

**M.A. Comprehensive Examination**  
American Politics/Applied Politics  
Spring, 2006

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 IV**.

You may not answer more than one question from any section. 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. How does the nature of policy, programs, and issues (independent variables) influence policy making (dependent variable)? Include a discussion of the academic work on this topic in your answer. Also cover the following questions in your answer: How do issues get on the public agenda? What is the influence of actors in and out of Congress in the adoption of policies? Why do agencies get so much “political space” and what are the politics of the regulatory process and administration of a program? How are they evaluated? Are the effective evaluations true scientific cost-benefit analyses?
2. The physics discipline achieved scientific acclaim by creating ever-better bombs (that is, by making itself useful to society). Does political science research make itself equally useful to society? Cite specific research on either side of the question, and say how you would improve on it.

**Section II**

1. Discuss the relationship between the president/executive branch and Congress. How can this relationship be characterized? What factors affect the relationship? What can presidents do to affect the relationship? What can Congress do? Use examples to illustrate your points, as appropriate.

2. Scholars often speak of presidential power, but a clear definition of the concept often eludes us. What is presidential power? What are the formal and informal foundations of this power? How much power do presidents wield and what evidence do we have for the importance of this power in our political system?

### **Section III**

1. Media ownership has changed drastically in the past few decades. Explain the four models of private ownership and explain how the evolution of media ownership has the potential to hurt the democratic process. In particular, address three potential effects on voters.
2. Voter turnout in the United States is significantly lower than in other nations. Why does only half of the eligible electorate vote in American elections? Describe the decision that citizens make about whether to vote. What factors affect this decision? How do electoral reforms designed to increase turnout address these factors and how effective are these reforms? Finally, consider whether low turnout is problematic for our democratic system.

### **Section IV (Applied Politics)**

1. As the 2006 and 2008 elections approach, there is much discussion among journalists and political activists about the need for the Democratic Party and its candidates to develop a message. Why do candidates need a message? What are the characteristics of a successful message? Give an example of a candidate that you think had a successful message, an example of a candidate whose message you would describe as unsuccessful, and explain why you consider one successful and the other not successful.
2. What are the major problems in lobbying, congressional ethics, and congressional procedures facing Congress? Evaluate several solutions (reforms) linked to these problems? What is the likelihood of adoption of the reforms? Why will they be adopted or not? What types of lobbying are completely left out of the current discussion? Discuss the political science literature that is helpful in evaluating lobbying problems and solutions.
3. The policy process produces considerable entry points for organized interests seeking to advance their respective agendas. Drawing on your knowledge of one policy area, or interest group or a particular social movement, discuss how these entities have succeeded in securing items on their respective agendas, or why they have failed.