

Sample Questions In-Class Qualifying Exams

Students will take a theory exam and a research methods exam. The student will answer four questions on each exam. Exam questions will have equal weight. Each semester, the Qualifying Exam committee will have flexibility in terms of developing the exam. In many instances, students will be able to select from among several questions within a section. Any questions that are not optional (referred to as “required” below) will either have flexibility within them [e.g., “pick any two theories to explain (this behavior)”] or will call upon knowledge that is central to our field (e.g., “describe the strengths and weaknesses of experimental and quasi-experimental designs”).

Below are sample questions. (This is **not a pool** from which the exam committee will select.) The Graduate Committee reviewed the in-class comprehensive exams that are administered by Florida State University and found these to reflect the nature/scope of questions that will be used for the USF Criminology in-class exam. (Find this resource at <http://www.criminology.fsu.edu/p/current-grad.php>, scroll down to “past comp exams.”)

Sample Theory Questions

- ✚ *This is an example of a question that could be required.* A successful theory must meet both theoretical and empirical standards. In some detail, highlight the theoretical and empirical elements of a good theory. Which criminological theory does the best job of meeting these standards? What current criminological theory fails to meet these standards? Justify your answers to those who would disagree.
- ✚ Describe the current state of labeling theory. In doing so, be sure to emphasize (1) the definition of labeling, (2) the factors that should increase one’s exposure to labeling, (3) the reasons why labeling should affect later crime, and (4) the factors that may amplify or diminish its effects on crime. Where relevant, discuss empirical evidence on the accuracy of labeling theory’s predictions.
- ✚ What is the established empirical relationship between employment and crime and what criminological perspectives are most relevant to its explanation?
- ✚ Travis Hirschi has held an esteemed role in criminology for decades, and been a major theoretical influence. He developed social bonding theory (1969), and then co-developed self-control theory. Despite the successes of self-control theory over nearly two decades, Hirschi (2004) has recently called for a modification of how self-control is conceptualized and measured. First, compare and contrast the two versions of self-control theory – the 1990 and 2004 versions. Second, provide your opinion as to which version reflects the better theory. Justify your selection.

Sample Research Methods Questions

- ✚ Discuss the strengths and limitations of longitudinal research designs and cross-sectional research designs. Discuss a situation when a longitudinal research design would be preferred over a cross-sectional research design. Discuss a situation when a cross-sectional research design would be preferred over a longitudinal research design.

- ✚ *This is an example of a question that could be required.* What data problems or issues do each of the following multivariate statistical procedures help address (i.e., under what circumstances do they need to be used)? Pick any two of the following:
 - (a) Factor analysis
 - (b) Hierarchical linear modeling (HLM)
 - (c) Logistic regression
 - (d) Poisson or negative binomial regression
 - (e) Structural equation modeling (SEM)
 - (f) Survival models

- ✚ Heteroskedasticity, autocorrelation, and multicollinearity are always concerns when conducting ordinary least squares regression. Thoroughly describe each of these concepts. What impact do they have on our parameter estimates and hypothesis tests? What methods might we use to detect each of them, and how might we correct or account for them?

- ✚ Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of simple random sampling, stratified random sampling, cluster sampling, and snowball sampling. Discuss a research scenario for when each of these would be the most appropriate.