

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

**December 2015**

**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. Age is one the strongest correlates of crime. What do we know about this correlate as it relates to criminal offending? Pick one theory that you think explains the relationship of age to crime and one theory that you think does not explain it or fails to explain it. In your answer, please document how these theories do and do not account for the correlate.

2. A successful theory meets both theoretical and empirical standards. In some detail, discuss the elements of a good theory. Which criminological theory does the best job of meeting these standards? What current criminological theory fails to meet these standards? Justify your answers.

### **Policy**

1. The U.S. leads the world in gun-related deaths by a considerable margin. The conservative solution to this problem is generally greater access to guns. The liberal solution to this problem calls for stricter gun control. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each approach. Be sure to cite relevant empirical literature in your answer.

2. More than 20 years ago, the federal government passed legislation that directed federal funds toward building new prisons. The 1994 Crime Bill provided financial incentives to states that increased arrests, prosecutions, and prison sentences. Recently, scholars and some policymakers have argued that the federal government reverse course and provide funds to states to reduce imprisonment and crime. If you were to advise policymakers on the best approach to reverse crime and/or reverse mass incarceration, what would you suggest? Your answer should be theoretically grounded and supported with empirical research.

### **Data/Methods**

1. A big-budget research grant opportunity to study the “gateway” effect of marijuana use has arisen. Some people hypothesize that use of marijuana causes escalation, among some users, to more dangerous drugs, serving as a “gateway” to cocaine or heroin use by providing training in the methods of drug use, rationalizations for law violation, and so on. Others say the association between marijuana use and the use of other drugs is spurious, due to the common influence on both marijuana use and other drug use of extraneous variables that influence all forms of rule-breaking behavior. Design a longitudinal non-experimental study to address these causal issues as well as possible, providing careful explanations of the key problems involved and how each aspect of your design solves or reduces the problems.

2. 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.