

**American University Department of Government**  
**M.A. COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION**  
American Politics  
Spring, 2015

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 and the Campaign Management Institute.

**DIRECTIONS:** You will write three essays. Be strategic in your selection of questions, choosing those that allow you to show the greatest breadth of your knowledge. Notice that in almost every case, you are expected to demonstrate your knowledge by drawing on a range of appropriate scholarship.

**All students must answer one question from Section I.**

Students in the Applied Politics concentration must answer **one** question from **Section II** and **one** question from **Section III**.

Students **not** in the Applied Politics concentration may answer **two** questions from **Section II** or **one** question from **Section II** and **one** question from **Section III**.

Clearly identify the questions you choose to answer. Please use 12-point type, double-spaced, and standard margins when preparing your essays.

**SECTION I**

1. Natural experiments are widely recognized as an effective design for establishing causal relationships. What are the key features of natural experiments? What are their advantages in establishing causal relationships?
  
2. Many argue that partisan polarization has led to dysfunction within Congress and between Congress and the president. What are the sources of polarization? How does polarization influence the development and implementation of public policy? Did the outcome of the 2014 election change that dynamic? Provide evidence from the lectures and scholarly literature and examples from recent policy debates.

**SECTION II**

1. What are the costs and benefits of presidential efforts to politicize the executive branch? Explain. Does the phenomenon of politicization challenge or confirm the conventional wisdom about presidential power as the power to persuade? Explain and illustrate with examples from the Obama presidency.
  
2. Referring to the second chapter from the main course text, *Campaigns and Elections: American Style* (4th Ed.) and Kristen Soltis Anderson's class presentation, pollster David

Winston outlines a plan for “Creating a Winning Strategy.” List and describe all five major components of a “winning” campaign strategy.

3. Describe the major differences in the legislative process between the House and the Senate. In doing so, please highlight the following distinctions:

The rights of the minority party, the committee process, the floor process, the incentives (or lack thereof) for compromise and collaboration.

Would you reform the legislative process? If so, how? If not, why not?

### **SECTION III**

1. You have been just been hired as the campaign manager for a competitive Senate election in 2016. Explain what you will do in your first month in this position. In your essay, you should take into account the presidential election, and how it might affect your Senate race.

2. Critically evaluate how our pluralist representative democracy is working. What is wrong and what is right about interest groups and lobbying in the United States? What are your criteria for evaluation and how do they apply to your evaluation? Use specific examples from readings, lectures and your research to make your evaluation.