Department of Political Science

Public Policy Minor Field Comprehensive Examination

May 2019

Directions: Answer two questions, one from each group listed below. *When answering the questions strive to provide theoretical and empirical insights from readings assigned in Politics and Public Policy, as well as other courses you completed as part of your policy sub-field.*

Group 1: Answer one of the two questions listed below.

1. Political scientists who study public policy are interested in "policy feedback" (the ways in which policy affects politics). Policy feedback is thought to lead to "path dependency" which creates possibilities and limitations for reform. Discuss policy feedback in politics and policymaking. Explain how and why the development of policies may in turn create a series of political opportunities and constraints. Using a substantive example you are familiar with, explain how policy decisions made in the past have shaped and influenced policymaking today. Given your analysis of policy feedback in this case, explain how this literature could guide policymakers to craft policies that are likely to be sustained.

2. Political science has contributed a number of theoretical perspectives/frameworks to the study of public policy. In your judgment, what are the three most important such contributions (please identify and describe the contributions you judge to be important)? In answering this question, be sure to define the contours of the discipline of political science (i.e., what makes it similar to and different from other, nearby disciplines) and the standards by which political science contributions to the study of public policy are best judged. Bolster your answer with examples drawn from a policy area (or multiple areas) in which you have a particular interest.

Group 2: Answer one of the three questions listed below.

3. Critique this statement: The Trump administration has enjoyed great success using regulation as an instrument of policymaking. In assessing this possibility, be sure to use theoretical and empirical insights of course readings to consider the broad procedural and institutional context within which regulation occurs. In addition, ground your response in the facts of what the Trump administration has and has not accomplished thus far in the area of regulation. (Note that "success using regulation as an instrument of policymaking" does not necessarily only mean the creation of new regulations. It can also mean the repeal of existing regulations, and other uses of the regulatory process. So be sure to define your standards of evaluation carefully.)

4. Although Paul Pierson (in a *World Politics* article published in 1996) described the distinctive politics of social policy retrenchment, he later suggested that the welfare state was being restructured, not retrenched, as it struggled to adjust to "permanent austerity." Jacob Hacker (writing in the *American Political Science Review* in 2004) criticized Pierson's analysis of welfare state retrenchment for being too narrowly focused; Hacker contended that Pierson emphasized formal revision of policy and overlooked other important ways in which policy can be altered.

> Select and identify a particular nation that is of interest to you. Describe the important social policy changes that have taken place in that nation since 1980. Changes may include alterations to existing conditions and social problems, alterations to existing welfare state programs, shifts to new policy tools, and changes in processes (such as privatization, moving functions from the public to the private sector, and devolution, transferring policymaking authority to levels of government below the national level). Do you think the policy developments you have described amount to retrenchment, restructuring, or something else?

5. Policy in the U.S. is developed and implemented within a system of federal relations. An enduring question about American public policy is why state-level policy varies within this federal system. Identify and explain what past research has found to be important variables to explain inter-state policy variation. Identify what you think are the most compelling explanations and explain why you find these claims to be convincing. Then, select a policy you are familiar with and explain how this policy area illustrates the policy determinants you have identified as compelling explanations of inter-state policy variation.