PLAP 3270: Public Opinion and Political Behavior
Spring 2017

Mon & Wed 10:00–10:50am
Nau Hall 101

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

Professor Nicholas Winter
nwinter@virginia.edu
http://faculty.virginia.edu/nwinter
S385 Gibson Hall
office hours:
Wednesday 1:30–2:45pm
& by appointment

Teaching Assistants

Henry “Bennie” Ashton
Boris Heersink
Taylor Pokrant
Alexander Welch

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.

Latest syllabus is always available on Collab at here: https://goo.gl/bywx7r

Changelog:
v1.0.0 original version
v1.0.1 corrected office hours and typos
v1.0.2 updated midterm and final exam details
Course Requirements
Requirements for this course include:

- attendance and participation in section,
- an in-class midterm exam,
- a comprehensive final exam,
- 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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<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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<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. If you have an extraordinary situation, contact your TA to discuss it as far in advance as possible.

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 multiple choice exams designed to test your attention to lecture and readings. They will be administered in class (midterm) and during the university’s scheduled final exam slot (final).

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/GF6VgT.

Laptops in Lecture
A growing body of research is demonstrating that multitasking decreases comprehension and performance, that being able to see multitasking degrades other students’ performance, and that taking notes by hand increases comprehension and performance. Therefore, the use of laptops and other electronic devices is not allowed during lecture.

*Exception:* If you have a learning or other disability that precludes you from taking notes effectively by hand, you may use a device as specified in your SDAC documentation.

Section rules on the use of laptops and other electronic devices is at the discretion of your TA.
Lecture Schedule and Outline

### I. INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

**January 18: Welcome and introduction to the course**

Berinsky, Adam. “Introduction.” *Reader*


*Optional, for your information:*


### II. MEANING AND MEASUREMENT OF OPINION

**January 23: What is “public opinion”? Why is that a hard question?**


Cramer, Katherine J. *The Politics of Resentment,* chapter 1 (”Making Sense of Politics through Resentment.”)

**January 25 – February 8: 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:


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

February 13: The public’s political information and sophistication


February 15: 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.)
February 20: Ideology and the organization of opinion

Cramer, Katherine J. The Politics of Resentment, chapter 3 (“The Contours of Rural Consciousness”). (You should focus on several things in this chapter: (1) Cramer’s method; (2) her understanding of rural consciousness; and (3) the ways rural consciousness might serve as a political “ideology,” or a lens for understanding politics more generally.)

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

February 22: The political unconscious: implicit and explicit attitudes


February 27: What is in it for me? Self interest and opinion


March 1: Groups I—political parties

Cramer, Katherine J. The Politics of Resentment, chapter 5 (“Attitudes toward Public Institutions and Public Employees”).

March 6 – 8: Spring Break (no class)

March 13 & 15: Groups: Race, gender, “American”


March 20: Midterm exam in class

March 22: Emotion


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V. OPINION IN POLITICAL CONTEXT

March 27 & 29: John Zaller’s theory of opinion formation and expression


April 3 & 5: The media


April 10, 12, & 17: Framing


April 19 & 24: Campaigns & Elections


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VI. CONCLUSIONS: PUBLIC OPINION IN POLITICS

April 26: The conversation between citizens and government: representation


May 1: Conclusions: Public opinion and American democracy
Sears, David O. “Conclusion: Assessing Continuity and Change.” *Reader.*
Cramer, Katherine J. *The Politics of Resentment*, chapter 8 (“We Teach These Things to Each Other”).

Thursday, May 11, 9am-12noon—Final Exam