

**Theory Comprehensive Exam
Spring 2016**

Instructions: For this exam, you are to select any four (4) of the following nine (9) questions. All responses are to be turned in no later than 5:00 p.m. Once a student takes possession of the examination, this constitutes an attempt of taking the exam regardless of whether the student completes the exam, hands in any answers, or remains for the full exam period.

1. Describe the benefits and limitations of multi-factor theories (i.e., those that focus on several causal factors) and single-factor theories (i.e., those that focus on a particular causal factor). Identify which approach you believe provides a “better” explanation of offending and defend the criteria you use to make this assessment.

2. A central policy shift in recent decades was a move towards more incarceration. (a) Discuss the theoretical foundations on which to anticipate that incarceration would reduce crime rates and then summarize the state of research on incarceration and crime rates. (b) Evaluate the theoretical foundations on which to anticipate that incarceration would reduce recidivism, and then summarize the state of research on incarceration and recidivism. (c) Discuss how theory might be used to improve the possibility or likelihood that incarceration reduces recidivism.

3. Empirical research is at the heart of criminological research. At the same time, criminology rarely falsifies a theory based on empirical data, though theories and methods are sometimes attacked on ideological grounds. Identify one theory that should have been discarded because of empirical-based findings based on a body of quantitative research. Defend your position by discussing and citing these empirical studies that show no support for the theory.

4. Demographic and social status correlates of crime have received significant theoretical and empirical attention. For one of the correlates below, systematically review empirical evidence on its relationship to criminal involvement and discuss the theoretical framework(s) most relevant to explaining the link between this correlate and crime.

- a. race/ethnicity
- b. social class/poverty

5. What explains desistance from crime? Describe the prominent theoretical perspectives and systematically review and critique the relevant empirical evidence.

6. Much is made about the importance of having criminological knowledge impact public policy. Select explanatory statements from three of the following perspectives and discuss what they suggest should or could “be done” assuming the statements are supported by evidence. The perspectives are: strain, labeling, bio-social and cultural or social learning.

7. What three (non-edited) books (author, title) have most informed your awareness of and appreciation for criminological theory and why?

8. Does the available criminological evidence support a conflict interpretation in the application of formal social control? Why or why not? What limitations in the empirical evidence must be addressed in order to answer these question more conclusively? Be sure to cite relevant empirical research.

9. Criminology has a number of theoretical perspectives that attempt to explain the concentration of crime at places. Explore *three* of these perspectives in terms of how well place-based theories explain the concentration of crime across places. What does the empirical evidence tell us about how fruitful these theories are?