

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

**December 2014**

**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.

## **Data/Methods**

1. Suppose you are asked to evaluate a substance-abuse treatment program for convicted adults, and you attempt to use some kind of experimental or quasi-experimental design to assess whether the program works in terms of reducing re-arrest. What could you do to deal with the following "potential" problems?

- a. You are unable to do random assignment of subjects.
- b. You lose cases from the experimental group due to drop-outs from the program.
- c. You have nonequivalent control and experimental groups.
- d. You are concerned about regression artifacts since those selected for the treatment program tend to have a more extended criminal record.
- e. Events occurring between the beginning of the treatment program and the posttest could have produced the observed outcome in the absence of the treatment program.

2. Scientific inquiry hinges on researchers' ability to properly measure phenomena. Unfortunately for us, the measurement of social phenomena tends to be imperfect at best, leading to many critical questions about the utility of social science research. As a researcher, you are interested in measuring serious delinquency. Discuss the criteria used by researchers that you would use to judge the reliability and validity of their delinquency measures. What are the consequences of analyzing measures with questionable reliability and validity? What are the consequences for your regression estimates when your dependent variable is measured with error? Be sure to discuss the differences in consequences for random vs. non-random (systematic) error. In addressing these issues, make sure you discuss concerns surrounding conceptualization and operationalization of criminological constructs as well as the statistical concerns.

## **Policy**

1) It might be argued that one of the most significant events in modern correctional policy is the shift from a pure punishment model back to a rehabilitation model. Discuss the political, social, and economic factors that have contributed to this paradigm shift. Next, discuss the empirical evidence that supports the view that offenders can be rehabilitated and describe how this can be incorporated into our crime control policy.

2) According to official statistics, the U.S. violent crime rate has dropped considerably since the early 1990s. In fact, for most types of violent crime, recent rates are the lowest since the early 1960s. Describe fully the nature of the current state of violent crime in the US, describe the historical trends of the violent crime drop, and thoroughly examine the literature purporting to explain such trends. Be sure to clearly discuss the possible explanations for past trends/current levels and provide your assessment of those explanations from logical and empirical standpoints as they relate to criminal justice policy. Present convincing arguments in favor of the explanation that you believe best explains the crime drop backed up with empirical evidence and cites.

## Theory

- 1) Fast forward 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?
  
- 2) Perhaps the most robust finding across criminology is the enduring gender differences in criminal involvement. With the rise of feminist criminological perspectives, there has been a significant movement within the discipline to explore gender-specific pathways to crime. Discuss the predominant theories and seminal works that explore why males are more criminally involved than females and the recent controversies on this topic. Are the causes of female crime similar to or different from the causes of male crime according to this body of work? Does research suggest that females are more criminogenic than they were in prior times?