Public Policy Preliminary Examination
September 17, 2001

Instructions: Answer one question from each part of the examination for a total of three answers. Please identify the question you are answering at the beginning of each essay. You are limited to 3000 words for answering each question.

Strong answers make coherent and forceful arguments, are grounded in scholarly literature, and make use of relevant examples. They show an understanding of current research and issues. Weak answers often fail to make an argument or do so without reference to relevant literature. Exams are graded as a whole; repeating arguments in response to different questions weakens the overall exam. Good luck!

Part I: General Public Policy Questions

1. If you were designing a graduate public policy seminar, outline the main “take home points” for your students. List and explain at least five sources that you would include in your class reading list to help students understand the importance of studying public policy. What work would you purposefully not include? Why?

2. Provide a rationale for an “incrementalism” view of American policy making. What is the evidence for and against this view?

3. Explain Elinor Ostrom’s institutional rational choice approach to policy. Compare and contrast the contributions of empirical applications of the institutional rational choice approach and the contributions of an alternative approach.

Part II: Stages of the Policy Process

1. A considerable body of research on "morality" politics and policy has now emerged. What, if any, theoretical reasons are there for approaching morality issues as a distinctive category for analysis? (If you see none that have merit, you must nevertheless discuss the claims offered by analysts in this genre.) Has the morality policy literature yielded empirical findings that justify treatment of morality issues as a distinctive category?

2. Students of American politics frequently suggest there is a strong linkage between public opinion and public policy. Outline the different approaches that have been used to study the relationship between public opinion and public policy and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of each approach. Based upon these various strands of literature, what do we know about the opinion-policy connection? Is there a convergence of findings in any respect? Outline why some authors find opinion-policy linkages while others do not.

3. It has been over 15 years since John Kingdon’s book, Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies, was published. Evaluate this book’s contribution to the field of public policy, and how the problem definition/agenda setting literature evolved since then. What should be the agenda for future research in this field if a goal is to develop general theory? Cite specific gaps in our knowledge that future research should attempt to fill or other ways that specific kinds of future research would be of value.
Part III: Social Welfare Policy

1. State policymaking is often discussed in the context of legislative or gubernatorial action. Yet policymaking clearly permeates state bureaucracies, including front-line workers responsible for direct contact with citizens. Discuss the policymaking role of front-line staff in the context of the PRWORA of 1997, with a focus on the following two issues: 1) How and to what extent do front-line staffers affect the substance of policy decisions? 2) How and to what extent do front-line staffers affect the implementation of state policy? What are the implications of this for ongoing theoretical debates about policy implementation?

2. Welfare reform is based on the assumption that most, if not all, welfare recipients can find and keep gainful employment. What does the research literature suggest about the strengths and weaknesses of this assumption? To what extent has this research literature informed the policy debate? Why or why not?