Public Policy Prelim: Fall 2012

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

Part I: General Public Policy Questions

1. Many years ago, Theodore Lowi famously argued that the focus on how politics creates policy should be reversed, such that attention is paid to how policy (re)creates politics. Since then, several lines of related theorizing and some notable empirical work has elaborated on this important insight. Summarize the relevant theoretical contributions that have followed up on Lowi’s insights about how the character of policy shapes or reinforces the character of subsequent politics. Then discuss what the related empirical work reveals about the utility and explanatory potential of this theoretical framework.

2. A neo-institutional interpretation of social construction theory suggests that policies (and bureaucracies) shape their target groups (or clients). Where might we observe this phenomenon? Is there evidence that his is correct?

3. Are nongovernmental interests (NGOs, interest groups, lobbyists) influential in the policy process? Review two competing views in the literature--one arguing an important role of pressure groups in policymaking and another arguing a limited role--and discuss what conclusions can be drawn from previous research as well as directions for future research in order to better understand nongovernmental interests' influence in policymaking.

4. Under what circumstances is public policy responsive to majority public preferences in the U.S.? Under what circumstances is public policy at odds with public preferences?

Part II: Stages of the Policy Process

5. Policy diffusion now has a considerable number of case studies that test models of diffusion, especially across the American states. From the empirical models testing the theory, what can we safely conclude? What is it that we don’t yet know?

6. Why do some policy problems get attention and others don't? Explain, referring to major bodies of research that have been written on this topic. Be sure to include the shortcomings of existing research, such as areas that remain relatively unexplored.
7. How might public policy theory and empirical work based on it provide insights relevant to the ongoing scholarly conversation about the role of formal policy analysis in the policy process?

8. In a political system dominated by fragmentation and multilevel governance, are bureaucracies optimal organizations for service delivery? Discuss the theoretical and empirical literature highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of relying on bureaucracies for program implementation.

Part III. Policy Specialty

9. Explain how punctuated equilibrium theory might be used to develop propositions that could explain your choice of one of the following: (a) differences across U.S. states [and/or localities] in climate change policy (b) differences across time in U.S. immigration policy (c) change in U.S. counter-terrorism policy over time. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of punctuated equilibrium theory that become apparent when one attempts to use it for the policy application that you choose.

10. Choose one of the following policy areas: Counterterrorism and Security, Immigration, Environmental Policymaking. Does one theory work better than another in explaining what has happened in the policy area that you chose? In answering why or why not, consider what may be distinctive about your chosen policy area relative to other policy areas.

11. Choose one of the following policy areas: Counterterrorism and Security, Immigration, Environmental Policymaking. What evidence is there for a central role played by policy entrepreneurs in the policy area that you chose?