Comparative Politics Preliminary Examination, Fall 2012

Introduction:

Preliminary examinations are about demonstrating breadth; dissertations are about demonstrating specialized knowledge. Good answers to preliminary examination questions may illustrate critical points with examples from one or many countries so long as case material (regardless of how many countries it involves) buttresses theoretical arguments. Accordingly, an essay should convey that a student is: (1) well-versed in the key literature; and (2) able to knowledgeably apply a case or cases of their own choosing to that literature.

You should answer one of the questions in Section I. In Section II, you should answer one question from two of the subsections (A, B, or C). Answers for each question should be no more than 2,500 words. You may turn in your reference pages by 1:00 pm the day after your examination. Your reference pages are not counted in the word limit.

Section I: Comparative Theory and Methods (All students must answer one question from Section I)

1. Many scholars suggest a mixed methods approach to research, but this requires understanding both quantitative and qualitative methodology. How can a researcher design a research project that can be considered a mixed methods approach without simply taking a method “off the shelf”? Provide a research design that would include both methodologies. In your design provide a research question and variable concepts. Then discuss the sample selection and data collection methods (i.e. operationalization of the variables) as well as variable reliability and validity.

2. Compare and contrast at least two theories of democratization. How do these theories compare? Explain the variation or similarity in several empirical studies that apply these two theories, including definitions and measures of key variables. How have these studies advanced one or both theories of democratization? Are there any factors or concepts that these two theories have not adequately addressed?

Section II: Answer one question from among two of the subsections below: (A) Comparative Institutions and Government; (B) Comparative Political Behavior and Social Politics; or (C) Comparative Research Agenda

A. Comparative Institutions and Government (choose one question)

1. Many states that are engaged in a democratic transition face the task of establishing a political system that protects the interests of minority groups while creating a structure that is stable but not rigid. What does the theoretical literature tell us about the form(s) of government that are best able to accomplish these goals? Does the literature accurately predict examples of democracies that appear to have successfully met this challenge?

2. Which form of government is most democratic in terms of social choice results: parliamentary, presidential, or semi-presidential. Why?
B. Comparative Political Behavior and Social Politics (choose one question)

1. Event data form the basis of protest and repression studies. To what extent can survey data be added usefully to these investigations? What are the advantages and disadvantages?

2. Since Almond and Verba published their seminal *The Civic Culture* (1963), culturalists maintain that the long-term stability of democracies is increased if citizens hold values that match a constitution (see also Easton). However, Barry (1970), Rogowski (1974) and even Verba (1965) remind us that Germany's new democracy remained stable despite the prevalence of anti-democratic norms; and subsequent institutionalist studies (e.g., Di Palma, Przeworski, Gunther) question the importance of values in maintaining stable democracy. In your essay, evaluate this debate between culturalists (who suggest the importance of values) and institutionalists (who downplay individuals' values in favor of performance-related factors). What are the major issues in examining the foundations of liberal democracies? What are the major methodological differences among the various approaches and how do these differences influence the results of studies? (Where appropriate, provide specific examples illustrating your theoretical discussion).

C. Comparative Research Agenda

Pick a subfield of comparative politics and write a coherently organized and analytically rich discussion of how your personal research agenda relates to that subfield. This research essay may not relate to the same topic that you addressed in Section II(A) or II(B) above.