:12

I think if you can give it 5/10 minutes even just leave yourself really because I struggle at first with starting a new project. It's like, oh, now I gotta get all these books out and now I have to read, you know. And so if you can leave yourself just a trail of breadcrumbs to pick up the next day. So what I started doing was I would have leave myself like a clear direction, I could finish this paragraph today or this chapter today. But I'm not doing it so that tomorrow is easier to jump in. And once I get started, I'm fine. But even if I'm just staring into the abyss, and it's chapter three and the cursors blinking, it takes me a little while to get going. So I was one thing I was talking to someone about this, and they were trying to pick up an exercise habit. And they were saying I just put on my workout clothes every day. I don't have to do anything. Maybe a walk accidentally happens. Maybe it doesn't, but at least I'm prepared. And so I started to apply that with getting the books out and doing the stuff you know, I'll sit here with my books out and maybe some writing will happen. Maybe it won't. And more often than not it does. And so that's kind of how I approached it. It's easier though it took me a few weeks to build the habit, you know, you take a break in between projects and kind of build some bad habits in, so it took me a little while but each time that was the way that I did it I left myself a clear path forward every time.



Jenn Tostlebe 24:54

Alright I'm going to try that strategy and hope that it after a couple of weeks you know I get into the habit.



Jose Sanchez 25:01

Yeah me too.



Jenn Tostlebe 25:03

Just out of curiosity, were either of you teaching during this phase of your program?



Brandon Tregle 25:09

Yeah, I was. And I asked that I could teach. So most of the time, I was either a TA or I taught one class every semester. But I asked that in my last year, I teach two classes in case, you know, I went to a 2-2, or something like that, I would know kind of what the schedule would be like. And I don't know if that was the best approach. Two classes is more than double the work of one class for some reason. And so I kind of, you know, it was a heavy workload at the time. But yeah, I think if you, you know, it was kind of nice to break it up. Like I said, I wrote for three, four hours a day at most. I wouldn't make much progress outside of that. So they're not to do some light lifting, like meet with students and grading stuff like that in the afternoons.



Shannon Magnuson 25:51

I was not. At Mason you're allowed to work up to 30 hours a week. And so I was 30 hours at NIJ, and then working on the grant work with training students with Dr. Rudes. but wasn't directly

teaching at the time.



Jenn Tostlebe 26:08

And so both of you mentioned that kind of one of the requirements before getting into the proposal phase is doing comprehensive exams, other places have qualitative [**qualifying**] papers. And so were either of you able to take those papers or parts of them and apply them to your dissertation?



Brandon Tregle 26:26

I was not, we kind of read in the two areas, criminology and criminal justice and take a comp in each. But I was really surprised at how much I referred back to my notes and article summaries and book summaries and stuff like that for the comps. So I wouldn't discount. You know, like when you're reading for the comps, you know, it's kind of you're like, why am I doing this sometimes. But if you can keep good notes, I really did. Like it framed the theoretical background, much more than I thought it would for my dissertation. So I couldn't use the comp for the dissertation. But I did use the notes and summaries and everything.



Shannon Magnuson 27:00

Yeah, I agree. Mason now does both comps and qualitative papers, or they call them MAPs now major area papers. I wasn't able to use it, word for word of sorts, it wasn't the same topic. But I still think that there was still some language I borrowed. I think like Brandon, I use a significant portion of my comp prep, to write some of the lit review of the major questions. So I agree with Brandon that I wouldn't discount that work as though you're only going to use it for comp, and then it's going to fall out of your head and you're never going to use it again. Right, I did feel like I continue to use it, it was really helpful to have everything annotated and ready to go. What I did use significantly now that I'm thinking about that was the reference lists significantly significant, I cannot stress significantly enough to save so much time, both in the proposal writing and in my final defense, that I had a running list of citations of all of the Comp prep. And it was mostly just copy paste, and I didn't have to go hunt down the citation. That was incredibly helpful.



Brandon Tregle 28:08

Yeah. Agreed.



Jenn Tostlebe 28:10

All right. So is there anything that we've missed? Or do you have any other advice for people who are like working on writing their proposal, or any advice for like work life balance during this time too. Both of you it sounds like we're very busy at this time with all different things.

B**Brandon Tregle 28:28**

Definitely. One thing I did was I tried to not negotiate my sleep time either. So I tried that make that bedtime, non negotiable. And also time for exercise. I noticed on days that I wasn't as disciplined with that, I would also lose the discipline on writing and stuff like that. So it ended up being productive, even though it feels like you know, a few hours that you could have spent making progress. But I think that for me, a little progress each day was better than trying to make a lot of progress all at once. But you're getting a lot of contrast here, it sounds like but it's probably, you know, people fall in all kinds of different buckets. So it's probably good.

S**Shannon Magnuson 29:05**

I feel like I need Brandon to be my life coach.

J**Jose Sanchez 29:08**

Yeah.

**Jenn Tostlebe 29:09**

I feel like that too.

S**Shannon Magnuson 29:11**

I'm like, I'm like, Wow, I feel like I need to get up and like change everything about my routine right now. Inspired by Brandon. I think the only other piece of advice that I have that I definitely did not take while I was doing it. I definitely did not take while I was writing my dissertation, until the very, very end is two parts. One is it does not need to be a magnum opus, just put it down on paper. Everyone is a very smart, intelligent human being and they didn't get this far if they were not. So anything you write is probably going to be great. It's better than you think it is. So throw impostor syndrome out the door. Just put it down on paper. That would probably be one. The second is that and maybe Jenn for you, this might help you get through it a little bit too, is that it will likely change. At least for me. I started here. I have all this data. I had five data sources, use two at the end of it. I kicked out questions, I rewrote it. It changed on the back end, not my approach, but about ultimately what I used and the story I wanted to tell. And I think the earlier you're willing to be flexible with yourself about what it is, the easier the process will be for you. So know that what you write in your proposal might not happen for lots of reasons, more COVID issues, more data issues more whatever. And the sooner you come to terms with the fact that everything will continue to be in flux, I think the easier the process will be for you.

B**Brandon Tregle 30:38**

Yeah, I agree with that. And I mean, like, you know, it sounds good when I'm talking about it now. But this process was dirty for me too. I mean, we're turning in, you know, a version only to find that that doesn't even make sense in it. And you realize that it's not like "oh, the tests."

find that I had several grammar errors in it. Or at one point, I did a replace all for "deviants." And they replaced the name of the theory for defiance, for some reason. And so I completely had the wrong name for this theory, seven times, I think. And I mean, I was just mortified by stuff like that. So it's just about, you know, continue moving forward, continue to make progress. And like she said, everyone's smart, they know you can do it. And so you just have to get it done.

J Jose Sanchez 31:18

Yeah, I think the best piece of advice I got early on in the program, and this gets to what Shannon was saying, a done paper is the best paper.

B Brandon Tregle 31:28

I can't tell you how many times I heard that from so many people at conferences, my advisors, everyone just, Yeah.



Jenn Tostlebe 31:36

It sounds like both of you agree with that.

S Shannon Magnuson 31:39

Yeah, I think I mean, I'm a little rough and raw, because mine is just over. And so there was definitely a moment towards the end of my dissertation writing, where I felt like I was just smashing the keyboard with my palms. And whatever came out was what I was going to send to my committee, and I hope that it was, like comprehensible. And so I think there is just a moment where, of course, everyone wants to do really good work. And we don't want to have a replace all situation that is mortifying, so I'm with you, I feel, I'm with you. We can sit in that mortification together. I think ultimately, giving yourself grace and telling yourself like, what you produce, even if it's not the best version of it, because you ran out of time, or because you're on a time constraint. I had my feet put to the fire for mine, because I basically was timing out for some things. And so ultimately, just leaning in and just getting it done, and it sounds like, but I want to make it better, I want to put my best foot forward. And ultimately, you get to a point where you're just, you're okay, with whatever came out that day.

B Brandon Tregle 32:50

I was similar, and I just kept trying to improve it and kept trying to improve it, and then they were like, you know to do, you're gonna have to give us something. And so I think I may have even made it worse, I spent so much time on it. But one thing that I think comes out here, in talking to other grad students, if you can kind of form a circle, you see that everyone's going through the same thing. Everyone's having grammar errors, and can't believe they just turn

this thing in. And it's coming out, you know, we're all going through it. And you're not the only one, it really helped me to kind of move past a lot of the issues I was having with submitting something and things like that. So.

J Jose Sanchez 33:25

Right, so we're getting kind of starting to touch on this. But at what point did you finally feel like okay, like this is it? I'm ready to defend this. Was it just when you got an email from your advisor? Or was there some moment where you're like, that's it, like, there's no more that I can get out of this? Let's just get it over with.

B Brandon Tregle 33:42

For me, it was a little both. I got to the point, like Shannon said, I have to submit something now and I have to defend something or else I'm gonna miss the deadline. It was done. I was just trying to continue to do more. But it always felt like it could be improved. But I didn't notice that I hit a point where I was kind of spinning my wheels, and it was time to put other eyes on this and start to incorporate feedback. So like she said, I submitted what I had, and went with it and all worked out.

S Shannon Magnuson 34:08

Yeah, I mean, I think just the same. I think when I was done writing, I felt pretty good about it. I'd spent a lot of time with it. I think there's two other things, though, right, is that no one's going to know this as best as you know it, right. And I think having a chair constantly remind me that I am the expert in not only the data, but the questions and as a qualitative researcher who had spent time in these particular prisons that I was researching. I knew the area better than any member of my committee did. And so that was also really helpful of knowing, Okay, it's time to just give them something. I think the other thing for me that happened, and it feels natural, isn't that I felt like I experienced impostor syndrome. Like I felt very confident and capable. What I felt nervous about was producing something that scholars that I super respected were going to read, and then it being trash. And realizing that I didn't get this far writing like a dumpster fire, right, that I can write well, people respect that writing, it's good and to have confidence in the writing, the way that I have confidence in the methods. And for me, that was the largest hump to get over was really sharing my work with people I really respected and wanting them to say, Oh, wow, you've got this. Which was ultimately what happened, right? No committee member came back to me saying, This is really bad. I'm not really sure why you got here, no one said that. And if they had, I would have had to have a, you know, real talk conversation with my chair. Because the other thing is that your chair shouldn't be putting you in situations where you're submitting work to your committee that really needs an overhaul. So really trusting that process, that your chair is looking out for you, and that your work is good. That's the point in which you just kind of let it go and send it along.



Jenn Tostlebe 36:09

Okay, and so in preparation, then for the actual defense, what was kind of the most challenging aspect of this preparation for the actual defense for each of you?

aspect of this preparation for the actual defense for each of you.

B

Brandon Tregle 36:21

I think I wasn't sure what to expect. I don't know if it's like this everywhere. But I've talked to other people about it, and they don't really publicize prospectus defenses. In a lot of places. I've heard it's close. I don't think that's the case that you know, but it was just my committee, and I didn't, you know, like, do I need to wear a tie for this even, like just little things like that. But I was kind of unsure of how to take it through the whole thing, which my advisor really helped me with that too. But it was just that I wasn't sure what to expect going in. And that was my biggest challenge.

S

Shannon Magnuson 36:51

That's a really great follow up. Mine was closed and virtual, pre-COVID. But that's because two of my committee members at the time one was in California, one was in Pennsylvania. So it had to be virtual. I think asking questions, which I now that I'm thinking about it to not ask about, like, how should I be dressed? How formal is it? I as we know, I'm a very casual human being. So I'm gonna guess that I walked in wearing a t shirt and some ripped jeans and some like slide on sneaks knowing me. But I think that that's certainly a question that's worth asking. My committee and my chair are also very casual people. So I could feel that. But I could see a world where if I had chosen different faculty in my department that I should have maybe presented myself differently or look differently there. So I think that's certainly a question that I never considered, but I think is worth asking. For me. The presentation part of the actual defense part, I felt like was the easy part. I enjoy putting together presentations and trying to tell a story of what I was doing. I think the more challenging part was really thinking about how do I keep it to 20 minutes and tell you the story of why this research is so needed, when the story is how the state got to where it got to is such a long process and really important details. So I think for me, it was mostly about practicing. How do I keep it succinct, hit the highlights? So that way, the questions that I'm asking make sense in context of the statement of the problem?

J

Jose Sanchez 38:22

So talking about the actual defense itself. Shannon you mentioned a 20 minute presentation. But can you maybe give us more of a rundown of the like, what the actual defense? Like how long it was? The how do you handle the nerves and the ever so dreaded Q&A at the end?



Jenn Tostlebe 38:38

Yeah. Brandon, what, like you were saying, I feel like I have basically no idea like how this actually works. So enlighten us, please.

S

Shannon Magnuson 38:48

Yeah, so mine was about an hour to an hour and a half, I think they might have actually like my

dissertation defense was two hours. And so I basically presented a 20 minute presentation. A small Asterix here is that my presentations generally do not look like most other people's presentations. So to say what was the format, I generally don't follow format. I didn't put a lit review in there. I told the story the best way that I thought was compelling. Part of the work and part of my research agenda is also translational research. And so being able to create a story from research that doesn't feel like research is part of like the Schlicht that I'm going for, it's the brand. And so for me, my proposal presentation looked distinctly different than my colleagues. That doesn't make it better or worse. It just makes it different. So I think working with your committee to say, Do you want a lit review? Do you want the research questions? You want the analytic thing? Like do you want it one by one? Do you want all the research questions at one time? Do you want all of the analytic methods at one time? The why this matters at one time? I think asking more follow up questions to get a format that makes sense for you. Then I was asked questions for about 30 to 45 minutes about why I chose these methods, how I planned for this. So there was a couple cases where they were asking me if I could pilot work or do some demo work to make sure that the instrument that I was using was good. And I basically had to say, There's no way I can just hop into the solitary confinement unit and try it out one time to see how it'll work. But it was just questions like that, like, can you do that? I don't know. And then just being ready to say no, because there are some real limitations of access that make that impossible, right. So from there, I was dismissed in my process, I think for maybe 20 minutes or so. I took a walk around the block. And then I came back and my committee said, okay, you've passed, there's a couple things that we would like from you, we want, like I said, the questions hanging together more, we want a more descriptive framing of it, but you don't necessarily need to write it in your proposal document, we'd like it as a memo, and submit the memo to the chair. And once she says it's great, we'll all sign off on it. But it's kind of my process there.

B

Brandon Tregle 41:05

Mine was very similar to that. I was given a lot of latitude in how I presented it. So I just kept it very structured. I walked through each three of the chapters, told kind of the story of why the program was started, the background, relevant literature, and then I went into my research questions and how I plan to analyze the data. It was helpful, because I had already started to analyze the data a little bit. But mine lasted about 35 minutes. And then I had 25 minutes of questions and feedback, things like that. And then I had to leave the room. I think it was 10/15 minutes. And then I came back. And they told me that I passed, but they did want to see, like Shannon said the same thing, narrow the focus, hang the questions in there better, structure everything towards the question, because I was just like, I really wanted to evaluate everything, which will have to be done later, you know, I can't have an 800 page dissertation. And so I think they saw the trap that I would have fallen into. And so they said, you know, really try to tie everything in better, maybe you need to remove some research questions. I got basically the same feedback that she did. And so for me, it was to put it into the final product and send it to them that way, once I finished the dissertation.



Jenn Tostlebe 42:12

All right. And so we've asked about the challenging parts of this. For each of you what was the most rewarding aspect of going through the proposal defense?

B**Brandon Tregle 42:22**

For me, it was the boost to keep going after. It was kind of you know, like now have something to show for it. I've been writing for six months, while collecting data and trying to balance all these things. And now I've got a trophy, you know, I passed my perspectives defense. And now I kind of have something to show for all of that work. And so it kind of provided the motivation to get started. Like, as I said, once I finished that, it was like I knew where I was going every day. But now it's chapter four, and that cursor is blinking on a white screen again. And so it kind of gave me the boost to move forward and keep going. And then now I've gotten some clear feedback. And I've gotten a roadmap from faculty, here's where you need to go from here. So that helped me to kind of pick it back up and get moving.

S**Shannon Magnuson 43:06**

Yeah, I agree. I think for me, at that point, the important parts were, one having a move forward and becoming a candidate, right, you get to change at least some part of your email signature from student to candidate, which felt like I was making some progress for someone, I took a significantly longer time than most of my peers, throughout my doc program. So it was nice to finally move, continue to move forward. I think also, one of the rewarding parts was that a lot of my faculty members had told me, this is a really ambitious dissertation. This is very large. And your chair is telling us that you can do it. So we're gonna let you do it. But we suspect you might have to scale back. So it's okay, if you want to come back and say we're scaling back. And at no point did I come back and scale back I collected all five data sources, I did it all. And then I told them what I was going to present to them. And that was a really rewarding process for them to say, this is a really bold dissertation to be doing, we have faith in you and we'll support you if it works out or if it doesn't work out. And so I think that was also really nice to be supported by faculty again that I super respected who thought it was ambitious, who thought it was challenging, and then to rise to the challenge that I effectively set for myself.

**Jenn Tostlebe 44:26**

So now you have kind of this boost in motivation. You defended your prospectus, you've passed. What then were the next steps. Brandon, you hinted at this blank screen again, but kind of what steps did you take to move forward?

B**Brandon Tregle 44:43**

The first thing I did was I took a step back and went back and incorporated all of their feedback first, just to make sure that everything I did after this would stay relevant. So I went back I made all of my corrections. I was you know, like I said, you have clear feedback, you know where you need to go from here. So that process wasn't too bad, it wasn't as bad as you know, starting over again. So I put all the feedback in, I made the corrections, I removed some research questions. And then honestly, Chapter Four was my results. Chapter Five was my discussion. And then I had a short conclusion chapter. And that was kind of fun after because now you're talking about what you found. And I think like speaking to both of us, you can hear the passion coming through even, we're not even telling you about our projects. And you can

see how much we really enjoyed working on it. So now you're getting to tell. And Dr. Nix told me that I was gonna happen. And it did, it was, you know, you're kind of just, you can write and you're free again, it's almost like after you finish comps, and you get to pick up something that you want to do. And so that really happened for me.

S

Shannon Magnuson 45:40

I was expecting Brandon to give us a very structured answer about what he did next. I did a little less than that, per usual, it seems like. I didn't touch it for a little while because it didn't want to see it. But I was doing data collection. I defended my proposal, I think in February or so and my data collection started in June. So it made sense for me to kind of pick it back up in the end of March and April, to start doing logistics for access into the prisons I was going into. And so it gave me at least a month timeframe to do other things, work on other projects, feel, you know, proud that I finished it and have some space and distance from it. And then to Brandon's point, feel excited to pick it up and start running with it. I think if I would say to do as I say not as I do that, if I were to go back, perhaps I could have also been doing a bit more framing, a little bit more lit review framing about some of the questions that I ended up selecting. However, at the end of it, I didn't know, it's hard to say because at the end of my dissertation, I didn't know which data sources I was going to ultimately end up using and the story I was going to end up telling until I was already so far along. So to have written some other parts to kind of put them together in the process, for me would have been very challenging. I might have actually just redone work that I had already done. But if you have a fairly straightforward secondary analysis of sorts like that might be something that you could work on. At the same time. I think for me, it was just mostly having a really detailed--this is the only thing that feels Brandon-like about my journey, I guess--was that I had a very detailed list order of operations, like I knew exactly in this month, I need to be getting access to this prison. In this month, I need to be collecting this. This is due to the Department of Corrections here, I need to check in about getting access here. More documentation for more access here, I had a very clear outline for myself of when things needed to happen. So I knew that if I was pretty much on target for collecting the data, or not. The writing process, I fell off a timeline completely. But at least the data collection process was on a very strict timeline that I had for myself.

B

Brandon Tregle 47:57

Yeah, I had a very similar situation with that. There were low hanging fruit. So I could have measured and they would have been so great to add in, but then I risk losing control again, and going into too much. And my committee, you know, offered some of it. They're like, you know, you're already doing this if you just add it in, but then you have to go back and change the literature review and everything. And I, it was a little like, I didn't feel satisfied that I skipped on that. But you know, I think that you have, like Shannon said, you've got to make some decisions, make some tough decisions and move forward. And that's kind of what happened with me. So I guess my advice would be, like Shannon said, celebrate. But for me, it was just don't do it for too long, because those bad habits are habits too. And so I moved into my corrections and started going at this point, like in contrast to Shannon, I was slowly collecting data now I had the bulk of it done. And at this point, it was just in qualitative interviews that occurred once or twice a month. And it was, you know, three people at a time. And so it was a

slow drip of data for me, rather than still kind of collecting heavy amounts like she was. And so it was a little easier for me to say, to sit down and write when I'm, you know, mine's already done.



Jenn Tostlebe 49:05

One question that I have is it sounds like both of your dissertations kind of changed in different ways, but changed a little bit from your prospectus? Is that something that like you have to go back and check with your chair your committee about or are those decisions that you like primarily make on your own?

B

Brandon Tregle 49:24

Well, my committee kind of gave me the roadmap to do it and then left it up to me how to do it. But I did expect to kind of get more feedback after about like you did this wrong, but I didn't, you know, it worked out. But they told me kind of like Shannon said, tie it all in better, narrow the focus, and so on and left it up to me how to do that. So it was nice to stay in control of it, but it was they were more like guardrails instead of like, you know, leading me to water.

S

Shannon Magnuson 49:56

I think for me, the answer is no, I did not have to ask permission. I made all the decisions. However, I knew I was going to potentially have the answer for them in my defense. So I just was prepared to answer those questions. However, I would say that it would depend on both your chair and your committee and how much it's changing. So for colleagues of mine, or peers of mine, I know that they had to substantially go back to their committee, because their ends were significantly less than they said, and that changed significantly what was happening for them. In those cases, they had to have a conversation with their committee. In other cases like mine, I just made a decision, I'm not giving you two whole pieces of data sources. That's a later conversation. And I'm gonna give you the story that I think is the most compelling of what I've collected from start to finish. I did tell my chair, I'm going to do this, there's just too much data at this point. And one of the data sources, I actually split in half again, and actually created a separate research question that didn't really quite exist in the same way. But I think that's also part of the research process, right, you ask questions that you think you have, and then you get down the rabbit hole doing it, you're like, Well, that was not that great of a question. A better question would have been this. And so I just use the better question in my defense, and claimed I've been using it the whole time. But you know, I just told them, I said, like, look, this is what I started with. But as I did this work, that what you wanted from me was clarity on how these things hang together, I now have better questions now that I understand it more. These are the questions I'm using. This is the question I'm answering. And my committee did not have a problem with it. They thought it was more compelling. But I would say that it would depend on how much it's changing. And your chair, and maybe the dynamic of your committee of how involved they want to be, how much they don't want to be involved. And I would also say if you're using someone's data on your committee. So some people might use an outside chairs data or something like that, in those cases, it might be worth revisiting.



 B**Brandon Tregle 52:03**

Yeah, that was a great point, in addition to the direction I got from the committee, I also notice some themes that came up in the data. And so I didn't take the low hanging fruit of the things that the faculty said, you know, maybe you should add this in. But there were just things I felt like I couldn't not mention. And so I did go back and add that stuff in. And, you know, it's things that maybe the literature hinted at, but no one measured yet, or it was measured in other areas, but not this one, specifically. And it was just, you know, I really felt like it needed to be on paper. And so I did, yeah, my ideas did change that way.

**Jenn Tostlebe 52:36**

I was just like thinking about it, and thinking about the fact that something could change, because I feel like people always talk about that, right? Like, I passed my defense, but then things came up and it changed. And I was just wondering how that works.

 S**Shannon Magnuson 52:49**

I would definitely say to allow the change to happen. If it feels like it organically is pushing you that way, right? Don't go out looking to change your dissertation. There's no need for that. But I think for some of my peers, they run themselves into a wall staying pretty firm, heels dug into the ground about doing the exact thing that they proposed. And they're creating a lot of resistance for themselves, instead of being flexible, and just letting it be what it needs to be, because that's what the data says, or that's because what the access point is, or because of you have new thinking now. And so I think that all of those things are okay. I also feel like my dissertation took a very strong organizational change lens, because that's who I am and how I see the world. And I wrote that pre-George Floyd. And on the other side of this movement that we've had in our country, it's very challenging to write about solitary confinement from only an org-change lens and not have any race conversation as part of the process. And you know, four years down the line, I'm writing this and saying to myself, if I don't say these other things that I know that I cannot not unsee now, kind of like Brandon saying, I'm going to really look like I'm tone deaf, and I missed the boat here. And so allowing it to expand or be what it needs to be. I think Brandon said earlier to find a group of friends that are kind of doing it with you. I have a group chat called like get finished. And it's like Ph, you know, ins. And we all basically just chat each other complaining about IRB processes or data requirements, or I need help with this or can someone help me format this? Or where's the website for this or and all of these things that you feel like you have to navigate alone? And one of the things that comes up a lot in that group chat is, guys, what if I need to change this like completely? And everyone's answer is then do that then do the thing that needs to happen for you to get done. And so I think leaning into change is probably one of the things I would recommend on the other side of your proposal defense?

 J**Jose Sanchez 55:02**

Any final words or advice or closing thoughts as we wrap up?

 B**Brandon Tregle 55:07**



Brandon Hegie 55:07

Just, I'd say, remember why you're doing it. Have fun with it. There were a lot of times where I needed to step back and get out of the books. And just think of how cool of a program this is, and that I'm getting to evaluate it. And I enjoyed it at one point. And now that I've read three books about it, not so much. But you know, there was a reason I wanted to do this. And so allow yourself to kind of step back and remember the big picture while you're doing it and try to have fun. Let your curiosity take over. There were a few times where, especially my literature review, I went somewhere I wasn't originally planning to go, just like I got curious about it. And then it led to, you know, great findings, like I said, in those themes that came up, so I was like, oh, yeah, I did read that. And then I got to go back and incorporate it.



Shannon Magnuson 55:51

I agree with Brandon, I feel like it makes sense. For me, I took a lot of breaks, maybe more breaks than the average bear should take, do as Brandon says, not as Shannon does. And but I think understanding that your mental health is really important. And that separation from it is great. To read things beyond what you're working on, to inform what you're doing, I think is also really thoughtful. I think the other thing for me was, and that I often share with students that I work with, is to understand why your dissertation matters, maybe to you, and identify that. So that's something you can lean on, but then understand why it matters for the world. And I think that if you're writing it with a firm understanding of why it matters from the world, the writing will come easier, I think the presentation will come easier. Working through it will come easier, you'll feel confident and own the space and command spaces because you have a firm understanding of why it's important for the world to know the work that you're doing. And I think to identify that early in the process, I think is really important. And understanding how to articulate that, at a fairly high level. I always encourage students to tweet, like, tell me what your tweet would be of your dissertation or tell me what your tweet would be. In 140 characters or less, tell me why it matters. And for me, in my writing process, I often had that at the like the header in my writing, as I was writing was like the tweet, I would write for myself for that paper. So I knew constantly what the bottom line was that was writing towards. I think that was super helpful in the process, too.



Jose Sanchez 57:29

Well, that's great advice. That's all the time we have for today. Thank you both so much for joining us. This was a really enlightening conversation, as Jenn and I both are kind of setting sail on our prospectus writing and defense.



Jenn Tostlebe 57:45

While we were coming up with the questions, it was like, what all questions do we have? So yeah, thank you to both of you. This was really helpful. I'm probably going to go back and listen to it again.



Jose Sanchez 57:56

This would be the one episode that I wouldn't mind relistenina. I hate listenina to these and

mostly listening to myself talk is like the worst. But is there anything, either one of you would like to plug any projects or papers or anything that we should be on the lookout for now?

B

Brandon Tregle 58:14

Not yet, no, nothing yet.

S

Shannon Magnuson 58:17

The only thing I have recently was myself and two colleagues, Dr. Rudes, from George Mason, who's now moving to Sam Houston State University, and Dr. Angela Hedery, who was at Mason, who's now at the University of Delaware. We published a book together called *Surviving Solitary*. And so it is on Stanford University Press. You can also find it on Amazon. I love a good coup deal. So if you buy it on Stanford University Press using the coupon solitary20, you get 20% off. It's totally okay if you want to do the paperback and not the hardback. I didn't even purchase a hardback version for myself. It was too expensive. I couldn't even bring myself to buy my own book in hard copy or a hardback. So but yeah, that sounds Stanford press.



Jenn Tostlebe 59:02

Yes, this is gonna come out after that. But there's a book talk next week, right?

S

Shannon Magnuson 59:07

There is a book talk, I should have probably told you the whole name of it. It's called *Surviving solitary: Living and working in restricted housing units*. So it's about it uses data from 2 predominantly, two research projects in solitary in the state of Pennsylvania.

J

Jose Sanchez 59:21

And where can people find you? Are you either one of you on like Twitter, the Twitterverse?

B

Brandon Tregle 59:27

I took a break from Twitter for my dissertation, but I'm @BTregle. I plan to pick it back up now. But I did take a break to make myself write.

S

Shannon Magnuson 59:37

Brandon, what's your life coaching Twitter account?



Jenn Tostlebe 59:40

You need to start one now.



Brandon Tregle 59:43

I don't know if you want that advice from me.



Shannon Magnuson 59:46

I'm also on Twitter. I think it's @SMagnuson323, I believe.



Jose Sanchez 59:52

Awesome. Well, thank you both. Again, really appreciate you taking the time to talk to us and congratulations to you both for your awesome achievements. We hope to one day be like you.



Shannon Magnuson 1:00:03

You already are. You guys are already killing it. I don't have a podcast. Brandon, do you have a podcast?



Brandon Tregle 1:00:08

I don't have have a podcast either.



Jenn Tostlebe 1:00:08

You're both on a podcast now. So there you go. Thank you to you both.



Shannon Magnuson 1:00:16

All right, have a good day.



Jenn Tostlebe 1:00:18

Bye, you too.



Jenn Tostlebe 1:00:19

Hey! Thanks for listening.



Jose Sanchez 1:00:21

Don't forget to leave us a review on Apple podcasts or iTunes. Or let us know what you think of the episode by leaving us a comment on our website, thecriminologyacademy.com.



Jenn Tostlebe 1:00:31

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Jose Sanchez 1:00:42

Or email us at TheCrimAcademy@gmail.com. See you next time!