

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

October 2011

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.

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 1/2 hour 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 committee 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

Question 1:

Of the following criminological theories, which would you identify as a "good" theory and which would you designate as a "bad" theory? In your answer, provide and apply the criteria by which you are judging the theories, as well as provide a clear outline/overview of the selected theories and a review of the empirical (evidence-based) foundation for your endorsement of one and rejection of the other.

Anomie/strain theory

Social learning theory

Social control (social bond) theory

Crime propensity (self-control) theory

Deterrence theory

Question 2:

Exposure to delinquent/criminal peers has long been one of the most robust predictors of offending, at the individual level. Several mainstream (i.e., general) theories of crime either explicitly or implicitly address the role of exposure to peers in their explanations of crime. Using two mainstream theories of crime and citing recent and relevant research literature, explain the foundation of each theory in detail with a particular emphasis on how the role of peers operates within the context of each theory. Next, discuss recent developments in the literature that have addressed the peer effect through the lens of each theory and speculate on how the role of peers might change in future tests/explanations of crime.

Methods

Question 1:

You have just received a substantial grant to study a program designed to reduce drug use among Texas high school students. Describe in detail what your study will look like. Your answer should include the specific research question to be addressed, the proposed research design to be implemented, how you will recruit and sample participants for your study, how you will measure and assess the reliability and validity of your key variables of interest, how you will analyze the data, and how you will address internal and external validity issues related to your research design. Be sure to note any possible limitations that may arise because of your research design.

Question 2:

There is a large literature that examines the effect of the defendant's race on the likelihood of receiving an incarceration sentence. Much of this line of work suggests that there are small but significant race effects in the in/out imprisonment decision (where Blacks are disadvantaged more than Whites). Yet several scholars have argued that there are important issues related to differential selection and sample selection bias that makes any previous conclusions premature. Please provide an overview of the differential selection/sample selection bias issue (feel free to use any criminological/criminal justice example), provide recommendations as to how scholars can overcome these issues, and indicate what method(s) you think the field should adopt.

Policy

Question 1:

There is some skepticism about the ability of criminological research to impact criminal justice policy or practice. Write an answer in which you provide examples of how (a) research has affected policy/practice and (b) research has not affected policy/practice. Your answer should provide specific examples of research falling on each side of the issue.

Question 2:

The Governor of Texas had appointed you Crime Czar. The Governor is deciding between two different police strategies to embark upon. Your first task is to review the evidence with respect to hot-spots-oriented policing and broken-windows-oriented policing. What does this literature say (and not say)? Your second task is to suggest to the Governor which approach Texas should take, why it should take it, and what the Governor and citizens should expect to see in the short and long-term with respect to the effect of the proposed policing strategy on crime.