Instructions for the American Politics Qualifying Exam

Spring 2006

The American politics qualifying examination is an eight hour, one day, open note test. Students are asked to write no more than 30 pages, double-spaced and typically write about 25 pages on average. Students answer questions from three sections and, within each section, they typically will be able to choose among two or three possible questions. Traditionally, the sections are divided along the following topic lines:

1) Public opinion/electoral behavior/political participation/rational choice theories;
2) Congress/presidency/bureaucracy/courts;
3) Urban politics/social movements/interest groups/race, ethnicity, and gender politics/American political development.

The American politics faculty has devised a set list of 100 classic readings from books and articles in the field. This list can be obtained from Kathy Anderson. These readings are the very minimal needed for preparing for the exam. In studying for the exam, students are also expected to be familiar with current research trends as evident in new books and in articles from the top journals (*American Political Science Review, American Journal of Political Science, Journal of Politics*) from the past 10 years. We highly recommend that students use the three volumes of *Political Science: the State of the Discipline* Series from the American Political Science Association. We also recommend that students interested in taking the exam take the survey course in American politics and consult with each member of the American politics faculty.

Finally, and most importantly, the exam is designed to force students to think beyond the debates in the subfield and apply the arguments they have learned to substantive issues within American politics. Students will be expected to answer the particular question posed before them. Examinations that give stock answers to general concerns in the field rather than addressing the particular issues posed in the questions will not be passed.