The PhD comprehensive examinations are an integral part of the PhD degree in Criminal Justice. They represent the part of the program that requires students to demonstrate their understanding of the central issues facing the discipline. It also requires students to have formed their own positions on these issues, to demonstrate that they have the ability to articulate and defend these positions. As such, they place an emphasis not only on what people know but also on how they can use what they know, and if they have developed an understanding of how what we know can be transformed through research, theory development, and action. The student is expected to demonstrate in the examinations their reasoned perspective on the literature in our field and their ability to integrate that literature to describe future developments.

**Content**

The Corrections examination includes topics covering the history, goals, and administration of the correctional system. This includes knowledge of the development of various correctional and prevention efforts, such as the various political, social, and practical influences on correctional practice over time. Students must also demonstrate adequate knowledge related to the theory of and research on institutional and community corrections, including the prediction, prevention and treatment of criminal and delinquent behavior/offenders, and other responses by the criminal justice system to the problems posed by known or likely juvenile and/or adult offenders. In addition, this exam will require students to relate their knowledge of the methods commonly employed in correctional research, including both quantitative and qualitative methods and analytical techniques in order to demonstrate an understanding not only of the state of knowledge on these issues, but of the processes used to generate that knowledge.

**Administration**

All examinations are given twice each year (on the last Friday in January and the first Friday in August). Each exam will be six hours in length. Students will be given between 6 and 8 questions of which they will be required to answer four. At each offering, the Department will designate a specific tenured or tenure-track faculty member to proctor the exam process. Copies of past examinations will be kept in the Department and will be available to students to facilitate their understanding of the nature of the examinations and the expectations for their overall content.

All examinations must be word-processed. Students who elect to hand write their answers must leave the answers with the examiner at the end of the examination, then return to the Department on the next business day to key in the exact text they have handwritten during the examination. The text will be proofread by staff. Any variation between the two versions will be taken as a case of academic dishonesty and may result in failure of the comprehensive exam.

**Preparation**

Preparation for the Corrections comprehensive examination is facilitated by taking required and recommended courses. These courses are not required of students before taking exams but are offered as guides to the kinds of materials that should be covered during the
preparation. It must be understood that completion of these courses is not all that needs to be
done to prepare for comprehensive exams. In addition to satisfactory performance in course
work, the students must develop their own positions and organize the literature in a way that
leads them to be able to “profess” the discipline.

A key thrust of the Corrections comprehensive examination is the expectation that
students will be able to critically analyze research and propose and defend statements regarding
the development, philosophy operation, and effectiveness of various correctional efforts.
Students are expected to know the “empirical status” of various correctional programs/policies; for instance, to what extent do existing research studies support the effectiveness of each
program/policy in meeting multiple correctional goals? Students also must be able to know how
to evaluate such programs/policies and critically assess the status of the research on these various
programs/policies.

For the Corrections examination, students should consider taking courses offered as part
of the Corrections track (Corrections, Community Corrections, Juvenile Corrections,
Correctional Rehabilitation, and Crime Prevention). Courses in research and statistical methods
would also be useful in preparing for this exam (Quantitative Methods, Qualitative Methods,

In addition to coursework, students have access to suggested reading lists compiled by
the faculty for each examination. As with coursework, these reading lists are designed to be study guides. Unlike the Theory area, where there tends to be a more narrowly circumscribed and more readily accessible body of empirical literature, there is a large body of unpublished and less accessible work in the “Corrections” area. Due to the extensive volume and often “fugitive” nature of a great deal of literature relevant to the “Correction” area in general, this reading list should be seen even more as a guide to or overview of the literature. This list is neither an exhaustive nor necessarily sufficient review of all the possibly relevant material in this area. The student will have to determine for him/herself the scope and amount of material needed to adequately prepare for the exam. In addition to the reading list, students are expected—as noted—to know the empirical research on various correctional programs/policies.

This task involves reading the evaluations of these efforts that have been undertaken and that are usually published in academic journals (some findings appear in books). Beyond classic empirical studies, students must examine the main journals in the field over at least the past five years to find and then read articles that assess these correctional efforts on this reading list. These journals include (but are not necessarily limited to): Criminology, Justice Quarterly, Journal of Quantitative Criminology, Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, The Prison Journal, Criminal Justice and Behavior, Journal of Criminal Law & Criminology, Criminology and Public Policy, Crime and Delinquency, Journal of Criminal Justice, Journal of Offender Rehabilitation, International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology, and the University of Chicago Press “Crime and Justice” Series.

**Taking the Examination**

No advice can be offered that will ensure a passing grade on the comprehensive
examination. Even so, it might be helpful to share some broad suggestions on the factors that
often are considered in the grading of the examination. First, it is essential that students know the
issues related to each correctional program/policy accurately (e.g., what the program attempts to
accomplish; who it targets; how it has evolved over time; how effective is it in meeting its goals).

Second, a related difficulty is when students display a surface knowledge of the area
being discussed. Stated positively, answers that show scholarly depth are accorded higher grades.
Stated negatively, answers that are filled with broad statements—which themselves are not
supported with appropriate citations to the literature—do not show convincingly that a student truly knows the subject matter. Remember this simple but important point: only what is written on the exam can be graded. Professors cannot “fill in the blank” or “assume you know the answer.”

Third, scholarly depth is shown by citing appropriate works. Note that merely providing “a string cite”—that is, a list of works cited with no discussion of any work in detail—is usually not sufficient to answer a question. In assessing the empirical status of a program, policy or issue, students must be able to discuss the research analytically: what are the major points or conclusions that can be drawn from existing studies? Further, in conveying an answer, an effort must be made to discuss research studies in detail (e.g., the sample and measures used, specific findings, the reason why the study illuminates an important aspect about the program). Thus, an answer might make a point about a program and list several citations, and then go on to say: “For example…” – and discuss one or two studies in detail that substantiate this point being set forth.

Fourth, citations to textbooks are forbidden (do not do it!!!). Textbooks on Corrections—such as Champion’s Probation, Parole and Community Corrections or Clear and Cole’s American Corrections may be useful in helping you to organize main points about different programs or aspects of the correctional system and learning about a given program’s empirical status. These works, however, are not replacements for reading the original research of the authors listed on your reading list. In your examination, you must cite the original works and research studies.

**Grading**

Comprehensive examinations will be graded by at least three tenured or tenure-track faculty with full-time appointments in the Department. Each grader will grade each question “pass” or “fail” (faculty may also make a recommendation for or against a grade of “pass with distinction”). The Department Chair, or his or her designee, will tabulate scores by student in a matrix by de-identified graders. Each student will be allowed to review the matrix for their own examination, but not for other students. All examinations with 75% of the total possible score will pass. Those with less than 75% will fail.

Once a student fails a comprehensive examination, he or she must retake the exam at the next offering. A student who fails will meet with a faculty member for advising about how to proceed in preparation for the second administration. A student who fails a comprehensive examination a second time shall be terminated from the doctoral program.

**CORRECTIONS READING LIST**

**General Correctional Readings**

Some Useful Books (multiple Topics)


History of Corrections

Public Opinion and Correctional Policy

Institutional Corrections


**Sentencing**


**Deterrence as a Correctional Policy**

[Note: Refer to the Theory Reading list for additional materials on Deterrence more generally].


Incapacitation as Correctional Policy


Community Corrections


Community Corrections- Restorative Justice

Primary/Secondary Crime Prevention
Elliott, D. Blueprints for Violence Prevention series. Boulder, CO: Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, University of Colorado. [Note: Good source for what works in violence prevention, especially with juveniles].


Correctional Rehabilitation


**Cognitive-Behavioral Treatments**


Little, G.L., Robinson, K.D., Burnette, K.D., & Swan, E.S. (1996). Review of Outcome Data with MRT: Seven Year Recidivism Results. *Cognitive Behavioral Treatment Review,* 5, 1-7. [Note: See other studies from earlier years by these same authors]


**Juvenile Corrections/Rehabilitation**


Risk Prediction, Assessment and Classification


Race and Corrections

Drugs and Corrections


**Women and Corrections**


**The Mentally Ill/Disabled and Corrections**


**Sex Offenders and Corrections**


The Death Penalty


