Public Policy Preliminary Examination

September 16, 2002

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. Although Theodore Lowi is often credited with the insight that public policy shapes the character of politics rather than the other way around, a number of more contemporary scholars have made very similar arguments. Assess the strength of this line of argument. What empirical evidence supports it? What strengths and weaknesses does the argument have on theoretical grounds?

2. There seems to be considerable overlap between the work of public policy scholars and scholars of American politics. A nearby political science department is considering combining these two fields within the department’s graduate program. Make an argument as to why or why not the department should have distinctive sub-fields for American politics and public policy.

3. Compare and contrast incrementalism and punctuated equilibria as organizing metaphors for the study of budgeting and agenda setting.

Part II: Stages of the Policy Process

4. Some have argued that at every stage of the policy process policy entrepreneurs are required to move the policy forward. Based on research on the topic, analyze similarities and differences in the various roles policy entrepreneurs play in the different stages of policy development. Offer an assessment of what the line of work on policy entrepreneurs contributes to our understanding of the policy process.

5. A key focus of public policy research is the assessment of the impacts of public policy. In other words, we often wish to understand if policies have had their intended effect. Describe recent literature in this area with an eye towards the methodological problems inherent in policy analysis. Finally, briefly design a study that would explore a potential unintended consequence of a given policy.

6. Some policy scholars have pronounced the stages heuristic as dead, arguing that it is not a coherent theory of the policy-making process. Describe the theoretical and empirical contributions, if any, of this approach to understanding policy-making. Is the stages heuristic a useful theory of the policy making process? If so, why and if not, why not?

Part III: Morality Policy

7. Although it is not always clear what we mean when we say morality policy, a considerable body of research on morality policy now exists. What theoretical reasons are there, if any, for approaching
morality issues as a distinctive category for analysis? Has the morality policy literature yielded empirical findings that justify treatment of morality issues as a distinctive category? Explain.

8. For many scholars abortion epitomizes morality policy and politics. Explain why this is. Further, explain how and why some newer issues have, are, or might be merged into the abortion debate, including human cloning, human stem cell research, or other genetic or medical procedure issues. If you believe these issues have not or will not be merged with the abortion debate, explain why.