

Public Policy Preliminary Exam, Fall 2011

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 Public Policy Questions

1. Explain the utility of social construction for explaining the policy process? Outline criticisms and respond to them.
2. Compare and contrast Elinor Ostrom's version of institutional analysis – the Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) approach, with at least one other major theoretical stream of institutional analysis.
3. Compare the role of groups and public opinion in the policy-making process. Do we have substantive evidence on whether groups or public opinion plays an important role in the policy process?

Part II: Stages of the Policy Process

1. In what ways was Baumgartner and Jones' punctuated equilibrium theory a major contribution to the understanding of agenda setting? In the years since it was first introduced to policy scholars, has the theory been further refined or developed? Successfully challenged, even in part? Influential in guiding empirical research beyond those authored by Baumgartner and Jones?
2. Comparative public policy scholarship has benefited tremendously from the growing cross-national data on policy agendas. What are the most important things that we know about agenda setting in comparative politics as a result of all of this research and what aspects are not yet well understood?
3. Policy implementation and evaluation scholarship are not simply the domain of Political Science. What, in your view, are some of the more important contributions from political science scholarship to studying policy implementation and program evaluation?

Part III: Comparative Morality Policy

1. Existing research that employs the ACF to understand morality policy appears to be entirely based on case studies. Can the ACF move beyond case studies for understanding morality policy?
2. The characteristics of morality policy in the U.S. seem to fit the real world pattern of politics fairly well. However, morality policy seems to be less prevalent in other parts of the world. Is this theory transportable to other countries?
3. Trace the development of morality policy from the initial recognition of this phenomenon as a supposedly unique type of policy to the present generation of research. Considering both the empirical findings that have been reported and the conceptual issues that have been tackled, take a stand on whether you view this sub-area of research as one exemplifying theoretical progress or one exemplifying the problems that can occur when concepts are too mushy and empirical researchers "talk past each other."