

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 responsiveness, substance, coherence, clarity, organization, intellectual rigor, 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 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 evaluators 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

Age and race/ethnicity are two of the strongest correlates of crime. What do we know about these two correlates as they relate to criminal offending? Pick one theory that you think explains the relationship of age to crime and the relationship of race/ethnicity to crime. Pick one theory that you think does not explain or fails to explain these two relationships. In your answer, please document how these theories do and do not account for those correlates.

Question 2

At a conference on theoretical integration held at SUNY-Albany in 1989, Professor Charles Wellford claimed that the field of criminology was in a “state of theoretical paralysis”, indicating that there were no new ideas about how crime was produced or how it varied across persons, areas, cultures, and so forth. So, here we are, some twenty years later, and you have been asked by a theoretical Genie to comment on whether Professor Wellford’s statement remains true. Does it remain true? If so, document why we remain in this state of theoretical paralysis and provide some indication of how we can get out of this predicament. If you disagree with him, document at least two salient theoretical advances since 1989 and how they have helped us answer important questions and/or spurred new theoretical puzzles.

Policy

Question 1

In several cities in the United States, violent crimes committed by juveniles has been increasing. Assume that the mayor of a city plagued by these recent issues asks you to recommend strategies to address this problem. How would you go about creating a policy to effectively decrease juvenile crime? In your answer, provide an overview of how your proposed strategy is based on relevant theoretical and empirical evidence. Be sure to address any concerns critics of your approach would have.

Question 2

Crime rates fluctuate up and down over time. What policies are directly or indirectly responsible for these fluctuations? Which of these policies has had the most significant effect on crime rates and why? If no single policy stands out, why is that?

Methods

Question 1

Discuss in detail the concept of the experimental research design. In principle, what are the strengths and weaknesses of experiments? Discuss the practical problems that criminal justice/criminology researchers face in carrying out experiments. In practice, why are experiments not often used in crim/cj research? Be sure to use specific examples of experimental research designs from crim/cj (or related) research literature. Finally, discuss some alternatives to the experimental design that can be used to address criminological research questions in a more practical manner.

Question 2

Criminal behavior is difficult to analyze, in part for reasons that differ from the study of other human behaviors. The complications of analyzing criminal behavior emerge at all phases of a research project beginning with the conceptualization of the term, *criminal behavior*, and extending through statistical modeling issues. For this question:

- a. List and explain the ways in which the measurement of criminal behavior presents special problems to criminologists, noting how these differ from those applying to the study of other human behaviors. Be sure to discuss the conceptualization and operationalization of criminal behavior as well as measurement reliability and measurement validity concerns.
- b. Outline the strategies criminologists use to circumvent these difficulties and assess their limitations for successfully solving these problems. In other words, how do criminologists deal with measurement concerns? How do they deal with statistical modeling issues?

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