

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATION: COMPARATIVE POLITICS
MAJOR FIELD
5 HOURS

7 October 2015

Comparative Public Policy; Comparative Political Economy

You must answer a total of three (3) questions for this examination. You have five (5) hours to do so. You must answer one (1) question from the core section and one (1) question from each of the two (2) subfield sections.

In your answers to any of the questions below, please be sure to directly address the question and to refer to relevant readings and empirical examples.

SECTION 1. CORE QUESTIONS (Answer ONE)

1. To what extent can we understand politics as a conflict between economic or social classes? What are the limitations of a class-based approach to political analysis? Discuss in relation to multiple literatures in comparative politics.
2. Culture has been defined as practices involving the making of meaning (or “semiotic practices” (Wedeen 2002). Discuss whether and, if so, how cultural approaches to political analysis, focused on practices of meaning-making, offer explanatory insights beyond those provided by alternative analytic approaches that are common in comparative politics. What analytic challenges do cultural approaches face?

SECTION 2. SUBFIELD 1 – COMPARATIVE PUBLIC POLICY (Answer ONE)

1. Assess the core theoretical claims in Pierson’s seminal *Dismantling the Welfare State?* in light of the last 20 years of debate in the literature and real-world developments in social policy in OECD countries. To what extent do more recent arguments, findings, or developments support Pierson’s claims, challenge those claims, or suggest insights that can be fruitfully integrated with Pierson’s claims?
2. What is the relationship between public policies and public preferences in advanced democracies? What mechanisms may generate or weaken any link between the two? Under what conditions should we expect those mechanisms to operate? In your answer, refer to specific studies that provide evidence on these issues.

SECTION 3. SUBFIELD 2 – COMPARATIVE POLITICAL ECONOMY (Answer ONE)

1. Does partisanship help explain economic institutional reforms around the world, between the 1990s and 2015? Why or why not? Please illustrate your argument by reference to at least two

economic arenas (such as finance, corporate governance, labor market institutions, banking management, capital-market management, or education systems).

2. The “Washington Consensus” has emphasized the importance of markets and minimized the importance of the state in generating economic growth. Over the last 30 years, have countries that scaled back state intervention in the economy done better than countries that retained a strong interventionist role for the state? Why or why not? What can we say about the conditions under which the state has played an effective role in successful cases of state-led development?