Public Policy and Public Administration M.A. Exam – Fall 2014

Directions

Submit a cover page with your responses that lists the following: ID number, type of exam completed (e.g., M.A. major, M.A. minor), and examination area. Indicate also the semester the examination is taken. **DO NOT WRITE YOUR NAME ANYWHERE ON THE EXAMINATION.**

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, analytic essays that not only demonstrate your mastery of the literature but which 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 (5-8) double-spaced pages per question. Please do not write more than ten (10) pages on any individual question. Number your pages consecutively for the entire examination.

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

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

- **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.
I. Theoretical Approaches

A. An endemic problem in democracies is how a society handles common pool resource (CPR) problems. One perspective is Garrett Hardin’s. He suggests that without government interference and top-down coercion, the commons will be depleted. Do you agree or not with Hardin’s approach? Explain your conclusion. Please use at least two empirical examples and three sources in responding.

B. Some argue that policy theories are better at explaining policy stability than policy change. Discuss this claim with respect to at least three prominent theories of the policy process.

C. Discuss the role of ideas versus material interests in the policy process and in major policy theories.

D. What impact do governing institutions have on policy process and implementation? Use three examples in your answer, and pay particular attention to one or more stages of the policy process. Explain how institutions relate to the stage or stages of the policy process in the examples you select. Are there alternative (non-institutional) explanations for the result?

E. Various scholars attend to the interaction between politics and markets to explain the way welfare states undertake social provision, including providing for education (aka “human capital acquisition”), providing welfare benefits, work-family policies, and more. Take two or more such analyses and explain with some care how political and market-based approaches help us understand how social policies develop. Which approaches do you find most resonant to your own thinking, and why?

F. Problem definition and agenda setting are central concepts in public policy theory and applied policy analysis. Drawing from the core literature, apply these concepts to a specific policy arena of your choice. Explain how these concepts shape the policy process, including their effects on the policy discourse, the likelihood of attention by policymakers and, ultimately, the policy outcomes. To what extent can the dynamics of problem definition and agenda setting explain policy processes and outcomes relative to factors such as institutional design and rules?
G. Discuss the relative leverage that rational choice, punctuated equilibrium, and multiple streams as theoretical frameworks have in helping us understand the policy process. Compare and contrast them taking note as you do as to how and in what ways they may complement one another and how and in what ways they are mutually exclusive as explanations of policymaking.

II. Policy Research

A. What are some important and distinctive ethical challenges for scholars doing policy research, and how should policy researchers respond to those challenges?

B. Discuss the value of comparative approaches to policy research. Articulate the value that comparative research brings to the study of policy. Note also, however, some of the central problems that are associated with comparative research.

C. Policy researchers often focus on how political factors affect policy choice and, alternatively, they sometimes attend to how policies shape politics. How do these two causal relationships work, and what challenges do they present for doing policy research? Support your argument with pertinent examples from the policy literature.

D. The role of policy analysis is to let evidence speak louder than convictions. Discuss both the strengths and limits of policy analysis and the durability and intensity of convictions. To what extent is policy analysis a science? And does it inject uncertainty as much as reducing it?

E. What is the appropriate role of the public in the creation and implementation of public policy? Be sure to consider both the advantages and disadvantages of a greater degree of public involvement in such policy making. Discuss the appropriate role of the public in the creation and implementation of public policy in a specific policy domain, for example, environmental or social policy among others.
III. Substantive Policies

A. What accounts for the mix of state and market in the provision of work-family reconciliation policies in three contrasting OECD countries? Describe what the policies are and explain why the states you discuss have adopted the approaches they have.

B. Why has major health care reform been so difficult to achieve in the United States? Consider the following perspectives and discuss how they may have affected the fate of so many proposals. (1) political institutions; (2) the role of race; (3) the problem of Pareto optimization or even Pareto improvement, i.e., gains to some cannot be had without losses to others; and (4) path dependence.

C. Scientific information plays an important role in informing environmental policy. Some believe scientists have been too silent in expressing their opinions about policy alternatives, particularly with respect to climate change, while others argue that scientists have overstepped their role and have engaged in too much policy debate. Discuss the pros and cons of an “activist” scientific community engaged in the climate change policy debates, particularly as they relate to Pielke’s “The Honest Broker” and Nordhaus and Schellenberger’s “The Death of Environmentalism”.

D. How can public policy improve or impede political representation for historically marginalized and excluded groups such as women or African Americans in the United States? Provide an example of how policy either improves or impedes representation (or perhaps both) of these groups and explain why it does so.

E. With respect to recent literature on the welfare state, many scholars explicitly or implicitly react to the “convergence thesis” which stipulates that in the face of globalization and domestic fiscal crises since the late 1970s pressures for welfare state reform will eliminate the diversity of welfare states and result instead in a convergence around neo-liberal approaches. First, assess the evidence supporting this thesis. Second, what theoretical perspectives have scholars developed as alternatives to convergence? Third, what are the arguments that diverse approaches to politics, states, firms, labor markets, protest, and other phenomena have sustained diverse approaches to providing welfare needs?