

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.

Methods

1) Data sampling is critical in empirical analysis because access to entire populations is often not feasible. Provide a detailed discussion of sampling and why it is important to the quality of one's research. In doing so, be sure to (1) discuss probability theory and probability sampling techniques, (2) discuss non-probability sampling techniques, (3) provide an overview of the strengths and weaknesses of each technique discussed in (1) and (2), and (4) use examples of sampling strategies/data collection efforts relevant to criminology to help substantiate your response.

2) Scholars are acutely aware of the fact that correlation is not causation. Some writers have suggested that the search for causes is an "elusive paradise" that cannot be attained and in fact should not be sought. Write an essay describing the conceptual differences between causation and correlation. In other words, what must a scholar do in order to say s/he has identified a cause as opposed to identifying a correlation? Include in your discussion the strengths and weaknesses of the major strategies that are used to identify causes and correlates in criminological research.

Policy

1) Politicians are often accused of creating criminal justice policy based on knee-jerk reactions to highly publicized events. Identify two different policies that developed under such a framework and discuss the evidence base for such public policies. You should incorporate a discussion of relevant theories, a review of empirical research and evaluation of these policies, and extant legal, political, and criminal justice-related issues that have influenced the efficacy and implementation of such policies. In your view, what is the future of these policies in the criminal justice system and society? You may compare and contrast the policies or present them independently from one another.

2) The criminal justice system has been criticized for the disproportionate representation of minorities throughout the years. Identify two competing perspectives that have explored these discrepancies as evidenced by crime and correctional statistics, empirical investigations, and theoretical frameworks. Which policies do you believe have contributed the most to such discrepancies at each stage of criminal justice processing? Your answer should provide specifics of policies and realities based in the courts, law enforcement practices, and corrections to back up your answers and which present examples of the differing propositions. Be sure to use empirical evidence and citations to support your assertions.

Theory

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 the correlates.

2) Fast forward to ten years from now. You are on a faculty and you are preparing a theory question for a comprehensive examination. What is the question you would pose to the graduate students and what would, in your mind, be the ideal answer to your own question.