

**PRINCETON UNIVERSITY**  
**Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs**

**MEMORANDUM**

To: Students Taking the QE1  
From: Robert Willig, Faculty Chair  
Date: March 31, 2009  
Subject: QE1 General Procedures

The QE1 will be given on Thursday, May 7<sup>th</sup>, from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM. Background materials for the QE1 will be distributed at 1:00 PM on Wednesday, May 6<sup>th</sup>.

QE1 review sessions will be scheduled during the week of April 27<sup>th</sup> to help students prepare for the QE1; several previous QE1s will be reviewed with a faculty person. Each review session will concentrate on a particular discipline; i.e., Economics, Statistics, Politics, and Psychology. The dates and times of the review sessions will be announced shortly.

I. Format of the QE1

The format of the QE1 will be very similar to that of previous years, and like the written portion of the IPE. One modification to the coverage of the exam was made in 1999 with the incorporation of material from WWS 502, and this is the case this year, as well. However, the format and length of the exam will be unchanged.

As with the IPE, background materials relating to the problem will be distributed at 1:00 PM on the day before the exam. This information should be treated as completely accurate. You should read these materials prior to seeing the exam on Thursday morning. **Do not discuss the contents of the background material, as this is considered part of the exam.**

The exam that you receive on Thursday morning will ask you to analyze a concrete policy proposal or problem. Your job will be to respond in a clear “memorandum” that analyzes the problem and lays out a course of action. There is no single right answer. We can imagine many fine answers that are different from one another.

You will be given eight hours to complete and print the test. In that time, you should be able to answer all of the questions and address most of the important points in the problem, though probably not all of them. You could easily spend a week or more on the issues raised in the proposal (and still not have the perfect solution) -- but we do not intend for you to do so.

A number of arguments -- political, psychological, economic, and statistical -- will be included in the statement of the problem. **You may not discuss the QE1 with anyone except the designated proctors.** You may freely consult your notes from the core courses (501, 502, 507, 511, and 512). A calculator, graph paper, and statistical tables may prove essential.

\*Non-native English speaking students and students with documented physical limitations may apply for extra time for reading the background materials and writing their memos. A request form will be sent to you and must be submitted to the Graduate Program Office by Friday, April 24<sup>th</sup>.

## II. Exam Strategy

The key to doing well on the QE1 is simply knowing the material taught in the MPA program core, and clearly articulating its application to the QE1 problem. Otherwise, there is no foolproof technique for success. There are, however, several things to keep in mind when you are trying to take apart the problem and formulate a concise, compelling memo in response.

### A. How to crack the problem.

- (1) Identify the key goals of those who (in the problem statement) are asking you to analyze the problem.
- (2) Try to find answers to the following questions about any major proposal you are asked to analyze:
  - o what is the proposal supposed to do?
  - o will it actually do this? (as a matter of logic, and according to the facts the exam makes available)
  - o what else does the proposal do?
- (3) Identify the main actors who are involved in the problem and its solution. How do they perceive their interests? What strategies might diffuse opposition, or build support, so that a good solution would become politically feasible?

### B. How to prepare your memo.

- (1) Read the instructions.
- (2) Make sure you cover elements of the questions that are posed which deal with politics, economics, statistics and psychology. In view of the grading that is described below, you must show knowledge of and ability to apply material from all of these four disciplinary areas of the core.
- (3) Think, analyze, and organize before you write. A very good memo will be clear, cogent, and concise. Brevity is a major virtue, so long as you cover central aspects of the problem and use central tools from your core courses to solve it. Hence, you should not start writing until you have fair clarity in mind of what you are going to say -- although you should not put off writing until too late in the day.
- (4) Highly technical arguments, diagrams, and computations should be confined to appendices. Each appendix should stand on its own, so that somebody reading it would know what you are trying to show. Calculations randomly sprinkled on a page do not constitute a coherent appendix.
- (5) The cover memo should be clear and concise. It should be written in straightforward English, not jargon. Results of the arguments in appendices should be clearly summarized in the appropriate section of the main memo.
- (6) When in doubt, remember that the QE1 is an EXAM. Think of your cover memo as being a clear summary of your arguments. Think of the appendices as footnotes

that prove or demonstrate your assertions. Not all assertions need be accompanied by appendices--only those that are based on technical analytics. Nevertheless, evidence (numerical calculations, graphs, diagrams, or words) should be carefully marshaled to support your arguments.

### III. Grading

Before the exam, you will be given your blind grading number and your number will be on the envelope you receive on the day of the exam. **Only this code number should appear on your response; your name should NOT appear at all.** This procedure is designed to ensure that all grading is completely anonymous. The blind grade number is known only to you and to the Graduate Program Office.

THE FACULTY READERS ASSIGN GRADES IN FOUR DISCIPLINARY AREAS:  
ECONOMICS, STATISTICS, PSYCHOLOGY, AND POLITICS.

Passing exams have no more than one of the four grades at the D level, and no grade of F.

Failing exams are those with one or more F's or two or more D's in the four disciplinary components.

Any component given a grade of D or F will have been read by at least two disciplinary specialists, who must concur on the grade. Before an exam is failed overall, however, it will have been re-graded in its entirety by the QE1 Committee. Hence, no exam can be failed without its having been reconsidered twice: by at least one other reader in the relevant discipline(s), and by the entire committee. Decisions of the committee are final.

Each student will learn his or her four grades (and whether the exam has been passed, not yet passed, or passed with distinction) in a sealed envelope. A list of those students who passed the exam with distinction will be posted opposite the mailboxes in the Graduate Program Office.

### IV. Logistics of the QE1

At 1:00 pm on Wednesday, May 6<sup>th</sup>, the background materials for the QE1 will be placed in your mailbox. All students taking the QE1 should plan to read these materials carefully before Thursday morning. Remember, you may NOT discuss the material.

At 8:45 am on Thursday, May 7<sup>th</sup>, the QE1 will be distributed in the lower lobby of Robertson Hall. A continental breakfast will be available in the lower level of Robertson Hall after 8:00 am. The exam lasts from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. You will be permitted to take this examination in any of the classrooms in the lower level of Robertson Hall or in the computer room to which you were assigned if you requested use of a School computer.

You may not take the exam out of the building. You are nevertheless free to leave the building for a break if you wish. Lunch will be provided by the School between 12:30 pm and 1:30 pm in the graduate lounge.

The examination must be returned to **Bowl 16 no later than 5:00 pm** on the day of the exam. **Exams turned pass the 5:00 pm deadline will be marked late and will be considered for possible**

**failure by the Committee.** All examination papers must be returned in the envelope provided. Be sure to write your blind grade number, **NOT** your name, on each page of your memo, including the appendices, and to sequentially number each page.

Writing paper, a ball-point pen, and a pencil, will be provided in your examination envelope. You must use this paper and these pens, to facilitate the Xeroxing, for any hand-written portions of your exam. Extra paper will be available on tables in the lower lobby. Printer paper will be available in all clusters, carrels and in room 035 where extra printers will be set up to facilitate printing at the end of the day.

**REMEMBER: DO NOT PUT YOUR NAME ANYWHERE IN YOUR RESPONDING MEMO**

#### V. Role of the QE1 Results

The Qualifying Examination Committee regards the QE1 as a diagnostic tool to help students and faculty assess each student's educational experience in the School to date. Neither at the end of the first nor of the second year does failure to pass the QE examination automatically close off progress to the degree.

In very rare cases at the end of the first year, the full record of a student's performance, in coursework as well as the QE1, could lead the Committee to recommend that a student not be permitted to proceed to the second year. Students who fail the QE at the end of the first year normally proceed to the second year with the understanding that some part of their educational experience in the second year should be devoted to mastering the analytical skills of the core curriculum. They should then be able to pass this test when it is given again during the following January (the IPE may be taken as a make-up QE1 with the addition of a psychology question) or the following May. The administration does not announce, in any public forum, who has yet to pass this test. Approach the exam in a methodical way to show your knowledge of the core, and you will do well on it.

At the end of the second year, the full record of a student's performance, in coursework and the written and oral parts of the QE2 as well as the QE1, could conceivably lead the Committee to recommend that the student not receive the degree. But there are other cases in which the student's full record could lead the Committee to recommend that the degree be awarded even if the student has failed to pass the QE1. The printed "MPA Rules on Grading, Readmission, and Degrees," which you received at Orientation, contains more information than you really need to know about these procedures.

Good luck on your QE1