Guidelines for Comprehensive Exams in American Politics
Department of Political Science
The Pennsylvania State University

The American Politics comprehensive exam consists of two parts. All students sit for the first part, which is based on the core reading list provided below and the syllabus for the most recent introductory seminar in American politics (aka the proseminar in American). Students majoring in American politics also sit for the second part of the exam (minors take only the first part). In the second part of the exam, majors select three topic areas on which to be examined from the list below. Students should inform the subfield examiners of their specialized topics at the beginning of the semester before they take their exams. That is, if a student is taking the exam in May, subfield examiners should be notified of the specialized topic areas in January.

The reading list for each specialized topic consists of the syllabus from the most recent graduate seminar on that topic taught in the Department prior to the exam semester. Thus, if a student takes comprehensive exams in January when a seminar is being offered, he/she need not be familiar with that syllabus, but rather with the previous seminar on that same topic. Our list of topics as of Spring 2010 is as follows:

- Agenda Setting
- American Policymaking Institutions and Processes
- Gender and Politics
- Organized Interests
- Political Behavior
- Representation
- State and Local Politics

The list below constitutes the core for all students. Readings have been chosen to include, where possible, works that provide comprehensive coverage of the literature, especially classic works, and these classic works have not always been assigned on their own. With this in mind, students should seek to understand the chronology of development of the literature. While the list below represents a core, the best answers are likely to include reference to classics that go beyond what is apparent from secondary treatments of them as well as reference to the most important recent works on the topic that may have been published in the past year and therefore not reflected in the reading list or syllabi. In order to get a sense of the development of the literature over time, students may also find it helpful to consult edited works such as Oxford’s Institutions of American Democracy: A Republic Divided (2007) as well as the individual volumes in the Institutions series on the executive, legislative, and judicial branches (all three published by Oxford in 2005). Political Women and American Democracy (Cambridge, 2008) provides a fairly comprehensive review and critical assessment of the research on gender and politics. Another useful resource will be the new eight-volume Oxford Handbook of American Politics series that is forthcoming in 2010. Similar handbooks, encyclopedias, and sources of critical literature reviews may also prove useful.
American Politics

Core Reading List

Note: the readings below represent a set of core readings across many areas of American politics. At a minimum, any student sitting for an exam in American politics should be familiar with these readings as well as with the syllabus for the most recent introductory seminar in American politics. The best exams will go beyond these readings in discussing classics not included here (but referenced in literature reviews or field essays that are included here) as well as the most recent research in any particular area. The list is divided, for convenience, into fields which are by necessity somewhat arbitrary at their margins. No work is listed in more than one field in the list below.

Fundamentals:


Elections and Behavior:


Public Opinion:


**Parties:**

**Interest Groups:**

**Courts:**

**Presidency:**

**Bureaucracy:**


**Agenda-Setting:**


**Congress:**

State, Local, and Urban Politics:


Race:


Gender:


