

SEMINAR IN POLITICAL BEHAVIOR

Spring 2009

University of Wyoming POLS 4510 3:10-6:00PM Monday A&S 226	Prof.: Andrew Garner Office: A&S 146 Telephone: 766-2176 Office hours: Tuesday, 1-4:30PM e-mail: agarner1@uwyo.edu
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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This seminar examines the fragmented field of American public opinion. The role of public opinion in political decision-making has increased dramatically over the past century as the scientific opinion poll became used by candidates and the mainstream press. This course will begin by examining how public opinion is measured, including both the science and the art of public opinion polling, and we will focus on gaining a sophisticated understanding of what information is (and, more importantly, is not) communicated via polls. The class will then turn toward understanding the various theories and empirical research concerning the nature, origins, and causes of change in American public opinion. The last part of the semester will be divided between macro-opinion (or the public as a whole) and micro-opinion (individual attitudes) with the goal of having students gain a deeper understanding of each area of public opinion research. Finally, the class will consider issues and concerns about public opinion in the context of American democracy.

READINGS

Below are the required books for this course. All are available at the University bookstore and also can be found used (e.g., significantly cheaper) through several online bookstores:

Erikson, Robert, and Kent Tedin. 2007. *American Public Opinion: Its Origins, Content, and Impact*, Pearson-Longman, 7th edition.

Asher, Herbert. 2007. *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know*, CQ Press, 7th edition.

Stimson, James. 2004. *Tides of Consent: How Public Opinion Shapes American Politics*, Cambridge.

Zaller, John. 1992. *Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, Cambridge.

There will also be several assigned readings from supplementary texts throughout the course as indicated in the course schedule below. These supplementary texts will be made available online or in class.

GRADES

Your final course grade will be determined as follows:

- 40%: Participation

- 40%: Research Paper (5% each assignment, 25% final paper)
- 20%: Book Review

PARTICIPATION (40% of final grade)

This is a seminar class, meaning that class time is devoted to open discussion of the course readings and current events relevant to the daily topic. You are *required* to read the material prior to each class and to participate in the discussions of that material as well as current events relevant to the topic of the day. Reading at least one daily newspaper each day will help you stay current with on-going policy debates and topics relevant to public opinion. Simply attending class regularly is not sufficient – you are expected to know the topic of each week’s readings, the important points made by each author, the principal empirical findings of the literature, and (most importantly) how the research helps us understand American public opinion.

To facilitate student involvement with the discussions, each student will serve as discussion leader for at least one week. Your job as discussion leader will include formulating questions to motivate discussion, finding examples from current events that illustrate the major concepts, and providing any handouts or supplementary materials that help facilitate class discussion. Your performance as discussion leader will be evaluated based on the quality and thoughtfulness of your effort and will count for 10% of your final grade.

The rest of your participation grade will be evaluated based on the quality and quantity of your participation in the class discussions. Quality refers not just to the number of comments you make, but also the depth of insight and familiarity with the material that you bring to the discussion each day. In short, your grade will suffer if you act like a wallflower.

I also reserve the right to require weekly writing assignments or quizzes if I notice that class discussion is lagging or suspect that large numbers of students are not reading the material prior to class. The grades on these writing assignments or quizzes will count toward your class participation grade.

Please note that class time is for discussion of the course material. It is not for text messaging, answering phone calls, chatting with friends, reading the Boomerang, taking an afternoon nap, playing games on your computer, nor any other non-course related activities. Students engaged with activities other than those directly related to the course will not only receive a zero for class participation that day, but will also be asked to leave the classroom. Whether I allow you back to class in the future will be at my sole discretion.

Finally, also note that politics should be about the respectful exchange of ideas. Some of the topics will deal with long-held values and ideas that you may hold. Disagreement is always encouraged, but disrespectfulness toward other students is strictly prohibited.

RESEARCH PAPER (40% of your final grade)

Each student will research and analyze some aspect of public opinion. Students have wide latitude to choose the topic or issue of their interest (including public opinion in foreign countries), but you should consult with me about your topics to ensure there is enough data and research to form the basis of a research paper.

The research paper will be at least 20 pages in length and will be developed in stages throughout the semester as a series of shorter papers. The final research paper will be a compilation of these shorter papers that have been revised following my comments. More specific details and due dates

will be provided later in the semester, but the following provides an overview of the three assignments:

Assignment 1: Proposal and Preliminary Bibliography (5% of final grade): Provide 2-3 double-spaced pages that explains your research topic, including a) importance of the issue or topic to American democracy, b) what topics or themes you plan to explore in your research, and c) your overall strategy of researching this topic (what data sources are available and so forth). In addition to the 2-3 pages, you will also need to include a preliminary bibliography of references you have found (minimum of eight references).

Assignment 2: Abstract, Outline, and Literature Review (5% of final grade): Provide a 1-paragraph abstract that gives an overview of your research paper and what conclusions you hope to reach; provide a 2-page detailed outline of your paper; provide a 4-5 page literature review that analyzes and synthesizes the literature relevant to your topic.

Assignment 3: First Draft (5% of final grade): Provide an 8-10 page first draft of your research paper, including full citations. A separate bibliography should also be provided with the first draft.

Final Paper (25% of final grade): The paper should be approximately 20 pages (double-spaced, 12-point font, standard margins) with citations, footnotes, and bibliography. It should include a separate title page that includes the title of the paper and an abstract that is roughly 150 words long. Your final research paper will draw on the concepts and theories from class to analyze a particular issue area or topic in public opinion. It should look professional and be free of typographical or grammatical errors; your grade will be based on the quality of the scholarship of the paper as well as the quality of the writing and overall presentation.

BOOK REVIEW (20% of your final grade)

In lieu of a midterm exam, you will be required to write a 5-6 page book review. A list of books can be provided from which to choose, but ideally you will select a book that will be related to the topic of your research paper. The goal of this assignment is to encourage you to begin reading and researching your topic for your final research paper early in the semester. Book reviews are due by Friday, February 27th.

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

Any form of academic dishonesty will be punished ruthlessly. This includes plagiarism on your papers, cheating on exams, and any other form of academic dishonesty falling under the University's guidelines. Students caught engaging in such dishonesty will be punished in the most severe manner allowed by the university. No exceptions.

I cannot state this emphatically enough – I have a zero tolerance policy toward any form of academic dishonesty. Students should consult University Regulation 802 (www.uwyo.edu/legal/Uniregs/ur802.htm) as well as the Political Science Department's policy statement (www.uwyo.edu/Polis/Academic_Dishonesty.doc) regarding the definition and penalties for academic dishonesty. University Regulation 802 defines academic dishonest thusly:

An act is academically dishonest when it is an act attempted or performed which misrepresents one's involvement in an academic task in any way, or permits another student to

misrepresent the latter's involvement in an academic task by assisting in the misrepresentation. Some examples of academic dishonesty include such acts as:

- a. Representing as one's own work material copied or borrowed from any source, written or otherwise, public or private, without proper citation of the source.
- b. Using a ghost writer, commercial or otherwise, for any type of assignment.
- c. Submitting substantially the same work for more than one class without the explicit permission of all concerned instructors.
- d. Doing a class assignment for someone else or allowing someone to copy one's assignment.
- e. Using notes or prepared information in an examination unless authorized by the instructor.
- f. Taking an examination for someone else or allowing someone to take an examination for oneself.
- g. Copying from, or assisting, another student during an examination.
- h. Stealing, or otherwise improperly obtaining, copies of an examination before or after its administration.
- i. Submitting substantially the same work as someone else unless authorized by the instructor.

The University states the following about academic dishonesty:

The University of Wyoming is built upon a strong foundation of integrity, respect and trust. All members of the university community have a responsibility to be honest and the right to expect honesty from others. Any form of academic dishonesty is unacceptable to our community and will not be tolerated. Teacher and students should report suspected violations of standards of academic honesty to the instructor, department head, or dean. Other University regulations can be found at: <http://uwadmnweb.uwyo.edu/legal/universityregulation.htm>

GETTING HELP

It is important for you to realize that my job as professor is to help you learn the material. If you have questions, ask them! Chances are that if a point is unclear to you then it is also unclear to the majority of other students as well. Feel free to drop by my office, email me, see me after class, ask questions during class, or call me whenever you feel as though you do not fully understand the material. The sooner you ask for help, the more time I will have to help you. A panicked email twenty minutes before an exam asking me to explain the last two weeks worth of material is probably a bad idea. Your new motto should be: "Ask Early and Ask Often."

I will be happy to accommodate any disability so long as it is documented with the University Disability Support Services at the University. Please see me after class so we can discuss what accommodations need to be made.

COURSE SCHEDULE

	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Chapters to Read</i>
Week 1 Jan 12	Introduction to Public Opinion and Polling Methods	
Week 2 Jan 19	MLK: No Class	
Week 3 Jan 26	Polling and the Public	Asher Chapters 3-4 Asher Chapters 8-9 E&T Chapter 2
Week 4 Feb 2	Socialization	E&T Chapter 5 Jennings & Niemi 1968 Dolan 1995
Week 5 Feb 9	Stupid Is As Stupid Does: Information, Ideology, and Micro-Opinion	E&T Chapter 3 Niemi & Weisberg excerpt
Week 6 Feb 16	Party Identification	E&T Chapter 3 <i>American Voter</i> excerpt Achen 1992 Carsey & Layman 2006
Week 7 Feb 23	Macro-Opinion	E&T Chapter 4 Lupia 1994 Bartels 1996
Week 8 Mar 2	Group Differences in Opinion	E&T Chapter 7 Additional readings TBA
Week 9 Mar 9	Macro-Opinion In-Depth	Stimson Chapters 1-3
Week 10 Mar 16	SPRING BREAK: No Class	
Week 11 Mar 23	Macro-Opinion In-Depth continued	Stimson Chapters 4-6
Week 12 Mar 30	Opinion Formation In-Depth	Zaller
Week 13 Apr 6	Opinion Formation In-Depth continued	Zaller
Week 14 Apr 13	Opinion Formation In-Depth	Zaller
Week 15 Apr 20	Democracy, Public Opinion, and Representation	E&T Chapter 1 and 11 SME "Dynamic Representation."
Week 16 Apr 27	No Class: Work On Papers	q
FINAL EXAM	May 6th Research Papers Due	