

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. Criminologists attempt to explain why people commit or do not commit crime. Based on your reflection of the theoretical literature, how good of a job do criminological theories do? After outlining your criteria for how theories should be evaluated, pick one theory and review the evidence surrounding the theory. Has it been supported, not supported, or received mixed support from research? What portions of the theory need more attention or revising and why?

2. Labeling theory has had a long and contentious history in criminology. Owing its intellectual roots to symbolic interactionism in sociology, trace the intellectual history of the theory (where it came from, how it has changed, where it is currently), review the empirical evidence regarding key labeling theory predictions, and indicate whether you think labeling theory should remain among the field's leading theories or if you think it should be set aside.

Policy

1. In 1974, Robert Martinson famously chided criminal justice scholars and practitioners alike with his assertion that "Nothing Works" in terms of offender rehabilitation. Some forty plus years later, many critics would continue to agree with him. But is he still correct? Or has the criminal justice system improved in its ability to rehabilitate and reintegrate offenders? Support your answer with empirical evidence. What are the relevant social, political, and criminal justice system challenges that impact these policies?

2. Crime policies over the past 30 years have been based on the ideology of crime as a choice. Discuss several criminal justice-related policies based on this ideology and the empirical evidence as to their effectiveness. Considering the empirical evidence, should we continue to base our crime policies on the ideology of crime as choice? If so, why? If not, what should our policies be based on? Be sure to support your answer with empirical evidence.

Data/Methods

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.

2. Good sampling is an integral part of any research project. A poorly constructed sample will lead to imprecise results at best and incorrect results at worst. For your dissertation, you have been tasked with collecting a representative sample of incarcerated offenders in order to measure the relationship between substance use and incarceration. Discuss the various steps that you would take to ensure that the sample you draw is representative and useful for your research. Once your sample has been drawn, how would you go about measuring your variables of interest? Discuss the operationalization process and the ways in which you will determine that your items are appropriate. Be sure to discuss the potential consequences of measurement error in your independent variable of interest as well, such that you examine both the conceptual and statistical concerns of measurement. What are the differences in those consequences for random vs. non-random (i.e. systematic) errors in measurement?