

# Theory and Methods Comprehensive Exam

## Fall 2015

### 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 (only select one of each). Each response should be 10-15 pages, double-spaced, with 11 or 12 size font, for a total of 20-30 pages (excluding the cover page and reference pages). Make sure you carefully read each question and respond to all parts of the question in your paper.

The Fall 2015 Exam will be distributed between 9:00 am and 12:00 pm on Monday 8/10/2015 by Carol Davis in the main office. A hard copy of your completed examination must be submitted to Carmen Davis between 9:00am and 12:00pm on Monday 8/17/2015. Late examinations will not be accepted and will result in a failing score. An electronic copy of your exam must also be emailed to Carmen at [cldavis@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:cldavis@mailbox.sc.edu). Please note that once the comprehensive examination is distributed to you, you are required to submit an examination by the deadline; otherwise it will receive a failing score. Your submitted materials should contain three parts: (1) a completed comprehensive examination (a response to one theory question (10-15 pages) and a response to one methods question (10-15 pages), (2) reference lists for each response, and (3) a signed Honor Pledge.

Your comprehensive examination must conform to APA style guidelines and contain appropriate citations to authority and sources. DO NOT PLAGIARIZE – this will result in an automatic failing score (if you are unsure what constitutes plagiarism, see <http://plagiarism.org/>). Please do not identify yourself on the comprehensive examination or in the list of references. You will be given a code number to include in the upper right hand corner of each page (e.g., in the upper right-hand header, indicate your assigned code number). Be sure to include this code number on all submitted pages. The unique code number will link all of your submitted work. Also, make sure you sign and return (with the comprehensive examination) the Honor Pledge indicating you neither gave nor received assistance with the comprehensive examination.

When possible (i.e., when there are two or more test takers), your com-

prehensive examination will be graded in a double-blind manner – neither you nor the faculty graders will know each others identities (though students may know who the graders are after grades have been assigned). A committee of three faculty members will grade all examination questions. To pass the exam, at least 2 of the 3 faculty members must give each of your responses a passing score (pass or high pass). In other words, each question must receive a pass/high pass from 2 of the 3 graders. If you receive a fail on one question by 2 of 3 graders, you fail the whole comp. To earn a high pass, all three graders must score the exam as such. There is no low pass option. If you fail the examination, you will be permitted to retake it one additional time.

## Theory Questions

- Many of the leading theories of crime were developed with males in mind. There have been essentially three responses to this situation: (1) the explanations of crime offered by the leading theories are equally applicable to males and females; (2) existing theories need to be revised or extended to explain female offending; and (3) new theoretical perspectives that account for female criminality need to be developed. What is the state of the empirical evidence on this issue? In your essay, consider the strengths and weaknesses of each response.
- Social disorganization theory grew out of the spatial analytic work of Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay and others in the early Chicago School. The theory became one of the most prominent perspectives of mid-20th century criminology. Then it faded into relative obscurity before rising to prominence again in the late 1990's and early 2000's. Comment on the reasons for the waxing and waning of social disorganization theory, its current empirical standing, and how it has evolved over time. Does social disorganization theory make significant contributions to contemporary criminological thought? Or has it been supplanted by other ideas? Finally, can social disorganization theory – in its contemporary form – inform criminal justice policy? If so, how? If not, why not?

## Methods Questions

- Increasingly, our field is making use of so-called “natural experiments” to measure scientifically interesting treatment effects. One of the supposed virtues of the natural experiment is that it simultaneously raises both internal and external validity – a hard thing to do. Identify and describe a natural experiment in criminology and do the following: (1) explain why you think the study you identified is a natural experiment; (2) summarize the key question the study sought to answer; (3) characterize the major findings of the study; (4) measure that study’s methods and results against the benchmark of raising both internal and external validity (compared to an observational study, a lab experiment, or a field experiment).
- Over the past year-and-a-half, several unarmed, African American men have been killed at the hands of police officers sparking outrage, protests, and even violence in several cities across the country. Such events have revived the discussion on the tensions between law enforcement and disadvantaged, inner-city communities. Based in theory, design a program that aims to improve police-community relations in U.S. inner cities. Next, describe how you would evaluate the program you have designed. Your description should include the following:
  - clear statement of the research design
  - sample selection and recruitment
  - data collection methods
  - data analysis plan
  - strategies for enhancing the study’s rigor
  - possible limitations or weaknesses of your approach

## SAMPLE INSTRUCTIONS

### Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice University of South Carolina

#### Doctoral Program Theory & Methods Comprehensive Examination Spring 2015

The Theory/Methods Comprehensive Exam (i.e., “Examination #1”) consists of four questions – two theory questions and two methods questions. You must answer one (1) theory question and one (1) methods question. Each response should be 10-15 pages in length, double-spaced, with 11 or 12 size font, for a total of 20-30 pages (excluding the cover and reference pages). **Make sure you carefully read each question and answer ALL parts of each question in your response.**

A hardcopy of your completed examination must be submitted to Carmen Davis in Currell 100D on **Monday, January 12 between 9:00am and 4:30pm**. Late examinations will not be accepted and will result in a failing score. An electronic copy of the exam also should be emailed to Carmen at [cldavis@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:cldavis@mailbox.sc.edu). Please note that once the comprehensive examination is distributed you are **required** to submit an examination by the deadline or it will receive a failing score. **Your submitted materials should contain three parts: (1) a completed comprehensive examination (a response to one theory question (10-15 pages) and a response to one methods question (10-15 pages), (2) reference lists for each response, and (3) a signed Honor Pledge.**

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When possible (i.e., when there are two or more test takers), your comprehensive examination will be graded in a double-blind manner—the faculty graders will not know which student wrote which exam and students will not know who the members of the grading committee are. Note, however, that members of the grading committee may be identified once grades have been distributed. A committee of three faculty members will grade all examination questions. Each response will receive either a “high pass,” “pass,” or “fail” from each of the faculty graders. To pass the comprehensive examination, at least 2 of the 3 faculty members must give each of your responses a passing score (pass or high pass).

If you fail the examination, you will be permitted to retake it one additional time.

## **PAST EXAMS**

### **SPRING 2015**

#### **METHODS QUESTIONS**

##### **QUESTION 1**

Discuss in detail the concept of the true experimental research design. In general, what are the strengths and weaknesses of true experiments? Discuss the practical problems that criminal justice/criminology researchers face in conducting true experiments and why experiments are not often used in criminological research. Be sure to use specific examples of true experiments from the criminological (or related) research literature. Finally, discuss alternatives to the true experimental design that might be used to address criminological research questions in a more realistic and practical manner.

##### **QUESTION 2**

In the wake of the recent deaths of Michael Brown, Eric Garner and Tamir Rice, there has been a renewed call to impose limitations on police officers' use of force. Perhaps more importantly, it has been suggested that there needs to be a national debate not only on the issue of race in America but also how race shapes police-citizen relationships. While it is unknown at this point whether any substantive changes will result from this "national conversation," there has been some movement around the country to set up a number of panels of experts (task force) to help shape this debate.

Develop an empirical study that would test the key propositions of a theoretical framework that can be used to examine the nexus between race, policing, and the criminal justice system (e.g. strain, opportunity, racial threat, social disorganization, anomie, etc.). Justify the use of your methodology, identify the key variables to be included in the study, and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of your approach (experimental, qualitative, mixed-methods, etc.). Finally, identify and discuss whether there are any viable alternative approaches to your chosen methodology.

#### **THEORY QUESTIONS**

##### **QUESTION 1**

Strain theory has a long history in criminology. Trace the development of this theory from its roots to more recent revisions and expansions. Be sure to explain in detail the elements, assumptions, and assertions of the original theory and its revisions. Additionally, discuss the empirical support for contemporary versions of strain theory. Finally, choose one current crime problem and describe in detail how strain theory can explain its causes.

##### **QUESTION 2**

In the wake of the recent deaths of Michael Brown, Eric Garner and Tamir Rice, there has been a renewed call to impose limitations on police officers' use of force. Perhaps more importantly, it has been suggested that there needs to be a national debate not only on the issue of race in America but also how race shapes police-citizen relationships. While it is unknown at this point whether any substantive changes will result from this "national

conversation,” there has been some movement around the country to set up a number of panels of experts (task force) to help shape this debate.

Identify and discuss two key theoretical frameworks that can help shed light on the relationship and tension between racial minorities and the police. Be sure to discuss the basic tenets of the chosen theoretical perspectives as well as their strengths and weaknesses. Moreover, what are the implications of these theoretical perspectives for the deadly force incidents that we continue to see throughout the United States?

## **FALL 2014**

### **THEORY QUESTIONS**

1. Exposure to violence within the family remains a predictor of future violence in the child. Several mainstream (i.e., general) theories of crime either explicitly or implicitly address the role of exposure to violence in their explanations of crime. Using two mainstream theories of crime and citing recent and relevant research literature, explain the foundation of each theory in detail with a particular emphasis on how the role of violence operates within the context of each theory. Be sure to explain how the theories attempt to explain violent behavior and how they account for the influence of childhood/family exposure to violence and later-life violence. Next, discuss recent developments in the literature that have provided insights into how violence can be reduced (i.e., what are the [policy] implications of the theories).

2. The past several decades has seen a growth in the importance of neighborhoods in the explanation of crime and our responses to crime. Defend the importance of neighborhoods in criminological research and summarize the possible theoretical interpretations of the link between neighborhoods and crime or neighborhoods and responses to crime.

### **METHODS: QUESTIONS**

1. You have received a substantial grant from the National Institute of Justice to study desistance from criminal activity. Describe in detail what your study will look like. Be sure to address:

- A statement of the problem
- A detailed description of research design and methods, including research questions, hypotheses, description of sample, outcome measures and their operationalization, control variables and their operationalization (if necessary), and analysis plan
- Implications for criminal justice policy, practice, and theory

2. Gottfredson & Hirschi (1987) wrote the following abstract arguing for the merits of cross-sectional versus longitudinal designs in criminological research (The methodological adequacy of longitudinal research on crime. *Criminology*, 25,3, 581–614).

*This paper argues that the increasing dominance in contemporary criminology of the longitudinal or cohort study is not justified on methodological grounds, that this research design has taken criminological theory in unproductive directions, has produced illusory substantive findings, and has promoted policy conclusions of doubtful utility. In addition, it is noted that longitudinal research is very expensive and therefore has high opportunity costs, costs that have not been properly evaluated. The positive thesis is that many of the apparent benefits of longitudinal research can be obtained by carefully designed and reasonably conceptualized cross-sectional studies, at substantially reduced cost.*

Your task is to review the claims of Gottfredson & Hirschi and assess them against more contemporary arguments for and against the use of cross-sectional versus longitudinal research designs for testing causal hypotheses. Be sure to use examples of specific theories when discussing the merits of cross-sectional or longitudinal research (i.e., what are the advantages or disadvantages to each method when testing specific theories—is one approach better for a particular theory, etc.). Based on your review, make an argument for or against one or the other approaches.

## **SPRING 2014**

### **METHODS QUESTIONS (select one question)**

QUESTION 1: You have been asked by a local adult drug court to develop a mixed-methods research proposal to evaluate the effects of the program on crime, substance abuse, and other related outcomes (employment status, family functioning, etc.). In addition to providing a brief summary of the literature on drug court effectiveness (you may want to consult recent meta-analyses in this area), your research proposal should include the following components:

- Detailed description of research questions and hypotheses
- Sampling plan and/or data sources
- Conceptualization and operationalization of key measures
- Research design, including discussion of issues related to threats to validity
- Analysis plan, including both qualitative and quantitative components (i.e., mixed methods)

QUESTION 2: As exemplified by the National Archives of Criminal Justice Data and NIJ funding initiatives, the (re)analysis of secondary data is an important component of criminal justice research. Discuss the challenges and concerns that researchers face when they perform analyses of preexisting data. Your response should address, for example, questions of conceptualization and operationalization, human subjects issues, data access, and other relevant issues. Following this general discussion, identify a peer-reviewed research paper that analyzed secondary data and, based on your discussion above, assess the specific strengths and weaknesses of this study. (Be sure to include a complete reference of the research paper that you identify.)

### **THEORY QUESTIONS (select **one** question)**

QUESTION 1: There has been a growing interest among criminologists in explaining the causes of terrorism. Among other things, Rosenfeld (2004) argues that “grievances” or “strains” are a major contributing factor to terrorism. This belief has been echoed by other criminologists including LaFree & Dugan (2008) and Agnew (2010). Notwithstanding this burgeoning area of research, there are a number of criticisms associated with using this approach (i.e., strain theory). First, identify and outline the merits and limitations of using strain theory to explain terrorism. Second, discuss how and in

what ways strain theory may or may not be better suited to explain terrorism than alternative perspectives, such as cultural, instrumental, or organizational theories.

QUESTION 2: The relationship between past and future criminal behavior has significant implications for both criminological theory and public policy. Drawing on recent research in this area (see, e.g., Blumstein & Nakamura, 2009; Kurlycheck, Brame, & Bushway, 2007; Pager, 2007), describe our field's current theoretical and empirical understanding of this relationship. If you were to advise policy makers about the practical consequences of this relationship within relevant policy domains (e.g., employment and background checks, eligibility for programs and services such as drug courts and housing), what would you recommend?

## **Fall 2013**

### **METHODS QUESTIONS (select one)**

#### **QUESTION 1**

The past decade could be characterized as the “era of evidence-led policy and practice.” Select an area of criminology or criminal justice and design a study that would assess whether evidence has helped shape policies and/or practices. Provide your reason(s) explaining whether or not there is sufficient evidence to support your conclusion and how you would improve on what is known.

#### **QUESTION 2**

You have just received a substantial grant to study a program designed to reduce drug use among South Carolina high school students. Describe in detail what your study will look like. Your answer should include the specific research question to be addressed, the proposed research design to be implemented, how you will recruit and sample participants for your study, how you will measure and assess the reliability and validity of your key variables of interest, how you will analyze the data, and how you will address internal and external validity issues related to your research design. Be sure to note any possible limitations that may arise because of your research design.

### **THEORY QUESTIONS (select one)**

#### **QUESTION 1**

Criminologists have offered both structural and cultural explanations for the uneven social distribution of violence in the U.S. Provide the conceptual logic, key tenants, and evidence for these explanations. Is one perspective more valid to you than the other, and why? Are structural and cultural explanations fundamentally incompatible? If so, please explain. If not, how might they be usefully combined?

#### **QUESTION 2**

American criminology has many of its roots in The Chicago School. What are the theoretical contributions of the Chicago School, and what relevance do these contributions have for contemporary criminological theory?

## **Spring 2013**

## **METHODS QUESTIONS (select one question)**

### **QUESTION 1:**

Over the past few years there has been growing attention on the issue of desistance from gang membership. Our understanding of gang membership has moved beyond the myth that all gang members live in a “blood-in/blood-out” context, and that many gang members eventually leave the gang life style. Design a multi-method study that would improve our understanding of gang desistance. Be sure to address: 1) desistance prevalence, 2) the factors that influence desistance, and 3) the impact that desistance has on post-gang offender and victimization. Explain in detail each data collection and analytic effort, and the expected insights they would reveal.

### **QUESTION 2:**

In response to the Sandy Hook Elementary School mass shooting in Newtown, Connecticut, the NRA recently proposed placing armed police officers in schools across the country. While questions have been raised about the NRA proposal, some have noted that President Clinton implemented his \$60 million “COPS in Schools” grant program in 1998 to promote community policing and reduce crime and violence in and around primary and secondary schools. Although the program was cut in 2005, the federal government has since spent over \$753 million to hire more than 6,500 school police officers. As a researcher, you have been asked to design a pilot study to assess the effects of placing armed police officers in schools within a state that presently does not deploy officers in schools. Your study must consider issues pertaining to

- Sampling
- Causality
- Minimizing threats to internal and external validity
- Hypotheses
- Outcome measures and their operationalization
- Control variables (if necessary) and their operationalization

## **THEORY QUESTIONS (select one question)**

### **QUESTION 1:**

Many criminological theorists have called for a renewed focus on theoretical integration. Among them are Messner & Krohn (1989) and Barnard & Snipes (1996), who argue that if the field is to progress then there must be a logical, coherent, and understandable framework from which all criminologists work. While there may be different routes to achieve the theoretical ends which are sought by scholars, a number of obstacles still remain with regards to formulating a general theory of crime and deviance, including the sheer number of theories that proliferate the field of criminology. The fact remains that there are perhaps hundreds of “small,” standalone theories in the field, but there have been few attempts to “marry” them. As such, this question is divided into three primary components:

1. What is the current state of knowledge with regards to theoretical integration?
2. What are the main schools or traditions with regards to theoretical integration and what are their strengths/weaknesses?
3. What are the prospects for consensus among scholars in elaborating, collaborating, and testing the integrated frameworks that are developed?

## **QUESTION 2:**

A variety of explanations have been offered to explain the recent spate of mass shootings, especially following the Sandy Hook Elementary School incident in Newtown, Connecticut. Explanations include: 1) the wide availability firearms, 2) a lack of community-based mental health services, and 3) exposure to violence in popular media (e.g., video games, movies, and television). Review the empirical literature regarding number 3 above and choose a criminological theory that you believe best supports a causal link between exposure to media violence and violent behavior. Be sure to defend your choice of theory and fully articulate its utility (or lack thereof) for explaining mass shootings.

## **Fall 2012**

### **METHODS QUESTIONS (select one question)**

#### **QUESTION 1:**

Researchers often undertake a review of existing research as a mechanism for rendering judgment on “what we know” about a particular area of criminology or criminal justice. While typical reviews point out the limitations of individual studies, recent efforts to delineate our accumulated knowledge – such as the work of the Campbell Collaboration or OJP’s Evidence Integration Initiative – attempt to identify and include only studies that are of high methodological rigor. In this way, less rigorous studies can be excluded, treating them as not contributing to the state of knowledge. Collectively, this framework represents the evidence based movement in the criminology and criminal justice field.

First, define the concept of evidence-based policy making, along with the arguments for its use in criminology and criminal justice. Second, argue for or against excluding studies that do not meet a particular standard of methodological rigor. Third, assuming someone wished to assess the knowledge base using only rigorous studies, describe in detail what criteria and standards you would recommend be used to identify which studies should be included. You may choose to focus on a particular substantive issue area (e.g., police foot patrol, risk assessment, competency to stand trial) to focus your arguments.

#### **QUESTION 2:**

Select a commonly-studied criminological phenomenon. Compare and contrast the ways in which qualitative and quantitative researchers might study that relationship. It will be useful to support your assessment of these methodological approaches by discussing the methods used by researchers in the existing literature related to your selected phenomena. Discuss each methodological approach in terms of its epistemological assumptions, data quality and methodological concerns (e.g. validity, reliability, and generalizability). Then make an argument for which approach (qualitative or quantitative) is best for developing causal explanations. Fully support your position.

### **THEORY QUESTIONS (select one question)**

#### **QUESTION 1:**

Exposure to delinquent/criminal peers has long been one of the most robust predictors of offending at the individual level. Several mainstream (i.e., general) theories of crime either explicitly or implicitly address the role of exposure to peers in their explanations of crime. Using two mainstream theories of crime and citing the recent relevant research literature, explain the foundation of each theory in detail with a particular emphasis on

how the role of peers operates within the context of each theory. Next, discuss recent developments in the literature regarding the role of peers.

#### QUESTION 2:

Travis Hirschi developed two very different control theories, social bond and self-control. Many scholars say that while these theories have similar assumptions, they have very different stances the roles of stability and change in behavior among individuals.

1. Discuss control theories' underlying assumptions. That is, what assumptions do control theories make about human nature and crime?
2. Specifically discuss Hirschi's social bond theory. What is the theory? What does the empirical literature say about social bond theory?
3. Discuss Gottfredson and Hirschi's self-control theory. What does the empirical literature say about self-control theory? Does self-control theory criticize social bond theory in any way?
4. Finally, think about social bonds during adulthood. How does Sampson and Laub's life-course theory incorporate both concepts of social bonds and self-control, and how do these elements create stability or change in criminal behavior during adulthood?

### **Spring 2012**

#### **METHODS QUESTIONS (select one question)**

##### QUESTION ONE:

With roughly 700,000 prisoners returning to communities every year in the U.S., reentry is a major concern of criminal justice officials and academics. The South Carolina Departments of Corrections (SCDC) and Probation, Parole, and Pardons (SCPPP) have issued a call for proposals to design and evaluate a reentry initiative for parents of minor children. The goal is to improve the chances of parents' successful reintegration into the community and reunification with their minor children. You have been asked to develop a research and evaluation plan for this initiative. In this plan, you must include:

- A description of and logic model for the proposal.
- Identification of the targeted participants, and a description, with justification, of your sampling techniques and recruitment plans.
- The primary IRB concerns (e.g., protection of the research subjects) you will need to protect against and why these issues are important to consider.
- Description of the main independent and dependent variables and how they will be measured.
- A description of the research design, including how it addresses threats to internal and external validity.
- The analytic plan, including the specific analytic technique(s) that will be employed to assess outcomes.

In your answer, be sure to justify and defend all elements of your plan and ensure that your proposal is realistic and feasible to implement, although you can assume that funding will not be overly restrictive.

##### QUESTION TWO:

Although experiments involving random assignment to treatment and control groups are considered the “gold standard” among research designs, they are not always feasible, practical, or ethical to conduct. Quasi-experimental designs offer a reasonable alternative and certainly are preferred over non-experimental designs.

1. Discuss the strengths and limitations of experimental designs. In addition, describe the tradeoffs regarding internal and external validity for experiments conducted under highly controlled conditions (e.g., “lab” experiments) versus experiments conducted “in the field” and discuss why researchers might prefer one setting over the other.
2. Select **three** of the following major types of quasi-experimental designs and discuss their strengths and weaknesses (e.g., threats to internal and external validity): interrupted time series, propensity score matching, propensity score weighting, case-control, regression discontinuity, and difference-in-difference designs.
3. Choose **one** of the quasi-experimental designs and explain in detail how you would apply it to answer a research question of your choosing. Be sure to discuss why you would use the design, your method of sample selection (including a justification for the sampling method and a description of the control/comparison and experimental groups), and how the design minimizes threats to validity.

## **THEORY QUESTIONS (select one question)**

### QUESTION ONE:

Discuss the victim—offender (V—O) overlap (the fact that many victims are offenders, and that many offenders are victims) using the **three** following theories: strain theory, life-course theory, and routine activities/lifestyle theory. In your answer:

1. Review in detail the empirical literature demonstrating the V—O overlap.
2. Discuss how each theory mentioned above explains this overlap.
3. Identify, based on the extant empirical evidence, which of the above theories best explains the V—O overlap and why it is the most effective theory to explain this phenomenon.

### QUESTION TWO:

The school has been identified in several criminological theories as an important institution related to juvenile delinquency. The school as a possibly criminogenic setting has recently gained attention due to highly publicized bullying incidents that have resulted in violent shootings and suicides. The significance of this issue calls for more specific criminological theorizing to better understand the role that schools may play in fostering delinquency.

1. Choose **three** primary criminological theories and use **each one** to explain bullying behavior and crimes that take place within school settings.
2. Ensure that your explanations clearly show the differences, and, if relevant, the similarities between the three theories.
3. Given your review and your knowledge of the empirical literature, which of the three theories is best able to explain bullying and school-related crimes? Be sure to defend your answer by considering the strengths and weaknesses of each theory.

## **Spring 2011**

## **THEORY**

There are at least two strategies for theory development: theoretical integration and theoretical competition. Use Hirschi's (1969) theory of social control as your example in which you adopt one of the following two strategies:

- A. Argue that the theory of social control is inadequate and should be integrated with another theory to improve its explanatory power. Which other theory would you integrate it with and why do you think this integration would be promising?

OR:

- B. Argue that Hirschi's theory is fully developed, conceptually clear and empirically promising and that integration with another theory would only detract from it. Pick an example of another theory to illustrate your thinking on this point.

Social disorganization theory has evolved a great deal over the past several decades.

- A. Describe the evolution of social disorganization theory. What are the assumptions of social disorganization theory and how is it a control theory?
- B. How does social disorganization theory currently incorporate the social intervening mechanisms of collective efficacy, social ties, and culture? What are these mechanisms and how do they function to inhibit crime at the neighborhood-level?
- C. What is the empirical evidence for the usefulness of social disorganization as a macro-level theory of crime? What is the evidence for each of the social intervening mechanisms mentioned above?

## **METHODS**

South Carolina Probation Parole and Pardons recently implemented an intensive supervision program on a trial basis in three counties. They would like their program evaluated and have solicited proposals from research agencies and universities. You were asked by your boss to submit a proposal. Write a research proposal that evaluates SCPPP's program, assuming an experimental design is not possible. Among other things, you should describe your research design, sampling strategy, and data collection procedures. You should also describe which measures will be created and why they might be included in your final models.

Within criminology and criminal justice, many research questions can be best addressed using multi-methods, such as a mix of official (UCR/NIBRS/ NCVS) and unofficial (Self-Report, Interviews, Observations) data, as well as qualitative and quantitative methods. Using appropriate examples and debates from the field, discuss the merits of different methods for criminology and criminal justice.

- A. Discuss the benefits of using official vs. unofficial data. What types of questions can be best addressed by these different types of data? What are the major limitations of each type of data?
- B. How do qualitative and quantitative methods contribute to our understanding of crime? How does each method address concerns of reliability and validity in studies?
- C. What are the benefits of using multi-methods for criminologists?

## **Spring 2010**

### **THEORY**

1. The lifecourse developmental theory is currently one of the most influential paradigms in criminology but like all theories, it has both strengths and weaknesses that condition its usefulness to the field.

a. Discuss the major strengths and weaknesses of the lifecourse perspective, reviewing its main contributions to the field of criminology and its primary weaknesses or limitations. Then, present your opinion of whether the strengths outweigh the drawbacks, or vice/versa.

b. The lifecourse perspective can be considered an integrated theory of crime, though different theorists have emphasized different traditional theories of crime in developing their particular perspectives. Discuss three traditional theories that have been integrated into various life course perspectives. In doing so, review the main tenets of the traditional theory, how they are incorporated into lifecourse theories (using examples from the primary lifecourse theorists publishing in criminology), and the extent to which significant changes have been made to the original theory when integrated into the lifecourse perspective

2. Criminological theories can be classified as falling into different traditions in the field, such as "control", "strain", "learning" or "conflict/critical". In this essay, compare and contrast two major traditions. That is, pick a theory that you think fits one tradition (such as "control") and compare/contrast it to a theory that falls into another tradition (such as "strain"). Be sure to comment on why the theory you picked best represent that tradition and how some of its major assumptions and arguments differ from the other theory/tradition you choose. Pick a side.

## **METHODS**

1. The central public policy concern related to the use of force by the police is whether its application is reasonable or excessive. To date, the empirical literature examining the prevalence and nature of excessive force is limited and suffers from various methodological flaws. Build on these methodological limitations and provide two research designs that would improve our knowledge on the topic of excessive force - one representing a quantitative design and the other a qualitative design. Be sure to address the following:

- A. Provide a review of the empirical literature on police excessive force, with particularly attention to research design and flaws, and
- B. Sampling, data collection, and analysis strategies for both designs

2. Prisons around the country have recently begun animal rescue programs in which inmates are charged with training and socializing rescue dogs, who are later adopted by community members. In the words of one website, "Behind the walls of correctional institutions, inmates find a renewed sense of purpose through working with injured and rescued animals." Few if any of these programs has been evaluated for their potential to reduce recidivism among participants. Describe a high-quality research design that would allow you to test the hypothesis that prisoners caring for animals would have reduced rates of recidivism. Discuss in detail your research design and its primary components, including:

- A. Sample selection, size, and assignment
- B. The primary independent and dependent variables of the study and how they would be measured
- C. The timeline for data collection, potential challenges to collecting data, and how these would be overcome
- D. A brief description of the type of data analysis that would be needed to evaluate the effectiveness of the program

