Public Policy minor field comp

Political Science PhD Program

George Washington University

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Directions: You must answer a total of two questions, one from section 1 and 1 from section 2.

*Section 1*: Answer this question.

1. Theories of agenda setting explain how and why particular issues capture the sustained attention of Washington's institutions and elites. However, recently several observers have suggested that the policymaking process in Washington has broken down due to partisan gridlock. Consider the implications of partisan gridlock for theories of agenda-setting.

* To what extent is partisan gridlock evident in the contemporary policymaking process?
* How does gridlock influence the prospects for setting and advancing a policy agenda that reflects the priorities of elites?
* How does gridlock affect the prospects for interest groups to effectively participate in policymaking?
* How, if at all, do you think theories of agenda setting should be changed to reflect the effects of partisan gridlock?

*Section 2*: Answer any one of the three questions in section 2.

2. Many theories about how foreign policy is made—including theories of decision-making and theories about the origins of public policy—are grounded in theoretical concepts from American foreign and domestic policy, and are usually tested on primarily US data. What are the costs of this US-centric approach? What are the benefits? Going forward, how should scholarship on foreign policy balance these trade-offs? Discuss with relevance both to theory and empirical evidence.

3. One reform consistently advocated by physical and social scientists is the incorporation of scientific knowledge as a guide to policymaking. Write an essay assessing the potential contributions of science to policymaking.

* What is science (or more specifically, what are the key characteristics of scientific research that distinguish it from other forms of policy-relevant information)?
* What are the strengths and limitations of science as an information source to guide policymaking?
* What sorts of institutions are required to provide timely, relevant research to policymakers? Do we have such institutions presently?
* Does the value of science vary with the nature of the policy decision being made, or can science be a reliable help to policymakers regardless of the issue under consideration?
* Do you agree that policymaking is improved with more scientific information?
* Is there tension between science and politics? If so, and if there is tension with politics, how can these tensions be resolved?

4. American government is famously fragmented. However, policy typologies suggest that foreign policy is a distinctive domain in which power is unusually concentrated. And yet, cooperation among the disparate entities that make up the U.S. foreign policy community has long been a challenge. Is foreign policy a distinctive policy domain? If so, how so? If not, what do the policy typologies get wrong? Who are the key participants in the foreign policymaking process? Does it vary depending upon the issue being considered? Why is cooperation so difficult to achieve? Does this difficulty compromise US foreign policy effectiveness? What, if anything, can be done to improve the prospects for cooperation within foreign policy?