George Mason University
School of Policy, Government and International Affairs
Public Policy Doctoral Qualifying Examination
Part II (take-home exam paper)
January 8-12, 2015

This part of the exam must be delivered in hard copy to Shannon Williams or Alisha Klapholz no later than 5:00 p.m. on Monday, January 12, 2015. You must also email a copy to Shannon at swilli32@gmu.edu no later than 5:00 p.m. on January 12th.

You have been assigned a tracking number. Your Part II code begins with an “x.” Put the code on every page of the paper you submit as your response to this examination. Do not put your name on the document or on any envelope in which it is submitted.

It is recommended that you re-read the General Instructions for the Qualifying Examination before you begin work on Part II.

BACKGROUND
Education policy is an area of great debate nationally and internationally. For many years scholars and policy makers have made numerous contributions to these debates examining the relative impacts of school vouchers, vocational training, high-stakes testing, and access to higher education on individual, regional, and national social and economic outcomes. Indeed education policy is so controversial because it lies at the intersection of social policy regimes focused on equality of opportunities and the equality of outcomes. Despite this ongoing debate there is little consensus on what an ideal educational system looks like in the deeply interconnected world that exists early in the 21st Century.

There exists a strong trend in the scholarly literature suggesting that educational policy is closely connected to broader elements of the social policy and, indeed, the underlying economic system that exists in a particular country. This is particularly the case in the most economically developed countries where human capital formation regimes are closely connected to the underlying class and economic compromises at the heart of the welfare state. Thus, certain types of labor market structure, some argue, have a strong connection to a particular type of economic system.

Particular human capital formation regimes, focused on the production of narrower or more general skills across companies, industries, and the economy, tell us relatively little about education policy impacts. Leaving aside the underlying history of a particular human capital formation regime, what are the relative costs and benefits of such a regime moving forward for both wealthy and less well-off economies? What are the implications of these insights for countries in the developing world seeking to change patterns of human capital and provide new opportunities to their citizens?
ASSIGNMENT

Your task is to consider the impacts of different human capital formation regimes on social and economic development. You will provide a policy-focused paper on the impacts of welfare regime on education policy with a particular focus on how regimes can be altered to meet the contemporary challenges.

In this report be sure to include the following information:

1. Describe the range of human capital formation regimes in wealthy economies. Be sure to engage critically with scholarly approaches to this issue.
2. Discuss the impacts of a more general versus industry or firm focused skills formation policy, and the corresponding benefits and challenges of these approaches.
3. Which approach to human capital formation would be best for reducing inequality and / or alleviating poverty in an advanced economy? Which approach would have the greatest effects on economic development? What affects do these choices have on other types of inequality?
4. Which approach would have the greatest social impacts on a poor or middle-income country?
5. Please connect these debates about human capital formation regimes to debates in the United States about school voucher programs and high-stakes testing.
6. Finally, recognizing the real limitations that pre-existing economic ties and political compromises impose on any change in human capital formation policy, discuss strategies to shift from one path of human capital formation to another.

Your report should be about 25 pages in length, double-spaced with 1” margins and 12-point font, citations included. Be sure to use a standard reference system and cite your sources carefully. When you quote an author or refer to specific arguments or evidence from the articles, include page numbers in your citations. You are encouraged to use data to develop new or revised figures/diagrams where applicable.

The report will be supplemented by a 150-word abstract included at the beginning of your report so that the readers can easily see what your conclusions are and the main arguments you make in your full report.

The articles from which your analysis draws are the following:


