



Department of Political Science

POLS 317
Public Opinion and Electoral Behavior
Spring Semester 2008

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Office Hours: Mon. 9 to 11 am and Tues. and Thurs. from 2 to 4 pm
Class Meets: Tues. and Thurs. from 11:00 am to 12:15 pm in 2525 Faner Hall

Access Class Materials via Blackboard: <https://mycourses.siu.edu>

Course Overview

This course provides an introduction to the study of public opinion and political behavior in the United States. The course will focus on public opinion. We will discuss opinion polling, including its methods, history, strengths, weaknesses, and ways to evaluate critically surveys reported in the news media. We will discuss the origins and roots of public opinion, the nature of political attitudes and belief systems, persuasion and attitude change, what average people know about politics, the role of the media in shaping public opinion, and public opinion on important topics such as civil liberties and trust in government. We will end the course by comparing and contrasting public opinion in the U.S. with that of other countries and explore why some people in other parts of the world are distrustful of the U.S.

Required Reading

The course requires two books and selected readings. The books were placed on order at the university bookstore and the 710 Bookstore. Other required readings will be made available, for the most part online, through blackboard (<https://mycourses.siu.edu>). More information will be provided in class.

Rosalee A. Clawson and Zoe M. Oxley. 2008. *Public Opinion: Democratic Ideals, Democratic Practice*, Washington, D.C.: CQ Press. ISBN: 978-0-87289-304-7.

Andrew Kohut and Bruce Stokes. 2006. *America Against the World: How We are Different and Why We are Disliked*. New York: Times Books.

Course Requirements and Grading

Students will be graded on two exams (a midterm and a final), two writing assignments, and participation.

First Writing Assignment. 15% of final grade

The first writing assignment is due during the fifth week of the semester. The assignment is a critical review of a public opinion poll in one area of public opinion of interest to you. Students will be given instructions on the assignment in class. (Please see below for the policy on late and missed assignments)

Midterm Exam. 25% of final grade

The midterm examination will be held in class during the seventh week of the semester. It will cover all the material from lectures, class discussions, and reading up to the day of the exam. (Please see below for the policy on missed exams and arriving late to exams)

Second Writing Assignment. 25% of final grade

The second writing assignment is due during the fifteenth week of the semester. It is a critical review of the assigned book by Kohut and Stokes, *America Against the World: How We are Different and Why We are Disliked*. Students will be given instructions on the assignment in class. (Please see below for the policy on late and missed assignments)

Final Exam. 25% of overall grade

The final examination will be held at the day and time scheduled by the registrar, which is Wednesday, May 6, 2009, from 10:00 to 11:50 a.m. It will cover all the material dealt with from lectures, class discussions, and reading up to the day of the exam. (Please see below for the policy on missed exams and arriving late to exams)

Classroom Attendance and Participation. 10% of overall grade

Classroom participation is encouraged! This course will incorporate a mix of lecture and discussion. Come prepared to talk. Attendance will be taken often. Your participation grade will be awarded based on the instructor's perception of your attendance and thoughtful participation in class. Please come to class on time. Recurrent unexcused tardiness may diminish one's attendance and participation grade.

The university and I expect you to attend class regularly. If for some reason you have a legitimate reason for missing class, please send me an email letting me know ahead of time that you cannot attend class, and why. If you cannot let me know ahead of time, please tell me afterward. In general, students benefit themselves by attending every class, informing the instructor when they cannot, and by participating actively in class.

Overview of Course Requirements

- First Assignment 15% of overall grade
- Midterm Exam 25% of overall grade
- Second Assignment 25% of overall grade
- Final Exam 25% of overall grade
- Classroom Participation 10% of overall grade

Grading

Your writing assignments, exams, and overall grade in the course will be calculated according to the following scales. The writing assignments and participation grades will be awarded as the midpoint of the letter-grade range as indicated in the first column of the table below. Thus an “A” on the first writing assignment, worth 20 percent of the overall grade, would be awarded a numerical grade of “96.5,” an “A-” would be scored as a “91.5,” etc. The exam grades, as well as the overall final grade, will be awarded according to the scale in the second column. Since SIU does not observe plusses or minuses, pluses and minuses are not possible in the submission of final course grades. If your final grade is an “A-” you will receive an “A,” if your final grade is a “B+” or “B-” you will receive a “B,” etc. Grades in this course are awarded based on merit, according to the requirements outlined above, in conjunction with the judgment of the instructor, and are not otherwise negotiable.

	Assignment & Participation Scores	Exam and Final Grade Ranges
A	96.5	93 - 100
A-	91.5	90 - 92.99
B+	88.5	87 - 89.99
B	85	83 - 86.99
B-	81.5	80 - 82.99
C+	78.5	77 - 79.99
C	75	73 - 76.99
C-	71.5	70 - 72.99
D	65	60 - 69.99
F	30	0 - 59.99

Policy on Late Assignments and Research Papers

Please give me a paper copy of your first assignment and your final paper when it is due. I regret that papers and assignments submitted via email will **NOT** be accepted unless explicit **prior** permission is granted by the instructor. *Late papers* and assignments (those not ready to be handed in at the beginning of the class in which they are due) are penalized one full letter grade (e.g., from an “A” to a “B”) for each day that they are late. This means that an “A” assignment turned in five days late automatically receives a failing grade. *Students who find themselves turning in their assignment or paper late would benefit from communicating with the instructor before turning in their late assignment.*

Policy on Missed Examinations

Missed Exams will receive a grade of zero except in cases of demonstrated, appropriate, and verifiable emergencies or tragedies or where the student has prior approval from the instructor. Unexcused missed exams receive a grade of zero. In cases of missed exams excused by the instructor, a makeup exam will be rescheduled at the convenience of the instructor. Students must arrive to exams on time. Students who arrive at an exam 20+ minutes late will not be allowed to take the exam will receive a zero.

Policy on Academic Honesty

All of the work you do in this course is expected to be your own, done exclusively for this course. Instances of suspected cheating or plagiarism (using someone else's ideas or words without proper attribution) will be dealt with in accordance with the university's policy on academic honesty. Please note that penalties for academic dishonesty are severe and ignorance is not an excuse for cheating or plagiarism.

Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities that have been documented by the SIU office of Disability Support Services will be accommodated according to university policy. For more information please visit the Disabilities Support Services website at www.siu.edu/~dss/ or call the DSS office at (618) 453-5738.

Tentative Class Schedule

Please note that the schedule below is a guideline. Actual material covered in class will deviate from the schedule according to the progress of the class. Unless otherwise indicated orally during class, we will follow the order of the topics as listed in the schedule. *It is the responsibility of students that they be aware of where we are in the progress of the course and where we deviate from this schedule.* This will be made clear orally in class.

Introduction to Public Opinion

Week 1

- Tues., 01/13 Introduction
- Thurs., 01/15 Public Opinion and Democracy
Reading: Clawson & Oxley ch. 1

Introduction to Polling and Survey Research

Week 2

- Tues., 01/20 Who Polls, Why, and How: An Introduction to Survey Research
Reading: Barbara A. Bardes and Robert W. Oldendick. 2007.
"How are Opinions Measured and Used?" Download from
blackboard
- Thurs., 01/22 Polling, Cont.
Reading: Fritz Scheuren, "What is a Survey?" Download from
blackboard

Tapping into Public Opinion

Week 3

- Tues., 01/27 Statistical Sampling and Why It Matters (So Much)
Reading: 1. Cliff Zukin. October 2004. "Sources of Variation in
Published Election Polling: A Primer." American
Association of Public Opinion Research. Download from
blackboard
2. Humphrey Taylor. 1998. "Myth and Reality in Reporting
Sampling Error: How the Media Confuse and Mislead
Readers and Viewers." Download:
<http://www.pollingreport.com/sampling.htm>
- Thurs., 01/29 Sampling, Cont.
Reading: Barbara A. Bardes and Robert W. Oldendick. 2007.
"Measuring Public Opinion: The Origins of Polling."
Download from blackboard

Week 4

- Tues., 02/03 Evaluating Polls and Poll Questions
Reading: Sheldon Gawiser and G. Evans Witt. ND. "Twenty Questions
A Journalist Should Ask About Poll Results, 3rd Ed."
Download from blackboard
- Thurs., 02/05 Evaluating Opinion Polls, Cont.

Week 5

- Tues., 02/10 Focus Groups
Reading: Frank I. Luntz. 1994. "Focus Group Research in American
Politics." *Polling Report*.
Download from <http://www.pollingreport.com/focus.htm>
- Thurs., 02/12 **WRITING ASSIGNMENT #1 DUE IN CLASS**

Sources of Public Opinion: Socialization & Genetics

Week 6

- Tues., 02/17 Political Socialization
Reading: Clawson & Oxley ch. 2
- Thurs., 02/19 Are Opinions (Literally) Inherited?

Week 7

- Tues., 02/24 **MIDTERM EXAM**

Attitudes and Opinion Change

- Thurs., 02/26 Attitudes and Opinion Change
Reading: Clawson & Oxley ch. 4

Week 8

- Tues., 03/03 Philip Converse's "Belief Systems" and Critics
Reading: Clawson & Oxley ch. 5
- Thurs., 03/05 Attitudes and Opinion Change, Cont.

Week 9 **Spring Break**

What People Know About Public Affairs (and Why it Matters)

Week 10

Tues., 03/17 Political Knowledge, Interest, and Attention
Reading: Clawson & Oxley ch. 7

Thurs., 03/19 Political Knowledge, Cont.

Media and Public Opinion

Week 11

Tues., 03/24 News Media and Public Opinion
Reading: Clawson & Oxley ch. 3

Thurs., 03/26 News Media, Cont.

Week 12

Tues., 03/31 Entertainment Media and Public Opinion
Reading: 1. Josh Compton. 2008. "More Than Laughing? Survey of Political Humor Effects Research." In Judy C. Baumgartne and Jonathan S. Morris, eds., *Laughing Matters: Humor and American Politics in the Media Age*. Blackboard

2. Center for Media and Public Affairs. Winter 2008. "The Comedy Campaign: The Role of Late-Night TV Shows in Campaign '08." *Media Monitor*. Download:
<http://www.cmpa.com/pdf/08winter.pdf>

Thurs., 04/02 Entertainment Media, Cont.

Roots of Public Opinion

Week 13

Tues., 04/07 Values, Self-Interest, and Group Interest
Reading: Clawson & Oxley ch. 6

Thurs., 04/09 Race, Religion, Sex, and Sexuality
Reading: Clawson & Oxley ch. 9

Week 14

Tues., 04/14 Values, Groups, Race, etc., Cont.

Thurs., 00/16 America in Red and Blue
Reading: David Brooks. 2001. "Are We Really One Country?" *Atlantic Monthly*. Download from blackboard

Political Tolerance, Trust, and Social Capital

Week 15

Tues., 04/21 **FINAL WRITING ASSIGNMENT DUE IN CLASS**

Political Tolerance and Attitudes Toward Civil Liberties Issues

Reading: Clawson & Oxley ch. 8

Thurs., 04/23 Political Trust and Social Capital
Reading: Clawson & Oxley ch. 10

Public Opinion in Comparative Perspective

Week 16

Tues., 04/28 Discuss assigned book, *American Against the World*
Reading: Introduction and ch. 1-7 and conclusion of Kohut and Bruce

Thurs., 04/30 *American Against the World*, Cont.
Reading: ch. 8-10 and conclusion of Kohut and Bruce

Week 17

Wed., 05/06 10:00 – 11:50 a.m. – **FINAL EXAM**