PLAP 3270: Public Opinion and Political Behavior
Fall 2015

Mon & Wed 10:00–10:50am
Nau Hall 101

Course web page: https://collab.irc.virginia.edu/

Professor Nicholas Winter
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S385 Gibson Hall
office hours:
Monday 1:00–2:15pm
& by appointment

Teaching Assistants

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This course examines public opinion and assesses its place in the American political system. It emphasizes both how citizens’ thinking about politics is shaped and the role of public opinion in political campaigns, elections, and government. While the course will focus on research on the current state of public opinion, throughout the course we will also discuss historical developments in opinion and its place in politics, including changes that arose with the development of polling and with the advent of television and other new media. We will also consider normative questions, including the role opinion should play in American democracy.

Important note: This course was previously numbered as PLAP2270. You cannot receive credit for this course if you already took it under the old number.

Changelog:
v1.2.0  - added content analysis readings for September 2, 7, 9 & 14
v1.3.0  - updated dates in September and October
v1.4.0  - updated dates October through December to accommodate exam retake
v1.5.0  - updated November/December readings/topics
Course Requirements

Requirements for this course include:

• attendance and participation in section,
• a midterm administered on Collab,
• a comprehensive final, administered on Collab
• a public opinion research project, that includes a written proposal, a research instrument, a summary of preliminary findings, and a final research paper

Grades will be based on the following breakdown:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Section participation</td>
<td>15 percent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Midterm exam</td>
<td>15 percent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Comprehensive final exam</td>
<td>20 percent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research project</td>
<td>50 percent</td>
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<td>Proposal</td>
<td>5 percent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research instrument</td>
<td>10 percent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Summary of preliminary findings</td>
<td>10 percent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final research paper</td>
<td>25 percent</td>
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Assignments turned in late without prior arrangement with your TA will not be considered for a grade.

Readings

There are two required books for this course:


The books should be available from the UVa bookstore and the usual online sources. All other readings for the course are available through Collab and/or links on the syllabus. Each TA may assign a number of additional required readings over the course of the term.

Sections

The section meetings will provide an opportunity for you to clarify material from the course, discuss the lectures, readings, and current events, and work on your research project. Your TA will also assign periodic brief written work in or out of section.

*Attendance at your weekly section meeting is required.* This requirement is reflected, in part, in the 15% of your grade that comes from attendance and active participation in section, and the additional 50% from the research project. If you are deathly ill, we and your fellow students prefer that you *not* attend; otherwise you are expected to be there. If you do miss a section, you are responsible for all the material covered and the research project work that you missed.

Sections will meet the first week.
Exams
The midterm and final will both be administered via Collab. They will be timed, closed-book, and (of course) subject to the Honor Code. The midterm will be 60 minutes long; the final will be 2.5 hours. Each test will be available through Collab for a several-day window—you must take the exam during one single sitting at a time of your choosing during that window. You should plan your time so that you can finish the exam before the window closes, and you should read and carefully attend to Collab’s tips on taking online tests, which are available here: http://goo.gl/P7uube.

The midterm and final will be multiple-choice format, and will focus on the material from reading and lecture. The final will be comprehensive. Last year’s midterm and final will be posted to Collab so you have some sense of what to expect.

Other Policies
We respect and uphold University policies and regulations pertaining to the observation of religious holidays; assistance available to students with physical, visual, hearing, and other disabilities or impairments; plagiarism; racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, or religious discrimination; and all forms of harassment.

If you have (or suspect you have) a learning or other disability that requires academic accommodations, you must contact the Student Disability Access Center (http://www.virginia.edu/studenthealth/sdac/sdac.html) as soon as possible, and at least two to three weeks before any assignments are due. We take learning disabilities very seriously and we will make whatever accommodations you need to be successful in this class. However, they must be properly documented by the SDAC and we must have enough notice to make appropriate arrangements.

Plagiarism, or academic theft, is passing off someone else’s words or ideas as your own without giving proper credit to the source. You are responsible for not plagiarizing and are expected to abide by the University of Virginia Honor Code (see http://www.virginia.edu/honor/what-is-academic-fraud-2/). Note that we employ plagiarism detection software to help ensure the integrity of the course.

In addition, I have posted some information on nonacademic support for UVA students here: https://goo.gl/I1vXzH.
Lecture Schedule and Outline

I. INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

August 26: Welcome and introduction to the course
Berinsky, Adam. “Introduction.” Reader

II. MEANING AND MEASUREMENT OF OPINION

August 31: What is “public opinion”? Why is that a hard question?

September 2, 7, 9, 14, & 16: Conceptualization, measurement, and analysis of public opinion
Survey Research:
Asher, Polling and the Public, chapters 3 and 8 (“Wording and Context of Questions” and “Analyzing and Interpreting Polls”).

In-depth Interviewing:
Chong, Dennis. 1993. “How People Think, Reason, and Feel about Rights and Liberties” American Journal of Political Science 37(3):867-899. (Skim this now, focusing on the method; we will see it again in the tolerance unit.)

Focus Groups:
Gamson, Talking Politics, chapters 1-2 & Appendix A.
Press, Andrea L., and Elizabeth R. Cole. 1999. Speaking of Abortion: Television and Authority in the Lives of Women. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, chapter 1 (1-24) & Appendix A. (Focus on the method (focus groups); we will see it again in the ideology unit.)

Content Analysis:
Gilens, Martin. 1996. “Race and Poverty in America: Public Misperceptions and the American News Media.” Public Opinion Quarterly 60 (4):515-41. (Focus on the method (content analysis); we will see it again in the media unit.)

The following two are optional, but very useful if you are considering a content analysis for your project:
III. DEMOCRATIC COMPETENCE

September 21: The public’s political information and sophistication

September 23: Acceptance of democratic norms: the case of political tolerance
Chong, Dennis. 1993. “How People Think, Reason, and Feel about Rights and Liberties” American Journal of Political Science 37(3):867-899. (We read this before…take another look, this time focusing on his findings about political tolerance.)

September 28: Ideology and the organization of opinion
Lane, Robert E. 1962. Political Ideology: Why the Common Man Believes What He Does. New York: Free Press, chapters 4 & 22. (You can skim chapter 4 to get a feel for the view that Lane’s interviews give us about political reasoning; then focus on chapter 22 where he interprets his findings.)
Press, Andrea L., and Elizabeth R. Cole. 1999. Speaking of Abortion: Television and Authority in the Lives of Women. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, chapter 1 (1-24). (We read this before…take another look, this time focusing on their findings about political reasoning.)

IV. ROOTS OF INDIVIDUAL OPINIONS

September 30: The political unconscious: implicit and explicit attitudes
October 5: No class—UVa reading day

October 7: What is in it for me? Self interest and opinion

October 12: Groups I—political parties
Hetherington, Marc. “Partisanship and Polarization.” Reader, chapter 5.

October 14: Groups II—race and gender
Gamson, Talking Politics, chapter 5.

October 19: Core values

October 21: Emotion
Gamson, Talking Politics, chapter 3.

Midterm exam on Collab

V. OPINION IN POLITICAL CONTEXT

October 26: Exam retake (no lecture)

October 28 & November 2: John Zaller’s theory of opinion formation and expression
November 4 & 9: The media

November 11-18: Framing
Gamson, Talking Politics, chapter 7.

November 23 & 30: Campaigns & Elections

VI. CONCLUSIONS: PUBLIC OPINION IN POLITICS

November 23: Collective opinion

November 25: No class—UVa Thanksgiving break

December 2: The conversation between citizens and government: representation

December 7: Conclusions: Public opinion and American democracy
Gamson, Talking Politics, chapter 10.
Sears, David O. “Conclusion: Assessing Continuity and Change.” Reader.