M.A. Comprehensive Examination
American Politics/Applied Politics
Spring, 2007

Directions: This exam consists of questions drawn from the field of American Politics, and questions drawn specifically from our Applied Politics concentration offered through the Public Affairs and Advocacy Institute, the Campaign Management Institute, and the Women in Politics Institute.

You will write three essays.

All students must answer **one** question from **Section I**. Students in the **Applied Politics** concentration must answer **one** question from **Section III**.

Students not in the Applied Politics concentration may answer two questions from Section II.

Identify clearly the questions you choose to answer.

You should be able to demonstrate your familiarity with the relevant literature that pertains to the questions you choose to answer. Do not rely on the same literature for different questions.

Please use 12-point type, double-space, and standard margins when preparing your essays.

Section I (General)

1. If political science is ever to be unified under a single method, rational choice theory is likely to be the leader. Choose an area within political science, review the current literature there, and discuss how research there might be improved through the introduction of rational choice theory. Conclude by presenting a research design to implement your ideas (the design should include all stages, including data collection).

2. Research on public policy agenda setting and the policy process has often failed to meet the standards of contemporary political science, including the careful definition and measurement of concepts, the rigorous specification and testing of propositions, and the use of empirical theory to develop hypotheses and explain findings. This presents a striking irony: a very important process in American politics is the one that political scientists understand the least. By reviewing the scholarly literature, comment on whether and how political science has gone beyond description of the policy process to attempt an explanation of behavior and reach generalizations instead of ad hoc analyses.

Section II

1. As the 2008 Presidential Election draws near, Americans can constantly consult the media for information about the candidates. The media, in turn, are often criticized for their role in American politics. Are the media capable of affecting citizens' attitudes? If so, in what way? Discuss the research on "media effects," being sure to distinguish

between different effects (e.g., agenda setting, framing, and priming, and attitude change), the psychological mechanisms that underlie each, the way the effects can be measured or assessed, and their overall power in affecting political behavior.

2. Though the framers worried about the potential consequences of "public" presidencies, the office itself was conceived before the advent of modern media and campaigning. First, why was there a fear of a "public" presidency? Second, how do presidents use public strategies? What tools are available to them and who are they trying to reach? Perhaps more importantly, and given the framer's obvious disregard for public presidencies, why do we see modern presidents "go public?"

3. What role do parties play in mobilizing, informing and representing the electorate today? In what ways has their role changed since the heydey of parties in the late 19th century? To what extent have interest groups taken on some of these activities and what, do scholars argue, are the actual or theoretical consequences of their doing so?

4. One of the most important relationships in the formulation and implementation of public policy is that between the two branches: Congress and the President/executive. Choose two of the below topics, and discuss the interaction between the two branches on the development (and, if appropriate, the implementation) of policy. What is the role of Congress? Of the President, and of the executive branch (the bureaucracy, headed by political appointees such as department secretaries)? Discuss factors which affect the relationship between the two branches, and also how these factors may affect policy outcomes. What tools does each branch have to affect policy. What factors affect cooperation or conflict? Use specific examples to illustrate your points and/or conclusions. And, is there any theory relevant to this relationship?
Choose two of the following:
   a. agendas
   b. institutional perspectives
   c. leadership
   d. the budgetary process
   e. the organization and structure of the branch

Section III (Applied Politics)

1. Describe the critical elements of a public advocacy campaign by using a specific case (e.g. lobbying for Medicare Part B (prescription drug bill). What was the strategy, theme, message, and tactics of the proponents and opponents of this large advocacy campaign? What worked well, what failed, and why? What is the potential impact of recent lobbying and ethics reforms pending in the House and Senate?

2. After several political science studies in the late 1990s that demonstrated that when women ran for office they were as likely to win as their male counterparts, political scientists have recently begun to explore why women are not choosing to enter into electoral contests. Please outline four main challenges that women face when assuming

positions of political leadership and the supporting scholarly research. Conclude with a discussion of a variable important in our examination of women's continued under-representation in positions of political leadership that you believe has been understudied by political science and present a research design for how you would examine it.

3. Since 1998, when Jesse Ventura, a third party candidate, was elected Governor of Minnesota, every election has been questioned as "the year the Internet really broke through." Discuss the role of the Internet in campaigns, both the role it has played in recent past elections and the role it is likely to play in the 2008 elections. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the Internet to candidates and their campaigns? Are particularly types of candidates advantaged or disadvantaged by the role the Internet plays in campaigns?