

## MSc in CRIMINOLOGY and CRIMINAL JUSTICE

### REPORT OF THE EXAMINERS 2007

#### General Remarks

The Chair of Examiners would like to thank all of those involved in the examination process for the MSc in Criminology and Criminal Justice; those who served on the Board of Examiners, those who acted as Assessors, and, in particular, the Director of Examinations (Ann Kennedy) and the Examinations Officer (Julie Bass) who provided invaluable support and advice throughout the academic year. The Board of Examiners was supported by Professor Dick Hobbs from the London School of Economics who was enormously helpful in reading and commenting on essays and examination scripts. He performed this role extremely efficiently and we are delighted that he is available to continue as External Examiner during 2007-08. Dedicated administrative support was also received from the Criminology Graduate Studies Administrator, Mrs Cathy Byford, without whom the academic year and the examinations process in particular would not have run as smoothly as it did. The Board of Examiners would like to record its great appreciation for Mrs Byford's good-humoured and efficient support.

#### 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 five in Hilary). In Trinity Term, students were required to take *one* of three optional seminar courses. All optional seminar courses were examined by essays, the titles of which were posted on Friday of 6<sup>th</sup> week, and the essays submitted by noon on Friday of 9<sup>th</sup> week. Each essay, with the exception of the two methods courses (Research Design and Data Collection in MT, and Social Explanation and Data Analysis in HT) was to be no less than 3,500 and no more than 5,000 words. In all options the candidates chose one essay title from a choice of three. The methods options were assessed in the same way except the essays were to be no less than 2,500 words and no more than 3,000 words and the candidates had to complete weekly assignments, marked on a pass/fail basis, to the satisfaction of the course tutor.

**Examination.** Students were required to take two Core Courses; 'Explanation and Understanding in Criminology' in Michaelmas term, and 'Understanding Criminal Justice' in Hilary term. These two courses were examined by one unseen three-hour written paper on the Thursday of week 0 of Trinity Term (19 April 2007). Students were required to answer three questions from a choice of twelve

- **Dissertation.** The students were required to submit a Dissertation of no less than 8,000 and no longer than 10,000 words by noon on Friday of ninth week of Trinity Term.
- **To pass the Examination.** The degree of MSc is awarded to any candidate who achieves a mark of at least 50 per cent for (a) the assessed essays (b) the core course paper and (c) the dissertation. For this purpose, the individual marks of the five assessed essays are aggregated, and an average mark awarded for the assessed essays as a whole. The examiners award a Distinction to any candidate who achieves marks of 70 per cent or more on at least five of the papers. In this calculation, both the core course and the dissertation count as two.

### **Information given to candidates**

The Edict and supplementary edicts (attached as Appendix 1) were sent out to candidates in Michaelmas term 2006 in hard and electronic copy. The Edicts were also put on the MSc Criminology intranet pages. Much of this information had already been available to candidates in the MSc Criminology and Criminal Justice handbook, and the programme specifications (all students receive a hard copy of these documents and they are also available on the intranet).

### **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 agree a mark (see Appendix 2 for the marking scheme). In nearly all cases there was no substantial difference between the initial grades and so agreement was easily reached. In two cases a third Assessor was asked to read a script where there had initially been a fairly significant difference between the two appointed assessors. Agreement was then reached with the third assessor's grade being taken into consideration by the first two Assessors.

All papers where a mark of 49% or below had been given were sent to the External Examiner (there were four such papers), as were borderline papers (where a mark of 69% had been awarded) and a range of other essays and scripts. Altogether the External Examiner read twelve essays, four Core Course examination scripts and three Dissertations.

### **Procedures and Problems**

One of our candidates applied successfully to the Proctors for an extension on the assessed essays for Michaelmas and Trinity Terms and for the dissertation in Trinity term.

## **Plagiarism checks**

This year saw the start of routine plagiarism checks in criminology. Candidates were warned in the Course Handbook and in a supplementary examinations edict, that each term a random sample of essays would be checked for plagiarism. Accordingly, they were asked each term to submit electronically a copy of each of their essays to the Graduate Studies Administrator at the same time as they submitted a hard copy to the Examination Schools.

The Centre for Criminology does not currently own software for checking plagiarism (we are awaiting advice from the faculty on whether or not to use a new program called 'turnitin'), so, for during 2006-07, sections of student work were cut and pasted into the Google search bar (in double attributed-speech marks). This method had detected some cases of plagiarism in the past and seems to work reasonably well at detecting online sources. During 2006-07 we checked only assessed essays for plagiarism and not the dissertations. We checked a third of the submitted essays, drawn randomly.

The 'random sampling process' and subsequent correspondence between the administrator, Chair of Examiners and the assessors represented an extra administrative task. However, given the size of the sample, this was manageable and the administrator has identified further improvements which could be made to complete the process more efficiently, which will be introduced in 2007-08.

## **Medical certificates and other information about factors affecting performance**

1 medical certificate was forwarded to the examiners.

The following specific details have been requested by the Proctors. 1 medical certificate (from 6% of the candidates) was 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 2006, page 34) and the candidate's final results were materially affected.

## **Overall Results of the Examination**

There were seventeen candidates for the MSc Criminology and Criminal Justice (see display copy of the pass list at Appendix 3). One candidate failed, having failed to achieve a mark of 50% or above for the core course examination. Four gained distinctions. Two candidates did extremely well, both obtaining the maximum of nine weighted distinctions. 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. This candidate was awarded the Roger Hood *proximae* prize. Overall the performance of the candidates was very creditable.

Attached at Appendix 4 is the numbers of entrants, passes, distinctions and fails, broken down by gender, as well as the range of marks for each component of the course.

## **Core course examination**

The examination for the core course was taken by 17 students. The quality of the answers to this year's core course was generally high although one student failed. The breakdown of responses to specific questions was: 1 (20%); 2 (15%); 3 (35%); 4 (15%); 5 (25%); 6 (5%); 7 (60%); 8 (30%); 9 (20%); 10 (25%); 11 (10%); 12 (40%). All grades were resolved between the two examiners. The overall average of the agreed grades excluding the failed candidate was 63% and 3 candidates were awarded a distinction for their exam.

## **Optional Courses**

### **Michaelmas Term:**

#### ***Risk, Security, and Criminal Justice***

**Professor Lucia Zedner**

There were five candidates, one of whom was given dispensation by the Proctors to submit the essay late (this caused minor problems given it had to be assessed over the Christmas holiday closed period). Two candidates answered Questions 1 and 2 and one candidate answered Question 3. The quality of all but one essay was very good. All the candidates showed evidence of having read widely but their understanding of the literature varied between a sophisticated appreciation of the issues to a less certain grasp in some cases. Nearly all had evidently put a great deal of work into their reading and preparation. This said, few went much beyond the reading prescribed for the course

Two essays were judged by the examiners to merit a distinction. These essays were sophisticated in their analysis, very well written and effective in their engagement with and advancement of academic debates. The other essays showed a sound grasp of current debates but did not take the debate forward appreciably. The best essays had a strong thesis which was clearly articulated and persuasively developed. Below this top tier the other essays generally demonstrated a good command of the subject but failed to reach the highest marks because they did not advance much beyond an intelligent literature review. The main failings resulted from a lack of careful polishing of the final draft to excise stylistic slips, grammatical errors, and occasional sloppiness of referencing.

All the essays engaged directly and effectively with the questions set.

#### ***Victims***

**Dr Carolyn Hoyle**

Eight students submitted assessed essays. All passed, two with distinction.

Four students answered question 1 ‘Modern criminal control systems represent one of the many cases of lost opportunities for involving citizens in tasks that are of immediate importance to them ... The victim is a particularly heavy loser in this situation’ (CHRISTIE, 1977) Discuss’. Their marks were: 51%, 61%, 67% and 70%. The best paper discussed critically victims’ role in various aspects of the criminal process (from victim impact evidence to restorative justice, showing the threats to due process and proportionality in sentencing posed by enhanced roles for victims. The least impressive paper discussed some, although not all of the measures for victim participation but did not adequately draw out the implications for the criminal process.

Two students answered question 2, ‘In what ways can the social construction of ‘victims’ by different actors in different contexts affect the experiences of those harmed by crime?’. They were awarded the highest and the lowest grades (50% and 73%). The candidate who got a distinction wrote elegantly and persuasively about the implications of being a non-ideal victim in a wide-ranging and well structured essay. She or he drew on all of the relevant literature and discussed a range of examples to support their case, including state crime, miscarriages of justice, domestic violence and paramilitary punishments. The other paper, which only just passed, failed to draw out the relevance of some of the points made, drew on a narrow range of substantive examples, and was descriptive without being sufficiently analytical.

Two students answered question 3: ‘Is it unrealistic to attempt to use restorative processes in cases where there is a significant imbalance of power between the parties?’ Both got 68%. These were thorough and sophisticated reviews of the relevant literature, drawing on examples such as corporate crime, genocide, domestic violence and youth offending. Both went beyond the reading lists for this option. Both made arguments that were theoretically informed, empirically supported and the papers were well written.

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. Those papers which received marks in the 50 – 55% range were poorly structured, tended to include numerous errors of syntax and were inadequately referenced, with some unsubstantiated claims. Each would have benefited from better sign-posting and a more coherent structure.

### ***International Perspectives on the Death Penalty*** **Dr Carolyn Hoyle**

Eleven students submitted assessed essays: all passed, four with distinction.

Four candidates answered question 1 (1. In what ways do structural, cultural and political variables impact on the likelihood of a defendant being sentenced to death?), and their

marks ranged from the lowest grade, at 52%, to 64%. All but one of these candidates covered the main issues (victim impact evidence, race, gender, political influences at the micro and macro level, etc) but the papers with lower passes suffered from poor structure, inadequate referencing and one in particular was insufficiently analytical.

Three students answered the second question (about the influence of ‘evolving standards of decency’ on the administration of the death penalty.). Their marks ranged from 60% to 68%. The lower grade was awarded to a paper which cited and discussed all of the relevant legal authorities but was insufficiently sociological. The mid range paper, whilst not theoretically sophisticated made a good attempt to situate the discussion of case law into a framework of liberalism and considered the broader political philosophies. However, it did not problematise the concept of evolving standards of decency.

Four candidates answered the third question (about ‘death is different’ jurisprudence, focusing on *Atkins v Virginia*). All four papers were excellent and all candidates were awarded a distinction (ranging from 72% to 80%). This was a difficult question and as such brought out the best in those students of a high academic calibre who showed a sound understanding of the competing influences on the Supreme Court in its attempts to consider the Constitution in specific death penalty cases. All candidates drew on material from beyond their reading lists and in particular presented sophisticated analyses of the originalists’ position. The paper which was awarded 80% was beautifully written and, in the opinion of the assessors, of publishable standard.

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 those who reached a high pass or distinction level did it very well.

### ***Methods I – Research Design and Data Collection*** **Professor Julian Roberts**

In light of the fact that the students this year appear more knowledgeable with respect to research methods, as well as the fact that this was the easier of the research methods courses (being an introduction), it is no surprise that almost all did well. They had a choice between critiquing a summary of a published study and devising an original research study of their own. The students split pretty evenly in terms of choosing between these options. The questions seemed to bring out good responses from the students; a couple of the students produced work of the highest quality. The questions drew upon material covered in the course in the specific sense that we had discussed critiquing research as well as designing research. In light of the students’ performance on these assessed essays I believe they are well situated to evaluate and conduct research in the future.

### **Hilary Term:**

### ***Sociology of Punishment***

### **Dr Mary Bosworth**

There were seven candidates in this class. Five of them chose the same question on popular punitivism and the remaining two chose the question on race, gender and punishment. Nobody elected the third essay question. The quality of the papers varied considerably, reflecting the nature of the class. However, overall they were ultimately rather stronger than I had anticipated. Two were very good (one in particular), two were very weak and the remaining three were all at or above 65%. All of the students engaged with the reading from the course and a number drew on outside sources as well. It was apparent they had struggled with some of the theoretical reading, but almost all had risen to the challenges the texts had posed.

### ***Mafias***

#### **Professor Federico Varese**

Nine students submitted option papers. The answers were evenly distributed: three candidates answered question 1; three candidates answered question 2 and three candidates answered question 3. Most essays were carefully argued, engaged with the literature and in some cases went beyond the material covered in class. The assessors awarded two distinctions. No one failed.

### ***Methods II: Social Explanation and Data Analysis***

#### **Professor Federico Varese**

Twelve students submitted option papers. The answers were quite evenly distributed: Four candidates answered question 1; three answered question 2; five answered question 3. Most essays presented well argued research proposals. The assessors awarded two distinctions. All passed.

### ***Human Rights and Criminal Justice***

#### **Dr Ben Goold**

Five students took the course this year, and it was the opinion of both tutors that they were the strongest group we have had in this subject in recent years. In-class discussion was of a very high standard, and it was clear that the students worked hard throughout the term. Happily, this was reflected in the general standard of the assessed essays. Of the five candidates, three answered question two and two answered question one. Although all of the essays were of a good standard, the two distinction level essays were exceptional.

### ***Policing Global Insecurities***

#### **Professor Ian Loader**

Four students were assessed in this class. Two students answered question 1 on the concept of security; two students answered question 3 on transnational policing. Nobody answered question 2.

The marks achieved were 73 and 75 (both for question 1) and 64 and 60. All the students produced work with engaged with the literature and the reading and debates covered in class. The 2 students who achieved distinction marks, produced work that draw on references beyond the set reading and developed coherent lines of argument in relation to the question.

### **Trinity Term:**

#### ***Desistance***

**Dr Ros Burnett**

There were four candidates. Three of them answered question 1 and one answered question 3. Both of these questions required students to compare and contrast, and those students receiving the lowest marks were far less successful in making direct comparisons, and instead, among other weakness, used too many of the allotted words on separate treatment of the elements and on discussion of less pertinent or irrelevant issues. Essays which gained distinctions did so because – as well as meeting the fundamental requirements of the essays as set – to varying degrees, they presented powerful arguments, were lucid and eloquent and provided in-depth analysis of all elements of the question.

#### ***Prisons***

**Dr Mary Bosworth**

All students submitted their papers on time. One paper failed outright. Two were excellent and were awarded high distinctions. All but two of the students did the same question. The two who chose an alternate question both chose the same one. This meant one of the questions was not attempted by anyone. However, many of the students incorporated aspects of it (privatization) into their essays.

#### ***Sentencing***

**Professor Andrew Ashworth**

Nine students submitted essays on Sentencing. Four answered question 2, three answered question 3, and two answered question 1. The general standard was good, with plenty of evidence of reading and thought, and a willingness to tackle both theoretical and practical aspects of the questions. There was one outstanding essay, which displayed a fine knowledge of the subject-matter combined with a well-reasoned argument. Two other essays of Distinction standard showed excellent research and searching arguments. There was only one weak essay, written by someone with obvious language difficulties. All the

other essays were comfortably in the mid-60s, generally of a good standard but not always well focussed.

## **Dissertations**

The range of topics was wide and interesting. All candidates presented well-researched and well-written essays. All passed, with six obtaining distinctions. 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.

M. Bosworth  
D. Hobbs (External)  
C. Hoyle (Chair)  
J. Roberts  
F. Varese

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## Appendix 4.

### MSc Criminology and Criminal Justice

Table 1. Degree Results by Gender. 2006-2007 Academic Year

		Gender		Total
		FEMALE	MALE	
Grade	Pass	7	5	12
	Distinction	1	3	4
	Fail	0	1	1
Total		8	9	17

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

	FEMALE	MALE
<i>2005-6 Academic Year</i>		
Distinction	3	3
Pass	6	4
Fail	2	0
<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

Table 3. Option results, showing the range of marks and averages

Option	Number of candidates	Lowest mark	Highest mark	Average mark
Death Penalty	10	60	80	67
Desistance from Crime	2	54	75	65
Human Rights and Criminal Justice	5	60	71	66
Mafias	9	50	73	63
Methods I: Research Design and Data Collection	7	57	77	67
Methods II: Social Explanation and Data Analysis	6	52	76	62
Policing Global Insecurities	4	60	73	68
Prisons	6	48	65	58
Risk, Security and Criminal Justice	5	58	71	66
Sentencing	8	53	75	66
Sociology of Punishment	7	50	80	65
Victims	8	50	73	64

Table 4. Core Course Exam results, showing the range of marks and average (Including the two candidates who had deferred the exam from 05-06)

Lowest mark	Highest mark	Average
40	71	62

Table 5. Dissertation results, showing the range of marks and average (Including one candidate who had deferred the paper from 0506)

Lowest mark	Highest mark	Average
50	75	65