



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY  
WASHINGTON, DC

DEPARTMENT OF GOVERNMENT

**M.A. COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION**

American Politics/Applied Politics

Spring 2010

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 political science 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. Determining causality is the chief challenge of social science. How can an experimental design address this? Discuss at least one specific example of an experimental research design from the literature as well as the benefits and shortcomings of the experimental approach more generally.
2. There are a number of theories and findings from political science that could help address practical problems in politics and policy-making, but many practitioners are not aware of them or do not use the theories and findings regularly. Using your knowledge of the political science literature, discuss the research, hypotheses, and findings that you think most need to be applied to day-to-day politics, and how the application of such principles could aid our democracy.

**SECTION II**

3. "Separated institutions, sharing powers" offers a shorthand definition of how the separation of powers is meant to operate. How and why does Congress share the responsibilities of the executive branch to 'take care that the laws are faithfully executed' and when is Congress more or less effective at doing so?

4. Constitutional scholars have offered several different theories to explain how to interpret the Constitution. One major theme that seems to separate different approaches to constitutional interpretation is whether political and policy preferences can be separated from constitutional meaning. In other words, do we interpret the Constitution according to what we want it to mean, or do we interpret the Constitution in light of specific historical and textual meaning? Write an essay in which you take any two Supreme Court decisions and discuss whether the outcome of those cases was based on political or policy preferences or a historically precise meaning of the Constitution.
5. Using appropriate academic citations and examples, describe the historical evolution of the President's relationship with his party, with an emphasis on how the relationship manifests itself now. Is the President the leader of his party? A representative of his party? A wholly separate entity? How would you describe his current role and what evidence is there to support your hypothesis?
6. Some political analysts predict the emergence of a robust "New Democratic Majority" based on voting trends among young voters in 2008. Others claim that the electorate responds more to the candidates, issues, and context of particular elections and that prior voting behavior (e.g. voting for Obama or other Democrats) is not a particularly reliable predictor given the many unusual aspects of 2008. Discuss the scholarly research and different perspectives on this question and the implications for party and electoral strategies and activities in future elections.

### **SECTION III—Applied Politics**

7. Scholars offer a variety of explanations for women's numeric under-representation. Based on the literature, as well as the current numbers of women in politics, do structural factors or patterns of traditional gender socialization do a better job accounting for the dearth of female candidates and elected officials?
8. Critically evaluate how our pluralist representative democracy is working considering the recent battle over health care reform. What are your criteria for evaluation? Use the current health care reform or the cap and trade (environment-energy legislation) battles on the Hill. Use specific examples from your research or assignments to make your evaluation. Refer to the relevant literature (e.g. Kingdon, Thurber, Lowi, Kraft and Furlong, and others) as appropriate.
9. New technologies available to political campaigns provide more and diffuse opportunities for campaigns, but the existence of such technologies also provides challenges. Identify these new technologies and then discuss their advantages and disadvantages to political campaigns.