**Government 50.08: Psychology & International Politics**

**Professor Kathleen Powers**

**Midterm Memo**

Dear Political Psychologists,

**Logistics**

The class midterm will be held during our regular class meeting time on Thursday, April 25, in our regular classroom. If you need accommodations for this exam, please contact me no later than Friday, April 19.

**Scope**

The exam will cover everything from day 1 (What is political psychology?) through April 23’s meeting on Leadership Trait Analysis. This includes: all reading, lectures, discussion and activity-based material. Below, please find some notes regarding the structure and content for the exam.

The exam will comprise a series of open-ended questions designed to a) test your mastery of the concepts and theories that we have covered in the class, b) allow you to demonstrate that you are meeting the learning objectives laid out on the syllabus and class slides. This entails identifying and explaining key ideas, assumptions, and points of contention, generating examples that demonstrate your understanding, and applying concepts to novel examples.

The exam will comprise a mix of “1 point” and a small number of longer, “3 point” questions.

Questions worth one point will require brief responses. These questions will all be open-ended,[[1]](#footnote-1) but answerable in less than 2 sentences. For some, you will be able to answer with one word (akin to “fill in the blank”), while others may take a few words or 2 sentences. You should not feel compelled to write more than what is required to demonstrate that you know the material.

For example, here are two questions that appeared on last year’s exam:

1. Consider the following hypothesis: “States will be more likely to go to war to defend their current territory than to gain new territory."

From which theory, discussed in this course, did I derive this hypothesis?

1. Drawing from course material, give one example that illustrates a violation of **instrumental rationality** in international politics. Briefly, **explain** why this violates instrumental rationality.

Questions worth 3 points will require slightly longer responses, up to and including one paragraph (5 sentences). There will be no full essay questions that would require more than one paragraph.

1. Farnham's (1992) article “Roosevelt and the Munich Crisis….” discusses how Roosevelt's beliefs about whether the U.S. should intervene in the negotiations with Hitler shifted over the course of two weeks.
2. Why, according to Farnham, did FDR change his mind? Be specific, drawing on the necessary theory/concepts from the course.
3. Briefly, why is a rational choice explanation insufficient for explaining FDR’s shift?

This exam is designed to test your mastery of the material; it is not a test of writing skills.[[2]](#footnote-2) Your best bet to respond in the simplest, most straightforward manner that you can. Do not waste time crafting the most eloquent response possible (for either the 1 point or longer questions). Abbreviations, acronyms (as long as they are common enough for me to understand, like NATO, WMD, etc.) – these are all fair game. Bullet points and lists are also fine. While poor writing can obscure good ideas, no points will be deducted or awarded for writing skills/grammatical errors.

**Substance and Preparation**

The questions are designed to be straightforward if you have kept up with reading assignments, attended class, and thought about the material. Everything covered in both readings and lecture material is “fair game.”

I attempt to ask questions about reading material that concern key arguments and salient pieces of evidence/major examples – not the minutiae (e.g., I might ask “How do Kertzer, Rathbun, and Paradis differentiate between procedural and instrumental rationality?” But never “Explain the DNVP’s position on Alsace-Lorraine in 1925.”).

Instead, I advise you to consider the following questions as you review reading material:

1. What is the authors’ main research question?

2. What is the primary argument – the theoretical mechanism that the author believes would generate a particular outcome?

3. How do they test their theory?

4. What are the key results?

5. How do these conclusions relate to or inform theories from other authors that we read in class?

Test yourself by summarizing a reading assignment in 2-5 sentences (question, theory, evidence), by outlining what you know about in response to each of the learning objectives on the slides, by generating new examples of concepts, and by considering how various concepts and theories might inform each other.

Partial credit is awarded when it is merited.

The exam is new, like the course, and some questions may turn out to be more or less challenging than I anticipate at the outset. Moreover, it will cover a lot of material. I do not pretend to estimate in advance what proportion of correct responses constitutes an ‘A’ or ‘B.’ Tentative cut points for letter grades will depend on the standard deviation/natural clustering, rather than an arbitrary standard, and your final grades will be curved so that the median is a B+ (in keeping with the Government department standard laid out in the syllabus). If you experience any uncertainty about how to compose an answer, you can never go wrong by answering in a way that makes active, transparent use of what you learned in this course.

1. It is possible that there will be a few (< 10) multiple choice questions. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. There are many other opportunities to develop your writing skills on the other assignments; the exam is designed to meet different learning objectives. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)