Theory & Methods Comprehensive Exam
January 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 January 2016 exam will be distributed on Monday 1/4/2016 by the graduate program director (Robert Brame). Both a paper and electronic copy of your completed examination must be submitted to the program director by noon on Monday 1/11/2016. 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.

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

• Historically, there has been a tendency toward a high level of generality in the development of criminological theory. An alternative approach would be to advance theories that highlight the etiological significance of different types of people and different types of offenses. Considering the theoretical and empirical literature, provide your own assessment of whether the field’s traditional emphasis on general theory is well justified or should be revisited.
• Select any two of the following major theoretical paradigms: social disorganization, deterrence, strain/anomie, control. For each of these two perspectives, (a) trace their development from their early roots to current statements, including major specific theoretical positions within the paradigm; (b) discuss the current empirical status of the paradigm, citing and presenting key studies that have tested components of the paradigm; and (c) note the major critiques of these positions. Conclude your answer by discussing which perspective holds greater merit as an explanation of crime. Justify your position. Cite relevant literature throughout your answer.

Methods Questions
• The use of police in schools (school resource officers) has increased in the last decade due in part to available funding from the U.S. Department of Justice. A school district in a town not too far from the university you work at is interested in possibly expanding the SRO program to all schools in their district. They have approached you to write a research proposal so they can determine the impact – if any – the program is having in the schools that currently use the program. Write a research proposal that:

  – Describes the purpose and specific aims of the proposed study.
  – States the research questions and/or hypotheses to be tested.
  – Describes and justifies the analysis strategy and the data to be used, including the sampling plan, research design, and subject recruitment procedures.
  – Considers the strengths and weaknesses of the proposed approach.

• The National Institute of Justice consistently seeks to fund scholarship that demonstrates the highest levels of scientific rigor. While randomized trials often are mentioned as a hallmark of rigorous research, the central problem facing the field is how to simultaneously maximize both internal and external validity. How do randomized experiments move us closer to this objective? How do they fall short? What specific steps should the field be taking to move us closer to a research agenda that simultaneously promotes internal and external validity?