

POLI 4030 Political Attitudes and Public Opinion

Fall 2010

Basic Information

Class meets: Tuesday and Thursday, 9:10-10:30, 102 Tureaud Hall

Instructor: Professor Ondercin

Office: 118F Himes Hall & 208C Stubbs Hall

E-mail: ondercin@lsu.edu

Office Phone: If calling during office hours 578-4804. If calling some other time 578-2550.

Office hours: Tuesday 1-4 and by appointment. Office hours will be held in 118F Himes Hall unless otherwise announced.

E-mail is an effective way to reach me, I check my messages several times a day. In addition to my office hours, I will be available most days after class. If these times don't work, talk to me and we can make an appointment. Never hesitate to talk to me if you have a problem, comment, or concern.

Course Description

This class is a survey of the scientific study of public opinion in the United States. We will review the work conducted in political science and the other social sciences on the attitudes and beliefs of the U.S. electorate. Then we will study public opinion at both the micro-level and macro-level. Micro-level studies of public opinion focus on the individual. We will begin by reviewing how public opinion is measured. This review will focus primarily on the use of surveys; however, we will touch on alternative ways of measuring public opinion. Then we will examine how individuals form their beliefs and what factors cause changes in those beliefs. Studies of public opinion at the macro or aggregate level explore the attitudes of the electorate as a whole. We will be concerned with how the electorate's attitudes change over time and the responsiveness of government to these changes.

Course Objectives

- Think critically about how public opinion is measured and used in the United States.
- Analyze contemporary public opinion in the United States.
- Assess the role of public opinion in democracy.
- Develop critical thinking and written communication skills.

Class Policies

The format of this class is a mixture of lecture, class discussion, small group projects and individual projects. Two things are very important to the success of this class: 1) your participation in class; and 2) that you have completed the readings **before** the class in which we will discuss them. Not having completed the reading adversely affects your ability to participate in class and, subsequently, your grade. You cannot learn from each other, and I cannot learn from you, if you are not prepared for class. I encourage you to ask questions you may have about lectures, class discussions, readings, and things you see in the news. Do not be passive; class will be much more interesting and you will learn the material better if you are an active participant.

Class attendance is the responsibility of the student. The student is expected to attend all classes. A student who finds it necessary to miss class assumes responsibility for obtaining lecture notes and otherwise compensating for what may have been missed. I will not take attendance in the class; however, it will be hard to do well in the class if you do not regularly attend. It goes without saying that attending class will prove very useful; **a great deal** of the material for which you will be responsible for can only be learned in class. Participation is graded and you can not participate if you are not present. If doing the readings and attending class will be too difficult, please give serious thought to dropping this class.

All assignments are due on the date listed in the tentative course schedule. I will collect assignments within the first 10 minutes of the scheduled class period. Assignments turned in late, but still within the normally scheduled class period will receive a penalty of a full letter grade for every 10 minutes the assignment is late. For example, your paper was turned in 30 minutes after the start of class and the grade on the paper was an 90, but because the paper was 20 minutes late your grade will be reduced to a 70. I do not accept assignments slipped under my office door or put in my mail box. Assignments turned in after the regularly schedule class period **will not** be accepted. All assignments are to be typed.

If you are experiencing problems of any sort please talk to me as early as possible. Everyone learns differently and has different strengths and weaknesses. I try to develop class activities and ways to assess your progress that accommodate these various learning styles. With that said there may be parts of this class that you find challenging. If you come and talk with me we can work on those issues to ensure your success in the class. However, if you wait until the day before the exam or an assignment is due it will be too late. So please talk to me as soon as you begin to experience problems.

This is a class about the study of public opinion and political attitudes. It is not a class about politics. However, in this class we will engage in discussions about politics and policies. During our discussions I want everyone to feel free to share their opinions with each other. Each of us brings a unique perspective to the class and we can all learn from this diversity. In order to make this possible you need to be respectful of other people's opinions,

even if they are the direct opposite of your own beliefs. I will not tolerate personal attacks on one another or the use of disrespectful language. There is no room for an atmosphere of intimidation, and I will not tolerate it in this class. If there are any issues that you feel uncomfortable with please feel free to talk to me.

I will not discuss or send grades via e-mail. E-mail is not a secure form of communication, meaning anyone can read your messages. In order to protect your privacy I will not e-mail you your grades. However, I am happy to discuss your grades with you in person anytime during office hours or by appointment.

Please **shut your cell phones off** before coming to class. It is disturbing to me and your fellow students. I reserve the right to confiscate phones if this becomes a problem. Please leave the newspaper, crossword puzzles, and other work at home. **NO LAPTOPS ALLOWED.** Using cell phones, text messaging, or doing other non-class related activities between 9:10 and 10:40 on Tuesdays and Thursdays will result in your participation grade being lowered.

All students are expected to work independently on all assignments. Group and collaborative work is not permitted unless specific instructions are given. If you are not clear on how to properly give credit to others, please see me before turning in any assignment. All students are required to read and be familiar with the Code of Student Conduct found at www.lsu.edu/judicialaffairs as well as all other university policies and procedures. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism see: <http://www.lib.lsu.edu/instruction/plagiarism/html>. I take this issue very seriously and will check all things turned into me for signs of plagiarism. Remember if you can find it on the Internet, so can I. Proper citations must be used to acknowledge any ideas, concepts, theories, organizational formats, and writing that is not your own.

If you are a graduate student enrolled in this course for graduate credit please see me. You will be required to complete additional readings and assignments to receive graduate credit.

Students with disabilities: Reasonable accommodations will be made for any student with documented disabilities to ensure that the student is able to participate in class to the best of their abilities. If you anticipate needing any type of accommodation in this course or have questions about physical access, please tell the instructor as soon as possible. Reasonable accommodations will be made for all students with disabilities, but it is the student's responsibility to inform the instructor early in the term. It is also the student's responsibility to register with the disability services office on campus. Do not wait until just before an exam to decide you want to inform the instructor of a learning disability; any accommodations for disabilities must be arranged well in advance.

If you did not attend the first day of class and/or added the class late, all class policies apply

equally to you. It is your responsible to find out any information gone over during the class periods you missed. Deadlines **will not** be adjusted on an individual basis.

Grading

Table 1: Assignments and Due Dates

	points available	percent of total grade	when due
Participation & Homework	15	15%	continually assessed
Literature Review	15	15%	October 28 th
Final Paper	20	20%	November 18 th
Midterm Exam	25	25%	October 19 th
Final Exam	25	25%	December 8 th
	100	100%	

Grades for the class will be based on participation, homework, a literature review, final paper, and two exams. A total of 100 points are available, below you will find a description of each of the factors that go into the final grade, the due dates, and the grade distribution.

Participation and Homework Participation is worth 15% of your final grade. You are expected to be engaged in class discussions, ask questions, and contribute to group work. Participation is not simply about quantity or quality. You should participate on a regular basis in a meaningful way. Additionally, there will be short assignments that you are expected to complete in class or at home. Completion and performance of these assignments contribute to your participation grade.

Literature Review and Final Paper In both the literature review and final paper you will be asked to examine some aspect of public opinion research in some detail. First, in the literature review you will identify a public opinion research question and provide a brief survey of how this question has been studied in the extant public opinion literature. Second, you will build off your literature review to conduct your final paper, in which you will examine the question on your own. While these papers are related they will be independently graded. More details about each paper will be covered in class and posted on **Moodle**.

I am more than willing to read over drafts of your papers or go over outlines with you. However, you need to come to office hours or schedule an appointment. I will not do this if you just e-mail me the paper.

Exams. There will be two exams in the class. The mid-term exam is worth 25% of your final grade. The final exam is worth 25% of your final grade. Exams will be short-essay questions. You will need to bring a blank blue book to class. While grammar and spelling is not graded in the exam you will be expected to write clear, complete, and legible sentences.

If you are absent for the midterm exam you will have the option to take a cumulative final exam. The cumulative final exam will be essay format. Your grade for the cumulative final will serve as your grade for both the midterm and the final exam. If you missed the midterm exam and would like to take the cumulative final you will need to inform me of this decision by e-mail no later than November 23rd. Do not assume I will remember that you missed the final exam, you must send an e-mail.

Table 2: Grade Distribution

A	100 – 90
B	89 – 80
C	79 – 70
D	69 – 60
F	59 and below

Grade Appeal. I will not discuss changes in grades on exams or papers for 24 hours after the paper or exam has been handed back. If you feel that I missed an important point that you made or there is some other problem with your grade, after 24 hours you may submit a grade appeal. Your appeal should be a typed argument for why your grade should be changed. It should be no longer than 1 page. You will need to hand the appeal and the original paper or exam back into me for review. I will then ask you to schedule a time to meet or come in during office hours to discuss the appeal. Appealing the grade does not mean that I will automatically increase your grade.

Extra Credit. Extra credit will not be given on an individual basis. Everyone in the class has the opportunity to earn extra credit by completing the extra credit assignment listed on Moodle. You can earn up to 3 points of extra credit. Simply completing the extra credit does not guarantee that you will receive a full 3 points.

Required Books

One book is required for this class and is listed below. Any additional readings can be found on Moodle. When readings are on Moodle it is indicated with a **Moodle** in the course outline.

- *Public Opinion, Democratic Ideals, Democratic Practices* by Rosalee A. Clawson and Zoe M. Oxley. 2008. Congressional Quarterly Press.

Tentative Course Outline¹

Week One What is Public Opinion?

- **Tuesday, August 24th**
 - Overview of class.
- **Thursday, August 26th**
 - Chapter 1 Clawson and Oxley

Week Two Measuring Public Opinion: Sampling and Question Wording

- **Tuesday, August 31st**
 - Erikson and Tedin, p 24-38 **Moodle**
 - How Serious Is Polling’s Cell-Only Problem? Scott Ketter **Moodle**
- **Thursday, September 2nd**
 - No Class.

Week Three Measuring Public Opinion: Non-Attitudes

- **Tuesday, September 7th**
 - Erikson and Tedin, p 38-43 **Moodle**
- **Thursday, September 9th**
 - “Non-Attitudes” *Polling and the Public* by Herber Asher **Moodle**
 - “Getting It Wrong” *New York Times* Jan 10, 2008 by Andrew Kohut **Moodle**

Week Four Alternatives to Traditional Surveys and Political Socialization

- **Tuesday, September 14th**
 - “How State-Level Policy Managers ‘Read’ Public Opinion” by Susan Herbst in *Navigating Public Opinion: Polls, Policy, and the Future of American Democracy*
- **Thursday, September 16th**
 - Chapter 2 Clawson and Oxley

¹Any changes to this schedule will be announced verbally in class. It is the student’s responsibility to note changes and adhere to the new schedule.

Week Five Socialization and Mass Media

- **Tuesday, September 21st**
 - “Generation Units and the Student Protest Movement in the United States: An Intra- and Intergenerational Analysis” 2002. M. Kent Jennings *Political Psychology* 23(2): 303-324. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3792292> **Moodle**
- **Thursday, September 23rd**
 - Chapter 3 Clawson and Oxley

Week Six Mass Media

- **Tuesday, September 28th**
 - Chapters 1, 3, and 7 in *News that Matters* by Iyengar and Kinder **Moodle**
- **Thursday, September 30th**
 - Chapters 2 and 4 in *The mass Media and the Dynamics of American Racial Attitudes* by Paul M. Kellstedt.

Week Seven Ideology and Constraint

- **Tuesday, October 5th**
 - Chapter 5 Clawson and Oxley
- **Thursday, October 7th**
 - “Left and Right Movement in Preferences” by Jim Stimson in *Tides of Consent* **Moodle**

Week Eight Alternatives to Ideological Thinking

- **Tuesday, October 12th**
 - Chapter 6 Clawson and Oxley
- **Thursday, October 14th**
 - No readings.

Week Nine Exam

- **Tuesday, October 19th**
 - Midterm Exam
- **Thursday, October 21st**
 - Fall Break

Week Ten Theories of Public Opinion

- **Tuesday, October 26th**
 - Chapter 4 Clawson and Oxley, p 93-106
- **Thursday, October 28th**
 - “The Responsive Voter: Campaign Information and Candidate Evaluations” by Milton Lodge, Maro R. Steenbergen and Shawn Brau
 - Literature Review Paper Due Today!

Week Eleven Political Sophistication

- **Tuesday, November 2nd**
 - Chapter 4 Clawson and Oxley, p 106-121
- **Thursday, November 4th**
 - Chapter 7 Clawson and Oxley, p 181-204

Week Twelve Political Sophistication and Trust

- **Tuesday, November 9th**
 - Chapter 7 Clawson and Oxley, p 204-211
- **Thursday, November 11th**
 - Chapter 10 Clawson and Oxley

Week Thirteen Trust and Approval

- **Tuesday, November 16th**
 - Chapter 5 in Hoekstra, Valerie. 2003. *Public Support for the Supreme Court* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. **Moodle**
- **Thursday, November 18th**
 - “Between Campaigns” by Jim Stimson in *Tides of Consent* **Moodle**
 - Final Paper Due Today !!

Week Fourteen Governments Use of Public Opinion

- **Tuesday, November 23rd**
 - “Public Opinion, Foreign Policy, and Democracy: How Presidents Use Public Opinion” by Robert Y. Shapiro and Lawrence R. Jacobs in *Navigating Public Opinion: Polls, Policy, and the Future of American Democracy*
- **Thursday, November 25th**
 - Thanksgiving

Week Fifteen Policy and Public Opinion

- **Tuesday, November 30th**
 - “Polls, Priming, and and the Politics of Welfare Reform” by R. Kent Weaver in *Navigating Public Opinion: Polls, Policy, and the Future of American Democracy*
 - Chapter 11 Clawson and Oxley (not required but recommended)
- **Thursday, December 2nd**
 - Chapter 12 Clawson and Oxley

Wednesday, December 8th, 3:00-5:00 Final Exam