

American University Department of Government
M.A. COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION

American Politics
Spring, 2019

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. Explain why this is the case. The reverse, then, should also be true during two years of unified party government with the Trump administration. Some argue that the 115th Congress was 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. Natural experiments are widely recognized as an effective design for establishing causal relationships. What are the key features of natural experiments? What are their advantages in establishing causal relationships? What are the potential pitfalls when using natural experiments?

SECTION II

1. In what ways did American women in the 19th century engage in politics and on what issues? What issues and demands did they emphasize? What were the most effective organizations

and which women leaders made a difference? Give examples of their actions. How and why did the post Civil War Amendments to the Constitution lead to divisions among women on the questions of women's political rights?

2. Explain the social-psychological (Michigan) model of voting behavior. What are the pros and cons of this model? What hypothesis about voting behavior in a presidential election or elections might this model reliably confirm or not? How would you organize a research project to test your hypothesis using key variables from one or more ANES surveys?
3. Consider the following approaches to the study of the presidency: psychology, legal/constitutional, political development, rational choice, and case study. Which one do you consider the most useful for understanding the contemporary presidency? Explain. Then identify the one that proves least helpful and explain why. In your conclusion, briefly illustrate with examples from the Trump presidency.
4. The founders aspired to a standard of representation that was based upon concerns they had about various pressures and considerations. How did the checks and balances they built into the internal structure of the Congress reflect those concerns? Does the legislative process in today's politically polarized environment function in the way they anticipated?

SECTION III

1. You have been approached by a State Senate candidate who is thinking about running for the House of Representatives in 2020. The Senator is in a relatively safe seat, and would likely be re-elected. What considerations should he/she take into account in deciding whether or not to run for Congress?

You can pick the state. Give your recommendations for both a Democratic candidate and a Republican candidate.

2. Describe the major dimensions of issue advocacy/lobbying campaigns in U.S. politics using examples from lectures, research and the academic literature. Both Presidents Obama and Trump have attacked "the way Washington works" ("drain the swamp") and promised to change the nature of lobbying campaigns. What are each president's major criticisms of lobbying and what were their primary reforms after taking office? Have they succeeded in changing the way lobbying campaigns work in Washington? Why or why not? Refer to the relevant academic literature, lectures, and primary sources in your answer.