

**Theory Comprehensive Exam
Spring 2009**

Instructions: For this exam, you are to select any four (4) of the following questions. All responses are to be turned in at 4:00 p.m. You may contact Margarita if you have any problem requiring faculty attention.

1. In Senate hearings last week, Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner characterized our current economic situation as the worst financial crisis we have seen since the Great Depression. Imagine you are to appear on a national news outlet as an expert on crime trends and you are asked to speculate on the impact of the economic crisis on crime over the next ten, twenty, and thirty years. What would you say? What is the theoretical and empirical basis for your speculation?

2. Identify what you regard as the most important theoretical dispute in the area of criminology today. What is the nature of the debate and what are the positions of the various parties involved? Be sure to cite relevant literature. Review the empirical findings pertaining to this dispute. What are your ideas for the resolution of this debate?

3. Describe the theoretical perspectives that emphasize the view that the effects of punishment on crime are highly conditional—legal punishments may increase or decrease crime, depending on the context and manner in which sanctions are delivered. Then systematically describe the empirical research on this issue and identify any key conclusions that can be reached.

4. Some would suggest that theory and the “real world” are separate realms. Discuss the variety of reasons why this is not true.

5. The literature on social control often mentions both “formal” and “informal” mechanisms of social control. Provide some examples of these two methods of achieving social control, outline the major theoretical rationales for why or how each might be effective at regulating deviance, and summarize what we know from the research literature on the effectiveness of each form, and relative to one another.

[see next page]

6. In his recent Presidential address to the American Society of Criminology, Professor Robert Bursik lamented that, even though most contemporary theoretical and research issues have a long and deep history of study in the discipline, this is too often overlooked by contemporary criminologists and this has impeded the accumulation of knowledge in the discipline. For a variety of reasons, including the expansive and multidisciplinary nature of criminology, many scholars are guilty of this in a general sense, of course, especially in areas tangential to their major research focus. But as Professor Bursik pointed out, it is essential that criminologists at least be cognizant of the historical evolution of theory and research within their major area(s) of study. Write an essay in which you identify /your/ major research area and discuss the historical roots of the ideas, highlight the major theoretical developments and contributions, and provide a summary of the major historical shifts in the nature of empirical research and the overall accumulation of knowledge. In your conclusion, be sure to provide an overall assessment of the amount of progress that has been made in advancing our understanding and note any significant impediments that have prevented further progress.

7. Describe the evolution of strain theory.

8. Offender reentry has been a major policy concern for several years now, but it has arguably not received sufficient theoretical attention. What does theory and research tell us about the most consistent predictors of successful reentry?