

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

**May 2016**

**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. Fast forward ten years from now. You are on a faculty and you are preparing a theory question for a comprehensive examination. What is the question you would pose to the graduate students and what would, in your mind, be the ideal answer to your own question.
2. You have been asked to teach a special topics course on criminological theory. This course will be an in-depth analysis of two theories. Which theories would you select and why? Detail the material that would be covered.

## **Policy**

1. With the rise in media coverage and public discussions regarding racial tensions over officer-involved shootings, the public sometimes has contradictory views of policing and criminal justice. On the one hand, some underserved and minority communities argue that they don't receive enough police resources to combat crime. On the other hand, there is strong resentment and mistrust of intense police involvement in minority and disadvantaged neighborhoods, such as with racial profiling and aggressive stop and frisk practices. Present the challenges to policing today and offer a critical discussion of research and evidence-based practices or programs that may help to address these compelling issues. What policy recommendations will best move communities toward a more "community-based" approach to policing and serve to improve relations between underserved and minority communities and their police? Can policing truly be "community-based?" Why or why not?
2. Recent high-profile mass shootings (e.g., Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Connecticut; Umpqua Community College in Roseburg, Oregon) have led politicians, citizens, and victims to call for reforms to U.S. gun laws. How should we address gun violence through policy? In your answer, discuss the problem of gun violence in the U.S. and then make specific policy recommendations for reducing it. Be sure to include empirical evidence to support your policy recommendations.

## **Data/Methods**

1. Criminal behavior is difficult to study, in part for reasons that differ from the study of other human behavior.
  - a. List and explain the ways in which criminal behavior presents special problems to criminologists, noting how these differ from those applying to the study of other human behaviors (e.g., job satisfaction, voting behavior, consumer sentiment).
  - b. Discuss the various methods that criminologists use to measure criminal behavior in order to get around these difficulties, indicating the strengths and weaknesses of each as it pertains to the goal of achieving measurement validity and reliability in light of the difficulties you have identified above.

2. You've been appointed head of the Mayor's Crime Commission in a city that, for the last 5 years, has enjoyed a precipitous drop in violent and property crimes (the mayor was fond of citing that crime was lower today than in 1960). Today, only 18 months since his last press conference on the issue, the mayor announces that the city is on pace to have a violent crime rate that nearly doubles the preceding year. The mayor has asked you, as head of the Crime Commission, to recommend a study that will inform his policy response. Relying on your knowledge as a criminologist, define the study you would recommend to the mayor (assuming that cost is not an option). Be sure to identify the following elements:

- a. Your research question;
- b. Your unit of analysis;
- c. Your data collection strategy;
- d. Your null and research hypotheses;
- e. Your analytical strategy; and,
- f. Threats to reliability and validity.