

American University Department of Government
M.A. COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION
American Politics/Applied Politics
Spring 2011

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. 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 from Section II and one from Section III.

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

SECTION I

1. What are the most significant impediments to a fuller realization of democracy in the United States? What might we do to move the U.S. toward having a more genuinely democratic political process? How do your recommendations connect with some of the current debates and new trends in the research on American politics?
2. Critically evaluate how our pluralist representative democracy is working. What are your criteria for evaluation? Use the current health care reform or the climate change policy battles on the Hill. Refer to the relevant academic literature in developing your arguments and draw on specific examples from your own research (assignments) while here at American University.

SECTION II

1. There is widespread agreement among scholars that while various institutional forces can make it difficult to make formal changes in congressional rules, members of Congress often adapt their practices in order to use rules for strategic benefit. The most casual observer can also see that reliance on rules varies profoundly, both between chambers and with the passage of time. Describe and explain the differences you observe in this institution's use of rules. Rely on scholarship to bolster your argument.
2. One of the enduring questions in the discipline of political science is: Whose interests are represented in our democracy? Answer the question by drawing on the political behavior literature in two of the following areas: voter turnout, participation, vote choice, elections and public opinion. Who or what factors account for the patterns you report: attributes about citizens, elected officials, groups, legal factors, anything else? Finally, to what extent does your answer lead to an optimistic or pessimistic conclusion regarding democracy in the U.S. in 2011?
3. Richard Neustadt's *Presidential Power* was a landmark work in the study of the Presidency. In the ensuing five decades scholars have often responded to it critically. Bearing in mind these debates over different aspects of the presidency, to what extent would you say that Neustadt has been comprehensively refuted, was correct for his time, but is now out of date, or still captures the essence of the presidential role? Rely on scholarship in developing your essay.
4. Critics argue that most social policies affecting women have reinforced women's traditional roles and subordinate status. Draw on scholarship to examine two of the significant changes in social policy during the 20th century and assess whether the content and impact of those policies support or refute that criticism.

SECTION III—Applied Politics

1. Pundits, pollsters, and politicians predicted that 2010 would be another “Year of the Woman,” yet we experienced a net loss the number of women elected to Congress (the first time such has happened in 30 years). Offer an assessment of why 2010 was **not** the “Year of the Woman.” In your answer, consider candidate recruitment, voting behavior, and institutional factors. Be sure to rely on academic literature to substantiate your claims.
2. In 2006 and 2008 the political environment favored Democratic candidates. In 2010, the political environment favored Republicans. What can a candidate running for office in a political environment unfavorable to his/her party do to counteract the unfavorable political

environment? When possible, use specific examples and authoritative sources to support your arguments.

3. You have been awarded a grant to study the politics and impact of interest groups and lobbying on public policy making in America. Your task is to analyze the goals, tactics and strategies of the adversaries involved in *one* recent domestic policy battle (e.g. health care, financial reform, climate change policy, etc.). Bolster the credibility of your analysis with relevant scholarship, lectures, presentations, and any other authoritative sources on the topics of lobbying and interest groups that come to mind.