

Public Policy Major Field Exam — questions with annotations

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The examiners for August 2014 will be [Sylvia Bashevkin](#), [Grace Skogstad](#), and [Phil Triadafilopoulos](#).

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1 | Tips from the binder of old MFEs

Guidelines for writing the major field exam in public policy

The purpose of the MFE is to demonstrate that you are knowledgeable about the major literature in the field. In the case of the Public Policy MFE, this knowledge consists of:

1. being familiar with the major approaches (and their authors) advanced to explain the policy process and policy outcomes;
2. understanding how these approaches differ in terms of their ontological assumptions about what units of analysis (individuals, collective entities of social action, institutions / social and economic structure, norms, etc) best explain policy-making;
3. understanding the strengths and weaknesses of different epistemological approaches (qualitative / quantitative) to explaining the policy process and its outcomes

To demonstrate your knowledge to the professors who set and grade the Public Policy exam, bear in mind the following when writing your answers to exam questions.

1. Answer the question. You don't have to provide an unequivocal answer to the question, but do tackle the question head on.
2. Your answer to the question should be an argument that you state in the opening paragraph of your essay.
3. As you draw on the literature to advance your argument, make sure you summarize the literature correctly. If you say author X argues Y when she argues Z, the examiners will be sceptical that you know the literature.
4. Relatedly, make sure you develop key concepts that you need to advance your argument. If, for example, you say that path dependency explains why radical policy change is difficult, explain what path dependency is.
5. Reference as much literature as you can. You should be familiar with all that covered in the core course as well as being able to cite a few additional readings / authors from the longer Reading List for Public Policy. Never draw on one author exclusively to answer a question.
6. Keep your eye on the clock: 3 hours to write 3 essays means 1 hour for each. A common error is for students to run out of time and steam by their third answer. A weak third essay can leave the examiners worried about how broad your knowledge is.

2 | Work in progress

Eventually, this document will include all available exam questions, sorted by frequency of occurrence, as well as the outline of an argument for answering them and a list of useful sources.

3 | Comparing theoretical schools

3.1 How do institutionalist, rationalist / materialist, and ideational approaches differ in their accounts of how and why policy change occurs? (May 2012)

Outline:

Sources:

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3.2 What theory (or theories) and method(s) provide the most powerful means of understanding public policy-making? Be sure to contrast your choices against competing alternatives. (May 2011)

Outline:

Sources:

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3.3 Contrast theories of public policy based on rational actor models with one alternative approach. (May 2011)

Outline:

Sources:

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3.4 The rational actor model presumes that policymakers have relatively easy access to relevant evidence and information in making policy decisions. Drawing on theories of public policy decision-making, please comment on the accuracy of this model. (December 2010)

Outline:

Sources:

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3.5 “If your objective is to explain the substance of public policies, rationalist accounts are likely the most satisfying. If your objective is to explain the stability of public policies, historical institutionalist approaches are likely to provide the most satisfactory account.” Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not? (August 2005)

Outline:

Sources:

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3.6 Is agenda setting a function of political agency or political structure? Discuss, with reference to how various authors approach this question. (August 2005)

Outline:

Sources:

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3.7 How distinctive are feminist approaches and methods from traditional approaches and methods to the study of public policy? In other words, does feminist public policy provide a unique contribution to the study of public policy, and if so how? If not, why not?

Outline:

Sources:

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3.8 “The most useful theories of the policy process are those that recognize that causal mechanisms — like feedback effects, framing, discourse, and learning — interact with the context (ideational, material, and institutional) in which they operate.” Discuss this proposition, by drawing on examples of research that examines the context-specific effects of causal mechanisms, and its utility for building theories of the policy process. (May 2012)

Outline:

Sources:

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3.9 Theories of the policy process — the role and influence of different social and economic actors, the selection of policy choices — differ in terms of their assumptions of whether the process is driven by a logic of instrumentality or a logic of appropriateness. Discuss. (May 2014)

Outline:

Sources:

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4 | **Transfer, diffusion, and learning**

4.1 Can processes of transfer and diffusion be understood independently from processes of internationalization and globalization? (May 2012)

Outline:

Sources:

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4.2 How, if at all, can theories about the diffusion and transfer of public policies be reconciled with developments in comparative social welfare policy over the past 30 years? (May 2010) (August 2010)

Outline:

Sources:

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4.3 Peter Hall has argued that “the impact of causal variables is so context-dependent that it is meaningless to assume unit homogeneity.” At the same time, another literature theorizes and documents the diffusion of policy ideas and programs across jurisdictions. How, if at all, can these two literatures be reconciled? (May 2014)

Outline:

Sources:

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5 | Displacement, layering, drift, conversion, and exhaustion

6 | Flavours of institutionalism

6.1 ‘If students of public policy really want to understand the role of institutions in policy-making, they should focus more on the moments of creating political institutions rather than on their effects once in place.’ Where do you stand on this proposition? What literature would you draw on to defend your stance? (August 2010) (May 2010)

Outline:

Sources:

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6.2 To what degree are rational institutionalist and historical institutionalist approaches converging? How is discursive institutionalism similar to or different from these other two institutionalisms? (August 2009)

Outline:

Sources:

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7 | Ideas

7.1 How important, if at all, are governments' ideological orientations (as reflected in their party type — e.g. social democratic, conservative, liberal, green, etc.) in explaining domestic economic and social policies? Feel free to draw on additional policy areas to illustrate your answer.

Outline:

Sources:

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7.2 What is your position on the long-standing debate about whether ideas always matter to public policy-making or whether they have an impact only at moments of crisis? How has the literature on the role of policy ideas and policy paradigms helped to inform this debate? (August 2011)

Outline:

Sources:

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7.3 How do policy paradigms gain broad acceptance? Why and how are they replaced? Use an empirical case of your choice to illustrate your answer. (May 2011)

Outline:

Sources:

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7.4 How do policy issues emerge? Is it a question of framing and social construction or a response to real world shocks or crises? Feel free to draw on a policy area you are familiar with in your answer. (May 2012) (May 2011) (May 2010)

Essentially identical questions:

How do policy issues emerge? Is it a question of framing and social construction or a response to real world shocks or crises? Feel free to draw on the case of climate change in your response. (August 2009)

How do policy issues emerge? Is it a question of framing and social construction or a response to real world shocks or crises? (August 2010)

Outline:

Sources:

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7.5 Scholars debate whether ideas have an independent effect on the design of public policies that is distinct from that of interests or institutions. What is your view? Do ideas have an independent impact on policy or is their impact always closely intertwined with interests and institutions? Draw on relevant literature and empirical examples to answer this question. (December 2010)

Outline:

Sources:

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7.6 The global financial crisis of 2008 has thrown prevailing economic policy-making paradigms into doubt. What does this case tell us about how policy paradigms gain broad acceptance and why are they subsequently displaced? (December 2010)

Outline:

Sources:

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7.7 How, if at all, are theories of the policy process affected by the shift of lexicon from public administration to new public management? (August 2005)

Outline:

Sources:

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8 | Comparing methodologies

8.1 What are the relative strengths and weaknesses of process-tracing vs. large-N quantitative analyses? Answer this question with reference to public policy. (May 2012)

Outline:

Sources:

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9 | Explaining continuity and change

9.1 “To explain both policy change and policy continuity, a theory of public policy must recognize that institutional contexts not only constrain but also empower political actors to varying degrees.” Do you agree or disagree? What evidence is there in support of this proposition in the public policy literature? (August 2011)

Outline:

Sources:

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9.2 A frequent criticism of historical institutionalism is that it is good at explaining policy stability but less helpful for explaining policy change. Do you agree or disagree? Why? (May 2011) (December 2010)

Outline:

Yes — this is a standard criticism of institutionalism generally, and perhaps of historical institutionalism in particular.

Defining institutions: rules and procedures that constrain policy-making (constitutions, laws, procedures, organizations, and rules) (John2012) * Examples: federalism, the Westminster-style parliamentary system, Canada’s constitution, *House of Commons Procedures and Practices*, the committee system in the U.S. Congress

To what degree do institutions have independent causal effects, and to what degree are they just the venue where interests of different strengths compete to influence policy?

Explanations for stability:

- Institutions embody and solidify norms, establishing predictable patterns of behaviour. Once established, these can be costly and difficult to change

- Institutions produce increasing returns and path dependency (Pierson2000)
- Institutions empower specific veto players and, the more of these there are, the more challenging it becomes to create substantial policy changes (Tsebelis1995). For example, conservative southern Democrats were able to use committee chair positions to block civil rights legislation in the 1950s (John2012, 45)
- The institutionalist approach “presents a static view of the policy process” and “lacks a theory of human action as it tends to consider that the rules and norms that constrain behaviour are reasons for action in themselves” (John2012, 45)
- Some actors may resist efforts to produce institutional change, producing outcomes like ‘layering’ (Thelen)

Institutionalist explanations for change:

- Usually a consequence of an external shock
- Alternatively, tensions can build up within an institution, eventually reaching such a magnitude that change occurs — punctuated equilibrium rather than incrementalism
- For scholars like Steinmo that see institutions evolving in a way akin to biological organisms, institutions and their policy consequences shift gradually over time
- Sometimes, institutions are the mechanism through which change is achieved: for instance, school desegregation through the U.S. Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), or the rise of monetarism under Thatcher in the UK (John2012, 50)
- New institutions can serve as means for overcoming problems of coordination

Sources:

- Greif Avner and David D. Laitin. 2004. “A Theory of Endogenous Institutional Change.” *American Political Science Review* 98, 4:633-52.
- Hall Peter A. and Rosemary C.R. Taylor, “Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms,” *Political Studies*, 44(5), 936-57.
- Hay, Colin and Daniel Wincott. 1998. “Structure, Agency and Historical Institutionalism.” *Political Studies* 46: 951-57.
- John, Peter. *Analyzing Public Policy: Second Edition*. New York: Routledge, 2012. (chapter on institutionalism)
- Mahoney, James and Kathleen Thelen. 2010. “A Theory of Gradual Institutional Change.” In James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen, eds. *Explaining Institutional Change:*

Ambiguity, Agency, and Power. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- March, James G. and Johan P. Olsen. 1989. *Rediscovering Institutions: The Organizational Basis of Politics*. The Free Press.
- Pierson, Paul. 2000. "Increasing Returns, Path Dependence, and the Study of Politics." *American Political Science Review* 94, 2: 251-267.
- Steinmo, Sven. 2010. *The Evolution of Modern States*. New York: Cambridge University Press
- Thelen, Kathleen. 1999. "Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Politics." *The Annual Review of Political Science* 2: 369-404.
- Thelen, Kathleen. 2003. "How Institutions Evolve: Insights from Comparative Historical Analysis." In *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*. Eds. James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer. New York: Cambridge University Press: 208-24.
- Tsebelis, George. 1995. "Decision Making in Political Systems: Veto Players in Presidentialism, Parliamentarism, Multicameralism and Multipartyism." *British Journal of Political Science* 25 (3):289-325.

9.3 Are different conceptual tools used — and needed — to explain policy continuity as compared to policy change? (August 2009)

Outline:

Sources:

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9.4 Provide two different theoretical accounts of transformative policy change, describing how they differ in their hypotheses regarding the causal drivers and pathways of that transformative policy change. (May 2014)

Outline:

Choose from among the advocacy coalition framework, punctuated equilibrium, Kingdon's streams and windows, and evolutionary theories.

Sources:

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10 | Policy failure

10.1 As the gap between rich and poor widens in several industrialized countries, students of public policy are reminded that providing an account of why governments often do *not* act is as important as providing an account of why they do. Are political economy theories that emphasize structures and structural power more helpful than other theories — institutionalist or agent-centred — in explaining why governments often fail to address pressing policy problems? (August 2011)

Outline:

Politics is often a competition between groups for influence and resources, as each seeks to advance a distinct agenda. As a consequence, it is rare that any policy will be praised universally as a success, or derided as a failure by all. Bovens *et al.* highlight how policy analysis is not politically neutral, and cannot be undertaken in an entirely detached way. A problem that appears “pressing” to one group may lack urgency to another, or even be seen as a desirable state of affairs. They also identify a range of biases that affect individual attempts at policy evaluation, including goal-based biases, time bias, public perception bias, cultural bias, spatial bias, and action-oriented bias.¹ As Howlett discusses, policy evaluation is also something decision-makers actively seek to manipulate, attempting to avoid blame for failures. Nonetheless, there are some reasonable criteria through which scholars of public policy may seek to evaluate policy. The publicly-stated motivations of those who enacted

¹See also: Kearns and Lawson 2009

the policy can be scrutinized, along with their understanding of what policy ‘problem’ motivated its enactment. Alternatively, public perception can be used as a yardstick, with the severity of policy problems and the effectiveness of attempted solutions evaluated in terms of the public mood. The question of why the governments of industrialized countries have generally failed to curb rising economic inequality is complex. For one thing, not all societal groups would even identify rising economic inequality as a problem. Nonetheless, using political economy, institutionalist, and agent-centred theories of public policy-making can permit the problem to be fleshed out in useful ways, with generalizable implications for more general questions about government’s failing to act in response to pressing problems. These failures have multiple origins, and the particular causes of a policy failure can often be more effectively evaluated through one theoretical framework rather than another. Generally speaking, institutionalist theories are useful for explaining policy inertia and strong *status quo* biases, agent-centred accounts are well-suited to collective action and common property failures, and political economy accounts can be helpful for explaining cases where public opinion is trumped by the more organized interests of holders of structural power.

For the purposes of this discussion, ‘agent-centred’ theories will generally be considered those in the rational choice or rational actor tradition, in which utility-maximizing individuals make strategic choices in order to maximize their self-interest, subject to the constraints under which they are operating. Individuals are able to bargain in order to try to achieve mutually acceptable outcomes, but this may be blocked by divergent preferences or insufficient means for coordination and verification. This approach is strong in terms of micro-foundations and providing an explanation for individual action. Scholars like Mancur Olson have highlighted the challenges faced by self-interested individuals, in circumstances where uncoordinated individual action will not produce outcomes that maximize utility in general. Policy failures that take the form of a failure to coordinate — perhaps due to a lack of trust, or high transaction costs — can be effectively understood through this framework. The classic example of policy failure which can be easily explained through this sort of analysis is pollution control; restricting the ability of firms to pollute involves concentrated costs and diffuse benefits. As a result, those with a preference for avoiding regulation have more of an incentive to act, and have fewer coordination problems to overcome. ‘Political economy’ covers a broad range of theories, though it may be described in general terms as a branch of social science that considers the relationships between economic phenomena like markets, production, resources, and employment and political phenomena like parties, electoral outcomes, and policy choices. [MORE] Finally, institutionalist theories emphasize the degree to which extant institutions like parliaments, legal systems, and bureaucracies shape political outcomes. These institutions may be political (the structure of government, the electoral system, etc), economic, and perhaps even social. For much of its history, po-

litical science has focused heavily on institutions for explaining policy outcomes, including major features of states like federalism and Westminster-style parliamentary democracy. A number of distinct approaches to institutionalist analysis have emerged — including rational institutionalism (which shares methods and assumptions with rational choice theories), historical institutionalism, and sociological or discursive institutionalism. By emphasizing different aspects of the policy environment, these sub-disciplines likewise have variable capacity to explain specific policy failures. Since institutions are more easily understood as constraints on behavior that deviates from the *status quo*, institutionalist accounts are arguably especially well equipped to explain the absence of change — including in terms of insufficient governmental responses to problems which are deemed pressing by some.

Other rational actor scholars to mention?

- Levi, Margaret. 1997. “A Model, a Method, and a Map: Rational Choice in Comparative and Historical Analysis.” In *Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure*. Ed. Mark Irving Lichbach and Alan S. Zuckerman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: pp. 19-41.
- Shepsle, Kenneth A. and Mark S. Bonchek. 1997. *Analyzing Politics: Rationality, Behavior, and Institutions*. New York: Norton: chapter 2, pp. 15-35.
- Sabatier?

Political economists?

- Esping-Andersen?
- Haddow?
- Hall?

Institutionalists? Which sorts?

- Baumgartner and Jones (punctuated equilibrium)
- Greif and Laitin?
- Kingdon (policy and political streams, policy windows)
- Mahoney and Thelen?
- Ostrum (bounded rationality)
- Pierson (path dependence)

Howlett also provides a three-part typology for policy failure, consisting of programme, process, and political failures. The programme view focuses on the relationship between a policy's outcomes and the initial intentions of its designers:

a policy, to be successful, must attain or exceed its original programmatic or technical goals, at roughly the same cost, with the same degree of effort, and within the same period of time as originally envisioned (545).

Process failures, by contrast, are situations where it proves impossible to proceed through the many stages necessary for implementation. As John identifies: “The failure of public policies may be due to feedback from the policy intervention to the decision-making procedures themselves” (8). Policy ‘success’ under this point of view, may include policies that have little real-world impact, but which do manage to “navigate a complex, veto-point-filled and multi-actor approval process to creation and implementation” (545-6). Political failures are those where policies reduce “the ability of parties or individuals to obtain or retain their positions in government or elsewhere in the political system” (547). To a degree, it is possible to match up these types of policy failures with the institutional frameworks that may be most suited to explaining them. For example, the process-focused account aligns neatly with institutionalism, while the political accounts accords with a rational actor model that is focused on elites. Policy success or failure in terms of the convergence between intended outcomes and actual results seems more challenging to map to a particular theoretical perspective, in part since none aligns very well with the rational and linear policy-making process that is criticized as unrealistic by John and many others (17-28).

Economic inequality is a particularly challenging area in which to evaluate whether policy problems exist, are “pressing”, and have gone unaddressed. In a straightforward utilitarian analysis, individuals would not be expected to show great concern about their relative income or wealth. Rather, they would be expected to support policies that raised their own absolute standing. All else being equal, it represents a pareto improvement for a subset within society to grow richer while others remain at the same absolute wealth or income level. Under such a theory, economic inequality would be most easily understood as problematic if it could be shown to have a causal effect in suppressing the welfare of the general population. Alternatively, a theory of utility that better incorporates human preferences for fairness and material equality might be more easily able to categorize inequality as a problem in itself.

Even if inequality is accepted as a problem, the road to addressing it through public policy is not entirely clear. The source of rising inequality is quite important. It may be that technological development and economic globalization are widening the gap in outcomes between those at the very top, in terms of business or personal earning power, and those with less ability to compete. Alternatively, highly differential outcomes could be the product of the effective manipulation of political systems by small groups who are effectively undertaking rent-seeking. Other explanations are also possible. Some degree of confidence about

the source of rising inequality is probably necessary in order for governments to deliberately counteract it, though it is theoretically possible for them to reduce it simply through redistribution of resources, without engaging with the original cause of inequality.

To summarize, policy failures are nearly always contested. Nevertheless, there are characteristic patterns of types of policy failures, some of which are more easily linked to particular theories of policy-making than to others. The clearest areas of policy failure are those in which the outcomes that arise please nobody, or virtually nobody. One might think of the rate of post-operation complications or hospital-acquired infections. In most other cases, policy outcomes will please various sets of actors to different degrees.

Sources:

- Bovens, Mark, Paul 't Hart, and Sanneke Kuipers. "The Politics of Policy Evaluation". In: *The Oxford Handbook of Public Policy*. Ed. by Robert E. Goodin, Michael Moran, and Martin Rein. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Howlett, Michael. "The lessons of failure: learning and blame avoidance in public policy-making". In: *International Political Science Review* 33.5 (2012).
- Kearns, Ade and Louise Lawson. "(De)constructing a policy 'failure': Housing stock transfer in Glasgow". In: *Evidence and Policy* 5.4 (2009).
- John, Peter. *Analyzing Public Policy: Second Edition*. New York: Routledge, 2012.
- Turnpenny, John et al. "The Policy and Politics of Policy Appraisal. Emerging Trends and New Directions". In: *Journal of European Public Policy* 16.4 (2009).

10.2 What insights do theories of policy diffusion and policy convergence have for explaining policy instrument choice when it comes to tackling climate change? (August 2009)

Outline:

Different jurisdictions have adopted a wide variety of policies in response to anthropogenic climate change, both with the intention of reducing the magnitude of change and adapting human systems to it. On the mitigation side, states and sub-national jurisdictions have put a price on carbon using a carbon tax, cap-and-trade system, or other mechanisms; they have established or tightened efficiency standards for buildings, vehicles, and industry; they have promoted the deployment of low-carbon forms of energy and energy efficiency improvements; they have discouraged or phased out the use of especially powerful climate-altering chemicals; they have sought to enhance carbon sinks like forests; and they have encouraged

fuel switching from fossil fuels deemed more climatically damaging to those considered less so (most notably, from coal to gas). In terms of adaptation, states have largely concentrated on assessing risks on a more fine-grained and regional basis, as well as the design of infrastructure to function across a wider range of conditions including both acute and chronic extreme weather events such as storms and prolonged periods of drought. While states have certainly paid heed to policy choices elsewhere, there is only a limited degree to which policy responses to climate change have converged. Furthermore, policy within states has often been unstable, with successive governments undoing the approaches of their predecessors — scrapping carbon prices, for instance, or reversing course on nuclear energy. The literature on policy convergence and diffusion nonetheless offers some assistance for understanding instrument choice in response to climate change. [MORE THESIS]

As discussed by Berry1999, Gray1973, Shipan and Volden2008, and Weyland2005, policy diffusion refers to the tendency of policy innovation in one jurisdiction spreading to other countries, often following a distinct geographic pattern. There are certainly regional variations in climate change policies, particularly in terms of the more aggressive action undertaken in Europe and Scandinavia when compared with other regions like North America. At the same time, the overall level of effort undertaken by various states is fairly heterogeneous across the world, with Japan perhaps having more in common with Germany than with its neighbours and major fossil fuel exporters like Canada and Australia often aligned in their comparative inaction. Drezner2005 argues that policy convergence has a complex relationship with globalization, and that the overall degree of harmonization depends on whether great powers can agree on a policy direction. This has taken place superficially in terms of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), but not substantively to date in terms of achieving substantial cuts in greenhouse gas emissions or major adaptation efforts. Drezner also argues that increasing returns to scale from regulatory harmonization will often lead to policy convergence, but this mechanism largely seems to not be operating in the climate realm, with very different policies and approaches being adopted even by sub-national entities. While convergent outcomes have arisen within the European Union and to a limited degree under other regional arrangements, global convergence toward specific instruments remains quite patchy.

The variation in climate change policy responses reflects many specific national characteristics: the political influence of fossil fuel and energy-intensive industry sectors, degree of perceived vulnerability (especially high in low-lying states and small island states), and the presence or absence of a general political consensus about the seriousness of climate change and the most suitable mechanisms for addressing it.

Sources:

- Berry, Frances Stokes and William D. Berry. 1999. "Innovation and Diffusion Models in Policy Research." In *Theories of the Policy Process*. Ed. P.A. Sabatier. Boulder, CO: Westview Press: 169-200.
- Drezner, Daniel W. 2005. "Globalization, Harmonization, and Competition: The Different Pathways to Policy Convergence." *Journal of European Public Policy* 12, 5: 841-859.
- Gray, Virginia. 1973. "Innovation in the States: A Diffusion Study." *American Political Science Review* 67, 4: 1174-1185.
- Holzinger Katharina and Christoph Knill. 2005. "Causes and Conditions of Cross-National Policy Convergence." *Journal of European Public Policy* 12, 5: 775-796.
- Shipan, Charles R. and Craig Volden. 2008. "The Mechanisms of Policy Diffusion." *American Journal of Political Science* 52, 4: 840-857.
- Weyland Kurt. 2005. "Theories of Policy Diffusion: Lessons from Latin American Pension Reform." *World Politics* 57, 2: 262-95.

11 | Policy networks

11.1 Some literature characterizes the policy process as tightly bounded by closed networks of highly interested actors. Other views depict it as more open and driven by a broader range of competing interests. Which view provides a more accurate description and why? (December 2010) (May 2014)

Outline:

Sources:

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11.2 In his 1976, ‘Studying Public Policy,’ Richard Simeon argued that it was useful to distinguish the impact of policy of five competing but also complementary factors: the environment, the distribution of power, prevailing ideas, institutional frameworks, and the process of decision-making. To what extent do those who theorize the role of policy networks in policy-making integrate one or more of these five factors? (August 2010) (May 2010) (May 2010)

Outline:

Sources:

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12 | Micro-foundations

12.1 Is it necessary to have a micro theory of actor behaviour to explain public policy outcomes? (August 2011)

Essentially identical questions:

Is it necessary to have a micro theory of actor behaviour to explain public policy development? (August 2009)

Outline:

Sources:

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12.2 Political scientists often crudely distinguish between theories of agency and structure. Do you believe that it is necessary to have a micro theory of actor behaviour to explain public policy development? Or is it sufficient to *assume* an individual actor logic and to concentrate on interests, institutions and other structures? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each approach? (August 2010) (May 2010)

Outline:

Sources:

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13 | Globalization

13.1 How does economic globalization, as compared to internationalization (or transnationalism), affect domestic public policy formation? Should we expect their impacts to vary across jurisdictions? (August 2011)

Outline:

Sources:

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13.2 You are teaching a fourth-year undergraduate seminar on comparative public policy and must prepare a session on globalization. Which concepts and literatures would you draw on and why? (May 2011)

Outline:

Sources:

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13.3 A few years ago, many writers argued that globalization was leading toward policy convergence, a “race to the bottom”, and the “hollowing out of the state.” More recent writers have argued for the continuing prevalence of policy difference, and the persisting relevance of the “state.” Assess this debate and the assumptions that differentiate the two perspectives. (December 2010)

Outline:

Sources:

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13.4 ‘Our theories about public policy — its causes, processes and outcomes’ — are being reformulated in light of economic globalization and internationalization.’ Discuss. (August 2009)

Outline:

Sources:

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14 | Economic inequality and the welfare state

14.1 Which theories of the policy process are most helpful for understanding the growth in economic inequality that characterizes countries like the US, the UK, and even Canada? Does a comparison with countries characterized by greater economic equality (Scandinavian countries, for example) help us answer this question? (May 2012)

Outline:

Sources:

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14.2 Which public policy theories help us explain why income inequality has emerged as an important issue on the policy agenda? Are these same theories helpful in explaining the likelihood of policy action to reduce the income gap, or are other theories of the policy process needed? (May 2014)

Outline:

One somewhat bold option would be to say that income inequality has grown substantially, but that governments in most jurisdictions haven't been effectively pressured to respond to

it. In fact, many of the types of policy-making that have facilitated the growth in income inequality have persisted.

Sources:

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14.3 Theorists such as Paul Pierson argue that the politics of retrenchment differ fundamentally from the politics of growth and welfare state expansion, and that each required a different theory. Examining two theories to explain welfare state expansion, consider whether they also work for explaining success or failure at retrenchment. How, if at all, do theories to explain welfare state expansion need to be modified to explain retrenchment politics? (August 2005)

Outline:

Sources:

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15 | Comparative approaches

15.1 Do theories of public policy have to be comparative to be useful? Or are there theories of public policy that are sui generis to Canada? Elaborate your answer with examples of public policies of your choice. (August 2010)

Essentially identical questions:

Do theories of public policy have to be comparative to be useful? Or are there theories of public policy that are *sui generis* (unique) to Canada? Elaborate your answer with examples of public policies of your choice. (August 2010)

Outline:

Sources:

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15.2 Write an essay in which you discuss what you see, and why, to be a) the two or three major policy accomplishments in the study of comparative public policy over the past two decades; and b) the two or three key areas of inquiry / modes of inquiry that will be important in the next decade for advancing the study of public policy processes. (May 2010)

Outline:

Sources:

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15.3 The bulk of the public policy literature — particularly those theories which look to explain policy-making processes — comes from the developed world experience. In what ways is this body of theory transferable to the developing world, and what, if any, are its limitations? (August 2005)

Outline:

Sources:

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