Criminology and Criminal Justice at the University of Nebraska Omaha refers to the scientific study of causes of crime and societal responses to crime and deviant behavior. The reading list for the criminal justice comprehensive examination is designed to provide students with a substantive knowledge base pertaining to the societal responses to crime. The list is not exhaustive in any area, but includes the readings that the faculty has deemed essential knowledge for students who graduate from the university with the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Criminology and Criminal Justice.

The criminal justice comprehensive examination tests students on how well they critically evaluate the extant literature in the field and requires them to integrate knowledge drawn from different scholars and perspectives and articulate their understanding of central issues facing the discipline. To this end, there are three main goals of the reading list for the criminal justice comprehensive examination.

1) Aid students in passing the exam.

The list is inclusive of the readings you must be familiar with to pass the exam. However, the reading list is not meant to be exhaustive. It should be viewed as a very good starting point. You may also want to be familiar with relevant literature that has been published in the major journals in the past five years as well as other materials that you have covered in your course work, even if these readings do not appear on the list. Major journals include Criminology, Journal or Research in Crime and Delinquency, Crime and Delinquency, Justice Quarterly, Journal of Quantitative Criminology, Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology, Law and Society Review, American Sociological Review, American Journal of Sociology, Social Problems, Social Forces, Criminal Justice and Behavior, and Journal of Criminal Justice.

A successful examination demonstrates a student’s ability to apply their understanding of the criminal justice literature to broad questions facing the field of criminology and criminal justice. Rarely is the inclusion of any single article or book “pass or fail.” Instead, you need to be familiar with relevant issues and the extant literature. In other words, you do not need to memorize what the authors of the items on the list say, but instead, read them, take notes, and think about how the materials on the list might fit together. The idea is that when confronted with a question, you should have the knowledge base to produce an informed and well thought out answer.

2) Aid students in thinking about their research interests more broadly.
In conducting their research, criminologists often fall victim to overspecialization and fail to think about how the broader criminological research may be relevant to their particular research interest. As you read through the materials on this list, you should think about how these readings could be used to develop your own research agenda. If you are still unsure what your research interests are, reading the materials on this list will expose you to a variety of research areas that may be of specific interest to you. Regardless of whether you know what you want to study or whether you are still figuring it out, you will (or should) learn that grounding your research in the broader theoretical and methodological traditions in criminology and criminal justice will help you become a more successful researcher and scholar (e.g., publications in major journals, securing extramural grants). The readings on this list will provide you with the knowledge base to do just that.

3) Aid students in preparing their courses.

In a perfect world, all Ph.D. graduates would obtain a job at a university that only required them to teach about their specific area(s) of interest. Unfortunately, this is rarely the case. It is highly likely that you will be required to prepare and teach a variety of courses within criminology and criminal justice, but outside of your specific area(s) of interest. The readings on this list will provide you with the background knowledge to teach a number of courses that fall within criminal justice. Taking thorough notes and/or preparing detailed summaries of the readings on this list will not only aid you in passing the exam, but will also provide you with a wealth of knowledge from which you can draw from when you are preparing to teach the courses you are assigned at your eventual academic appointment.

**ADMINISTRATION OF THE EXAMINATION**

The exam will be given on one day in both the fall and the spring semester. The exam will have two sessions (a morning session and an afternoon session). Each session will be 4 hours long. During each session you will be asked to answer two of three questions prepared by the grading committee.

**TAKING THE EXAMINATION**

There is no advice that will ensure a passing grade on the comprehensive examination. Even so, it might be helpful to share some general suggestions on the factors that are likely to be considered in the grading of the examination.

In order to pass, your answer must respond to the test questions. You should expect to write a detailed, thorough, and well-integrated answer to each question you address. A successful answer will not only refer specifically to the relevant literature, but also demonstrate an understanding of the material. Generally speaking, in writing a well-structured answer, you should first tell the grading committee how you plan to answer the question, then tell the committee what you said you would tell them, and lastly, sum up and conclude what you wrote.
If a question requires knowledge of a criminal justice theory or theories, it is essential that you know the theory or theories accurately. An answer that only demonstrates surface knowledge of the theoretical material is not acceptable. Answers that show scholarly depth will be more likely to pass. Answers that are filled with broad statements that 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.”

Related to the discussion above, citations to textbooks are not recommended. Textbooks or readers that contain overviews or summaries of theories may be useful in helping you to organizing main points about different theories and/or learning about a given theory’s empirical status. These works, however, are not replacements for reading the original theoretical or empirical contributions of the authors listed on your reading list. In your answers, you should cite the original theoretical works and research studies.

With all of the above in mind, you should take a moment to reflect on what you are about to do. On the one hand, preparing for and eventually taking comprehensive examinations is a stressful and very time consuming endeavor. On the other hand, this will be the only time in your academic career that you will be afforded the time (and be expected to use the time) to immerse yourself in the criminology and criminal justice literature. Faculty members are here to guide you if needed, but this is also the time during which you will train yourself to 1) read literature and pick out relevant points; 2) think about a large body of literature and how different works may or may not fit together; and, 3) develop ideas that can be used to answer questions on a comprehensive examination or in your own research areas once you pass.

Good luck!
READINGS

The readings below are organized into different subareas. However, as you read the literature, you will become aware that many of the readings that are listed under one subarea also could fit within other subareas. As you read, you should think about whether particular readings might be useful to answer potential questions pertaining to several the subareas.

General Overview


**Criminal Justice Theory**


**Correlates of Decision-Making across the System**


**Sex, Race/Ethnicity, and Class and Criminal Justice Processing**


**Criminal Justice Policy-Making**


**Policies/Reforms Intended to Influence the Behavior of Criminal Justice Actors**


**Crime Control and Prevention**


