

Public Opinion and Survey Research

PSCI 319

Fall 2018

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Office Hours: Tuesday & Thursday 10:00 – 11:00
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Course Description

This course introduces students to the methods, theories, and common core questions of public opinion research. The course begins with an overview of the statistical and survey methods used to collect and analyze public opinion data. The next section examines citizens level of political knowledge, sophistication and interest and the role these factors play in the development and expression of public opinion. This discussion is followed by an analysis of the different factors that drive public opinion at both the individual and national level. Finally, we end with an analysis of several central questions of political science including whether Americans are becoming politically polarized and the extent to which politicians actually respond to public opinion.

Course Objectives

After completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Describe the methodological tools and common pitfalls of survey research.
- Apply basic statistical techniques to public opinion data including correlation analysis, tests of statistical significance, and difference of means tests.
- Discuss basic theoretical approaches to the understanding of public opinion and how they relate to broader theories of politics.
- Develop and explore a question concerning public opinion through the application of real-world survey data, using statistical, graphical, and other analytic techniques.

Required Readings

The required reading for this course are available on Moodle in the “Readings” folder.

Grading

Your grade in this course consists of the following assignments:

- Class Participation (10%)
- Weekly Reading Assignments (15%)
- Data Assignments (20%)
- Literature Review Assignment (20%)
- Final Paper (35%)

Class Participation: Students are expected to be active participants in the course. Active engagement includes consistent participation in class discussions, clear preparation before class, and use of respectful language and behavior. Students will receive feedback outside of the class if their level of participation falls below appropriate levels.

Weekly Reading Assignments: Starting on Week 6 (October 3rd), students will write a one page (single spaced) critical response to the readings for each week. A good reading response critically assess the reading by analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of the argument presented, discussing the central argument in the context of the broader course, and examining new questions raised by the readings. The purpose of this assignment is for students to seriously and critically engage the readings for each week prior to attending class, aiding in understanding of course material and substantially improving the quality of in class discussion.

The weekly responses will be graded on a scale of zero to two. At the end of the semester, the total of all points received on the response papers will be added up and divided by 14 and then multiplied by 100 to give a percentage, which will constitute your grade on the weekly responses papers. There are a total of 9 weekly reading assignments. This means that if a student scores a full two points on each assignment, they can skip two weeks and still receive full credit.

The assignment for each week is for that week's readings. For example, for week 6 (the first response paper) the response would be for the readings from Delli & Karpini and Zaller. The weekly reading assignments are due on Moodle in PDF format at the beginning of class. **NO LATE PAPERS WILL BE ACCEPTED.** Do not test this – you will be disappointed.

Data Assignments: Each week, students will complete an assignment requiring the use and manipulation of public opinion data. The assignments are designed to give you the opportunity to apply and practice the statistical and data manipulation skills taught in the first weeks of class to real world data. Additionally, the assignments will frequently engage your chosen paper topic and so will help you both to get a head start on your paper topic, while also getting consistent feedback on your project throughout the semester. Your lowest two data assignments will be dropped.

Final Paper: The principal project of the course is a research paper on a topic of the student's choosing related to public opinion. The paper will integrate course material while demonstrating the ability to analyze survey data in service of answering a research question. A full description of the paper will be provided separately. The final paper is due on the day of the final exam (TBD by University).

Literature Review Assignment: The literature review assignment is a first cut of your final research paper in which you will explore existing research and literature pertinent to your specific question. This analysis of the research will then be incorporated into the final paper along with the appropriate data analysis. The lit review is due November 6th.

Course Schedule

Week 1 28-Aug Introduction

Measuring and Interpreting Public Opinion

Week 2 4-Sep Measuring Public Opinion: Sampling and Survey Techniques
Reading Berinsky (2017) Measuring Public Opinion with Surveys

Week 3 11-Sep Describing the Data
Reading Asher (2017) Analyzing & Interpreting Polls - From Polling and the Public
 Salkind (2012) Data Collection and Descriptive Statistics

Week 4 18-Sep Dealing with Uncertainty
Reading Salkind (2012) Introducing Inferential Statistics

Week 5 25-Sep Tools of the Trade
Reading Moore & McCabe - Looking at Relationships (Excerpts)

Democratic Competence

Week 6 2-Oct Political Knowledge
Reading Delli Carpini & Keeter (1996) What Americans Know About Politics
Zaller (1990) Information, Predispositions, and Opinions

Week 7 9-Oct Fall Break

Week 8 16-Oct Democratic Competence
Reading Converse (2000) The Democratic Capacity of Mass Electorates
Bartels & Achen (2016) The Elusive Mandate

Where does Opinion Come From?

Week 9 23-Oct Campaigns and Parties
Reading Gerber et al (2011) How Large & Long-lasting are the Persuasive Effects of Campaign Ads
Bartels & Achen (2016) It Feels Like We're Thinking (chapter 10)

Week 10 30-Oct The News Media
Reading Delli-Carpini (2015) Political Effects of Entertainment Media (Excerpt)
Baumgartner & Morris (2006) The Daily Show Effect
Prior (2005) News vs. Entertainment

Week 11 6-Nov The Rational Individual vs. The Social Animal (**Lit Review Due**)
Reading Clawson & Oxley (2017) Political Socialization & Pluralistic Roots of Public Opinion
Bartels & Achen (2016) The Very Basis of Reasons

Patterns of Public Opinion

Week 12 13-Nov Political Polarization
Reading Fiorina & Adams (2008) Political Polarization in the Public (ARoP)
Iyengar & Westwood (2015) Fear & Loathing across Party Lines

Week 13 20-Nov Value Change
Reading Clawson & Oxley (2017) Attitude Stability & Attitude Change
Stimson (2015) Left & Right Movements in Preferences (Chapter from Tides of Consent)

Week 14	27-Nov	Is Anyone Listening?
	Reading	Burstein (2003) The Impact of Public Opinion on Public Policy Lax and Philips (2009) Gay Rights in the States Bartels (2008) Homer Gets a Tax Cut
Week 15	4-Dec	Policy Feedback Effects
	Reading	Pierson (1993) When Effect Becomes Cause Svallfors (1997) Worlds of Welfare and Attitudes to Redistribution

Academic Honor Policy

All students are required to uphold the highest academic standards. Any case of academic dishonesty will be dealt with according to the guidelines and procedures outlined in Drew University's "Standards of Academic Integrity: Guidelines and Procedures," which is located in the academic policies section of the catalog.

Accommodations

Students who wish to disclose a disability for the first time are instructed to contact Accessibility Resources, Brothers College, 119B; 973-408-3962. Although disclosure may take place at any time during the semester, students are encouraged to do so early in the semester, because, in general, accommodations are not implemented retroactively. For additional information, visit: <http://www.drew.edu/academic-services/disabilityservices>

Returning Students with Approved Accommodations: Requests for previously approved accommodations for the current semester should be sent to Accessibility Resources ideally within the first two weeks of class. This allows the office sufficient lead time to process the request. Please call 973-408-3962, email disabilityserv@drew.edu, or complete the accommodations request at:

<http://www.drew.edu/academic-services/disabilityservices/request-for-accommodations>.

Late Work Policy

No late work will be accepted in this course without extenuating circumstances.