

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) 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.

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 computers 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. 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

Question 1:

Almost everybody knows that violent crime rates tend to be much higher in neighborhoods with higher levels of poverty, yet despite more than a century of research the true meaning of this association remains ambiguous.

Summarize the possible theoretical interpretations of the link between neighborhood poverty rates and levels of violence and assess which of these interpretations has the most support in the literature.

Question 2:

Citing relevant literature, discuss the development of two (2) of the following four general theories of crime from inception to the present date. For each theory, present a detailed overview of a) how the theory explains offending, b) the major transitions/extensions of the early versions of each theory through today, c) recent literature testing varying components of each theory, and d) the major critiques of each theory's ability to perform as a general theory of crime. End with a discussion of which theory (if any) you feel does a "better" job at explaining crime in general.

1. Learning theory
2. Strain theory
3. Deterrence theory
4. Life course theory

Robert Morris 3/31/11 7:38 AM

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Policy:

Question 1:

According to Rosenfeld (2011:3), "mass incarceration has become the criminological issue of our time." Assuming one could overcome the political obstacles associated with reducing mass incarceration, how should the projected cost savings be redistributed to control crime? Citing the relevant theoretical and empirical literature, explain how you would reinvest the savings from reducing correctional populations into one or more of the following areas: social programs, crime prevention programs, policing, and community corrections.

Question 2:

Scholars often note that a disconnect exists between criminological research and the policies that are created by policymakers. Pick one example that you feel best evidences the disconnect between research and policy. Explain (1) what the topic is, (2) what research has revealed about the topic, (3) what the current policies are (i.e., what is currently being done?), and (4) what research suggests would be a good policy (or how current policies should be reformed). When addressing parts 3 and 4, make sure you highlight the differences between what research says should be done and what is currently being done by policymakers.

Methods

Question 1:

You are in the process of developing your dissertation proposal exploring the effect of a year-round public school initiative on self-reported juvenile delinquency (you do not need to be familiar with the literature directly surrounding delinquency). Citing relevant literature, develop a research methodology/strategy to collect and analyze data for this project. Be sure to provide adequate information on the data/sample you plan to collect, the operationalization of your measures, and the analytical design used to address your research question/s. Be sure to discuss issues relating to the accuracy of self-report data and the ethics of managing potentially sensitive information, among other topics. Be sure to include reference to published works that have used elements of your approach in and around the discipline of Criminology.

Question 2:

Theories of criminal behavior are tested through the use of cross sectional and/or longitudinal methods. Using any theory in criminology as a discussion platform, explore the implications of the following questions:

1. Is the theory largely supported through one type of method?
2. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the two methods?
3. What impact does the type of method used have on the results?
4. If you were going to design an empirical test, what type of method would you use? How would this contribute to the body of knowledge in this theory and in the discipline, and what would the unique contribution of your work be to the field?