

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.

Theory

1. Theories of criminal behavior are typically tested through the use of cross sectional and/or longitudinal data. Choosing any theory in criminology as your discussion platform, use the empirical literature to showcase your knowledge of the theory and discuss the implications of the following points:
 - a. Summarize the empirical evidence supporting the theory from its beginnings to present day.
 - b. When you look across this body of literature, is the theory largely supported through one type of data?
 - c. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the various methods used to test the theory?
2. What is the "best" criminological theory and why? Specify at least 5 criteria to guide your answer, as well as how and why the substantive literature on your theory supports your choice.

Policy

1. The political unrest surrounding strained police-community relations is a problem facing police departments today. The Dallas area has seen its fair share of concern over police-community interaction, and in mid-July experienced an ambush on its officers. Based on extant research, provide Chief Brown with two recommendation(s) that you believe can help improve these relationships. Additionally, propose how the command staff of the Dallas Police Department could implement the recommendations you identify, paying close attention to how your policy solution would improve police-community relationships.
2. With the upcoming presidential election making daily headlines, the subject of mass incarceration has recently been in the news. There has been a great deal of concern over how policy changes in the mid to late 1980s have had a disproportionately negative effect on minority communities and have led to mass incarceration. Write an essay in which you discuss the impetus for the policy changes in the 1990s and examine the research that has led to the conclusion about disparity. If you were tasked by the incoming president to run a task-force to make changes, what would you propose? Be sure to support your answer with evidence.

Data/Methods

1. You are the principal investigator on a project to evaluate the effects of a procedurally just policing initiative on motorists' perceptions of police officers. The police department you are working with wants to know whether officers who employ procedural justice principles during traffic stops receive more favorable evaluations from citizens than officers who do not employ such principles. Describe in detail what your study will look like. Your answer should include the specific research question(s) 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.

2. The effects of recreational marijuana legalization on juvenile delinquency and/or risky behavior, either directly or indirectly, remains largely unknown. Assuming you have little to no knowledge of the existing literature surrounding this topic, but you have complete access to official data sources as well as the financial resources to carry out a sophisticated study. Design a study to determine whether the transition to legalization of recreational marijuana use for those over the age of 21 has affected whether juveniles will engage in such behavior. Clearly define and discuss the elements of your study that others would use to assess its scientific merit. Be sure to outline your research questions, research design, sampling procedures, etc. You are free to take a qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods approach. For quantitative proposals, provide a discussion of how your study's design allows for the results to be generalized to juveniles in other communities, and how it cannot. For qualitative proposals, discuss how your study is designed to maximize its validity. Your answer should propose a top-quality study that could be realistically carried out.