

MSc in CRIMINOLOGY and CRIMINAL JUSTICE

REPORT OF THE EXAMINERS 2006

Structure of the Examination

The structure of the examination was unchanged from the previous year.

The elements of the examination were as follows.

- **Option Essays.** In each of Michaelmas and Hilary Terms, students were required to take *two* optional seminar courses (out of a choice of four in Michaelmas and four in Hilary). These were examined by essays, the titles of which were posted on Friday of 6th week, to be submitted by noon on Friday of ninth week. Each essay was to be no less than 3,500 and no more than 5,000 words. In Trinity Term, students were required to take *one* of three optional seminar courses; this course was assessed in the same way as the optional courses in Michaelmas and Hilary terms.
- **Examination.** Students were required to take a Core Course, entitled ‘Analytical Criminology and Criminal Justice’, in Michaelmas and Hilary terms. This course was examined by a three-hour written paper on the first Monday of Trinity Term.
- **Dissertation.** The students were also required to submit a Dissertation of no less than 12,000 and no longer than 15,000 words by noon on Friday of ninth week of Trinity Term.
- **To pass the Examination** as a whole, students had to achieve an average mark of 60% or above for the five option essays, and a mark of 60% or above for the Core Course Examination Paper and Dissertation. Students who received a mark of 70% or above on more than half these papers were awarded a Distinction (for this purpose the Core Course Examination Paper and the Dissertation each counted as two papers).

Marking

Each option essay, dissertation and core course examination paper was double blind marked by two Examiners, or an Examiner and an Assessor, who then met to see whether they could agree a mark. In nearly all cases there was no substantial difference between the marks given and so agreement was easily reached.

All papers where a mark of 59% or below had been given were sent to the External Examiner, as were papers where a mark of 69% had been awarded. The External Examiner also saw the only paper where the internal Examiners had failed to reach an

agreement. Altogether the External Examiner read eight essays, four Core Course examination scripts and three Dissertations.

Procedures and Problems

Generally speaking, this year presented no major administrative difficulties. The Proctors dealt with any queries raised quickly and effectively, as did the Examination Schools. The Proctors found one candidate guilty of plagiarism in two papers. The efficient support provided by Ann Kennedy, Chair of the Examinations Committee of the Law Faculty, was also much appreciated. The Board of Examiners received dedicated administrative support until mid-June. This relieved the Chair, in particular, of a number of routine burdens. The Board would accordingly like to record its great appreciation for Jenny Collett, administrative secretary at the Centre of Criminology until mid-June.

Medical certificates and other information about factors affecting performance

The following specific details have been requested by the Proctors. Four medical certificates and similar documents (from 10 % of candidates [N=2]) were forwarded to the examiners under sections 11.8 – 11.9 of the EPSC's General Regulations for the Conduct of University Examinations (see *Examination Regulations 2005*, page 34), but in none of these cases was the candidate's final result materially affected.

Core course examination

The examination for the core course was taken by 16 students. Of the twelve questions on the paper all but 2 (questions 1 and 11) were attempted by at least one student. Overall, 18 essays for questions covering the first half of the course and 30 for questions covering the second half of the course were attempted. On the whole, the standard of the answers was impressive. No students failed the examination, the lowest mark being 63%, gained by two students. Two students achieved marks of over 70%.

Optional Courses

Michaelmas Term

Public Opinion and Crime

Seven candidates answered the question relating to the causes and consequences of public misperceptions of crime. The answers were generally good, and the students had introduced a considerable amount of additional material. Since almost all students had answered the question, the quality of the papers was variable, but generally quite

satisfactory. The remaining student answered the question which asked about the virtues and limitations of ‘Gallup’ style polls. The student showed a good grasp of the subject. All students taking the seminar had completed and digested all the assigned readings, and several had undertaken a significant amount of extra library research.

Methods I: An Introduction to Methods of Data Collection

Two candidates took this option (two other students attended without taking the exam). One essay was excellent and one very good. Overall, the essays were carefully argued, engaged with the methodological shortcomings and merits of the studies under analysis, in particular in the area of validity, reliability and research design. The examiners were pleased with the papers, one essay was awarded a distinction.

Sentencing

The most popular question asked students to identify the strongest case in favour of mandatory sentencing. Seven papers were completed in response to this question, and they were quite variable in quality. Three other papers responded to a question that asked what effect the Criminal Justice Act 2003 would have on consistency in sentencing. The remaining three students responded to the title which asked them to address the ways in which restorative sentencing would differ from sentencing under a desert-based model. These papers were generally good, although the students had some difficulty with some of the more challenging readings relating to the theory of sentencing. All students appear to have read and digested the assigned readings for this particular option.

Mafias

Nine candidates took this option. Most candidates choose question 2 (“Under which conditions can a new mafia emerge?”). Two essays were outstanding, one excellent, and the remaining ones varied from solid to good. Overall, the essays were carefully argued, engaged with the literature and in some cases went well beyond the material covered in class.

Victims

Seven students submitted assessed essays. All passed, two with distinction. Two students answered the question ‘In what circumstances should victims be listened to’. Two students answered the question, ‘How do ‘non-ideal victims’ experience the criminal justice system?’. Three students answered the question: ‘Where is justice to be found when individuals are victimised by state agents or groups contending for state power?’. All of the essay questions were, to a greater or lesser extent, cross-cutting, requiring students to draw on the literature from more than one week of the course. By and large all students achieved this.

Hilary Term

Human Rights and Criminal Justice

Eleven students submitted assessed essays for this course, one student having left during the term. Three were awarded Distinctions in this subject. The level of detail and understanding of human rights law was generally good, and the best scripts combined this with thoughtful criticisms and engaged with theoretical arguments. However, some of the other essays contained examples of poor structure, insufficient precision, and inadequate critical reflection on the material.

Crime, Political Ideologies and Political Cultures

Six candidates sat this course. Three candidates answered question 2, two answered question 1 and one answered question 3. Two candidates were awarded marks over 70, the rest being in the 60s, with the lowest at 61. Overall, the essays evidenced much hard work and in the main a wide range of reading around the relevant subjects. The marks in the 60s could generally have been improved by the development of a sharper analytical edge, and a more authorial voice.

Methods II: Introduction to Methods of Data Analysis

One student took the class and obtained a distinction.

Risk, Security, and Criminal Justice

There were eleven candidates of whom one withdrew shortly before submitting her assessed essay. No candidate answered question 1, four answered question 2, and six answered question 3. The quality of answers was generally good. Most candidates showed evidence of having read widely and had a good understanding of the literature. The quality of research and reading carried out was generally sound, though few went much beyond the reading prescribed for the course. One essay showed almost no sign of having read the required reading at all.

Only one essay was judged by the examiners to merit a distinction, it was sophisticated, very well written and engaged effectively with academic debates. The main rump of essays demonstrated a good grasp of current debates, though few really took the debate forward. The best essays were polished and engaging, providing intelligent overviews of the subject. A few others showed a good grasp but did not really digest or engage with the material. One essay, judged by the examiners to fail, relied largely on news media and press cuttings and failed to engage at all with the academic literature. All but this essay made a good effort to engage with the questions set.

International Perspective in Restorative Justice

Eight students submitted assessed essays. All passed, three with distinction. One student answered the question ‘Is there evidence to suggest that restorative justice programmes currently operate in such a way as to breach the principle of proportionality in punishment? Are greater safeguards against such breaches desirable?’. Three students answered the question based on a quotation by Braithwaite which invited a critical appraisal of the alleged merits of RJ. Four students answered the question: ‘Is it unrealistic to use restorative justice processes in cases where there is a significant imbalance of power between the parties?’ All of the essay questions were, to a greater or lesser extent, cross-cutting, requiring students to draw on the literature from more than one week of the course. By and large all students achieved this.

Trinity Term

International Perspectives on the Death Penalty

Eight students submitted assessed essays: one failed and seven passed, two with distinction. Two candidates answered question 1 (1. Is America’s retention and administration of capital punishment “exceptional?”), five of the eight students answered the second question (2. “It seems that the decision whether a human being should either live or die is so inherently subjective - rife with all of life’s understandings, experiences, prejudices and passions - that it inevitably defies the rationality and consistency required by the Constitution.” (Justice Blackmun, dissenting in *Callins v. Collins*, 1994) Discuss.). Only one candidate answered the third question (3. To what extent has social science research influenced judicial decisions on capital punishment? To what extent should it?). All of the essay questions were cross-cutting, requiring students to draw on the literature from most weeks of the course. By and large all of students managed to do this, and some did it very well.

Public and Private Policing

This year four students completed the option in Public and Private Policing, with the final assessed essays being evenly split between questions one and three. Overall the standard of the essays submitted was relatively high, and two distinctions were ultimately awarded. While all of the assessed essays demonstrated a good understanding of the literature and were well-written, the best were marked by a genuine attempt to produce original reflections on the questions asked. One essay in particular contained examples of advanced critical analysis, and with further work would probably be worthy of publication. In summary, it has been a good year for this subject.

Desistance from Crime: the Role of Criminal Justice Agencies

Five students submitted essays for this course (two other students who registered for the course ‘dropped out’ from the MSc this year). All three essay questions were answered

by at least one student. The relationship between grades and essay questions was as follows:

Essay 1. Done by 3 students. Grades: 60, 66, 70

Essay 2. Done by 1 student. Grade: 70

Essay 3. Done by 1 student. Grade 72

Three essays, each answering a different question, were of a high standard and the assessors agreed that they met the specified criteria for a distinction. The other two both answered the same question (essay 1). One was average in standard, covering the relevant material and citing additional readings, but lacking depth of analysis and a fully sustained line of argument. One was only good enough for a bare pass: although, overall, the essay made points which answered the question, it was weak in structure, made insufficient use of relevant literature and reflected lack of insight into some of the key concepts.

Dissertations

The range of topics was wide and interesting. All candidates presented well-researched and well-written essays with nine obtaining distinctions. All passed. The distinctions were characterized by extensive reading, effective engagement with the research literature, and a clear ability to mount, sustain, and substantiate a coherent argument. Four dissertations were outstanding.

Overall Results of the Examination

Nineteen students submitted papers. Two failed and one deferred. Six gained distinction marks. As shown by Table 2 below, Distinctions and passes were roughly evenly divided by gender. Two candidates did remarkably well, obtaining respectively seven and eight weighted distinctions and a 72 weighted average grade. They were awarded *ex aequo* the Roger Hood Prize, designed to recognize the best performance on the MSc at Distinction level. A third student also did very well, obtaining seven weighted distinctions and an average weighted grade of 70. This candidate was awarded the Roger Hood *proximae* prize. Overall the performance of the candidates was very creditable.

C. Hoyle

I. Loader

J. Roberts

A.H. Sanders (External)

F. Varese (Chair)

July 2006

M.Sc Criminology and Criminal Justice

Table 1. Degree Results by Gender. 2005-2006 Academic Year

		Gender		Total
		FEMALE	MALE	
Grade	Pass	6	4	10
	Distinction	3	3	6
	Fail	2	0	2
Total		11	7	18

Table 2. Degree Results by Gender. 2001-2005 Academic Years.

<i>2004-2005 Academic Year</i>		
Distinction	2	2
Pass	6	4
Fail	0	0
<i>2003-2004 Academic Year</i>		
Distinction	1	2
Pass	4	4
Fail	0	0
<i>2002-2003 Academic Year</i>		
Distinction	2	1
Pass	6	5
Fail	0	0
<i>2001-2002 Academic Year</i>		
Distinction	4	1
Pass	2	4
Fail	0	1