Public Policy and Public Administration Examination
Spring 2007

Student ID# __________________________

Directions

You have 48 hours to prepare your answers to these questions. Budget your time carefully, including time to think and organize, as well as rest, 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 that literature expands our collective knowledge. Be sure to answer the question or questions that are asked of you. Answers should range from five to eight double-spaced pages per question; please do not write more than ten (10) pages on any individual questions.

Cite sources throughout your examination using a standard format and provide a bibliography that covers all materials used in preparing your answers.

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

Please put your Student ID number at the top of each page of your examination. DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME ANYWHERE ON THE EXAMINATION.

MA Minors: Please answer one question from each of the three sections, for a total of three (3) answers.

MA Majors: Please answer a total of four (4) questions, at least one question must be answered from each of the three sections.

Ph.D. Minors: Please answer a total of four (4) questions, at least one question must be answered from each of the three sections.

Ph.D. Majors: Please answer a total of five (5) questions, at least one question must be answered from each of the three sections.
I. Theoretical Approaches

1. Some might argue that after 40 years, policy theories boil down to a single insight: focusing events create dramatic policy change in otherwise relatively stable policy systems. Discuss this claim with respect to modern developments in public policy theory.

2. Max Weber famously compared ideas in politics to “switchmen” directing “interest-based actions down one track or another” (quoted in Campbell 2002). Discuss this idea with respect to recent theories of the policy process.

3. Evaluate the usefulness of work rooted in historical institutionalism and path dependency: what kinds of questions does this work answer? What kinds of explanatory factors does it emphasize? What are its particular blind spots or weaknesses as an approach to studying policy formation? Do not assume that there is a single overarching “path dependency” approach or model; clearly discuss and explain particular works/arguments, and take note of differences among them.

II. Policy Research

4. Public Policy research is sometimes criticized for being “atheoretical.” Discuss whether you think this is a valid criticism or not, on both empirical (is it true?) and normative (is it a valid criticism?) grounds.

5. There are a variety of ways to do comparative work on social policy: case studies, policy historical work, quantitative studies, elaboration of typologies of welfare states. Discuss the utility of these differing approaches to doing comparative work for different kinds of insight or knowledge.

6. Frank Fischer (2003: 230-231) has promoted a new approach to policy research that he terms “policy epistemics.” Where traditional policy analysis studies technical solutions, he says, “policy epistemics would focus on “how people construct their policy arguments” including “the interplay between specific statements or contentions and background consenses upon which they are constructed…” Discuss this new approach to policy research, including how it is related to other post-positivist techniques like discourse analysis, and your assessment of its strengths and weaknesses.

III. Substantive Policy

7. How do the public and experts differ in their understanding of environmental risk and risk management? What are the implications of these differences for policymaking?

8. Some have argued that the “commodification of nature” is the key cause of modern environmental problems. Others argue that it is the solution. Discuss this controversy,
including consideration of leading proponents of either position as well as your own views on the matter.

9. Assess the value of approaches taken by scholars to "gendering the welfare state." How do feminist scholars engage mainstream analyses of the welfare state, or address substantive policy issues? What new arguments do they make for a feminist theorization or understanding of policy making or welfare states? What do you find valuable, and what do you find problematic, about the approaches you discuss?

10. Virtually every affluent democracy has a form of national health system designed to provide universal health care services for all its citizens. The American system, despite providing universal care for certain categories such as senior citizens and the impoverished, still is tied to an employment-based system. Despite radical reversals of position over the years by some key provider groups such as the American Medical Association (which now favors some form of universal care), the system has scarcely moved even as total expenditures continue to rise while larger proportions of the population remain uncovered. Explain why you think the current largely privatized system of health care continues to be prevalent in the United States. Factors you might consider include: (1) political ideology about public/private responsibilities including beliefs about the relative efficiencies of private and public sectors; (2) political institutions and veto points making change difficult; (3) Pareto sub-optimal outcomes (some people, perhaps many, will be made worse off by a mandatory universal system than under the status quo); and (4) path dependency and interest embeddedness in the existing system.