

Public Policy Prelim Questions Fall Semester 2010

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

1. Is public policy responsive to public opinion in the U.S.? Considering the most important theoretical perspectives and empirical findings in the literature, outline what we know so far about this provocative question. Considering the strengths and weaknesses of the literature that you have outlined, what should be the priority research agenda to advance knowledge on this matter?
2. In Graham Allison's 1969 article, "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis," he argues that "Analysts think about problems of foreign and military policy in terms of largely implicit conceptual models that have significant consequences for the content of their thought." Essentially, when studying political phenomenon, the conceptual lens employed by a researcher can lead to different explanations for the same phenomenon. Pick two public policy theories and one policy event. Use each theory to explain the same event. Highlight the aspects of each theory that would lead to different explanations, as well as those that would lead to similarities. Explain which theory is more compelling.
3. Some scholars charge that many theories of the policy process are not falsifiable and are instead frameworks. Choose one framework (other than the stages heuristics) for which scholars make this claim. What scholarship supports or refutes this claim?

Part II: Stages of Policy Process:

1. It has been over 15 years since John Kingdon's book, Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies, was published. Evaluate this book's contribution to the field of public policy.
2. What are the essential claims of those conducting and espousing research on "policy feedback effects"? Evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of empirical research done under this rubric.

3. Write an essay in which you discuss how 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 bureaucracies shape policy during implementation. Do the findings have implications for policymaking generally or bureaucratic policymaking specifically?

Part III: Substantive Fields

Education

1. Evaluate the utility of principal agent theory in explaining the development and implementation of “No Child Left Behind.”
2. Provide supporting evidence as well as a thorough critique of one theory you believe is the most promising for understanding education policy change in the United States. Identify the aspects of education policy where your theory performs the best and where it performs poorly.
3. Explain the assumptions of market-based school reforms. What does social science research tell us about these assumptions?

Morality Politics

1. Evaluate the utility of principal agent theory in explaining the development and implementation of abstinence-only education policy.
2. What are the theoretical grounds for identifying morality policy as a distinctive type of public policy? What definition of morality policy is suggested? To what extent do empirical results support such a definition of morality policy? What theoretical and empirical grounds are there for challenging such a definition of morality policy?
3. What is the advantage of studying “morality” issues as a unique policy area? Pick one morality issues. Compare and contrast morality policy theory compared to a general policy theory.