

American University Department of Government
M.A. COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

American Politics
Spring, 2018

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. When doing so, be sure to cite the scholarship you are drawing upon explicitly.

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

Applied Politics students must:

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

Students **not** in the Applied Politics may either:

- Answer **two** questions from **Section II, OR**
- Answer **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. Pivotal politics theory would indicate that in times of divided party government, policy making should be more difficult. The reverse, then, should also be true during unified party government of the Trump administration. However, partisan polarization has led to one of the most dysfunctional and least productive congresses in recent history. In explaining why this is the case under Trump's unified party government, focus on the major sources, characteristics, and consequences of political polarization among voters, the media, political parties, interest groups, and Congress.
2. What are the fundamental challenges to causal inferences in general? What are the key assumptions that we need for draw causal inferences in social sciences?

SECTION II

1. In recent years, members of both political parties have decried the lack of "regular order" in the consideration of legislation by Congress. Explain what you consider to be "regular order" and discuss how the House and Senate leadership increasingly have employed procedural tactics and budget rules to limit opportunities for the minority party and individual members to debate and amend legislation.

2. Choose two of the following four approaches to the study of the presidency: psychology, legal/constitutional, political development, rational choice. Assess the strengths and weaknesses of each approach for understanding the source and nature of presidential power. Illustrate with examples from either the Obama or the Trump presidency.
3. Explain the arguments on both sides of *F.E.C v. Citizens United*. What was the constitutional basis for the Supreme Court ruling in this case? What laws regulating fundraising and spending changed, and which ones have remained in place? What are the pros and cons on constitutional grounds of prohibiting the government from establishing significant campaign finance restrictions?
4. Briefly describe what Madison means by “mischiefs of faction” in *Federalist 10*. What are the two cures offered by Madison for such mischief? How do efforts today to combat partisan polarization and restrict interest group activity in campaigns and in the legislative process relate to Madison’s two cures for these mischiefs of faction?

SECTION III

1. There are varying perspectives on what the communications frame will be for the 2018 elections. If you were to interview for a Communications Director position for a competitive Senate race in 2018, what would be three messages you would recommend for 1) a Republican candidate, and 2) a Democratic candidate. Be specific in your reasoning for choosing these messages.
2. Describe the major elements of an effective issue advocacy campaign. Critically evaluate the effectiveness of each tactic. Also evaluate the impact of advocacy and lobbying on the quality of our pluralist representative democracy. Is lobbying helping or hurting our American democracy? Specify your evaluation criteria and apply them to what you have learned from the speakers, readings and research.