

Suggestions for Studying for Comprehensive Exams

University of Florida

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Graduate Program in Criminology, Law and Society

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Comprehensive exams are designed to measure your breadth of current knowledge in the generally accepted major skill, theoretical and substantive areas in the discipline of criminology, law and society. The purpose of the comprehensive written exams, along with the oral examination conducted by the student's supervisory committee, is to ensure that students have acquired a base level and breadth of knowledge (proficiency) in criminology, law and society sufficient for a doctoral candidate who is prepared to pursue a dissertation project. This is different than the dissertation proposal, the written dissertation, and defense of the dissertation which are designed to ensure students can conduct solid, sound research, make an original contribution to knowledge, and become an expert in a particular topic or research area of the field.

The faculty would like to suggest that students study for comprehensive exams in the following ways:

1. Create a reading list for yourself using the following guidelines. It is ok to show it to faculty to see if they have any other suggestions. It's a good idea to start working on this list in your first year of graduate school. It's ok to work together with other students to create readings lists.
2. Look at classical works in the area (which may have been written many years ago) as well as new research on the major issues, controversies, and groundbreaking work in the area. Make sure you read the ORIGINAL sources.
3. Examine syllabi (for some readings), the literature you used for class papers, and lectures from your graduate courses (and possibly readings assigned by faculty in their undergraduate courses). Take courses from our faculty.
4. Look at major methodological and criminology and criminal justice or law and society textbooks for an outline of the critical areas in the field, to help you create a framework for study and select some of your readings.
5. Review major journals in our field (including but not limited to *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, *Criminology*, *Criminology & Public Policy*, *Justice Quarterly*, *Law and Human Behavior*, *Law and Society Review*, *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, *Crime & Delinquency*, *Psychology*, *Public Policy and the Law*) for the articles that are published there, and look at their references lists for more readings. It might help to ask different faculty what journals they think are important.
6. Read recent reviews of topics in the area (e.g., Meta analyses, and the *Crime and Justice Series*).
7. Look at previous exams, which are posted on our web site. It's a good idea to do some practice questions, and possibly show faculty your answers for any comments or suggestions.