American University Department of Government

M.A. COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

American/Applied Politics

Spring 2023

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 and depth of your knowledge. Note 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. Include a reference list following each question you answer.

All students must answer one question from Section I.

Applied Politics students must in addition:

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

American Politics students (i.e., those *not* in Applied Politics) in addition 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 font and standard margins and double-space your essays. While essay length will vary depending on the question and author, successful responses are typically 3-4 pages.

NOTE: Exam takers must abide by American University's Academic Integrity Code. Exam takers must work independently and must not use others' work without attribution. All exams will be checked for plagiarism.

SECTION I

1. Compare and contrast cost-benefit and cost-effectiveness as part of the economic approach of policy analysis.

2. There have been several models developed to explain the policy making process. John Kingdon's "policy stream" model articulates three streams – problems, policies and politics – and argues that change happens when the streams connect and a policy window opens. Describe the Policy Stream model and explain each element. Then, using one public policy issue, illustrate each stream and how the streams came together to result in policy change.

3. What is the fundamental problem of causal inference? How does this affect what someone may learn from an analysis of data (either quantitative or qualitative)? How might researchers address this fundamental problem in their design of research to make stronger causal claims? Describe at least two such approaches drawing from both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Finally, discuss the internal validity, external validity, and limitations of these approaches.

SECTION II

1. Describe how Congress has contributed to the growth in the Executive Branch's role in policymaking through what Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson once described as 'inertia, indifference or quiescence.' Using specific examples, explain how Congress can reclaim some of its institutional power through both its explicit power to legislate and its implicit power to oversee and investigate the Executive Branch.

2. Explain the "minimal effects theory" regarding campaign effects: what is its definition, and why do scholars argue so? Discuss using scholarly evidence as well as recent events to argue whether this conventional understanding holds regarding persuasion and mobilization.

3. Richard Neustadt in his book *Presidential Power* asserts that the power of the president is the power to persuade. What does he mean by this? In what way is this idea a departure from the

understanding of the nature of presidential power that came before? What changes in recent American presidential politics have impacted the president's 'power to persuade'?

SECTION III

1. You have been hired as the Communications Director for a competitive Senate race in 2024. It is 18 months from the election, and one of the questions facing you and the senior management team is how to position your candidate and campaign in this presidential election year. What would be your advice, and would it differ it you are working for a Democratic or Republican Senate candidate?

2. How has social media influenced advocacy campaigns in terms of structure, process, skill set and cost? Contrast it to campaigns that are not primarily relying on a social media approach.