

Theory & Methods Comprehensive Exam

August 2016

Instructions

The exam consists of four questions: two theory questions and two methods questions. You must respond to one theory question and one methods question. Make sure you carefully read and respond to all parts of each question.

The August 2016 exam will be distributed on Monday 8/8/2016 by the Department's administrative specialist, Shamauri Jenkins. Both a paper and electronic copy of your completed examination must be submitted to her by noon on Monday 8/15/2016. Late examinations will not be accepted and will result in a failing score. Please note that once you receive the comprehensive examination questions, you are required to submit an examination by the deadline; otherwise your exam will receive a failing score. If you experience extenuating circumstances that interfere with your ability to complete your comprehensive exam, you should notify the graduate program director immediately. Please make sure your exam complies with the following submission requirements:

- You have written a response to one of the theory questions (10-15 pages not including the cover page and reference list).
- You have written a response to one of the methods questions (10-15 pages not including the cover page and reference list).
- You do not identify yourself anywhere within the document other than on the two cover pages. You will be assigned a separate identification code for each question so your answers can be linked to your name after grading is complete.
- You have a separate cover page for each answer with your name, a clear indication of the question you have chosen to answer, and the identification code you have been assigned for that question.
- You have a separate identification code for each answer that is typed on both the cover page and the top right-hand corner of each page of your answer.

- You have separate reference sections for each answer that contains a list of references and source material that you have cited in your answers.
- You follow the APA format, with 12-point font, double-spacing, and 1-inch margins throughout your answers.
- You have checked your document to ensure that you have not plagiarized. Any finding of plagiarism will result in a failing score on the exam. If you are unsure what constitutes plagiarism, please see <http://plagiarism.org/>.
- You provide a signed honor pledge indicating that you neither gave nor received assistance with the comprehensive examination.

A committee of the entire regular graduate faculty (excepting faculty members on leave or on sabbatical) will grade all examination questions. To pass the exam, at least $\frac{2}{3}$ of the grading faculty members must give each of your responses a passing score (pass or high pass). To earn a high pass, at least 90% of the grading faculty must assign a grade of “high pass” to each of your responses. If you fail the examination, you will be permitted to retake it one additional time.

Theory Questions

1. Criminologists have identified several correlates of crime. Choose TWO of the three correlates listed below and discuss how each of the correlates you selected is related to offending behavior. Make sure to include (a) the theoretical framework(s) linking the correlate to offending, (b) the status of the empirical literature, and (c) directions for future research.
 - Race/ethnicity
 - Gender
 - Neighborhood context
2. Discuss the concept of desistance and the current state of the literature on the topic. Select two criminological theories and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of using them to understand desistance.

Methods Questions

1. The fields of Criminology and Criminal Justice are advancing at a rather rapid pace. Along with our advances in theory construction, there have been concomitant advances in the various methodologies that are used to explain and test these theories. As with all advances, there are tensions with respect the most appropriate approach to use in order to study the phenomena that we observe. This tension has taken center stage with respect to the qualitative versus quantitative methodology debate in the field. For example, some scholars have argued that qualitative methodologies are best suited to study intimate partner violence given the sensitive nature of the relationships between the victims, their abusers, and the criminal justice system. Others argue that quantitative methodologies can capture complex processes that elude qualitative approaches especially when victims are not confined to a single jurisdiction or state.

This question requires that you do the following: 1) identify the strengths and weaknesses of using qualitative versus quantitative methodologies to study sensitive and complex criminal justice phenomena and 2) identify and discuss the merits of using a mixed methods approach to study these phenomena. Make sure that your responses are thorough and they provide equal time (balance) to both portions of this question.

2. Debate concerning the “Ferguson Effect” suggests that recent negative publicity (on both conventional and social media outlets) surrounding law enforcement and the police killings of unarmed African Americans has caused officers to begin de-policing shirking their duties out of fear of being the subject of the next viral video. Some argue this is causing upticks in crime rates around the U.S. From a criminological standpoint, this discussion has renewed concern with examining trends in crime rates. Your task is to propose a study that examines whether crime rates have changed as a result of high-profile police-involved shootings and, if so, the potential sources (i.e., social media, news media, social movements such as Black Lives Matter, etc.) of such changes. Comment on the strengths and weaknesses of different methods that have been and could be used to study this phenomenon.