

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

May 2018

Instructions

The Comprehensive Examination in Criminology consists of three sections:

- (1) Theory
- (2) Policy and
- (3) Data/Methods (for students who have not passed the Qualifying Exam)

Type your assigned ID number at the top of your first page (DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME).

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 lunch break between 1-2pm (when two exam sections are administered on the same day).

You are free to use the restrooms whenever you want but may not bring your jump drive or any testing materials with you.

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.

THEORY QUESTIONS (choose one):

1. Bernard and Snipes (1996) argue that there are two main types of criminology theories: "individual difference" theories and "structure/process" theories. They also maintain that the theories can be integrated to provide a more useful approach to explaining crime and criminality as well as contribute to better policy implications for reducing crime. Construct an "integrated" theory of crime to explain why homicide rates are higher in some areas than others. The causal chain of your theory should move from: structure to process to individual criminal behavior. You may explain the variation in homicide rates

at the neighborhood or city-level. Be sure to include empirical evidence to support your answer (e.g., if you include unemployment as an independent variable, cite supporting literature).

2. Which theory of crime is best and which is worst? Articulate your answer using specific criteria and relate these criteria against the literature on the two theories you choose.

POLICY QUESTIONS (choose one):

1. In their new edition of their book, *Criminology and Public Policy: Putting Theory to Work*, Decker and Wright state that theory matters for policy and policy matters for theory. Do you agree or disagree with their stance that one cannot (nor should not) be done without the other. If you agree, identify three specific policy initiatives that support your position and identify the theoretical background/support that underlies these policies. If you disagree, identify three specific policy initiatives that are not grounded in any extant theory (or empirically supported theory).
2. One public policy problem that consistently ebbs and flows in the public consciousness is gun control. With the seeming “up-tick” in mass casualty incidents that are directly related to guns, there are increased calls for gun control strategies and legislation to prevent these types of incidents. Florida Governor Rick Scott championed one such approach recently in the wake of the shooting in South Florida. Using the empirical literature on gun control strategies, what policy efforts should be used to target the problem of gun violence? In your answer, discuss the problem of gun violence in the U.S. and then make specific policy recommendations for reducing it. If you do not believe the literature provides adequate support for making drastic changes in this policy arena (i.e., there is little evidence-based support for efforts to address gun violence) identify what specific challenges—methodological or otherwise—need to be overcome in order to develop a sound body of empirical research that would inform this public policy debate.