

## MSc in CRIMINOLOGY and CRIMINAL JUSTICE

### REPORT OF THE EXAMINERS 2008

#### 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 were available throughout the year for support and advice.

Dedicated administrative support was received from the Criminology Graduate Studies Administrator, Mrs Cathy Byford, without whom the examinations process would not have run as well as it did. The Board of Examiners would like to record its appreciation for Mrs Byford's efficiency and professionalism throughout the 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 and we are pleased that he is available to continue as External Examiner during 2008-09.

#### 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 three 'in house' methods courses (Research Design and Data Collection in MT; and Social Explanation and Data Analysis, and Qualitative Methods 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 three 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 a number of assignments during the first six weeks of term, 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 (Thursday 17 April 2008). 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 (attached as Appendix 1) was sent out to candidates in Michaelmas term 2007 in hard and electronic copy. The Edict was 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 1, which contains the marking conventions under Appendix B). All papers where a mark of 49% or below had been given were sent to the External Examiner (there were three 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 fourteen essays, four Core Course examination scripts and four Dissertations.

### **Procedures and Problems**

One of our candidates applied successfully to the Proctors for an extension on three assessed essays, one for each term, twice for medical reasons. The Proctors did not advise us to impose an academic or financial penalty.

### **Plagiarism checks**

This was the second year 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. Using the system of selecting a random sample of assessed essays and checking a selection of paragraphs and phrases using 'google', developed and used in 2006-2007, first assessors for each option checked a third of the submitted essays, drawn randomly by the Chair of Examiners. This process applies only to assessed essays and not the dissertations. This year this process revealed no cases of plagiarism.

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.

The Centre for Criminology does not currently own software for checking plagiarism. Turnitin became available during this academic year but the Criminology Board of Examiners were divided on whether or not it would prove to be an efficient and appropriate resource for the Masters programme. In response to the Board's concerns, the Criminology Board of Studies discussed the matter in full in Trinity Term 2008 and decided not to introduce turnitin for 2008-09, but rather to keep the current system and review this decision in Trinity 2009, in light of the experience of the law faculty for other post graduate courses.

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

Three medical certificates (from 11% of candidates) were forwarded to the Examiners under sections 11.8 to 11.9 of the EPSC's General Regulations for the Conduct of University Examinations (see Examination Regulations 2007 page 34). In one of these cases the candidate's final result was 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 2), plus one candidate from 2006-07 who re-sat and passed the core course examination. All candidates passed the degree; three gained distinctions. One candidate did extremely well, obtaining seven weighted distinctions and was therefore awarded the Roger Hood Prize, designed to recognize the best performance on the MSc at Distinction level. Two other students also did very well, obtaining six weighted distinctions both with a 70% weighted average. As these candidates were indistinguishable they share the Roger Hood *proxime* 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 18 students, including one who had failed the examination in the previous year. The quality of the answers to this year's core course was generally high with only one student receiving a grade in the fifties, and the rest achieving 60% or above, with one gaining a distinction.

## **Assessors and Examiners' Reports**

### **Core Course Exam**

*Professor Ian Loader*

*Professor Julian Roberts*

The exam responses in general were good, although one candidate received a mark below 50. There were 25 candidates. The top mark was 74 and the lowest mark was 44. Thus the range of agreed grades ran from 44 to 74. There were 4 distinctions.<sup>1</sup>

Question 1 was answered by 7 candidates.  
Question 2 was answered by 10 candidates.  
Question 3 was answered by 9 candidates.  
Question 4 was answered by 10 candidates.  
Question 5 was answered by 5 candidates.  
Question 6 was answered by 2 candidates.  
Question 7 was answered by 7 candidates.  
Question 8 was answered by 7 candidates.  
Question 9 was answered by 9 candidates.  
Question 10 was answered by 2 candidates.  
Question 11 was answered by 4 candidates.  
Question 12 was answered by 4 candidates.

## **Optional Courses**

### **Michaelmas Term:**

#### **Mafias**

*Professor Federico Varese*

Eight students submitted papers for this option. Seven students answered question 3, 'which sectors of the economy are more vulnerable to mafia penetration?' and one chose 'Why do mafias have rituals?' Overall, the essays were carefully argued, engaged with the literature and in some

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<sup>1</sup> These statistics, and the data on questions which follows, include the seven students on the MSc Criminology and Criminal Justice (Research Methods) degree. The Report for this degree will be available in October 2008. No candidates on the MSc Criminology and Criminal Justice failed and there was only one distinction. Some of the following reports from assessors include the seven Research Methods students – the three methods courses in MT and HT and the options in TT.

cases went beyond the material covered in class. The assessors awarded one distinction. No one failed.

## **Methods I: Research Design and Data Collection**

### ***Professor Federico Varese***

Eighteen students submitted papers for the option, four of them being Probation Research Students (PRS). The work-load for the class included weekly 'research design' assignments and simple statistical exercises. All students handed in the weekly assignments in time and answered the questions in full.

The exam question asked the candidates to critically discuss one of three different papers, each representing a different type of data collection method and research design. Below, I report the spread of answers.

- Nine candidates choose to analyze Moon, M., Sundt, J., Cullen F., & Wright, J. 2000. Is child saving dead? Public support for juvenile rehabilitation. *Crime & Delinquency* 46(1), 38-60.
- Seven candidates choose to analyze Bond-Maupin, L. 1998. Self-Determination? Juvenile Justice in One American Indian Community, *Journal of contemporary criminal justice* 14 (1), 26-41.
- Two candidates choose to analyze Weerman, Frank M., Bijleveld, Catrien C. J. H. 2007. Birds of Different Feathers: School Networks of Serious Delinquent, Minor Delinquent and Non-delinquent Boys and Girls, *European Journal of Criminology* 4(4): 357-383.

The assessors were overall very impressed with the quality of submissions. They awarded six distinctions. One failed. The four PRS students were marked on pass/fail basis and all passed (some wrote excellent papers).

## **News Media, Crime and Policy**

### ***Dr David Green***

Nine students in total attended the class, three of whom audited the course. Of the six who were examined, half choose to answer question 1, which asked them to design a strategy to reform the media's treatment of crime. Two chose question 2, which asked them to address the shortcomings of the methodologies utilised to assess the media's effects on crime. One student chose to answer question 3, which asked how the proliferation of 24-7 news has affected the way that the press, the public and politicians address crime issues. The essay marks ranged from a 'good pass' low of 58 to a 'distinction' mark of 75. Only one exam was at 'distinction' level. Two exams achieved marks in the 'good pass' range and three in the 'strong pass' range. All of the exams demonstrated a grasp of the relevant literatures, but those receiving lower marks lacked a clearly made argument. The papers in the middle range showed a grasp of the literature and were well written and well argued. The paper receiving the highest mark made a well-argued, strong and stimulating argument drawing upon both the literatures discussed in class and upon additional material.

## **Prisons**

### ***Dr Mary Bosworth***

Nine students attended the course, but one was auditing from the MSc (research methods) stream so only eight submitted papers. Of these, four answered the question on women's prison, three on

prison privatisation and one on whether or not prisons are in crisis. The essays were fairly consistent. Everyone had done a lot of research and, for the most part, developed their analysis well. There was some variation among them in terms of written English, probably reflecting the high proportion of non-native speakers in the class.

## **Victims**

*Dr Carolyn Hoyle*

Six students submitted assessed essays. All passed, one with distinction.

Two students answered question 1 ‘What are the challenges posed by attempts to facilitate communication between offenders and victims?’ Their marks were in the mid to high pass range. The better paper presented a reasonably sophisticated critique of the pitfalls of restorative justice measures. The less impressive paper discussed some, although not all of the challenges and failed to mention the implications for due process and fair trials.

One candidate answered question 2, ‘Do all crime victims have equal access to service and procedural rights?’. This candidate 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.

Three students answered question 3: ‘What are the prospects for justice when the offender is the state?’ . The responses ranged from average to excellent. The candidate who got a distinction wrote elegantly and persuasively about the various responses to genocides and other conflicts. This well structured essay presented the literature and debates within a clear theoretical framework. The other two papers did not go much beyond the prescribed reading, and one suffered from a certain amount of conceptual confusion.

Overall, the quality of the papers varied from adequate to first-rate. All of the essay questions were, to some extent, cross-cutting, requiring students to draw on the literature from more than one week of the course. By and large all students rose to this challenge. The three papers which received marks in the 50 – 59% range were less well structured, tended to include numerous errors of syntax and were inadequately referenced; one in particular had a number of unsubstantiated claims. Each would have benefited from better sign-posting and a more coherent structure.

## **Hilary Term:**

### **Death Penalty**

*Dr Carolyn Hoyle*

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

One candidate answered question 1 (“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.), and received a distinction for a very well written and sophisticated study of the capriciousness and arbitrariness of the application of the death penalty in the US.

Eight students answered the second question (In America the rate of executions has declined from 98 in 1999 to 42 in 2007, and the number of death sentences imposed has dropped from 284 in 1999 to 110 in 2007. How can we account for the dramatically declining use of the death penalty in recent years?). Their marks ranged from 59% to 75%. The lower grades were awarded to papers which accurately listed and described the main factors influencing the declining use of the death penalty in recent years. The higher marks were received by students who had written more theoretically sophisticated papers which analysed *how* these factors had influenced the administration.

Three candidates answered the third question (In what ways do international law, norms, and values influence the administration of the death penalty?). Their grades were: 54%, 67%, and 72%. The distinction was awarded to the student who problematised the concept of international norms and values, and who took both a jurisprudential and sociological approach to understanding the influence of international law.

All of the essay questions were cross-cutting, requiring students to draw on the literature from many 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.

### **Desistance from Crime**

*Dr Ros Burnett*

There were seven candidates. Three students answered Question 1, one answered Question 2 and three answered Question 3. The standard of answers ranged from 'good pass' to 'fine work'. The best answers to Question 1 discussed with examples the interplay between 'social capital' and 'personal agency' in the desistance process, as well as dealing analytically with each concept. The three answers to Question 3 provided balanced arguments and drew on the course material but the best essays were especially comprehensive, well-constructed and logically argued and demonstrated additional reading and reflection. Both of the assessors agreed that the essay on Question 2 insufficiently responded to the first part of the question and ignored some of the most relevant material. However, it dealt with epistemological aspects of the question extremely eloquently and insightfully, drawing on alternative literature, and it offered an original viewpoint which could be regarded as a creative contribution.

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

*Professor Andrew Ashworth, Dr Ben Goold, Dr Liora Lazarus*

Nine students took this option, and three were awarded Distinction marks. Two students were awarded marks in the upper 50s, and the remainder were comfortably in the 60s. Although the top three essays were impressive, it was a disappointment that no other essay even approached Distinction level, and the general standard was middling. There were some deficiencies of technique in developing human rights arguments, which seemed to suggest a lack of attention. Four students tackled question 2 on prisoners' rights, and the answers were only moderate. Three attempted question 3 on privacy, where there was two excellent answers. The other two candidates attempted question 1 on self-incrimination, one of them being outstanding.

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

*Professor Federico Varese*

Sixteen students submitted papers for the option, four of them being Probation Research Students (PRS). The work-load for the class included weekly 'research design' assignments and simple

statistical exercises. All students handed in the weekly assignments in time and answered the questions in full.

The exam question asked the candidates to write a research proposal that involves the use of one or more methods of data collection and analysis. The proposed research should examine (1) a criminal organization or network; or (2) a criminal justice institution; (3) criminal behaviour. Three candidates answered question 1; six candidates chose question 2; and seven chose question 3.

The assessors were overall pleased with the quality of submissions, although less than in the previous term. Two distinctions were awarded. Two candidates failed. The four PRS students were marked on pass/fail basis and all passed (some wrote excellent papers).

### **Qualitative Methods**

*Dr Mary Bosworth, Dr Carolyn Hoyle*

Eight candidates submitted essays, one failed, and seven passed, three with distinction.

Only one student did the qualitative methods research proposal (undoubtedly because all of these candidates were also taking the Methods II course and the assignment for that course was to write a research proposal). Nonetheless, this candidate received the highest grade (72%) for a very thorough, sophisticated and viable research proposal.

Two candidates chose question two, to critically assess the research methods used and the inferences drawn in an article on gender, motivation and street robbery. One produced an excellent essay which was awarded 71%, the other a less sophisticated, but still reasonably thorough appraisal of the methodological issues arising from the study and the article, for which they were awarded 61%.

Five students answered question 3, on whether qualitative research is of use to criminal justice policy makers. The marks awarded ranged from a fail (at 44%) to 70%. The candidate who failed had not answered the question.

### **Trinity Term:**

#### **Race and Gender**

*Dr Mary Bosworth, Dr Carolyn Hoyle*

The papers for Race and Gender were good. Two students answered the question on 'institutional racism' and then one each answered the question on the Masculinity and intersectionality. Assigned marks ranged from a good pass to a distinction. Nobody failed.

#### **Restorative Justice**

*Dr Carolyn Hoyle*

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

Three students answered the first question about retribution and restoration. Two got high passes (66% and 67%) and one a distinction (72%). All papers were strong on the theoretical debates within the literature about whether RJ should be conceived of as punishment and the extent to

which retribution and restoration were diametrically opposed. The two which did not achieve distinction had some minor errors of syntax and were not structured as well as they might have been.

Two students answered the second question about RJ in post conflict societies. Both passed, one with 66% and one with distinction (73%). The essay which was awarded a distinction was a wide-ranging and well structured paper which problematised all of the key concepts, was balanced, authoritative and beautifully written. The other paper was very thorough but had a few errors of fact, showing that the candidate had not gone to the most up to date sources on the development of gacaca in Rwanda. It also had a rather weak and slow introduction.

One student answered the third question, drawing on the Braithwaite quotation. This candidate was awarded a pass, at 62% for this largely uncritical description of the potential of RJ. Whilst the paper dealt thoroughly with the key issues, the question had invited challenges which were not adequately provided in this paper. It also failed to discuss fully enough the evidence on reducing crime.

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.

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

*Professor Lucia Zedner*

There were eight candidates, one of whom was given dispensation by the Proctors to submit the essay late. One candidate answered Question 2 and all the other candidates answered Question 3. The quality of essays was very variable. The best candidates showed evidence of having read widely, demonstrated a sophisticated appreciation of the issues, and engaged effectively with the academic debates. Most candidates had read widely but many reported rather than engage with what they had read. The weakest essays failed to understand the arguments they had read or misrepresented what was said. Nearly all had put a good deal of work into their reading and preparation but some of the essays could have built much more effectively upon the course reading.

Only one essay was judged by the examiners to merit a distinction, though two came very close at 68. These essays were sophisticated in their analysis, very well written and effective in their engagement with and advancement of academic debates. The other essays were all markedly less strong, two marks fell at 60, two in the 50s and one was a clear fail. Those that passed displayed a sound understanding of basic concepts and issues but did not sufficiently advance any clear line of argument. They stayed very close to the literature and did not take the debate forward. The one script that failed was very short, poorly written, and did not display an adequate understanding of the literature.

### **Sentencing**

*Professor Andrew Ashworth, Professor Julian Roberts*

Seven students took this option: three were awarded Distinction marks, and the remainder were quite close to Distinction level. The assessed essays in this subject came as a pleasant surprise to the examiners. The seminars this year were rather quiet and, although the standard of discussion increased as the term went on, we were not led to expect such a uniformly high standard of essays as we received. The topic of previous convictions clearly seized the imagination of the class, and

all but two students wrote their essay on this topic. They grappled with issues raised in Professor Roberts' 2008 book, issues on which there is no secondary literature at all yet. Some students managed to develop interesting arguments of their own, which was pleasing. One student answered the question on aggravating and mitigating circumstances, and another the question on sentencing guideline mechanisms.

### **Sociology of Punishment**

*Dr Mary Bosworth*

The papers on the Sociology of Punishment option were good. Marks ranged from one in the pass range to one distinction, with most clustered around the 65 mark. Nobody answered one of the essay questions – the one on Foucault – dividing more or less equally between the questions on the utility of culture as an explanation for punishment and the inevitability of popular punitivism. Students demonstrated a keen understanding of the course material, and were able to summarise and analyse the main points of the literature. Two essays were randomly assigned for a plagiarism check with no evidence of plagiarism found.

### **Dissertations**

The range of topics was wide and interesting. All candidates presented well-researched and well-written papers. All passed, with six obtaining distinctions. No student was awarded a grade lower than 60%. 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)  
F. Varese

July 2008

## Appendix X.

### MSc Criminology and Criminal Justice

Table 1. Degree Results by Gender. 2007-2008 Academic Year

		Gender		Total
		FEMALE	MALE	
Grade	Pass	10	5	15
	Distinction	1	2	3
	Fail	0	0	0
Total				18

Table 2. Degree Results by Gender. 2001-2007 Academic Years

	FEMALE	MALE
<i>2006-7 Academic Year</i>		
Distinction	1	3
Pass	7	5
Fail	0	1
<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	12	54	75	66
Desistance from Crime	7	64	72	68
Human Rights and Criminal Justice	9	57	73	65
Mafias	7	54	70	64
Methods I: Research Design and Data Collection	7	46	75	64
	<i>Including RM students: 14</i>	46	75	66
Methods II: Social Explanation and Data Analysis	5	20	70	55
	<i>Including RM students: 12</i>	20	70	58
News Media, Crime and Policy	6	58	75	65
Prisons	8	55	70	63
Qualitative Methods	1	71	71	71
	<i>Including RM students: 8</i>	44	72	65
Race and Gender <i>(all RM students)</i>	4	61	71	67
Restorative Justice	5	62	73	68
	<i>Including RM students: 6</i>	66	66	68
Risk, Security and Criminal Justice	7	35	70	60
	<i>Including RM students: 8</i>	35	70	59
Sentencing	3	68	74	71

Option	Number of candidates	Lowest mark	Highest mark	Average mark
	<i>Including RM Students: 7</i>	68	74	70
Sociology of Punishment	2	63	64	64
	<i>Including RM Students: 6</i>	54	70	64
Victims	6	56	77	62

Table 4. Core Course Exam results, showing the range of marks and average (Including one candidate who had retaken the exam, and all RM students)

Lowest mark	Highest mark	Average
44	74	65

Table 5. Dissertation results, showing the range of marks and average

Lowest mark	Highest mark	Average
60	75	67