Public Policy Preliminary Examination
February 7, 2000

Instructions: Answer one question from each part of the examination for a total of four answers. Please identify the question you are answering at the beginning of each essay.

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!

General Public Policy Questions

1. The stages heuristic of James Anderson (and others) has structured a great deal of research in public policy. Many scholars are critical of this approach. For example, Baumgartner and Jones suggest that a punctuated-equilibrium theory is a more realistic assessment of policy change and stability. Evaluate the current status of the stages heuristic. You must either provide support for the critique of the stages heuristic or defend it against its critics.

2. Explain Elinor Ostrom's institutional rational choice approach to policy. Compare and contrast the contributions of the institutional rational choice approach and the contributions of a leading, alternative approach.

3. What is the role of public opinion in the policy-making process? Which way do the causal arrows run? Is there some distinct entity of public opinion, or is it a construct that has little independent value as an operating concept?

Stages of the Policy Process
Agenda Setting and Adoption

4. In American politics of the 1980-2000 period, who set the policy agenda? Be sure to address the roles of political and governmental institutions, elections, public opinion, the media, and the legal system in your response.

5. Much of the state policy adoption research is focused on policy innovation and diffusion models. Explain this approach and describe its major strengths and weaknesses for understanding policy change at the state level. Also, are policy innovation and diffusion models applicable to national policymaking or to comparative (between countries) policymaking? Why or why not?

Implementation and Evaluation

4. What changes and continuities (over the past 30 years) do you see in the role that formal policy analysis/evaluation plays in contemporary, domestic policymaking in the U.S.? What changes have there been in the kinds of institutions that are key contributors to formal policy analysis/evaluation? What connection do you see between change in policy analysis institutions and change in the role of formal policy analysis/evaluation in policy decisionmaking? What other developments might account for both the institutional changes in policy analysis/evaluation and change in the role of formal analysis/evaluation in policy decisionmaking?
5. Using the prevailing, general theories of policy implementation, compare and contrast the contemporary literature on rulemaking processes and the literature on political control of the bureaucracy to assess whether they adequately account for our understanding of policy implementation. If they do, in what ways? If not, how should they be refined to do so?

Social Welfare Policy

6. Welfare reform is arguably the most active area of social policy change. To what extent has social science, and specifically public policy analysis, contributed to these changes?

7. Although we generally think of policy formulation and adoption as something that happens in the major political institutions, bureaucracies are also active in the formation and adoption of public policies. Write an essay in which you discuss how social welfare bureaucracies have and/or can influence the formation and adoption of policies by other political institutions. In addition, explain how recent literature describes how different social welfare bureaucracies, through policy implementation, influence the behavior and efficacy of participants. Do the findings have implications for policymaking generally or bureaucratic policymaking specifically?