

American University Department of Government

M.A. COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

American Politics/Applied Politics
Fall 2008

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.

DIRECTIONS: You will write three essays. 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.

- **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 from Section II and one from Section III.

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

SECTION I

1. One standard for claiming that political science is a "science" rather than a branch of the humanities is the extent to which research is cumulative in a field. What areas of research in American politics have demonstrated the most evidence for cumulation and advancement, and in what areas has such cumulation been wanting? What are the pros and cons of qualitative versus quantitative research? In what ways are they complementary and in what ways are they contradictory? Is one better than the other? Why or why not?
2. Opponents of quantitative work in political science have often complained that social and political variables that are important in political science simply cannot be measured with quantitative tools. How severe a problem do you believe measurement error is in quantitative political science? Can qualitative research help to remedy this? If so, how? Give examples in which quantitative and qualitative methods can be complementary and/or contradictory, paying careful attention to when one approach may prove more useful to understand the question.
3. Many would argue that political science has not always paid enough attention to practical politics and that policy-makers and politicians would benefit from paying more attention to political scientists. Using the literature, discuss areas in which political science could improve by paying attention to politics and political actors could benefit from findings in political science.

SECTION II

1. What did the framers envision for the role of Members of Congress and Senators as “representatives” of the people? How were they supposed to act in these roles? Describe how the concept of representation today compares/comports with those aspirations and what factors have affected this vision over time.
2. To what extent can we predict a president's performance in office based on their a) behavior or activity as a candidate and b) personalities? Use the appropriate literature to argue your point
3. To what extent have interest groups taken on traditional activities of political parties and what are the actual and theoretical consequences of their doing so? Where are the areas of debate and contradiction? What is missing from this literature, and how might political scientists improve upon our understanding of parties and interest groups?
4. The authors of *The American Voter* made a strong case that party identification is a critical filter that Americans use to form attitudes about political candidates. However, in a primary election (particularly a closed primary), party labels do not distinguish opposing candidates. Voters must find other ways to form a preference for their desired candidate. Exit polls taken of voters participating in Arizona's 2008 presidential primaries, which was one of the Super Tuesday primaries held on Feb. 5, 2008, for instance, showed that amongst the 49% of Democratic voters who believed the economy to be the most important issue of the election, 54% preferred Sen. Hillary Clinton to 38% for Sen. Barack Obama, while amongst the 26% who thought Iraq the most important issue, 49% preferred Obama to 44% for Clinton. Similarly, amongst the 32% of Republican voters in Arizona who thought the economy the most important issue, 47% favored Sen. McCain to 37% for Gov. Romney. Yet of the 31% who thought illegal immigration the most important issue, 44% preferred Romney to 33% for McCain. How do voters in a closed primary like this form their preferences for presidential candidates? What might explain their differing issue preferences when differing party labels are not a factor? Use your knowledge of political science literature to support your answer.

SECTION III—Applied Politics

1. Discuss the factors that influence turnout in an election. What advice would you give to the Obama and McCain campaigns as they try to rally their supporters in the next week? Would your advice be different for candidates in competitive House and Senate elections?
2. Describe the major strategies and tactics used in a major advocacy campaign. Select an policy facing the next President of the United States (such as cap and trade, immigration, a health care reform, No Child Left Behind) to apply you know about the critical elements of a public advocacy Campaign. Evaluate the most effective tactics used by those for or against one of these policies? What tactics are ethical and what are not and why? What strategies do you

recommend for managing the many elements of an advocacy campaign? Refer to the relevant scholarly literature and wisdom from practitioners in answering this question.

3. In the very recent past, women have reached the highest levels of power in the American political hierarchy. Yet, Speaker Nancy Pelosi presides over a House that is only 16% female, and 26% of women in state legislatures are women. According to the women and politics literature, does this matter? What impact, if any, does the presence of women have on public policy?