Public Policy Prelim: Fall 2013

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.

The exam is due back by 5 pm the next day, but an extra 24 hours is allowed for the completed bibliography. Good luck!

Part I: General Public Policy Questions
1. Explain the neo-institutional approach to public policy and its several strains. Be sure to discuss both the politics of structural choice model and Elinor Ostrom's institutional rational choice approach. Compare and contrast the contributions of empirical applications of the neo-institutional approaches and the contributions of alternative approaches.

2. Scholars of so-called “policy feedback” have argued that, depending upon various design features, public policies can either mobilize or demobilize subsequent political participation by the individuals experiencing those policies. What are the strengths and weaknesses of the policy feedback literature?

3. Compare and contrast the advocacy coalition framework to the punctuated equilibrium framework. Evaluate each framework’s treatment of mobilization, rationality, information, institutions, and policy learning. Based on this evaluation and applications of these frameworks drawn from the literature, identify the theory you think is stronger.

4. In what ways does Baumgartner and Jones’ punctuated equilibrium theory contribute to our understanding of the policymaking process? How useful is the theory empirically in explaining how government processes information and prioritizes problems?

Part II: Stages of the Policy Process
5. The use of social construction theory has recently gained traction in the field of political science. However, critics contend that it is not a theory. Using the research on social construction theory, identify what substantive findings it has added to the study of the policy process and whether or not it has addressed any of the “big” questions in public policy. Based on this scholarship, do you agree with social construction critics?

6. Diffusion of innovation is a widely used theoretical approach used to examine how policies emerge across political units. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of research in this area. What do we know, and what questions remain unanswered?
7. Identify the strongest set of empirical literature contributing to our knowledge of one of the stages of the policy making process. Defend your selection. Why it is stronger than the empirical literature testing phenomena in other stages of decision-making.

Part III: Morality and Education Policy

8. Evaluate the role of federalism in the morality politics /educational policy literature. What differences and similarities exist between the research focusing on the national political arena compared to the state/local political arena? Does it make sense to study morality/education policy at the national level?

9. Evaluate the morality politics/educational policy literature. Has it contributed to any large theoretical questions? Do you think morality /education policy should be incorporated into other theoretical frameworks or should it remain a distinct field of study?

10. Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the theoretical and empirical literature in your substantive area. What are the critical questions that remain unanswered and how are these questions related to prior research in public policy, including education/morality policy?