JGSPA Doctoral Qualifying Exam Study Questions: Public Policy and Economics

The following field, policy, and economics questions are illustrative of both the nature and scope of the questions you can expect to appear on the candidacy exam. In addition, you should be minimally be familiar with all (both required and optional) of the readings from the 8000 Foundations class, 8030 Policy class, and the 8050 Economics class. Further, you should be broadly familiar with the papers published during the past five years in the *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, *Policy Sciences*, *Policy Studies*, and the *National Tax Journal*.

Field Questions

1. The early proponents of policy analysis had great hopes for how it could improve policy. Identify the early hopes for this new profession and whether these promises have been fulfilled. The early proponents were also cognizant of potential obstacles to how well policy analysts could accomplish their work and the degree to which policy analysis could have an impact on policy. Have these concerns proved correct? Have there been contributions or obstacles that were not anticipated by the early proponents of policy analysis?

2. Consider the early contributors to the field of public policy, e.g., Lasswell, Lindblom, and Dror. Describe in detail the framework that each advocated for developing the field of public policy. Discuss the ways in which the field of public policy has advanced beyond these frameworks. In what ways are these frameworks still relevant to the field? Be sure to include as evidence for your characterizations recent policy scholarship.

3. Historically public affairs schools have separated the public policy field from the public management field. What do you think of this separation? Is there theoretical and/or practical overlap across the fields? How do policy studies inform management and vice versa? Be sure to include as evidence both historic and recent policy and management scholarship. Are the fields becoming one? Why is this a good or a bad idea?

4. Policy analysis brings expertise in service to democracy. Yet, the earliest writings in public administration demonstrate that there are fundamental tensions between expertise and democracy. Trace the broad contours of this discussion and identify the major tensions. Have we adequately reconciled how expertise can truly be of service in a democracy? How is this manifest in practices and institutions?

5. The norms and processes in science and democracy are, in some ways, similar and compatible. At the same time, some can see too much science as a threat to democracy and too much democracy in science as problematical as well. Since policy analysis adapts the social sciences to public policy problems, and integrates social knowledge from many disciplines, the positive and negative tensions between democracy and science are also present within the policy analysis. Identify these tensions as they relate policy analysis and assess their implications for conducting useful policy analysis.

Policy Process, Design, Analysis and Evaluation Questions

6. A common element of the many tasks that policy analysis has assigned itself is that of the problem of dealing with information asymmetries. Identify a component of the policy process and describe where the information asymmetries exist and how policy analysts can redress those imbalances. Assess how well these efforts are likely to be by examining the threats to the efficacy of these efforts.

7. In attempting to develop concepts and a vocabulary to talk about policy analysis, scholars have developed several intellectual tools including typologies, models, or frameworks to characterize, explain, or understand the policy process. Pick one of these tools and briefly describe that tool and what it sought to accomplish. Then identify the criticisms of that tool. Finally, decide and support your arguments on whether that tool has made a contribution to academics or practitioners in advancing knowledge in the field.

8. A great deal has been written on the appropriate role that the policy analyst can serve in supporting policy makers. Less discussed and articulated is the appropriate role that the policy analyst has in supporting citizen participation. Identify why this oversight has occurred. What are the difficulties in involving citizens in the policy process? Did certain theories of democracy provide insight as to how one would successfully involve citizens? Considering the realities of how policy analysts' work and the institutions that they operate in, what are the prospects that policy analysts can play an important role in citizen participation?

9. How is policy made? How does it change? There have been several frameworks, theories, and models, each characterizing the change process differently and offering a different way to talk about or explain the change dynamic. Compare and contrast some of the important frameworks. Then, identify which of these frameworks does a better job at explaining the policy process? Does the ability of the framework depend on the particular policy context?

10. Policy decision-makers and the public can focus on only a finite number of problems. Discuss the various theoretical approaches that explain how problems (or issues) appear on the agenda. As important, what explains how long issues stay on the agenda before they are either disposed of or attention is lost?

11. Compare and contrast the social constructionist and logical positivist contributions to Policy Analysis. Can we synthesize these approaches? Do they make differential contributions to different subfields or different components to the policy process?

12. Although commentators like Heclo and Coleman have talked about iron triangles, issue networks and interorganizational coordination, policy networks are a relatively recent approach to understanding policy. There is currently much intellectual energy behind networks, in both the policy and management literatures but does this enthusiasm have any basis? What has the research contributed so far to our understanding of how networks operate? What future?

13. Can there be a general theory or model of implementation? Explain what a general theory of implementation would look like? What would it include and what would it exclude?

14. Compare and contrast the various approaches to evaluation: policy as design, the rational approaches, and positivistic approaches. Identify what epistemological and ontological assumptions underlay these approaches and what methodologies and methods derive from these approaches (and their assumptions). What are their implications for how policy is made or what constitutes "knowledge" for policy decisions?

15. One attempt to understanding the determinants of policy is the use of comparative studies among nations, states, or local governments. Why have some researchers pursued this approach? What, in the main, have been the contributions of this approach? What are the critiques of this approach?

16. The behavioral revolution in the social sciences swept aside previous political science and sociological concerns about, among other things, social elites and power. While the behaviorists certainly had legitimate concerns about the kind of research was done, one consequence, is that concerns like "power" are less explicitly dealt with, and are really absorbed into concepts like information asymmetry or frameworks like "advocacy coalitions" or systems theory of politics. Should policy analysts and academics deal with "power"? What is the appropriate way to understand power from a policy analysis perspective?

Economic Approaches to Policy Design, Analysis and Evaluation

17. Many economists now consider aspects of social structure in their models and analyses, and sociologists often intentionally contribute to questions about economic transactions. Describe some of the different approaches to integrate social structure into analyses of economic transactions. How do these approaches differ, in terms of their assumptions about human behavior and institutions? Provide an example of how one might empirically integrate social structure into an analysis of a specific economic transaction. Discuss the potential contributions and limitations of this analysis for public policy.

18. Transaction cost theory provides an explanation for why organizations exist and where they draw their boundaries. The theory helps explain why some activities and functions are performed inside organizations and why others are acquired through transactions across organizational boundaries. Lay out the foundational concepts, core assumptions, underlying logic and key hypotheses of the theory. Assess the theory's application to public sector organizations. Does the logic hold when explaining why certain functions occur inside public bureaucracies and other activities are acquired through contracts?

19. Transaction cost theory makes two foundational assumptions about human analytical capacity and behavior: bounded rationality and opportunism. Unpack each of these assumptions by defining each term. Do these assumptions accurately reflect human

analytical capacity and behavior? How would the logic of the theory and its key hypotheses change with different assumptions?

20. Discuss how social and economic infrastructures impact the ability of government to improve the quality of labor in a nation. In your discussion, contrast the German model from less developed social systems, such as France and Eastern Germany. Describe the tools (e.g., schooling experiences, training interventions and other tools) that governments can use to impact the production of skilled labor. In your discussion, be sure to define skilled labor, and the changing nature of required skills in response to changes in the economy.

21. Public finance has a foundation in economic principals. Describe the relationship between tax capacity and the need for public goods. What are the characteristics of a good that make it a public good, how can we determine the efficient level of provision, and what are some of the challenges to making collective decisions regarding that provision. Consider the alternatives of taxes versus incentives across spending bundles and the efficiency of tagging.

22. The majority of state and local governments offer some sort of economic development incentives. Why? Critically assess some of the primary equity and efficiency justifications that have been posited. Some people have criticized offering incentives, claiming that they result in nothing more than zero-sum transfers. Address this claim, paying particular attention to potential "winners" and "losers." Feel free to use examples.

23. Describe the role of information in addressing market failures, including potential benefits and limitations.

    a. Think about who has information, to what precision/time and the link between information, knowledge and behavior.

    b. The interaction (synergy?) of an information policy with other tools (standards through public-private partnerships)

    c. Should we approach information differently for vertical and horizontal quality (attribute) issues?

24. Compare and critique classic arguments including those made by Ando, Modigliani, Bernanke, Solow, and Samuelson, and their implications for US savings rates in our society. What are the implications for future levels of economic growth? For future levels of wealth? What factor or factors might mitigate the trend you/they suggest?

25. Describe relevant macro models, including the ISLM model, economic colonialism and the role of institutions.
    a. In what ways do you think Bernanke, Samuelson, Ando and Mogliani are consistent with the implications of Solow's work in terms of capital allocation across the globe and international development?

b. A famous critique of the Solow model is that it predicts convergence in economic development between northern hemisphere economies and southern hemisphere economies, but to date the model's predictive power has been quite weak. Why don't we see this convergence? What would you suggest in terms of international and/or economic policies to address the challenge?

c. How do you understand economic colonialism? What is the connection between Solow's approach and economic colonialism? Discuss the role of institutions and how they relate to Bernanke's perspective.