Chapter 1: Public Policy as a Concept and a Field (or Fields) of Study

1. Can “public policy” be defined as a distinct concept? If so, what would that definition be, and how does it avoid the conceptual difficulties of other definitions? If public policy cannot be defined, is there such a thing as a field of policy studies?

2. What are the advantages and/or disadvantages of treating the field of policy studies as plural rather than singular—that is, as a group of subfields such as policy analysis, program evaluation, and so on—rather than as a single field seeking a unifying theme or purpose?

Start by defining the subfield within public policy: agenda setting, policy evaluation, policy process, and policy analysis. How are these subfields tied together? Next, think about how other subfields in political science are defined. Does public policy hold the same weight as comparative politics, international relations, or political theory? Why or why not? If the unit of analysis within each policy subfield is consistent, then an argument can be made for a unifying framework.

3. Briefly describe Harold Lasswell’s notion of the “policy sciences.” Is this a realistic vision for what the field of policy studies should be? Why or why not?

Reread Lasswell’s 1951 chapter, “The Policy Orientation.” Pages 7-8 of The Public Policy Theory Primer refer to the tenets of Lasswell’s “policy sciences,” the most important of which are: 1) an interdisciplinary approach, and 2) an approach that serves democratic values.

Chapter 2: Does Politics Cause Policy? Does Policy Cause Politics?

1. Explain the main elements of good scientific theory as discussed by Daniel McCool.

The elements of good theory as defined by McCool are discussed on pages 24-25 of The Public Policy Theory Primer. Which elements are most realistic for policy theory and do other subfields in political science meet these requirements?
2. Is it fair to judge policy theory by the methodological standards laid out by Harold Lasswell and Daniel McCool? To be a legitimate theory, does a policy theory have to be parsimonious, predictive, and falsifiable, with considerable explanatory power? Consider whether the field public policy is being judged too harshly. It is arguably more quantitative than other subfields.

3. Is the stages model or policy typology framework rigorous enough to be called a theory of public policy? What are the scientific advantages and/or disadvantages of both approaches?

4. Is the policy typology framework a useful method for organizing the field? What is the current status of this framework in terms of its use by scholars, and is it still applicable?

5. Should policy scholars abandon the stages model and/or policy typologies? If so, explain why and whether there are other theoretical frameworks that are more useful.

   • The stages model and policy typologies are still standard reading for graduate programs suggesting there is some value in these frameworks.
   
   • The descriptive value of the stages model is clear, and scholars generally agree about the process of policymaking as shown on page 26 of The Public Policy Theory Primer. Where the stages model falls short is in testability and predictability. The question is whether such shortcomings are cause for abandonment of the model.
   
   • The typology framework fundamentally reshaped (for a time) how policy scholars think about the relationship between policy and politics. Lowi’s contribution cannot be overstated, the problem for the typology framework involves the unit of analysis. If the classification issue can be resolved, the theoretical value increases significantly.


1. What are the tenets of bounded rationality as laid out by Herbert Simon? How does Simon’s framework differ from complete rationality as discussed by scholars in neoclassical economics?
Simon’s *Administrative Behavior* is worth reading, as are his articles from 1955 and 1985, the latter of which introduces an interdisciplinary approach to the policy sciences that includes a heavy dose of political psychology.

2. **Incrementalism is essentially bounded rationality put into practice.** What are the main elements of incrementalism? Include discussion of key terms and phrases such as “muddling through,” the “root” and “branch” methods, “satisficing,” and “mutual adjustment.”

Lindblom’s 1959 article from *Public Administrative Review* introduces the concept of incrementalism. Simon provides the theoretical basis for incremental decision making and Lindblom puts that theory into practice by applying it to the field of public policymaking.

3. **What is the Tiebout model? Is there empirical evidence to support its framework?** Do citizens make choices in ways that fit with the Tiebout model? What are the potential implications of designing institutions based on the assumptions of the Tiebout model?

   - The Tiebout model makes certain assumptions about human decision making (that it is rational in the cost-benefit sense) and human mobility (that an exit option is always viable) that have been shown to be inaccurate. The school choice literature provides some limited support for the Tiebout model, but this research primarily shows the shortcomings of the Tiebout model.

   - To design institutions based on the Tiebout model is to ignore research from public policy and psychology about individual decision making.

4. **Does the institutional analysis and development (IAD) framework introduced by Elinor Ostrom satisfy the criteria of a parsimonious and falsifiable theory as set out by McCool in Chapter 2?**

The IAD framework, as shown in Figure 3.1, is a significant improvement over the Tiebout model as it is both interdisciplinary and more accurate in terms of predictability, but falls short on parsimony. Ostrom’s 1998 and 2011 articles are required reading on this framework.
5. Recent work in the IAD framework suggests that an external actor such as government may be unnecessary in certain situations. Under what conditions is this likely to apply?
The applicability of the IAD framework has in part been limited to common-pool resource dilemmas (CPRs). But within those limited settings, there is a clear trend showing that an external actor (e.g. government) is unnecessary; that social dilemmas can be solved with communication and the threat of sanction. This has enormous implications for public policy as suggested by Ostrom and her colleagues in their 1992 article (Ostrom, Walker, and Gardner).

Chapter 4: Whose Values? Policy Design

1. What is the “policy paradox” discussed by Deborah Stone? Is it falsifiable? In other words, is it something that can be empirically tested?
   Stone’s “policy paradox” is widely discussed by scholars, but difficult to study systematically. For example, what is the dependent variable? What is the unit of analysis? Without answers to these two questions, it is impossible to subject this concept to empirical scrutiny.

2. How do you test whether “democratic values” are included in the process of policy design? Is there empirical support for the work of Murray Edelman and Frank Fischer?
   As with the policy paradox, there is widespread agreement on Edelman’s and Fischer’s calls for incorporating “democratic values” into policy studies; in fact, this claim goes back to Lasswell. The dilemma for these scholars is finding agreement on values such as equity and liberty. This also fits with a more general critique positivists often make of post-positivists frameworks.

3. Discuss the main elements of the target populations matrix developed by Anne Schneider and Helen Ingram. What are the four main population groups, how are they defined, how do they vary in political power, and what are examples of each?
   The target population matrix is based on two concepts: deservedness and political power. Over time, groups have demonstrated tremendous fluidity within the matrix. A helpful exercise is to think of groups that have moved and the causes behind such movements.
4. What empirical evidence exists to support the social construction of the target populations framework? If social constructions are constantly evolving, does this render the framework untestable?

Target populations are socially constructed, but finding evidence to support this claim is difficult. Consider two populations: welfare recipients and the LGBT community. How are both groups socially constructed today, and have those constructions changed over the last 20 years? What evidence would you look to support your answer?

5. The narrative policy framework (NPF) is quickly becoming a dominant framework in policy design studies. What are the advantages and/or disadvantages of this approach, particularly in terms of the capability to test its key assumptions?

As with Schneider and Ingram’s work, the narrative policy framework (NPM) is best considered using real-life policies. Review the tenets of the NPM and apply to a specific policy such as recent changes by the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) regarding preflight screening of passengers at airports. Does the NPM apply?

Chapter 5: Where Does Policy Come From? The Policy Process

1. What are the two faces of power? How does this approach inform the study of issue networks and policy subsystems?

The two faces of power are direct and indirect power, the latter of which is more powerful given it concerns control over the list of alternatives to be considered. Subsystem actors with indirect power can essentially limit the power and involvement of outside actors, thus preserving control over the policy subsystem.

2. What are the main tenets of the advocacy coalition framework (ACF) and punctuated equilibrium theory (PET)?

3. Compare and contrast the empirical support for the ACF and with that for PET. Does either framework do better in terms of offering testable hypotheses?

- There are several tenets to the advocacy coalition framework (ACF) as shown in Figure 5.1 in the text. Key to understanding this framework is recognition that the coalition is held together by agreement around “core” beliefs, both “policy core” and “deep core.”
• Simply put, punctuated equilibrium theory (PET) states that a change in policy image can lead to a change in the institutional venue under which the policy is considered, opening the door for rapid policy change, or a policy punctuation. Review Baumgartner and Jones’s example of the nuclear power industry and how the policy image changed from one based on energy security to one based on human security and safety.

• As is the case with many policy frameworks reviewed in this text, the ACF and PET are highly descriptive and informative, but tend to lack predictability.

4. **What are the assumptions of the “garbage can model” of policy change, and how does this inform policy windows theory?**
   The “garbage can model” essentially posits that there is a significant stochastic element to policy change. While descriptive, it is not predictive.

5. **Explain how the role of the policy entrepreneur differs according to the ACF, PET, and policy windows theory.**
   In the ACF, policy entrepreneurs help preserve the coalition through agreement on core beliefs; in the PET and garbage can model, policy entrepreneurs take a more active role in monitoring the political environment for openings that will allow for policy change or recognizing the need to reshape a policy’s image.

6. **What challenges does Paul Burstein recent work on policy change present for the ACF, PET, and windows theory?**
   Burstein’s work presents a significant challenge to the ACF, PET, and windows theory because it shows public opinion and advocacy have small to nonsignificant effects on the likelihood of policy change. Scholars will difficulty challenging this work because it is both methodologically robust and innovative. The use of random sampling to select policies for examination is likely to significantly affect how policy scholars operate.

**Chapter 6: What Should We Do? The Field of Policy Analysis**

1. **How does the rationalist approach to policy analysis deal with the key normative question of what value or values to use to judge what policy alternatives are “best”?**
   As written on p. 119 of *The Public Policy Theory Primer*, the rationalist approach “takes an instrumental view of public policy,” policy analysis is quantitative with a clearly
specified set of alternatives from which to choose to address a particular problem. The rationalist approach focuses on the goal of efficiency to deal with value judgments inherent in the process of deciding what goal is “best”?

2. **What are the main elements of the post-positivist critique of the rationalist approach to policy analysis? Are these criticisms valid? Why or why not?**
   - The post-positivist critique of the rationalist approach is that the latter is essentially self-delusional; that values are embedded in the process of policy design and choosing policy outcomes, and the methodology for studying “what to do” should account for this fact.
   - According to post-positivists, rationalist approaches, such as welfare economics and cost analysis, rely too heavily on quantitative analysis, discounting the values that policymakers bring to the table.

3. **Define the Pareto and Kaldor-Hicks concepts of efficiency. Are each of these a good basis for evaluating policy alternatives? Why or why not?**
   - The Pareto criterion, as discussed on p. 123, “which describes an allocation of resources such that “no alternative allocation can make at least one person better off without making anyone worse off”” (Boardman et al. 2001, 26).
   - The Kaldor-Hicks principle, revises the Pareto principle by allowing for decisions that will allow for some individuals to be worse off so long as, in theory, the winners could compensate the losers from a particular policy.
   - The Pareto concept and Kaldor-Hicks principles are both problematic because they require complete understanding of individual utility; agreement on how to quantify utility is often not possible or requires considerable leaps in logic. The Kaldor-Hicks principle is perhaps most troublesome because it is based on an assumption about the winners of public policy that is most likely unrealistic.

4. **What are the key weaknesses of the post-positivist approach to policy analysis? Can these weaknesses be satisfactorily addressed? Why or why not?**
   The post-positivist framework is difficult to implement methodologically. While this framework rules out efficiency as the single factor for deciding outcomes, all other values are considered viable. Post-positivists take a normative approach to policy analysis.
Participatory Policy Analysis (PPA) is a popular approach among post-positivists, but there remain questions about its feasibility and applicability across all policy domains.

5. **Is it possible to successfully merge the rationalist and post-positivist approaches to policy analysis? How, exactly, could this be accomplished?**

Behavioral economics offers an opening for merging the rationalist and post-positivists camps. By bringing in psychology and social psychology, which help to inform the basis for behavioral economics, there is the potential to maintain the quantitative approach rationalists prefer while also acknowledging that the standard assumptions of cost-benefit analysis may not always apply.

**Chapter 7: What Have We Done? Impact Analysis and Program Evaluation**

1. **What is the difference between formative and summative policy evaluations? Under what circumstances should each be applied?**

   The difference between formative and summative evaluations is in the timing in which each is administered. Formative evaluations are conducted shortly after the implementation process begins, allowing for policy adjustments where necessary. Summative evaluations are completed after some time has passed since the policy was implemented and are a more general overall assessment of the policy or program’s effectiveness.

2. **What is the difference between process and outcome evaluations? What question(s) does each type of evaluation seek to answer?**

   Process evaluations focus on the actions and procedures of the actors implementing the policy; examples, as discussed on p. 146, include compliance issues and auditing. Outcome evaluations “assess what a policy has actually achieved” (p. 146).

3. **What’s the best way to go about operationalizing an outcome of interest in an impact analysis?**

   The outcome of interest is measured using a quantitative approach and focuses on key outputs of a particular policy. Scholars have shown, however, that any one outcome of interest may not reflect the entirety of a policy’s impact, and that public policies tend to produce multiple outcomes of interest.
4. Impact analysis employs a counterfactual approach to try and establish the causality behind an outcome of interest. Why does impact analysis not employ a simpler and more intuitive approach to establishing causality such as the diagnostic approach?

- The counterfactual approach is logically consistent and stems from three key elements: temporal precedence, covariation, and co-occurrence.
- The counterfactual approach is quantitative as opposed to the more qualitative approach used by diagnostic analyses. The counterfactual approach allows the policy analyst to determine whether Y would occur in the absence of X; in other words, the counterfactual approach seeks to establish a causal relationship between a policy and desired outcomes.

5. What is a program theory, and what advantages/disadvantages does it offer in framing an impact analysis?

As written on page 155, program theory “makes explicit the causal beliefs that link the policy to its desired objectives.” The advantage of program theory is that provides a clear and logical path, particularly through the use of an outcome line, between the problem, policy, and outcomes. The disadvantage to program theory is that it is context-dependent and applies on a case by case basis, thus it tends to lack generalizability.

6. Compare and contrast the main research designs used to structure impact analyses. As a rule of thumb, which would you recommend as the default research design for impact analysis, and why?

Table 7.1 discusses the advantages and disadvantages of the three main research designs to structure impact analyses: experimental, quasi-experimental, and correlational. Of the three, experimental is considered the “gold standard” because of its use of random assignment. Target populations are randomly assigned to either a treatment group, in which they participate in the program (or policy), or a control group, in which participants do not benefit from the program (or policy). Such an approach allows for a more direct test of causality and the counterfactual. The randomization process is designed to ensure that observed and unobserved factors that may be related to the impact of a policy or program are balanced across treatment and control groups; thus any
difference between the two groups can be attributed to the effect of the policy or program.

Chapter 8: How Does It Work? Policy Implementation

1. What is the main thing we learned from first-generation implementation studies? Are these sorts of studies still worth doing? Why or why not?

   • As discussed on pages 168-169, first-generation implementation studies can be traced to the work of Pressman and Wildavsky (1973). The key findings are that policy implementation is often more difficult than anticipated due to “multiple decision points” across and within governmental units, and that there is often disagreement on the “means” to achieving specific ends.

   • First-generation implementation studies are useful, but require considerable time and patience on the part of the researcher as they are qualitative and require considerable time in the field.

2. What is the difference between the “top-down” and “bottom-up” approaches that emerged in second-generation implementation studies? Which is the better approach to understanding implementation, and why?

   • A “top-down” approach to implementation studies stems from the work of Mazmanian and Sabatier (1983). When viewed from the “center”, or the view of the initial policymaker, implementing policy requires getting lower-level officials (bureaucrats) to appropriately enact the policy in accordance with its original intent.

   • Lipsky’s (1971, 1980) “bottom-up” approach was more focused on the views of the bureaucrats, the “periphery” in Mazmanian and Sabatier’s framework; that implementation is best understood from the perspective of “the people who actually did the implementing” (175).

3. Many scholars have concluded that third-generation implementation studies failed because of an unresolvable problem. What was this problem, and is it truly unresolvable?
Third-generation implementation studies are viewed as a failure due to a lack of coherence; models of policy implementation became enormously complex, with literally hundreds of variables as possibilities. As a framework, it lacked parsimony.

4. **What is the difference between policy implementation studies and program implementation studies?** Which do you think are most likely to lead to improved public policies and programs? Why?
   - Program implementation is more focused and quantitative than policy implementation. Program implementation studies are interested in improving particular programs through empirical scrutiny; there is less focus on building a unified theoretical framework.
   - Policy implementation is enormously complex, so a parsimonious model is perhaps unrealistic. The four generations of implementation studies, however, have added significant explanatory power to understanding how, once passed, a policy is put into action.

5. **Is the clear failure to develop a general theory of policy implementation likely to hamper future scholarly research on implementation?** Why or why not?
   Ken Meier, Laurence O’Toole, and Peter May are leading the way in spawning what some call a “fourth-generation” of implementation studies. While Meier and O’Toole are drawing on insight from the public management literature, May’s focus is on the perspective of “policy regimes” in implementing policy.

**Chapter 9: New Directions in Policy Research**

1. **Can insights from the cognitive sciences, including neuroscience, be used to improve existing theories of policy change?** How?
   While there is some variation in the literature on policy change, at its core, policy change is about fluctuating perceptions about a particular policy. The cognitive sciences offer unique insight into how and why perceptions change.

2. **How do recent findings from behavioral economics apply to the study of policy decision making?** What existing frameworks potentially benefit by incorporating such findings?
Numerous frameworks in policy studies, including the ACF, PET, incrementalism, and windows theory, are based on assumptions about human decision making. Insights from research in fields directly related to decision making can offer important new insights into how people respond to incoming stimuli.

3. **The work of Daniel Kahneman, Joseph LeDoux, Richard Thaler, and others has consistently shown that emotions play a more prominent role in decision making than assumed by neoclassical economics. Do such findings essentially render the Tiebout model (and school choice policies) useless?**

   The Tiebout model is based on a rational cost-benefit analysis of the quality of services provided; emotion has no role in the model. That scholars working in the cognitive sciences have clearly demonstrated a fundamental role for emotions in human decision making presents a serious challenge to the Tiebout model. People may “vote with their feet,” but that vote is less likely to be based service quality than other more personal or social factors.

4. **What are the main elements of evolutionary psychology, and how do they apply to the field of policy studies? What existing frameworks potentially benefit by incorporating such findings?**

5. **Does expanding the theoretical foundation of policy studies to include behavioral economics, evolutionary psychology, and even neuroscience improve the field as a whole? Is such an approach worthwhile so long as it improves the predictability and explanatory power of policy studies, even if this means a less parsimonious theory?**

   A more interdisciplinary approach to policy studies is necessary for the field and harkens back to two of the leading scholars in the field: Harold Lasswell and Herbert Simon. Both Lasswell and Simon argued that a more interdisciplinary approach not only improves our understanding of the policy process but also potentially improves how government responds to social and economic dilemmas.

6. **Can experimental methodology be used to improve existing theories of policy change and policy design? How?**

   Experimental methodology, while not always easily applied to specific areas relating to policy process or program evaluation, is increasingly being used in the field. Randomization, whether randomized controlled trials or random selection of policies, is
key. Where randomization is not an option, as may be case in the area of program evaluation, balancing on observable characteristics post-policy implementation allows scholars to examine whether a policy achieved a desired outcome controlling for other factors.

Chapter 10: Do the Policy Sciences Exist?

1. Is policy studies a “coherent academic field” of study?
   - Think back to McCool’s points of “good” theory; the dominant frameworks discussed throughout the text are all at least explanatory and descriptive, while some are more parsimonious than others (contrast PET with IAD).
   - As shown in Figure 10.1, the field is “coherent” in the sense that there are clear stages to the policy process, near universal agreement on those stages, and scholars have developed clear frameworks for explaining elements of each stage.
   - Policy studies is an internally coherent field, where criticism comes is when comparing to other academic fields in which the unit of analysis is more easily defined and measured.

2. What are the three most dominant theoretical frameworks, in terms of scientific rigor, in the policy studies?
   The ACF and PET have arguably generated the most scholarly research and attention in policy studies (after stages theory and the typology framework withered). A third could be in the area of implementation studies, Schneider and Ingram’s target population matrix, or the NPF.

3. What are the main conceptual challenges to developing a unifying framework for the study of public policy? What are the main methodological challenges?
   The primary conceptual challenge for a unifying framework is that thus far, frameworks in the field have been confined to stages of the policy process. This presents a clear methodological challenge because the unit of analysis will depend on the stage being studied. As discussed in Chapter 5, Burstein’s research using random sampling is already challenging existing frameworks and may lead to new insights.