

American Politics
Comprehensive Examination Instructions
September 2017

The American politics comprehensive exam is an open book/note exam that students have nine hours to complete. Non-native speakers of English will have 11 hours to complete the exam. Students must answer three questions for the exam. The recommended response length for each question is 1,750 words. Students may go over this length within reason if necessary. However, there is no expectation that the “best” answers will be the longest. You should focus on the quality of each response first and the quantity second.

1. Students must earn a passing grade on all three questions of the exam in order to pass. A failing grade on any of the three questions necessitates that the student retake the entire exam. The option of writing a literature review when failing one question is not available for the American politics comprehensive exam, as it is already an open book exam.

2. Students must have completed American Political Behavior (POLS 60043), American Political Institutions (POLS 60040), and at least one other graduate course in American politics (not including directed readings courses) prior to taking the comprehensive exam in American politics. The field chair in American Politics may grant an exception to this requirement when requested by the student, when supported by the student's primary advisor, and when there is a strong rationale for doing so.
3. The American politics comprehensive exam consists of two sections—one on American political institutions and one on American political behavior. Each section contains three questions. Students must answer one question from each of the two sections. For their third answer, students may choose a question from either the institutions or behavior sections.
4. The American politics comprehensive exam is graded by a committee of faculty members, which will change for every administration of the exam.

Preparing for the Exam

In order to prepare for the American politics comprehensive exam, students are encouraged to:

1. Take a range of courses on American political institutions and behavior and become familiar with the literature covered in those courses.
2. Consult with faculty members about the literature on topics in which those faculty members specialize (especially if the student has not taken course work that covers those topics) and about the nature of exam questions and faculty expectations for students' answers to those questions.
3. Consult copies of past exams to gain a sense of the types of questions asked. Develop outlines of answers to those questions to gain practice in answering exam questions. Remember that faculty members are not simply looking for a vast recollection of citations, but rather for the ability to integrate those citations into a logical and coherent argument about the literature on a particular topic.
4. Become very familiar with the seminal works in American politics, as well as the most important and influential recent books and articles. To do so, students should consult the syllabi for American Political Behavior and American Political Institutions, the syllabi for other graduate courses in American politics, and the syllabi for graduate courses in American politics at peer institutions. Students are also encouraged to regularly read journals such as the *American Political Science Review*, the *American Journal of Political Science*, and the *Journal of Politics*, and stay abreast of new articles on American politics in these journals.

If you have further questions, please contact the American politics field chair.