

## **American Politics Comprehensive Exam Spring 2016**

### **Part I: General (Morning) Questions**

Answer one of the following two questions. Indicate the question number and provide the text of the question at the start of your answer.

1. We appear to be living an age of intense political polarization and this is assumed by many to be a bad thing. What explanations can be offered to explain why such a condition has come about? What, if anything, can be done to decrease such polarization? Additionally, please evaluate the argument that polarization is actually healthy for the political system, giving citizens a real choice over the policy direction of the country?

2. An on-going debate in American politics centers on whether—and to what extent—the system of separation of powers/checks and balances constrains the choices made by the three branches of government. Consider the literature on the interactions between two branches of your choice (e.g. Courts and Congress, Congress and the Executive) and provide a well-reasoned and grounded response to chief questions raised by this debate: Why (or why not) would we expect one branch (e.g. the courts) to constrain the other (e.g. Congress), and vice-versa (e.g. why [or why not] would we expect Congress to constrain the courts)? To what extent is this expectation met? That is, based on the extant literature, do the preferences and likely actions of one branch (e.g. the courts) constrain the other (e.g. Congress), and vice-versa (e.g. do the preferences and likely actions of Congress constrain the courts)?

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### Part II: Subfield (Afternoon) Questions

Answer two of the following four questions. Indicate the question number and provide the text of the question at the start of your answer.

1. By constitutional design, the presidency is a central institution in American politics. Political scientists provide numerous explanations for the extent and utility of presidential power. Using political science research, discuss the development and institutionalization of the Presidency. How and why has the office changed over time? In addition, describe the role of the President as an agenda-setter and policymaker. When, and in what policy areas, is he most successful as a policymaker? What strategies are available to presidents eager to implement their policy agendas? Be sure to elaborate on his interaction with other institutions of American government including the courts, Congress, and the bureaucracy.

2. While relatively few observers would dispute the notion of an incumbency advantage in Congress, there is much less agreement among congressional scholars over the sources of that advantage for incumbent legislators. Discuss and evaluate the most important factors that scholars have identified during the past few decades as contributing to the incumbency advantage. In your answer, be sure to acknowledge limitations associated with existing explanations as well as why certain factors may not help us fully understand the advantages accruing to incumbents.

3. Since the 1970s and 1980s, managerial judging has been on the rise in trial courts in the U.S., particularly at the federal level. Its growth has not, however, been without detractors. Do you think this emergence of managerial judging is a good thing? You should defend your position through scholarly citations. In doing so, make sure to define managerial judging, explain its rise, discuss what it replaced and its alternative(s), and ponder how its application may differ between civil and criminal courts.

4. In the context of studying American political development, students of legislative politics often remark that a zero-sum relationship exists between congressional committees and political parties. Indeed, in earlier eras when political parties in Congress were quite strong, committees were considered to be much weaker in terms of their role in the legislative process. As the power of party leaders has receded over time, however, most scholars agree that this ushered in an era of "committee government." Discuss the nature of the relationship between congressional committees and parties over the course of congressional history. To what extent is it accurate to characterize this relationship as zero-sum? Under what conditions might committees and parties be working toward the same legislative goals?