Public Policy and Public Administration M.A. Exam – Spring 2015

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 from each of the three sections.
Part 1, Policy Theory

1. Some have seen social capital as a panacea for various "wicked problems" such as disaster recovery and facility siting while others have argued that the concept is too slippery to be useful. Using concrete examples from at least two policy fields please let us know your position on the issue.

2. Some scholars argue that the social group politics of domination and oppression cannot be ameliorated by public policy, since the “Master’s Tools will never dismantle the master’s house.” What does this view tell us about the understanding of the state? Do you agree or disagree? Support your argument with examples drawn from the policy issue of your choice.

3. Discuss the relative leverage that rational choice, punctuated equilibrium, and multiple streams have as theoretical frameworks in helping us to 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.

4. Various scholars attend to the interaction between politics and markets to explain the way welfare states address 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 policies develop.

5. 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. How much do other factors, such as institutional design and process rules, affect policy outcomes?

Part 2, Policy Research

1. Policy makers use a variety of policy mechanisms to try to influence behavior. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of different “types” of policies for addressing public problems.

2. Discuss the value of comparative approaches to policy. What value does comparative research bring to the study of policy? What are some of the problems associated with comparative policy research? Ground your answer in reference to comparative studies with which you are familiar.

3. The role of policy analysis is to let evidence speak louder than convictions. Discuss both the strength and limits of policy analysis and the durability and intensity of convictions. To what extent is policy analysis a science? Does it inject uncertainty as much as it reduces it?

4. The norms and processes in science and democracy are, in some ways, similar and compatible. At the same time, some see too much science as a threat to democracy and too much democracy in science as problematic as well. Since policy analysis adapts the social sciences to public policy problems and integrates social knowledge from many disciplines, the positive and negative
tensions between democracy and science are also present in policy analysis. Identify these tensions and assess their implications for conducting useful policy analysis.

5. Policy researchers often focus on how political factors affect policy choice, and sometimes attend to how policies shape politics. Explain these two these two different explanations, drawing on appropriate analyses. Where are they especially useful or pertinent? When might it be useful for researchers to move back and forth between such approaches? What promises or challenges does each approach present for doing policy research? Support your argument with pertinent examples from the policy literature.

6. From the “orange revolution” to #blacklivesmatter to the Arab Spring, political scientists increasingly must reckon with sources of political change originating in civil society. Are civil society influences given sufficient attention in the study of policymaking? Why or why not? Support your argument with examples drawn from the policy issue of your choice.

Part 3, Substantive Policy Questions

1. What are the pros and cons of using market-based approached to providing work-family support policies (e.g., childcare, preschool, paid parental leaves)? What countries favor such approaches, and why? Why don’t liberal market economies like the US adopt the “best practices” of northern Europe, epitomized by countries like Sweden and France?

2. Is the initial allocation of rights important in a market-based environmental policy? Why or why not?

3. Is cost-benefit analysis a good way to deal with problems of environmental risk? Be sure to consider prominent critiques and defenses of CBA in your answer.

4. Violence against women is a major obstacle for efforts to improve public health, democracy, child well-being and development. It is also widely affirmed to be a violation of women’s human rights. Yet government responsiveness to violence varies dramatically across the developed and developing world. Which national responses to violence are the most innovative and comprehensive? Why have they been adopted in some places but not others?

5. Many women’s rights advocates argue that measures to improve women’s descriptive representation, such as quotas, are critical for advancing sex equality. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

6. Why has major comprehensive 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) the nature of political institutions; (2) the role of race; (3) the problem of Pareto optimization or improvement, i.e., can gains to some be had without losses to others? and (4) path dependence.