

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

**April 2012**

**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 1/2 hour 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 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

A theorist's job is to explain how the natural world works. For criminology, this means that theorists must explain criminal behavior. How good of a job do criminological theorists do? To answer this question, you must consider the current state of criminological theory. Discuss three different theories and the state of the evidence surrounding those theories. Have they been supported, not supported, or received mixed support from research? What portions of the theories need more attention or revising and why?

### Question 2

Race/ethnicity and age are two of the strongest correlates of crime. What do we know about these correlates as they relate to criminal offending? Pick one theory that you think explains the relationship of race/ethnicity and age to crime. Pick one theory that you think does not explain the relationship of these correlates to crime. In your answer, please document how these theories do and do not account for the respective correlates.

## Policy

### Question 1

Identify and discuss in detail two (2) crime/criminal justice policies that have received considerable empirical scrutiny in recent years. The policies you select may come from any area of crime/criminal justice policy and may be unrelated to one another. Citing specific examples, discuss in detail what the research findings suggest are the strengths and weaknesses of each policy. What does the current research literature suggest for future refinement/management of each policy?

### Question 2

In September 2009, the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS) and the American Society of Criminology (ASC) joined together to form the Criminology and Criminal Justice Policy Coalition. The Coalition has retained the services of a Washington, DC-based lobbying group to help facilitate policy development at the *federal* level. You have been asked by the Coalition to identify a pressing policy issue in criminology. Explain what the issue is and what can be done to address the problem you have identified.

## Methods

### Question 1

While comparing city-level statistics across large urban cities (population greater than 100,000) across the United States, a criminology professor finds that cities with higher unemployment rates have higher rates of property crime. On the basis of this observation alone, s/he claims that this relationship is causal. Specifically, the unemployment rate of a city leads to or causes increases in property crime. Additionally, the professor claims that his/her data show that unemployed persons are more likely to commit property crime. Assess these claims in the light of common criteria for attributing causality. Also, discuss whether the professor's second claim (that the relationship holds at the individual-level) is supported by his/her data. Finally, if you disagree with the professor, discuss an improved analysis of this relationship.

### Question 2

Scientific inquiry hinges on researchers' ability to properly measure phenomena. Unfortunately for social scientists, measurement tends to be imperfect, leading to questions about the efficacy of social science research. Discuss the criteria used by researchers to judge the reliability and validity of their data. What are the consequences of analyzing measures with questionable reliability and validity? In so doing, make sure you address issues surrounding the conceptualization and operationalization of criminological constructs.

