

POL 309: Public Opinion and Political Psychology

Fall 2016

Basic Information

Class meets: Tuesday and Thursday, 1:00-2:15, Coulter Room 204

Instructor: Professor Ondercin

Office: 233 Deupree

E-mail: ondercin@olemiss.edu

Office Phone: 915-7218

Office hours: Tuesday and Thursdays 2:30-4:00.

You are welcome to meet with me about the class, or your professional development at any point during the semester. To facilitate meeting with me, please go to <https://ondercin.youcanbook.me/> and select an available time. You must do this at least 24 hours before you wish to meet with me.

Course Description

The basic premise of democratic government is that the government should be responsive to the wishes or opinions of the people. But how does government know what these opinions are? How are these opinions formed? Can these opinions be changed? And is government really responsive to the public's wishes? We will investigate these and several more questions throughout this semester to gain a more complete understanding of the scholarly research on public opinion in the U.S. political system.

This class is a survey of the scientific study of public opinion in the United States. We will critically analyze work conducted in political science and the other social sciences on the attitudes and beliefs of the U.S. electorate. This survey will include works that examine public opinion at both the micro-level (individual) and macro-level (aggregate or the entire electorate). We will begin our discussion with how public opinion is measured. Then we will examine how individuals form political attitudes and what causes these attitudes to change in individuals and in the aggregate. We will also explore the connection between an individual's attitudes and how they evaluate candidates for elected office, react to new events, and participate in politics. Finally, we will look at the connection between public opinion and government.

What You Can Expect of the Course

The class meets twice a week. I expect you to be there at **all times**. We will take attendance in the class daily using the scanners. You must bring your id to class, failure to bring your id will result in an absence. Results will be reported on midterm and final grades. Not attending class will negatively influence your grade. A large portion of your grade is based on participation in class discussion and you are not able to participate if you are not in class. Material not covered in the readings will be covered in class. There is no other place to gain this information other than being in class.

Attendance will be taken daily using the attendance scanners in the classrooms. Students should scan their student id card before class. The scanners will not record your attendance after the class has started, thus you will not be counted as present if you are late for class. You must bring your student id with you, there will be no alternative method for recording your attendance. Scanning any student id other than your own student id is an act of academic dishonesty. Additionally, scanning your id before class and leaving class is also an act of academic dishonesty. All cases of academic dishonesty will be reported to the university.

The university requires us to verify your attendance at least once during the first two weeks of the semester for financial aid and other administrative purposes. Students whose attendance is not verified after a certain period will be dropped from the class. If attendance is not verified, then a student will be dropped from the course and any financial aid will be adjusted accordingly. Please see <http://olemiss.edu/gotoclass> for more information.

You can expect a mixture of lecture, class discussion, small group projects, and individual projects. At all times, my aim will be to help you achieve a deep understanding of the material. Since so much of what I want you to learn will be dealt with only in class, it is important that you attend. Two things are very important to the success of this class: 1) your participation in every class; and 2) that you have completed the readings **before** the class in which we will discuss them. 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.

I expect you to observe common courtesy when you are in class. Please come on time: lateness is very rude! Please turn off cell phones and pagers. Please leave the newspaper, crossword puzzles, and other work at home. **NO LAPTOPS ALLOWED.** I do not teach in your bedroom; therefore, please do not sleep in my classroom. I expect you to be mentally present as well as physically present in class; this is the best way to ensure that you learn the course material. If I see you using electronic devices or engaging in inappropriate classroom behavior you will lose 1% of your participation grade. If this happens more than 3 times you will receive a 0 for participation.

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. 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.

A note about email communications: Please do not hesitate to email me with any questions or concerns you may have. However, please be professional in your emails. Just like a written letter, be sure to open your email with an appropriate greeting like, "Dear Dr. Ondercin", or "Professor Ondercin." Please make sure to identify who you are and what class you are taking from me in the body of the e-mail. Before sending an email, please make sure you cannot easily get the answer from another source (e.g., from the syllabus or other class documents). In addition, in many cases, I may request you meet with me to discuss your question rather than engage in a series of back-and-forth emails.

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.

Required Books

Two books are required for this class and are listed below. Any additional readings can be found on BlackBoard. When a reading is on BlackBoard it is indicated with a **BB** in the course outline.

- *Public Opinion, Democratic Ideals, Democratic Practices* by Rosalee A. Clawson and Zoe M. Oxley. 2016. Third Edition. Sage.
- *Tides of Consent: How Public Opinion Shapes American Politics* by James A. Stimson. 2015. Second Edition. Cambridge University Press.

Grading

Grades for the class will be based on participation, lab assignments, 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.

Table 1: Assignments and Due Dates

| | points available | percent of total grade | due dates |
|-----------------|------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Participation | 15 | 15% | continually assessed |
| Lab Assignments | 30 | 30% | see due dates below |
| Midterm Exam | 25 | 25% | October 13 th |
| Final Exam | 30 | 30% | December 8 th Noon |
| | 100 | 100% | |

Participation 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. Completion and performance of these assignments contribute to your participation grade. You cannot make-up work completed in class if you are absent.

Lab Assignments A series of lab assignments will be worth 30% of your final grade. Each lab assignment is weighted equally when calculating the homework portion of the final grade. For each lab assignment you will be assigned a partner. You are to work with your partner during the time allotted in class to start your lab assignment. Chances are you may have to do a little extra work on the assignments outside of class. As a result, assignments are not due until several days after the lab day. Pay attention to the course schedule below for when the lab assignments are due.

Two important things about lab days. First, on lab days you are allowed to bring your computer. Use of the computer is only for the completion of the lab assignments. If I see you engaging in non-lab work on your computer (e.g.m e-mail, Facebook, twitter, working on other assignments) your participation grade will be lowered 1 point. Second, if you are absent on a lab day your participation grade will automatically be lowered by 1 point.

The lab assignments will be graded on the following criteria:

- Completeness. Did you complete all the questions and submit all the material asked for in the lab assignment?
 - Superior: Everything is completed, well organized, and presented in a easy to read format.
 - Average: Everything is completed, organized, and readable.
 - Poor: Parts are not completed, and/or poor organization, and/or parts are unreadable.
- Correctness. Was your analysis conducted correctly?
 - Superior: All analysis was completed correctly.

- Average: The majority of the analysis was completed correctly.
- Poor: There were several mistakes in the analysis.
- Quality of responses to questions.
 - Superior: The answers to the questions are clear and well written. The answers use the appropriate information from the statistical analysis. An appropriate amount of detail from the statistical analysis is contained in the answer. The answers draw on materials from class and the readings. There are no grammar or spelling mistakes.
 - Average: The answers to the questions are clear and well written. The answers contain reference to statistical analysis and material from class and the readings.
 - Poor: The answers do not adequately address the statistical analysis. The answers fail to bring in appropriate material from class or readings.

Completed lab assignments should be turned in Blackboard before the start of class on the day that they are due. You and your lab partner only have to submit one lab assignment. Make sure both of your names are on the assignment, and save the assignment containing both of your names. For example: `smith_jones_assignment1.pdf` Assignments should be submitted as a pdf. If you do not know how to create a pdf, please talk to computer support in Weir Hall. Make sure that the formatting and any tables or figures are correct after you create the pdf but before you turn in the document.

If you are absent on a lab day, you can still complete the lab assignment. However, you will have to complete the assignment on your own, without a lab partner. Your final grade on the lab assignment will be lowered by one letter grade. Additionally, it will still be due at the same time as other lab assignments. There will be no extensions or late assignments.

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 30% of your final grade. Exams will be a mixture of short-answer and short-essay questions. You will need to bring a blank blue book to class. While grammar and spelling are not graded in the exam you will be expected to write clear, complete, and legible sentences. Make-up midterm examinations are only authorized for documented reasons involving personal medical or family emergencies. Ideally students need to inform the instructor of such events before the scheduled exam. If advance notification is impossible, then the student must inform the instructor as soon as reasonably possible. If such notification and documentation are provided, it is up to the instructor's discretion to grant a make-up exam. If a make-up exam is approved by the instructor, its content and format may significantly differ from the scheduled exam.

Grade Appeal. I will not discuss changes in grades on exams or papers for 24 hours after a 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 BlackBoard. 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.

Table 2: Grade Distribution

| | |
|----|--------------|
| A | 100 – 93 |
| A– | 92–90 |
| B+ | 89–87 |
| B | 86–83 |
| B– | 82–80 |
| C+ | 79–77 |
| C | 76–73 |
| C– | 72–70 |
| D | 69–60 |
| F | 59 and below |

Please note: Departmental policy is that Political Science majors need to make a C in a class for it to count toward the major.

Other Important Policies

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. I take this issue very seriously and will check all things turned in to 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.

Students with disabilities: Reasonable accommodations will be made for any student with a documented disability to ensure that the student is able to participate in class to the best of his or her 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.

Tentative Course Outline¹

Week 1: Introduction to the Course

Tuesday, August 23rd: Class Overview

Thursday, August 25th:

- Syllabus.
- Chapter 1: Public Opinion in a Democracy, Clawson and Oxely.

Week 2: Lab Week

Tuesday, August 30th:

- Lab Day

Thursday, September 1st:

- No class.

Week 3: Democracy and the Study of Public Opinion and Measurement

Tuesday, September 6th: Democratic Theory versus Theory Grounded in Reality.

- Stimson, James. "Opinion Flows" *Tides of Consent*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lab Assignment 1 Due Today!

Thursday, September 8th: Sampling.

- Keeter Scott, et al. 2009. Perils of Polling in the 2008 Election. <http://pewresearch.org/assets/pdf/1266.pdf> **BB**.
- Appendix to Chapter 1: Public Opinion in Democracy, Clawson and Oxely

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 4: Measurement of Public Opinion

Tuesday, September 13th:

- “Wording and Context of Questions” *Polling and the Public* by Herbert Asher **BB**.

Thursday, September 15th:

- Lab Day

Week 5: Political Socialization

Tuesday, September 20th: Agents of Socialization.

- Chapter 2: Political Socialization, Clawson and Oxley.

Thursday, September 22nd: Generational Units, Generational Effects, Period Effects, and Life-cycle effects.

- ‘Generations United and the Student Protest Movement In the United States: An Intra- and Intergenerational Analysis’ 2002. M. Kent Jennings. *Political Psychology* 23(2):303-324. **BB**.
- Lab Assignment 2 Due Today!

Week 6: Political Knowledge

Tuesday, September 27th: What we know about politics

- Chapter 8: Knowledge, Interest, and Attention to Politics, Clawson and Oxley
- Print off and bring the results of this quiz to class. <http://www.pewresearch.org/quiz/the-news-iq-quiz/>

Thursday, September 29th:

- James H. Kuklinski, Paul J. Quirk, Jennifer Jerit, David Schwieder, and Robert F. Rich, “Misinformation and the Currency of Democratic Citizenship,” *Journal of Politics*, 62 (August 2000): 790-816. **BB**

Week 7: Knowledge and Socialization Lab Tuesday, October 4th:

- Lab Day

Thursday, October 6th:

- No class

Week 8: Exam

Tuesday, October 11th: Review

- Review Day
- Lab Assignment 3 Due Today!

Thursday, October 13th:

- Exam

Week 9: Theories of Public Opinion

Tuesday, October 18th: R-A-S.

- Chapter 4: Oxely and Clawson,

Thursday, October 20th: Approval

- “Between Campaigns” in *Tides of Consent* by Jim Stimson.

Week 10: Organization of Opinions

Tuesday, October 25th: Ideology

- Chapter 5: Ideological Innocence and Critiques, Clawson and Oxley.

Thursday, October 27th: Ideology

- Chapter 2, “What the Public Wants from Government” by Jim Stimson in *Tides of Consent*.
- Chapter 3, “Left and Right Movement in Preferences,” by Jim Stimson in *Tides of Consent*.

Week 11: Ideology and Polarization

Tuesday, November 1st:

- Fiorina, Morris P, Samuel J. Abrams, and Jeremy C. Pope. 2006. Chapters 1 & 2 in *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized American*

Thursday, November 3rd:

- Lab Day

Week 12: Group Orientations to Politics

Tuesday, November 8th: Group Membership.

- Chapter 7, “Pluralistic Roots of Public Opinion: The Central Role of Groups,” Clawson and Oxley

Thursday, November 10th: Groups.

- Donald L. Kinder and Nicholas Winter, “Exploring the Racial Divide: Blacks, Whites, and Opinion on National Policy,” *American Journal of Political Science*, 45 (April 2001): 439-456. **BB**.
- Lab Assignment 4 Due Today!

Week 13: Media Content, Priming, and Agenda Setting.

Tuesday, November 15th:

- Lab Day

Thursday, November 17th:

- Chapter 3: Mass Media, Clawson and Oxley.

Week 14 -Thanksgiving Break

Week 15: Public Opinion Responsiveness

Tuesday, November 29th: Public Opinion and Policy.

- Chapter 12, “Impact of Public Opinion on Policy,” Clawson and Oxley.
- Lab Assignment 5 Due Today!

Thursday, December 1st: Bias in responsiveness.

- Gilens, Martin. 2005. “Inequality and Democratic Responsiveness.” *Public Opinion Quarterly*. 69(5):