University of Kansas  
Division of Government  
Department of Political Science  
Public Policy Preliminary Examination  
September 18, 2000  

Instructions: Answer one question from each section of the examination for a total of three 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! 

Part 1: General Public Policy Questions 

1. Drawing upon (a) theories of the policymaking process and (b) empirical evidence concerning the making of policy decisions, discuss the role of ideas (including values and belief systems) in policymaking. 

2. Is it possible and useful to envision a general or unitary theory of policy change (at least for the United States)? Or are policy dynamics so different from one substantive topic to another (e.g., healthcare, environmental regulation) that no single theory can account for them adequately? What role might the work on policy typologies play in resolving the dilemma? 

3. Clearly, public policy scholars study many of the same phenomena that are examined by students of chief executives, legislatures, bureaucracies, and even elections in democratic polities. The dividing line between the two groups of scholarly work is often hazy, although we can usually recognize it. What are the strengths of a broad focus on the policy process instead of a narrower one on the latter institutions or processes? Thus in what ways is research on relatively general policy matters able to create unusual knowledge? Alternatively, what is the value to public policy scholars of more focused research on individual institutions or processes? How is the work of specialists on the latter topics of importance to policy scholars? 

Part 2: Stages of the Policy Process 

1. Institutional venue is allegedly an important factor in agenda setting? But how, and why, and is it really? Drawing upon both theoretical material and empirical studies: (a) Discuss theoretical contributions that offer answers to how and why institutional venue would be expected to be important; (b) Discuss whether empirical studies support or refute these expectations; and (c) Describe where empirical research needs to go next in order to provide either better tests for the relevant theoretical perspectives or to provide evidence for institutional venue hypotheses that have not yet been tested. 

2. 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. 

3. Recently a number of policy researchers have pronounced that policy implementation is a dead subfield. Is this true? Take a perspective on this issue and support your argument with examples from
the literature and with examples of potential research questions that might support or refute the original contention.

Part 3: National Security Policy

1. Compare and contrast international structure explanations of U.S. national security policy with domestic political explanations. Which set of explanations do you find most compelling? Why?

4. 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 national security 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 national security bureaucracies shape policy during implementation. Do the findings have implications for policymaking generally or bureaucratic policymaking specifically?

5. Using a theory or theories of public policy, explain the changes (or lack thereof) that the U.S. defense community made during the 1990s in response to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Which changes are best explained by the theories; which are least satisfactorily explained? Your answer should focus primarily on using specific policies as illustrations of how the theories can be applied, not on the policies themselves.