

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

Instructions

The Qualifying Examination in Criminology consists of three sections: (1) Theory; (2) Data and Methods; and (3) Policy. 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.

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 need.

You will use one of the laptops provided to word process your answers. 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).

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 committee 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.

Do not put your name on the examination answers. You are to use the student # that will be assigned to you by Ms. McLain.

Theory

Question 1

For at least the last twenty years, there has been criticism that mainstream theories of crime have either not been tested adequately or are not falsifiable. As a consequence, there is growing disenchantment with traditional etiological perspectives and more funding and research attention in line with epidemiological approaches to identify risk factors for crime. The developmental perspective, or life course criminology, is a popular outgrowth of this research-driven and results-based scholarship. Identify three major research efforts and some of their main findings of developmental criminologists. Explain how this new knowledge contributes to our understanding of the causes of crime and criminality, and speculate on what the longstanding effect is likely to be for advancing theories of crime.

Question 2

Most criminological theories are founded on basic assumptions about the relationship between individuals and society. One position depicts individuals as largely passive, responding to larger features of their context. Another position emphasizes human agency and depicts individuals as active agents operating on their environment. Select two theoretical perspectives to illustrate these contrasting positions. Explain how the logic of each perspective reflects a particular view of human agency, external constraint, or both. Make sure your answer is evidence-based, drawing from the literatures relevant to both theories that you select.

Data and Methods

Question 1

Create a research proposal that tests any individual-level criminological theory in a deductive manner. The following areas should be included in the proposal:

1. A brief (i.e. a couple of sentences) introduction outlining the theory to be tested.
2. Research question (or hypothesis if you wish to use a declarative statement). Make sure the research question or hypothesis is a testable proposition deduced and directly derived from the theoretical framework discussed above.
3. Operational definitions of the key constructs of interest. Also, briefly discuss how you will test the validity and reliability of the measuring instruments you propose to use.
4. Sampling procedures to be used.
5. A discussion of the method (e.g., self-report survey, field experiment) in which the data will be collected. Indicate briefly any threats to internal and external validity that may be impossible to avoid or minimize.
6. Specify the inferential procedures (e.g., OLS regression) you will use to analyze the data.

Question 2

The following methodological issues are critical to effectively answering most of the questions upon which criminologists focus: ambiguous causal order, misspecification, measurement error, and multicollinearity. Explain the nature of these problems, and illustrate ways in which each problem has hindered efforts to test theories of crime. Then, identify strategies that have been proposed to alleviate these problems and discuss how they have been applied in specific studies during the past decade.

Policy

Question 1

Historically, criminologists and policymakers have gone separate ways. What would need to occur for criminologists and policymakers to work together? What would criminologists need to do? What would policymakers need to do? Substantiate your answer with evidence marshaled from the appropriate literature on this topic.

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? Substantiate your answer with evidence.