

Question 1

Many political scientists and historians have made a case for American exceptionalism. They argue that social welfare development in this country took a far different path from that of several European nations because of the American liberal tradition and our system of government, fragmented by separation of powers, checks and balances, and federalism. Choose an issue area with which you are familiar and trace its major historical developments, including how American ideology and institutions of government shaped major historical policy developments. Your critical examination of the literature should also include the role of interest groups and how claims were made on the government to shape the passage of policy and/or to block certain developments. You may include the role of leadership, ideas and policy advocacy. Critique the efforts of scholars to demonstrate American exceptionalism in the area you have chosen, and/or suggest a strategy for testing aspects of this theory using your example area. What insights does the concept of American exceptionalism provide to an understanding of the possibilities of future policy developments?

Question 2

It is often challenging to measure the effect of a social policy or program when its participants are self-selected, because those individuals selecting the program may differ systematically from the larger target population in ways that are predictive of outcome. Often there are barriers to conducting randomized controlled trials that would be a “gold standard” for program evaluation.

Select a social policy of interest to you where this type of biased selection has been an issue for evaluation and write an essay that incorporates answers to the following questions:

- a) Explain the goals of the program, specify the outcomes that are of policy interest, and describe how participants are chosen or self-select and how selection might relate to the outcomes.
- b) What was the measured impact of the program in studies that did not control for selection bias?
- c) Review the methods and results of studies that have addressed selection bias using such methods as (i) randomized trials, (ii) panel data designs or (iii) statistical corrections such as selection models or instrumental variables. How much bias was found and what was the impact of the program after corrections?
- d) If there are no studies regarding your program that use these techniques, outline how you would use one of the techniques listed (i, ii or iii) to correct for selection bias, and what you would expect to find.

Question 3

Obtaining the compliance of existing bureaucracies is essential to the successful implementation of public programs. Many models address the sources and circumstances of non-compliant behavior at the institutional and at the individual level.

Select a public policy in which implementation proved difficult. Identify the primary problems around obtaining organizational cooperation at **either** the institutional or individual level. Examine, from a theoretical point of view, the sources of resistance and reasons for resistance, and the programmatic context that contributed to implementation problems. Consider the kinds of responses by leadership that could be used to address the problems. Include, as appropriate, the structure of the program, control and incentive systems, training and selection strategies, etc. A critique of the research literature is expected.

Question 4

Claims are made that analyzing financial assets provides new understanding of inequality, social mobility, poverty, and stratification that are not revealed when only income, education, occupation, and similar variables are used. Detail the major claims and arguments for an asset perspective, summarize the state of our knowledge in this area based on a critical reading of relevant research literature, and discuss your assessment of the state of this new field. Discuss any major policy implications. Discuss the relationship between family wealth and social, cultural, human, and natural capital. Build to a theoretical model that incorporates some of our core research understandings of each of these "capitals."

Question 5

Tax policy can have important impacts on families with children in the U.S. Drawing on a critical review of the empirical literature, discuss the distribution of benefits under current tax policy and provide several examples of tax policies that might: (1) lower the percentage of children in poverty and/or (2) reduce income inequality in the United States. You must provide one or more definitions of poverty and/or income inequality, as well as an appraisal of the validity and usefulness of these measures.

Question 6

At the macro level, organizational theories explain how organizations interface with other organizations and with their environment. At the micro level, organizational theories explain how people work together and how work gets done. Choose a policy issue of interest to you, and consider how organizational theory, e.g. resource dependence, contingency/coordination, network/social capital, leadership, bureaucracy/post-bureaucracy, could inform the development of an effective policy. Based on a critical examination of relevant research, outline a study that would contribute to policy development.

Question 7

Pay-for-performance is a new approach in the U.S. health care system. However, several authors have described the early experience with pay-for-performance and the incentives that are inherent in various design choices. Moreover, large demonstration projects are currently underway in California and across the nation. Outline how the research director at a large managed care plan or at a state Medicaid agency might design a pay-for-performance system for general health care or for behavioral health care. What would be the goals of this system? How does the design of the program affect who wins and who loses? Based on a critical review of the theoretical and research literature, outline a study that evaluates the impact of the pay-for-performance system you have designed on provider behavior, costs, and quality.

Describe how the data would be collected, and identify key issues you would plan to study or account for, offer the most important hypotheses, and specify challenges to carrying out your study.

Question 8

The new Medicare pharmacy benefit (Part D) offers coverage to many Medicare beneficiaries who previously were not insured for prescription drug expense. However, other beneficiaries already had access to prescription drugs through Medicaid, a state pharmacy assistance program, a retiree health benefit, or other programs. The new program covers beneficiaries who enroll voluntarily, and has received a large amount of bad press because the pace of enrollment has been slower than expected.

As a new employee of Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, you are given the responsibility for developing a research study that will provide policy guidance in the next 18 months. Discuss your proposal to study enrollment in Part D. Supporting your discussion with a critical review of relevant research, indicate how theories about individual choice, costs, and benefits support your study design, outline how the data would be collected, and identify key issues you would plan to study or account for. Provide the most important hypotheses, your analysis plan and likely results.

Question 9

The National Healthcare Disparities Report (NHDR) is an Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ)-led effort on behalf of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). First published in 2003 and updated annually, the NHDR is a comprehensive national overview of disparities in health care among racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups in the general U.S. population and among priority populations. Discuss the definition of the term "health care disparities," focusing on the range of approaches to quality measures and access to health care. Discuss the theoretical and empirical justifications for using various approaches to defining health care disparities. Select from the report a set of specific measures pertaining to a particular condition (e.g., substance abuse, prenatal care, children's dental care, mental health, diabetes, cancer, etc.) and critique those measures in terms of their measurement characteristics and practical value for addressing the issue of health care disparity. In your discussion of the specific measures, please comment on the issue of how factors other than health care (e.g., education, etc.) influence quality and access.

Question 10

Choose a research area of interest for social policy and write an essay that incorporates all of the following:

- a) Summarize the scientific literature/current understanding of this area, including the history and theory related to it.
- b) Examine how this understanding may have been shaped by the historical, structural and/or political contexts of the times (e.g., zeitgeist).
- c) Evaluate how this research area (i.e., theory, methodology, and findings) addresses the needs and situations of marginalized groups (e.g., women, children, immigrants, populations of color, persons with substance abuse problems).
- d) Critique the research - evaluating its strengths, limitations, and needed “next steps.”
- e) Outline a study that could advance our understanding of this area. Discuss the potential contributions, limitations, and policy implications of the proposed study.