Criminology Comprehensive Exam Questions
Doctoral Program in Criminology
School of Economic, Political and Policy Sciences
University of Texas at Dallas

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Instructions

The Comprehensive Examination in Criminology consists of three sections: (1) Theory (2) Policy and (3) Data/Methods.

Each of these sections contains two (2) questions from which you will choose one (1).

You will have four (4) hours to answer the question you choose for each section.

Your answers will be evaluated on their organization, coherence, clarity, intellectual rigor, substantive validity, conceptual development, and application of relevant literature to the question at hand.

There will be a one-hour break between Sections 1 & 2. Section 3 will be taken on a separate day.

You are free to use the restrooms whenever you want.

You will use one of the computers provided to word process your answers, along with a jump drive. Make sure you save your work frequently as you progress through the day (at least once every 20 minutes is a good idea, though you may want to do it more frequently than that). All answers will be submitted on the jump drive.

You do not have to provide a bibliography of sources cited, but make sure your answers reflect an in-text citation format that shows the reviewers the author and year of the study you are citing.

There is no need for calculators, and you are not allowed to use any outside notes or outlines. The proctor can provide you scratch paper if you need it.

Do not put your name on the examination answers. You are to use the student # that will be assigned to you by the proctor.

Theory

1. Discuss the racial and ethnic differences in crime. Identify a theory or theories that best explain(s) racial and ethnic differences in offending. Be sure to include the relevant empirical research to support your answer.

2. Pick one theory that you think is good and one theory that you think is bad. Specify at least 5 criteria for your evaluation. Outline the relevant literatures on both theories as they apply to these two theories and your criteria to make your argument.

Policy

1. There appear to be two schools of thought with respect to whether randomized controlled trials (RCT's) provide the most appropriate methodology when evaluating crime prevention strategies. In your answer, provide an overview of both arguments, the 'RCT is always best' versus 'RCT may not always be best', and then indicate which of the two you think is the more preferred methodological approach. If you believe that both approaches are necessary, then indicate that and provide a justification for why you believe a mixture of the two is ideal.

2. With the recent presidential election making daily headlines, the subject of mass incarceration has recently been in the news. There has been a great deal of concern over how policy changes in the mid to late 1980s have had a disproportionately negative effect on minority communities and have led to mass incarceration. Write an essay in which you discuss the impetus for the policy changes in the 1990s and examine the research that has led to the conclusion about disparity. If you were tasked by the incoming president to run a task-force to make changes, what would you propose? Be sure to support your answer with evidence.

Data/Methods

1.
Part 1: Define what statistical bias is.
Part 2: Give an example of a measure (relevant to criminology or criminal justice) that is biased. Describe the source of the bias, and describe the direction in which it is likely biased.
Part 3: Give an example where causal inferences from a regression equation in a journal article may be biased. Examples of how regression coefficients (and their standard errors) can be biased may be due to omitted variables or simultaneity (e.g. one predicts Y from X, but Y also causes X) as well as due to bias in the measures. Describe why the estimates might be biased, and articulate reasons why it may be biased in a particular direction.

2. Propose a study to evaluate a popular crime prevention program or practice. This can be a randomized experiment or a quasi-experimental design. Clearly explain and defend your chosen research design by addressing the following points:

* Discuss the units of analysis and your total sample size of "treated" and "control" cases. These should be large enough that you will be able to detect meaningful program/practice effects in your statistical analysis.
* Clearly describe and justify the crime outcomes you will be measuring. Also address potential biases in those measures.
* Explain and defend your chosen follow-up period, such that you can determine whether the program/practice has sustained effects.
* Explain what, if any, statistical adjustments (e.g., control variables) will additionally be measured and included in your analysis.
* Discuss how you will monitor program implementation, to further insure internal validity.