**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?**

There are three basic agenda levels. The systemic agenda consists of any policy action that could possibly be considered by participants in the policy process. The institutional agenda consists of possible policy actions being considered by a governmental body. The decision agenda consists of proposed policy actions that a governmental body is about to act upon.

An issue can move through the agenda levels in various ways depending on who controls the agenda in a given policy domain. At one extreme the agenda may be control by an elitist triumvirate (i.e., the iron triangle model). At the other extreme of the spectrum the agenda may be controlled by a policy subsystem. One model of agenda setting may better fit a given situation than the other, which will determine which strategies will tend to work better for moving an issue through the different agenda levels.

If the elitist model is more relevant and elites are preventing an issue from reaching the decision agenda, then one might be successful in advancing the issue through the agenda levels by appealing to the public, appealing to a higher level of decision making (such as the state or federal courts), or changing the venue by appealing to the federal government rather than the state government or vice versa.

If the policy subsystem model is more appropriate to a given situation, then one might advance an issue through the agenda levels by employing approaches suggested by the multiple streams and policy windows theory and the advocacy coalition framework (ACF). These would include framing the issue in such a way as to link it with a problem that is on the decision agenda, building coalitions with prominent and hidden policy actors, and modifying the policy argument to align with the politics of the situation. External shocks or punctuations that shift the point of stability in a policy domain present unique opportunities for rapid policy change.

In the technology transfer policy domain, the passage of the Small Business Innovation Act of 1982 (Pub.L. 97-219) seems to exemplify the effectiveness of approaches based on the multiple streams and policy windows theories for getting an issue to the decision agenda. The issue of economic stagnation and maintaining the nation’s global competitiveness were already on the institutional and decision agendas. Proponents of the policy effectively link it to this problem and built a coalition of prominent policy actors to support the policy.

1. **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.**

There are two basic models of describing who is in charge of policy change. One model, what Deborah Stone calls the rationality project, is based on rational evaluation of alternatives guided by self-interest, which optimizes social welfare through the invisible hand of the market. Change is transactional in nature. At the other end of the spectrum is the Deborah Stone’s polis model, which is based on collective goals and collective efforts of a community and is often more emotional than rational. Change is driven by mutual agreement on ideas. The rationality model operates under the premise that there is an optimal solution to any given policy problem. The polis model operates under the premise that there are competing but equally plausible conceptions of any given policy problem (i.e., a policy paradox) that the community must resolve to effect policy change.

In studying the policy process that resulted in the Small Business Innovation Act of 1982 (Pub.L. 97-219), I found evidence that was indicative of Stone’s polis model. The primary policy paradox was around the concept of equity. Proponents of the policy defined equity in terms of the ability of small business to participate in federally-funded research and development (R&D) while opponents of the policy defined equity in terms of every applicant being evaluated by the same rules and having an equal opportunity to compete for R&D funding.

1. **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?**

The multiple streams and policy windows model seemed most applicable in explaining policy change as related to the passage of the Small Business Innovation Act of 1982 (Pub.L. 97-219). The issue of economic stagnation and maintaining the nation’s global competitiveness were already on the institutional and decision agendas. Proponents of the policy effectively link it to this problem and built a coalition of prominent policy actors to support the policy and advance the policy while the policy window was open and the political environment was favorable.

1. **The policy process can be conceived of as having two levels – a macro political level and a subsystem 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?**

With regard to the Small Business Innovation Act of 1982 (Pub.L. 97-219), the issue seemed to move from the policy subsystem to the macro political level. The policy was conceived and developed in the policy subsystem by a program officer within the National Science Foundation (NSF). In a relatively short time it moved to the Congress where it received overwhelming support.

1. **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?**

Of the five policy process goals that Deborah Stone articulated, three seemed to be most prominent in the debate over the Small Business Innovation Act of 1982 (Pub.L. 97-219). These were equity, welfare, and security. Tradeoffs among the goals seemed to be nonexistent, which suggests a polis model of policy of decision making. The issue of equity was framed in terms of giving small businesses a fair chance at participating in federally-funded research and development (R&D). This issue of welfare was framed in the context of the economic challenges of the early 1980s and the general perception that small businesses generate the majority of new jobs in the economy. The issue of security was framed as the U.S. losing is technological advantage over other countries and the belief that small businesses are more innovative than big businesses. The policy was framed as a way of advancing all three policy goals.

1. **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?**

In the framing of the Small Business Innovation Act of 1982 (Pub.L. 97-219), symbols and interests seemed most prominent. The primary symbol that proponents used was the idea of small businesses being more innovative and efficient than big businesses. Those who would benefit from increased participation in federally-funded research and development by small businesses coalesced around the policy. These included small businesses and small business advocacy groups. In the end, the policy received overwhelming support.

1. **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?**

Of the five ways to solve problems in the polis that Stone articulates, rules seemed to be the dominant problem solving motif in the debate about the Small Business Innovation Act of 1982 (Pub.L. 97-219). Interestingly, the rules established by the policy seemed to mirror the Polis definition. The very existence of the policy was based on the idea that there was not a single optimum approach to distributing research and development funding that would be appropriate for both small business and large business. The design of the policy, including its minimum set-aside, was apparently crafted with the intention of providing some flexibility for those required to implement the policy. The policy has been in place for nearly 40 years during which the rules that the policy lays out have been adjusted to address different situations, such as allowing small businesses that are majority owned by a syndicate of venture capital firms to participate.

1. **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?**

The Small Business Innovation Act of 1982 (Pub.L. 97-219) seemed to have elements of distributive, redistributive, and regulatory policy. It was distributive in the sense that it was meant to encourage small business participation in federally-funded research and development (R&D) activities. It was redistributive because it provided a benefit to small businesses through the Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program. The minimum set-aside was the regulatory portion of the policy which essentially prohibited agencies from distributing less than a specified minimum percentage of their extramural R&D budgets to small businesses.

1. **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?**

According to Booher and Innes, collaborative networks create network power, which enables traditionally powerful actors to accomplish together what they cannot accomplish alone. Collaborative networks and network power are particularly important in environments that are defined by rapid change, social and political fragmentation, global interdependence, and conflicting values. Network power is created when the relationship among actors is characterized by diversity, interdependency, and authentic dialogue (DIAD). When these factors exist, the collaborative network can often produce policy innovations that were not apparent or even accessible to any one actor.

My study of the Small Business Innovation Act of 1982 did not surface any examples of collaborative networks as described by Booher and Innes. This is likely because the environmental conditions conducive to collaborative networks were not present at the time. The pace of change was not rapid. There was no significant social or political fragmentation. Globalization was not as widespread. Moreover, the values under consideration in the policy discussion were not severely conflicting in nature.

1. **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?**

Based on my own reading of the course material and my study of the Small Business Innovation Act of 1982 (Pub.L. 97-219), I believe that the Polis model seems to dominate the Market model. There are many instances of policy decisions and citizen decision making that seem to violate the predictions of the Market model. The Polis model seems better able to explain or describe more of what is observed in the policy process. However, the tools commonly associated with the Market model can be employed under the Polis model to strengthen and provide credibility to a policy position. Although the Polis model seems to dominate, the Market model seems to be applicable to situations in which there are limited and finite alternatives that more easily identified and the personal stakes of the decision aren’t so high. The Polis model seems to be more predominant for so called wicked problems in which there is no good outcome, only bad and worse. I liken it to the difference between Einstein’s relativity theory and Newtonian physics. Although Einstein’s theory of relativity is more accurate and explains more of the physical universe, Newtonian physics is good enough in many applications we encounter in everyday life.

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

There are three basic frameworks for making ethical decisions. Utilitarian ethics focuses on doing the most good for the most number of people. Deontological ethics focuses on doing what’s right. Dialogic ethics focuses on honest and transparent communications among individuals with differing perspectives to come to an agreement upon what is the appropriate decision in a given situation. The saying that “ethics is relational” means that ethics is a search for what is just and fair in human interaction.

1. **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?**

The framework for analyzing public and private functions discussed in class was based on understanding the two functions of government, which are (1) deciding to provide a service and (2) providing the service. It is possible for the government to outsource either or both functions to the private sector. There are legitimate reasons for governments to privatize certain functions such as acquiring skills and capabilities or avoiding direct competition with the private sector. However, privatization can be overused or create issues regarding substantive rights.

1. **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.**

Implementation studies focus on what happens between intention and outcome. There have been three generations of policy implementation studies. The first generation of studies sought to demonstrate why implementation was important by systematically investigating the cause and effect relationships that drive policy implementation. The second generation of implementation studies was focused on developing a general theory of policy implementation. The third generation of implementation studies attempted to develop a theory of how implementation works by rigorously testing causal hypotheses.

1. **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 – structuralist 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?**

Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) is based on the idea that stories and narratives significantly affect public opinion and policy change. Researchers have used NPF to demonstrate that a compelling story is often more important to policy change than the policy details.

NPF seems to meld the post-structural and the structuralist approaches. The foundation of NPF is the idea that political realities are socially constructed, which is epistemologically post-structural. The methods emphasize content analysis of narratives. However, NPF uses empirical methods to test falsifiable hypotheses, which is a structuralist approach. This includes the increasing use of experimental and quasi-experimental designs in NPF-based policy studies.

NPF does seem relevant to understanding the policy process surrounding the Small Business Innovation Act of 1982 (Pub.L. 97-219). There does seem to be evidence of the four components of a narrative. The setting of the narrative was the economic recession of the early 1980s that came on the heels of stagflation in the 1970s. Proponents of the policy cast small businesses as both the victim and hero of the story and economic trouble and global threats as the villain. According to the plot of this narrative, many significant innovations and most new jobs are created by small businesses but a biased bureaucratic process was preventing small businesses from participating in federally-funded R&D. The solution to the problem (i.e., moral) was to establish a minimum set-aside and separate funding program for small businesses so that they could participate in federally-funded R&D and produce the innovations that would help the nation overcome its economic troubles and defend itself against global threats.

1. **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.**

Maximizing social welfare is often used as the yardstick for deciding what should be done regarding a policy problem. The Pareto principle is the idea that any policy that shifts the distribution of wealth above and to the right of the point where the resources of two groups intersects (i.e., the status quo) is desirable and efficient because it increases the wealth of one group without instituting a cost on the other (i.e., a Pareto superior outcome). In theory, efficient markets produce such outcomes.

While the Pareto principle is appealing in theory, it is difficult to implement in practice. The Kaldo-Hicks compensation principle is a concept for applying the Pareto principle in practice. It essentially states that if those who gain from a policy could theoretically make side payments to those who lose from the policy such that the losers become indifferent to the policy and the side payments are less than the benefit to those who gain from the policy, then the policy is potentially a Pareto superior outcome. It essentially creates a situation in which the benefits are greater than the costs.

While these principles are easy enough to understand, implementing them in practice requires making reasonably accurate estimates of demand curves for public goods and services, which presents technical challenges. Moreover, they are based on the normative concept of efficiency being the best measure for evaluating policy options. Efficiency is not always the objective of public policy decisions. The policy discussion about the Small Business Innovation Act of 1982 (Pub.L. 97-219) focused on equity, welfare, and security.

1. **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.**

Preference falsification is based on the idea that there are three basic types of utility. There is the intrinsic utility of our true preferences, the expressive utility of expressing our true preferences, and the reputational utility derived from how others react to our stated preferences. Because tribalism was the context in which the human brain evolved, our reputations among other members of the tribe plays an important role in our decision making process. If reputational utility is greater than expressive utility, it can cause us to state a preference that is counter to our true preferences resulting in preference falsification. The implications of this phenomenon on public policy is that the mood of a society or community may not reflect it’s true preference for policy change resulting in hidden opposition to proposed policy actions.

Emotional rationality is the concept that the human brain is emotional by evolutionary design and thus often processes information in a way that is in line with human emotional responses to situations (Kahneman’s System 1 mode of decision making) rather than a purely economic calculation (i.e., economic rationality) which is akin to Kahneman’s System 2 mode of decision making. This tendency can be manipulated by policy actors if one is not cognizant of it.

According to evolutionary psychology, humans evolved in an environment of scarce resources that required group cooperation for survival. Because group cooperation was so important to survival, the human brain evolved a so called cheater-detection module, which makes us wary cooperators. People tend to cooperate so long as others are cooperating and will incur a cost to punish others for noncooperation. This has significant implications for compliance with various public policies, such as tax policy which is essentially an honor system and requires self-reporting.

Risk aversion is the human tendency to derive more pain from a unit loss than pleasure from an equivalent unit of gain. This is particularly relevant to public policy because one’s preference for a particular policy solution depends to a great extent on whether it is framed as a gain or a loss. People tend to be risk-seeking when faced with a potential loss and risk-averse when faced with a potential gain.