

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

**April 2014**

**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.

## Methods

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

- a. A brief (i.e., a couple of sentences) introduction outlining the theory to be tested.
- b. 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.
- c. 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.
- e. Sampling procedures to be used.
- f. A discussion of the research design (e.g., interrupted time-series, post-test only control group design, observational/correlation data) by which the data will be collected. Discuss any threats to internal and external validity that may be impossible to avoid or minimize.
- g. Specify the inferential procedures (e.g., OLS regression) you will use to analyze the data.

2. Criminal behavior is difficult to analyze, in part for reasons that differ from the study of other human behaviors. The complications of analyzing criminal behavior emerge at all phases of a research project, beginning with the conceptualization of the term *criminal behavior* and extending through statistical modeling issues. For this question:

- a. List and explain the ways in which the measurement of criminal behavior presents special problems to criminologists, noting how these differ from those applying to the study of other human behaviors. Be sure to discuss the conceptualization and operationalization of criminal behavior as well as measurement reliability and measurement validity concerns.
- b. Outline the strategies criminologists use to circumvent these difficulties and assess their limitations for successfully solving these problems. In other words, how do criminologists deal with measurement concerns? How do they deal with statistical modeling issues?

## **Policy**

1. You run a non-profit agency that serves the community in South Dallas. The area is largely poor with high levels of crime, including open air drug dealing, homelessness, and gangs. A foundation has agreed to provide you with generous funds to design and implement an intervention program to reduce crime in this area. Your program can reflect primary, secondary and/or tertiary crime prevention strategies and should identify your target population(s) that you are seeking to include in the program. Describe your program design in detail and explain why you think it will reduce criminal behavior in South Dallas. The foundation asks you to include cites from relevant theoretical and empirical literature and best practices that inform your design. It also asks you to identify key outcome variables that would be considered as part of the final evaluation of efficacy of your chosen program.

2. Testifying before the Senate Judiciary Committee Hearings on federal mandatory minimum sentencing, a US attorney suggested that the federal criminal justice system needed to be reformed in two ways: (1) on the front end, through a “thoughtful editing and redrafting of current federal criminal laws and sentencing policies;” and, (2) on the back end, through “thoughtful implementation of corrections policy reforms designed to enhance public safety by improving the effectiveness and efficiency of the federal prison system.” What sentencing and correctional policy reforms would you suggest to policymakers? Consider the unintended consequences of mandatory minimum sentencing on corrections (prison and parole) and provide empirical evidence to support your policy suggestions.

## **Theory**

1. Is there a best theory in the field of criminology? In answering this question, you will need to (a) develop a clear set of criteria that you believe is important to evaluate theory, (b) be clear on what your criteria are and why they are appropriate, and (c) using your criteria, either justify the theory you feel is "best" or explain why there is no "best" theory in criminology.
  
2. Some people argue that Gottfredson and Hirschi's general theory of crime is the most important theoretical development since 1975. Other criminologists argue that the theory has done nothing to advance or push criminological theory in any useful direction. Take one side of this argument and defend your position using relevant examples and research from the theoretical and empirical literature.