

American University Department of Government
M.A. COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

American Politics
Spring, 2016

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. With historic low public evaluations of how Congress is working and trust on government generally, what are the causes and consequences of the way Congress is working and this distrust? Some of the criticisms are related to extreme gridlock and partisanship, but other criticisms relate to norms and decision-making processes in Congress and divided party government. Referring to the academic research and the wisdom of practitioners, evaluate what seems wrong with Congress and how to fix it. Describe your evaluation criteria and apply it to the functions of Congress (lawmaking, oversight, deliberation, representation, etc.)? What reforms do you recommend to improve how Congress works? Integrate the latest academic literature to support your arguments

2. Both Type-I and Type-II errors are important for statistical inference in quantitative research. What is the difference between Type-I and Type-II errors? How are they relevant for quantitative research in political science?

SECTION II

1. The founders aspired to a standard of representation that was based upon concerns they had about various pressures and considerations. They built checks and balances into the structure of the Congress to reflect those concerns. How are the structural differences between the Senate and the House of Representatives that the founders created affecting the legislative process in today's

politically polarized environment? Did they create a system that functions in the way they anticipated?

2. To study the presidency, should political scientists engage in comparative analysis – across time, across nations, or both? Explain why or why not. Illustrate with examples from the Obama presidency.

3. Group characteristics and loyalties often play a significant role in voting behavior. Explain why certain groups became part of the New Deal coalition. How and why was this coalition fundamentally altered by the late 20th century?

SECTION III

1. One of the most important critical decisions a Senate candidate must make in a presidential election year is whether or not to campaign with his or her party's presidential nominee. Pick a 2016 Senate race (it can be the race for which you wrote a campaign plan in CMI, but it does not have to be). For the Republican Senate candidate, what would be your recommendation as to should the candidate campaign with Trump, Cruz and Kasich. For the Democratic candidate, what would be your recommendation as to should the candidate campaign with Clinton and Sanders. Discuss the factors that go into each of your five recommendations.

2. President Obama has attacked the nature of lobbying and lobbyists in Washington, DC during his administration. In 2008 he promised to change the way Washington works. What are President Obama's major criticisms of lobbying and lobbyists in Washington? What have been his major reforms to change the way Washington works? Has he succeeded in changing lobbying and lobbyists in Washington? Why or why not? What reforms do you recommend (if any) for improving advocacy in Washington? If you think no reforms are necessary, please explain why. Include references to the relevant academic literature on interest groups and lobbying, lectures, and other sources on the topic in your answer.