

**Doctoral Qualifying Examination
Methods and Data Analysis
Department of Criminology**

Fall 2014

Exam Rules:

The student's personal items will be kept in the office of the graduate director during the exam. The student will be provided with a writing pad, computer, pen, and exam.

During the examination period of 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., the student must not utilize any outside resources. The student may not confer with any people or refer to any books, articles, etc. Students are on their honor to produce their own work on their exams. The University subscribes to a document-checking service that can be used to assess plagiarism; the Department of Criminology reserves the right to submit any examination to this service for evaluation.

Responses to exam questions may be typed; student should double-space and use a 12-point font. Students who use computers will save their exam as a single MS Word document to the notebook computer provided by the Graduate Director.¹

Students may not withdraw from the exam after receiving it; if the student does not complete and turn in the exam, it will be recorded as a failure. Exam responses must be submitted to the Graduate Director by 4 p.m.

Security: The computers have been stripped. After the fact, the computers will be checked to determine if any flash drive has been inserted or if the internet has been accessed. **DO NOT ACCESS THE INTERNET FOR ANY REASON.** The Graduate Director will have visual/audio contact with the room for the exam period.

There is a single Word file on the desktop with the exam. Write your answers IN that document (which includes the exam questions). You, your computer and your exam have a number that identifies you. Do not change the name of the file; do not include your name IN the exam file. You may print to the printer in SOC 351.

When you are finished, submit your completed exam to the Graduate Director.

¹ The exam computers are checked before the exam. All non-program files are removed, Internet access is blocked, and the computers are locked up until exam time. After the exam, software is used to detect use of USB ports.

Exam Instructions: You must pick at least one question from the first four questions (questions 1-4). (This is to ensure that you answer a question that requires a research design.) **Then pick any three of the remaining 7 (questions 1 – 8).** In total, you will answer 4 questions. For each, write an essay the scientific style of which resembles that found in scholarly peer-reviewed journal articles. Students should provide in-text citations to the best of their abilities; a reference list is not required. There are no minimum or maximum page limits.

1) You are writing a grant proposal to study the effectiveness of a prisoner re-entry program that exists in Florida. Explain the methodological approach you would take to conduct this study, the variables you would measure, and the population you would study. Note that the funding agency requires that characteristics of the individuals as well as the contextual characteristic of the location to which inmates are released be considered in the evaluation. Explain how you would approach these requirements from a conceptual, measurement, and analytic perspective.

2) Select a research topic based on your knowledge of the literature in criminology and criminal justice. Identify a research question that needs to be addressed and hypotheses that need to be tested. Develop a research design that addresses the research question and tests the hypotheses. Describe your design in a way that can be understood by those with a thorough understanding of research methodology, but who may not have a specialized knowledge of the particular area of research you have chosen. Be sure to discuss and justify the methods of data collection and operationalization of variables. What are the strengths and limitations in the research design you have proposed relative to previous studies in the literature?

3) Experiments have been described as providing the basis for the most credible estimate of a policy's impact. An experimental design typically is not feasible when undertaking community-level interventions. Given that, how would you conduct a study that would provide a credible assessment of the impact of a community-level intervention (e.g., community policing, a prisoner reentry program)? In answering this question: (a) describe a specific community-level intervention, (b) describe and defend the number of sites that you would use to conduct the study, (c) describe and defend the measures that you would use, (3) describe and defend the analysis plan that you would use, and (4) identify the limitations of your design and why it is nonetheless preferable to alternatives.

4) You are designing a study to determine the effect of a particular individual-level crime correlate on violent crime. You may pick from the following known correlates of violent crime: delinquent peers, poverty, or subcultural influences. First, design a study to answer your research question that relies mostly on quantitative data. Second, explain how you would answer this research question using qualitative data. For both designs, include a data analysis plan. Finally, explain the strengths and weaknesses of each design relative to each other.

5) Researchers often place great emphasis on whether their results are statistically significant. Thoroughly describe the concept of statistical significance with regard to an OLS regression coefficient. What does it mean to say an effect is statistically significant, and what are some of the factors that influence significance tests? Your answer should include, but not be limited to, a discussion of concepts such as the sampling distribution, the *t*-statistic, Type I and Type II errors, and *R*-squared.

6) There are three primary sources of data about the nature and distribution of crime in the US: official statistics, victimization surveys and self report studies. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each source. For example, what can each source tell you about how much crime occurs, where it occurs and characteristics of offenders and victims, etc.? What are the implications for data analysis of the various measures? Also, select a particular research question and cite examples from the literature showing how that question has been addressed with the various crime data sources.

7) Research rarely involves simple random sampling, due to various practical considerations. Explain the other type of sampling and sampling strategies that should be used to deal with each of the problems listed below. Discuss the data analysis implications of your strategies as they relate to weighting. Discuss the empirical literature and cite relevant articles/research to the extent possible.

- a) You need to obtain more cases to analyze that fall into a fairly rare subset of the population, such as elderly African-American females.
- b) You want a sample representative of the national population, but it would be impossible, too difficult, or too expensive to compile a list of all individuals in the U.S.
- c) You need a sample representative of a national population and have to do in- person interviews, but need to reduce interviewer travel expenses because it is too costly for interviewers to contact respondents scattered across different areas.
- d) You are doing a national survey, but need to reduce the random sampling error that is due to the heterogeneous nature of the national population.

8) Nearly all of the concepts central to the study of criminology are difficult to measure (e.g., crime, illegal immigration, recidivism). Take a concept related to criminology and discuss:

- Why is it difficult to measure?
- What types of data do researchers use to measure the phenomenon?
- How have researchers overcome some of the problems with these data?
- Which sources are more or less suited to studying which kinds of questions?
- Discuss the implications for data analysis of the various ways to measure this concept.
- How successful are these various approaches for measuring the concept? If the solutions are not perfectly valid, how much does that affect the conclusion(s) we wish to draw? Cite the literature to illustrate your discussion.