Policy Process Final Oral Exam Questions: Spring 2019

1. A key stage in the policy process is gaining the attention of policy makers. Out of the hundreds or thousands of issues that they could focus on, only a relative few actually make it to the agenda. Explain the different agenda levels and how an issue can move through those levels or can be prevented from moving. In your own research, was there an illustration or example of agenda setting?

2. A question that has been a constant throughout this term has been, “Who’s in Charge?” The answer has taken two forms – an elite few are in charge or nobody’s in charge. Explain these two concepts and be prepared to discuss which model most closely parallels what you found in your research.

3. Of the various change models we discussed this semester, iron triangles, advocacy coalitions, punctuated equilibrium, and streams and windows, what seemed most applicable to explaining your own research topic?

4. The policy process can be conceived of as having two levels – a macro political level and a sub system level. Chief executives (Presidents, mayors, etc.) and legislative bodies (Congress, state legislators, and city councils) are macro political institutions, while agencies that carry out the day to day work of government constitute the subsystem. In your research did you encounter issue movement between the two systems? What effect did the consignment of your policy to one level or another have on the support and/or progress of your initiative?

5. Deborah Stone articulated five goals for the policy/politics process: equity, efficiency, welfare, liberty, and security. Of these goals, which seemed the most prominent in your research? Did you encounter tradeoffs among the goals that supported the market model, or were the tradeoffs negligible or nonexistent, supporting a polis model?

6. Stone also describes five ways to strategically represent issues so they gain the attention of policy makers and the support needed to move the issue forward. These are symbols, numbers, causes, interests, and decisions. What seemed most prominent among these in the framing of your policy issue? How were they used? To what end?

7. Stone suggests five ways to solve problems in the polis: incentives, rules, facts, rights, and powers. Did your research uncover a dominant problem solving motif? Did the problem solving motif mirror the market or the polis definition of the strategy.

8. Considering the various policy typologies (distributive, redistributive, regulatory; adaptive, control; areal, segmental; public goods, private goods; symbolic, tangible), what category would you place your policy into or, following Steinberger, was the policy type contested, i.e. it moved among categories depending upon who was doing the classifying?

9. Did your research find any examples of collaborative networks as described by Booher and Innes? Did the network meet the DIAD criteria for exerting maximum network power?

10. Throughout the term, two major frames for considering the policy process have been compared and contrasted. These are the market, RAM model and the polis model. Based upon your readings and your own research, what is your sense about the dominance of one model over the other? Are there conditions under which one model seems to take precedence over the other? Or do the models themselves become rhetorical devices to advance a particular agenda? Are there any concrete examples of your conclusion from your own research?

11. Making a decision involves ethical considerations. Discuss the different frameworks for making ethical decisions. What does it mean to say ethics is relational?

12. There is an increasingly blurry line between public and private decision making and public and private goods. Describe the framework discussed in class for analyzing public and private functions. In your research did you uncover examples of public/private tensions, cooperation, challenges?

13. During the semester we discussed the different levels of policy, policy-in-intention, policy-in- implementation, and policy-in-experience. Smith and Larimer discuss the difficulties of implementation studies. Comment on their discussion noting the different challenges each generation of policy implementation studies attempted to manage.

14. The narrative policy framework recognizes the importance of stories for how we organize the world and the impact such stories have on policy. However, this framework has two iterations, the dominant post structural approach and the more traditional, scientific – sturcturalist approach. Discuss the difference between the two (unit of analysis, methodology, etc.) and the possibility of a “marriage” of the two approaches. Did you find any relevance of the npf in your own research?

15. There are two approaches to answering the question “What should we do?”: reflective deliberation and discourse among those with various perspectives and causal theories seeking to maximize utility. The Pareto and Kaldo-Hicks concepts of efficiency clearly fit into the latter category. Define these concepts and discuss from the point of view of your own research their relative merits and weaknesses compared to the more qualitative reflective approach.

16. Smith and Larimer’s discussion of prospect theory brings us full circle. They argue for the inclusion of findings from brain science and psychology into the study of public policy. Explain the evolutionary/neurological dynamics behind the terms “preference falsification,” “emotional rationality,” “wary cooperators,” and “risk loss aversion” and possible connections to public policy.

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