Political Behavior and Institutions ("American")
Fall 2006

Directions:

- Please put your **NEW** Student ID number at the top of each page of your examination. **DO NOT** write your name anywhere on the examination.

- Number your pages consecutively for the entire examination.

- Cite sources throughout your essay, where appropriate, using standard format and provide a single bibliography that includes all the materials used in preparing your answers.

- Clearly label each answer with the number of question you are answering.

- Submit a cover page with your responses that lists the following: ID number, type of exam completed (e.g. MA major, MA minor, PhD major, PhD minor) and examination area. Please list the semester the examination is taken as well.

- Budget your time carefully, including time to think and organize while preparing and writing the answers. Focus on preparing coherent, well-organized essays that not only demonstrate your mastery of the literature, but also indicate how the literature expands our collective knowledge.

MA Minors – 3 questions from at least 2 sections

MA Majors – 4 questions from at least 2 sections
A. Political Institutions

1. Paradigms guide the study of politics, and in particular, the study of political structures and institutions. Select one institution from the following political structures—interest groups, the presidency, bureaucracy, political parties, Congress, or the Supreme Court—and describe: (1) the major paradigms that have structured research in the area; (2) the important questions that have guided the paradigms over time; (3) the important controversies that have evolved; (4) significant concepts and theories within the paradigms; and (5) anomalies (departures from expected findings) that appear in some of the empirical research done in this area.

2. Focusing on the major paradigms that have guided the systematic study of decision making institutions in the American political system, compare and contrast the forces affecting the decisional behavior of U.S. Supreme Court justices with the forces affecting the decisional behavior of members of the U.S. Congress. As you compose your answer, be sure to make mention of the significant concepts and theories within the paradigms, the major findings or conclusions the paradigms have yielded, and any controversies that have evolved in the research literature.

3. The American electoral process has been described as a majoritarian system, characterized by single-member districts and plurality elections. However, democracies in other parts of the world have structured their electoral contests in very different ways. In a well-organized essay, compare and contrast the nature of the electoral systems in the United States and another country; the effects of the particular electoral systems on representation, election outcomes, and party behavior in government; and finally, the role of special interests within the electoral systems.

B. Political Behavior

1. The American citizen has been “attacked” so often for his or her lack of information that voter ignorance has become something of a mainstay in economic (see, for instance, Anthony Downs, An Economic Theory of Democracy) and political argument and analysis. Discuss voter awareness of political issues, impediments to that awareness—such as rational ignorance—the extent to which voters’ decisions seem to be informed or uninformed with respect to candidate choices, and the effects of voter ignorance on the policy-making process. If Anthony Downs is correct—that is, voting incurs greater costs than returns due to the large number of voters voting which renders one’s vote irrelevant to the outcome—there is no rational reason to vote, yet millions do so. How is this latter phenomenon explained?
2. A major issue in the study of American politics is the effect of the mass media on political attitudes, whether the issue is candidate choice, support for public policies, or presidential initiatives. The question of the effects of the mass media has produced considerable controversy. Critically evaluate findings used to support one position – say, that the media has a pronounced effect on political opinions against the other, such as the media has no significant effect. If you were to design a study to test for the effects of the mass media, how would you go about it? That is, what would your research design look like and why?

3. Although much of the elite political discourse in this country is couched in terms of a liberal-conservative ideological continuum, many researchers have questioned the value of trying to account for mass attitudes and behaviors by relying on the concept of ideology. To what extent do citizens organize their beliefs along a liberal-conservative continuum? In what other ways are belief systems organized, or perhaps, there is no organization to mass belief systems? Is the concept of ideology useful in the study of mass behavior? Why or why not? Describe the various controversies over the ideological nature of the mass public. Can you envision other means through which voters could make some sense of politics in the absence of ideological thinking on the part of citizens? Explain.

C. Democratic Theory

1. There are at least two major problems that confront most political systems. First, how to balance the equality of vote with the protection of minority rights, since under equality, majorities rule and minorities rights may be suppressed, but when minorities rule, such as in oligarchies, majorities are frequently disadvantaged. Second, what should be “private” (in the realm of individual action) and what should be “public” (within the purview of government and collective rather than individual choice). What solutions could you envision to these twin problems: protecting the rights of minorities, such as farmers and fisherman, as well as social groups in society, while ensuring majorities rule, and determining what should be in the public realm and what in the private?

2. Fully describe the role of the U.S. Supreme Court – a non-elected, life-tenured institution – in our democratic system. Is the design and operation of the Court justifiable under the principles of democratic theory? In your answer, be sure to fully explicate the case, both for and against, the institution’s design and performance.

3. Over 50 years ago, a team of political scientists led by E.E. Schattschneider called for “more responsible” political parties. What are the characteristics of a responsible party system, and how and why does the U.S. party system depart from this “model”? What are the benefits and costs associated with a “responsible party government” system?
Political Behavior and Institutions ("American") Examination
Spring 2006

Student ID#

Please circle the type of examination you are taking:

M.A. Minor: 3 questions from 2 sections

M.A. Major: 4 questions from 2 sections

Directions

Your examination should follow the following standards: 1) double-space entire text; 2) use 11.0 font; and 3) limit the number of pages for each essay to 10 (double-spaced) pages. There is no limit on the number of pages of references but they too should be double-spaced.

AND, also

1. Number your pages consecutively throughout the entire examination.

2. Cite relevant sources.

3. Clearly label each essay with the number of the question you are answering.

4. Place your student id at the top of each page of your examination.

5. Remember to circle the type of examination you are taking (at the top of this page).

6. Your essay will be judged on your ability to integrate relevant literature into your essay and your skill in addressing the substance of the questions. When citing literature, be sure to show how that literature relates to the problem or issue you are analyzing.

7. Do not print your name on this examination; please, instead, write your student identification number in the space indicated above on the written exam.
A. Political Institutions

1. Paradigms guide the study of politics, and in particular, the study of political structures and institutions. Select one institution from the following political structures—interest groups, the presidency, bureaucracy, political parties, Congress, or the Supreme Court—and describe: (1) the major paradigms that have structured research in the area; (2) the important questions that have guided the paradigms over time; (3) the important controversies that have evolved; (4) significant concepts and theories within the paradigms; and (5) anomalies (departures from expected findings) that appear in some of the empirical research done in this area.

2. The American electoral process has been described as a majoritarian system, characterized by single-member districts and plurality elections. However, democracies in other parts of the world have structured their electoral contests in very different ways. In a well-organized essay compare and contrast the nature of the electoral systems in the United States and another country; the effects of the particular electoral systems on representation, election outcomes, and party behavior in government; and finally, the role of special interests within the electoral systems.

3. It often goes unchallenged to say that the U.S. Congress is a representative institution, but in some regards—that is, by some standards—it isn’t very representative. Evaluate the extent to which Congress is “representative” and “unrepresentative” of the American populace. Describe the factors and forces promoting and inhibiting representation in the U.S. Congress. Now, compare and contrast the U.S. Congress to the representativeness of another legislature or parliament.

B. Political Behavior

4. Design a model of the decisional behavior of judges. As you specify your model, be sure (1) to clearly and completely articulate the theoretical perspective, and (2) fully discuss each of the concepts you include in your model—i.e., how each concept is derived or related to your theoretical perspective, what each concept will contribute to the explanation of your dependent variable, and how each of the independent variable are related to each other. Finally, is your proposed model properly specified for all levels of the judiciary in the United States?

5. Voting behavior has been a central area of study in American politics. It is an area rich in theory and concepts. A central work to the study of voting behavior is, of course, The American Voter. Describe the important theories and concepts associated with this work and how they have
shaped latter research. What controversies have resulted, challenging the central propositions of *The American Voter*? Now, assess the impact of this book on scholarship in the area. Describe the most important alternative theory or theories to *The American Voter* and assess their strengths and weaknesses.

6. The American citizen has been "attacked" so often for his or her lack of information that voter ignorance has become something of a mainstay in economic (see, for instance, Anthony Downs, *An Economic Theory of Democracy*) and political argument and analysis. Discuss voter awareness of political issues, impediments to that awareness—such as rational ignorance—the extent to which voters' decisions seem to be informed or uninformed with respect to candidate choices, and the effects of voter ignorance on the policy-making process. If Anthony Downs is correct—that is, voting incurs greater costs than returns due to the large number of voters voting which renders one's vote irrelevant to the outcome—there is no rational reason to vote, yet millions do so. How is this latter phenomenon explained?

7. A major issue in the study of American politics is the effect of the mass media on political attitudes, whether the issue is candidate choice, support for public policies, or presidential initiatives. The question of the effects of the mass media has produced considerable controversy. Critically evaluate findings used to support one position—say, that the media has a pronounced effect on political opinions—against the other, such as the media has no significant effect. If you were to design a study to test for the effects of the mass media, how would you go about it—that is, what would your research design look like and why?

8. Although much of the elite political discourse in this country is couched in terms of a liberal-conservative ideological continuum, many researchers have questioned the value of trying to account for mass attitudes and behaviors by relying on the concept of ideology. To what extent do citizens organize their beliefs along a liberal-conservative continuum? In what other ways are belief systems organized, or perhaps, there is no organization to mass belief systems? Is the concept of ideology useful in the study of mass behavior? Why or why not? Describe the various controversies over the ideological nature of the mass public. Can you envision other means through which voters could make some sense of politics in the absence of ideological thinking on the part of citizens? Explain. Finally, how would you characterize the American populace in terms of their ideological leanings? Why?

9. Select any one area in the study of political behavior from the following topic areas—voting behavior, public opinion formation, mass media, and political participation—and (1) describe the major questions and
paradigms that govern this area of study, or that have done so in the past; (2) the major concepts and theories underlying inquiry in this area; (3) the central controversies that have arisen over time; and (4) anomalies that have arise in the empirical research done in this area.

C. Democratic Theory

10. While demonstrably a democracy, elements of counter-majoritarian rule infect the American political system. Select any two of the national political institutions (i.e., the Presidency, Congress, the Judiciary) and compare and contrast the elements of majoritarian and counter-majoritarian rule. Is the design and operation of the institutions you have chosen justifiable under principles of democratic theory? In your essay, be sure to fully explicate the arguments both for and against, these institutions’ designs and operations in terms of premises embodied in traditional democratic theory.

11. There are at least two major problems that confront most political systems. First, how to balance the equality of vote with the protection of minority rights, since under equality, majorities rule and minorities rights may be suppressed, but when minorities rule, such as oligarchies, majorities are frequently disadvantaged. Second, what should be “private” (in the realm of individual action) and what should be “public” (within the purview of government and collective rather than individual choice). What solutions could you envision to these twin problems: protecting the rights of minorities, such as farmers and fishermen as well as social groups in society, while ensuring majorities rule, and determining what should be in the public realm and what in the private?

12. The assumption of rationality has led to some rather perverse predictions and explanations about the behavior of voters and politicians, many of which have nonetheless been found to have empirical support. Describe some of the ways that the rational behavior of politicians, political parties, voters, and interest groups result in outcomes detrimental to normative views of democracy. Now, evaluate the empirical evidence surrounding these predictions.