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Spring 2016

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CLASS MEETS: I+ Block: M, W: 3-4:15pm; Terrace Room, Paige Hall.

Professor office hours: Wednesdays, 10:30-11:45am, and by appointment.

Course Description:
This course addresses the impact of public opinion in the United States on the political process and vice versa. Our emphasis is on the linkage between American citizens and the democratic process. We will examine what public opinion is and engage in debates about how it can be measured. Topics include the nature of attitude formation, stability and change; the role of the media in opinion-formation; the link between attitudes and behavior; group differences in opinions; how elites influence mass opinions; political inequality; polarization; the Tea Party; and the relationship between public opinion and policy outcomes. We will also discuss congressional and presidential elections. These themes will allow us to consider a broad set of concerns about the linkage between American citizens and the democratic process. In addition, you will become critical consumers of opinion data through the analysis of surveys and by learning about the polling process.

Prerequisite: Any PS foundation course (PS11, 21, 41, 42, or 61). This course fulfills the Political Science Department’s methodology requirement.

You are expected to come to class prepared to discuss issues raised in the readings. I expect you to have read the assignments before class on the date they are listed and to have something to say about them. For weeks in which there is more than one reading listed, please read the items in the order in which they appear on the syllabus.

I strongly encourage you to follow current events and to read a national newspaper, such as The New York Times, or watch The PBS News Hour several times per week. I will be relying on current political issues and events for illustration, and I welcome your examples and observations in this regard.

Course Readings:
The following books are required reading for the course. They are on sale at the bookstore and on reserve in the library:

There are additional required readings posted on TRUNK (T) under “Resources” → “Readings”.

**Course website:**
If you are already registered for PS108, you should have access to the course website on TRUNK (http://trunk.tufts.edu). After you log in, select the link to our course across the top of the screen or under “My Sites.” There, you will find the syllabus, course readings, and links to websites that you may find useful as you work on assignments. The main “Course Tool” to use for our course is “Resources.” In it, you will find folders for readings, examples of past successful assignments, external links, citation guides, and more. I will use TRUNK to send emails to the class (using “Mailtool”) regarding announcements and possible syllabus changes or updates, and you will be required to use TRUNK to complete assignments. TRUNK automatically uses your “tufts.edu” email address; if this is not your preferred email address, then you must make sure that emails sent to you through TRUNK are forwarded to the appropriate location. *It is your responsibility to make sure that you receive and read class emails.*

**Assignments and Grading:**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Media poll critique</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exam 1</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<td>Exam 2</td>
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<td>Final paper prospectus</td>
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<td>Final paper</td>
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All assignments are graded out of 100 points. I take off 5 points for every day that an assignment is late. I use the chart below to convert numbers to letters:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>97 – 100</td>
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<td>94 – 96</td>
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<td>Below 65</td>
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Important Dates:

W, Feb. 10: Discussion of Media Poll Critique
M, Feb. 15: President’s Day: NO CLASS
W, Feb. 17: Media Poll Critique Due
Th, Feb. 18: MONDAY SCHEDULE; Class meets
Th, Feb. 25: Last day to select “pass/fail” option
M, Feb. 29: Exam 1

M, March 7: Session with Career Services
M, March 21: Spring Break: NO CLASS
W, March 23: Spring Break: NO CLASS
W, March 30: One paragraph description of final paper topic due

M, April 18: Patriot’s Day: NO CLASS
M, April 25: Prospectus due

M, May 2: Exam 2
M, May 9: Research paper due in Packard 210 by 11am (hardcopies only!)

Content reactions:
During the semester, you are to post at least two reactions to readings, which are to be posted on TRUNK before the class in which we are discussing the readings (“pre-lecture reactions”). These reactions can be questions you would like addressed, critiques of the readings, connections to current events, or ideas for further research. You are also to post at least two reactions to course material after a lecture (“post-lecture reactions”). These reactions can be questions that came to you during class, critiques of scholarship discussed in lecture, connections to current events, responses to comments from classmates, or ideas for future research. Your diligence and thoughtfulness in posting these reactions will be factored into your class participation grade. You can find a guide to writing effective content reactions posted on TRUNK under “Resources.” It is one of your first reading assignments.

To post a content reaction, go to the “Forums” tool on TRUNK. Then find the topic for the appropriate week. Then click the “start a new conversation” button to enter your content reaction.

Media Poll Critique:
Fifteen percent of your course grade is based on your critique of a media account of a recent public opinion poll. For this assignment, select an article from print journalism in the past year in which results from a public opinion poll are the main focus. You can select articles from print or online. You can choose from newspapers, magazines, journalist blogs, etc. You can also use a post from the website of a
television news show (i.e., from cbsnews.com), but you should not be critiquing video (i.e. do not critique a segment from NBC Nightly News).

Your critique should discuss the topic of the article and the context in which the article appeared (i.e. why would the news outlet cover this topic at this time?). Next, you should summarize the portrait of public opinion that the article conveys. Then you should assess the quality of the presentation of the results. What, if any, aspects of public opinion did the news outlet cover well? What aspects of the analysis were deficient? How, if at all, could coverage of the information be improved? How, if at all, could the poll itself have been improved? Do you think the media coverage was sufficient to allow the reader to be a critical consumer of the information? Our reading by Herbert Ascher will be extremely useful as you work on this assignment.

If you choose a print article, include a photocopy of the article with your critique. If you choose a web-based source, include the URL as well as a print out of the source article. If the website has links to additional information about the poll, you do not need to supply those additional printouts; it is sufficient to discuss the content of those associated files in your paper.

Tips: Use subheadings; include a proper introduction and conclusion; proofread; invoke course materials in order to substantiate your critiques and suggestions.

Your critique should be roughly 5 – 7 pages (numbered, double-spaced, 1-inch margins). This assignment is due in class on Wed., Feb. 17. Late papers will have points deducted. On Wed. Feb. 10, we will meet in small groups to discuss your critiques. Come to class that day prepared to talk in detail about your critique. Examples of successful media poll critiques from previous semesters are available on TRUNK (“Resources” → “Examples of Successful Papers”).

Research Paper:
Thirty percent of your course grade is based on your work for a research paper. The paper itself should be about 10-12 pages (numbered, double-spaced, 1-inch margins) and is worth 25% of your course grade. The prospectus for the paper is worth 5% of your course grade. For this paper, you may choose from among the three options below.

1. Write a memo to either a current elected official or to a potential candidate for office (focusing on potential Senators, governors, or presidential candidates). You memo should consist of either (a) advice about which direction to pursue on a policy area of your choice or (b) advice about how to campaign with respect to particular issues and/or groups (i.e., how to court Latino voters). For this paper, you are expected to combine information about current trends in public opinion with scholarly insights about the issues and/or groups you choose. You should explain what the relevant constituency wants, whether the politician should heed those wishes, and how best to sell his or her view to the public. Make sure you refer to course materials as well as to outside scholarly sources
to explain why the public seems to have the views it does, why you think their views will or will not affect their votes, and why your advice on how to proceed should be followed.

2. Pick a topic in public opinion that you find interesting or puzzling and write a paper that reviews existing research on the topic. Explain why you chose the topic and what the current state of scholarly knowledge is. What do we know about opinions on this topic? What explains attitudes on this topic? What are the academic debates about public opinion in this arena? What do we still need to learn? Examples include: Can we consider Latinos to be “values voters,” and thus, open to becoming Republicans? Do political campaigns matter, or are presidential elections really just determined by the state of the economy? How much does campaign spending affect public opinion during elections? How do gender and race interact to shape public opinion? Under what conditions are negative ads valuable? What shapes how Americans feel about “Obamacare”?

If you choose this topic, I suggest you start by reading “Doing a Literature Review,” by Jeffrey Knopf (posted on TRUNK, under “Resources”).

3. Write a public opinion autobiography. Explain how your own political outlook does or does not conform to expectations established in public opinion research. You do not need to address everything we have covered in class; instead, pick about 3 topics we have covered (socialization, race, class, gender, the media, citizen competence, etc.). Discuss the state of scholarly research on those topics (using course materials and outside sources) and compare scholarly expectations to your own opinion-formation process. If you think you deviate from the established literature (i.e. if you have a different partisan identification from your parents), discuss the potential reason(s) why.

More information about this assignment will be distributed in class in early October. A one-paragraph description of your paper topic is due in class on **Wed, March 30**. Two copies of your prospectus (roughly 4 pages) are due in class on **Mon, April 25**. The prospectus should include:

- A detailed description of your paper topic
- An outline of the paper
- A list of the sources you have consulted to date

On 4/25, you are also expected to email copies of your prospectus to the students in your peer review group. In the last week of classes, students will meet in assigned groups to critique each other’s ideas.

I strongly encourage you to meet with me or our TA at least once to discuss your research paper. The paper itself is due at 11am on **Monday, May 9**.

**Academic integrity:**
Assignments you submit for this course will be reported to the Office of the Dean of Student Affairs if any evidence of academic dishonesty is detected. When in doubt, cite! The Office of the Dean of Students publishes a thorough pamphlet on academic integrity and plagiarism. You can find it at: [http://uss.tufts.edu/studentaffairs/judicialaffairs/Academic%20Integrity%2010-11.pdf](http://uss.tufts.edu/studentaffairs/judicialaffairs/Academic%20Integrity%2010-11.pdf). It is also posted on TRUNK under “Resources” → “Citation guides and other academic info”
**Student Accessibility Services:**
Tufts is committed to providing equal access and support to all qualified students through the provision of reasonable accommodations so that each student may fully participate in the Tufts experience. If you have a disability that requires reasonable accommodations, please contact the Student Accessibility Services office at accessibility@tufts.edu or 617-627-4539 to make an appointment with an SAS representative to determine appropriate accommodations. Please be aware that accommodations cannot be enacted retroactively, making timeliness a critical aspect for their provision. You can learn more about Student Accessibility Services at [http://students.tufts.edu/student-accessibility-services](http://students.tufts.edu/student-accessibility-services).

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**Topics and Readings:**

**Week 1:**
M, Jan. 25: *Introduction*


**Reading:**
- PS108 syllabus.
- CLASS SURVEY: available on TRUNK or via email invitation
- (T) Guide to writing effective content reactions.
  - Introduction to a classic text in the study of public opinion.

**Week 2:**
M, Feb. 1: *Measuring Opinions*

**Reading:**
- (T) Barreto, Matt and Gary Segura. “Seriously flawed Latino polling in Georgia leads to wildly incorrect speculation,” 10/07/14 post on Latino Decisions Blog.
W, Feb. 3: Measuring Opinions, and How to Interpret Tables and Analysis
Reading:
  • ET: pp. 24-50.

Week 3:
M, Feb. 8: Debates about Citizen Competence
Reading:
  • NDPO: Gilens, Martin. “Two-Thirds Full? Citizen Competence and Democratic Governance.” (only read to p. 71)
  • (T) Asher, Herbert. 2012. Polling and the Public. 8th edition. pp. 137-161. Note: This reading will be extremely useful for your media poll critique.

W, Feb. 10: Small group discussion of Media Poll Critiques
Reading:
  • No additional reading

Week 4:
M, Feb. 15: President’s Day: NO CLASS

W, Feb. 17: Partisan Identification and Ideology
Reading:
  • NDPO: Federico, Christopher. “Ideology and Public Opinion.” (only read to p. 95)
  • ET: pp. 70-88.
  • (T) Ellis, Christopher, and James A. Stimson. 2012. Ideology in America, ch. 5: “The Operational-Symbolic Disconnect.”
    o Chapter from a book that explores symbolic vs. operational ideology (what people call themselves vs. what they actually want from government).
    o By “skim,” I mean you don’t need to worry about the methodological details of this article, but you should be able to discuss the main substantive findings.

**Media poll critique due**
Th, Feb. 18: MONDAY SCHEDULE: Opinion Polarization
Reading:
  o Opening shot in the debate about whether the American public is polarized.
  o Competing view on the polarization question.
  o Research on the extent to which partisan attachments now divide Americans.

Week 5:
M, Feb. 22: Polarization vs. Sorting
Reading:
  o Ch. 1: pp. 1-10; Ch. 3: pp. 38-57, 63-77; Ch. 5: entire;
  o Ch. 6: pp. 109-117; Ch. 7: pp. 120-131; 138-141.
• (T) “Partisan Sort discussion guide”
  o Come to class prepared to discuss in small groups the methods and findings in this reading.

W, Feb. 24: Values, Tolerance, and Democratic Stability
Reading:
• ET: pp. 155-164; 167-175.

Week 6:
M, Feb. 29: Exam 1

W, March 2: Self-Interest, Group Interest, and the “White Working Class”
Reading:
• ET: pp. 184-192.
Week 7:
M, March 7: Searching for Jobs and Internships: A Visit from the Career Center

W, March 9: Group-Based Opinion Formation: Race, Ethnicity, Gender
Reading:

Week 8:
M, March 14: Groups, continued, and Finding Sources in Political Science
Reading:
- No additional reading

W, March 16: Small group discussion of “Why do Asian Americans Identify as Democrats?”
Reading:
- (T) Kuo/Malhotra/Mo discussion guide
  - Come to class prepared to discuss in small groups the methods and findings in this reading.

Week 9:
SPRING BREAK: No classes
Week 10:
M, March 28: Media: News and Framing
Reading:
- ET: pp. 219-226; 233-239.
  o By “skim,” I mean you don’t need to worry about the methodological details of this article, but you should be able to discuss the main substantive findings.

W, March 30: Media: Campaigning
Reading:
- ET: pp. 244-247.
  **1 paragraph description of paper topic due in class today**

**Week 11:**
M, Apr. 4: Do Campaigns Matter?
Reading:
- NDPO: Sides, John and Jake Haselwerdt. “Campaigns and Elections.”

W, Apr. 6: Congressional Campaigns
Reading:
  o Excerpt from a book about Congressional elections, focusing on individual-level analysis.
- In class: Pick issue for 4/13 class.

**Week 12:**
M, Apr. 11: The Meaning and Impact of the Tea Party
Reading:
W, Apr. 13: Contemporary Issues

Reading:
- **NOTE:** For today’s readings, pick ONE topic to study in detail (see handout).
- (T) Schuldt, Jonathan, Sara Konrath, and Norbert Schwarz. 2011. “‘Global Warming’ or ‘Climate Change’? Whether the Planet is Warming Depends on Question Wording,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 75(1): 115-124.

**Week 13:**

M, Apr. 18: Patriot’s Day: NO CLASS

W, Apr. 20: Elite and Mass Linkages

Reading:
- NDPO: Campbell, Andrea and Elizabeth Rigby. “Public Opinion and Public Policy.”

**Week 14:**

M, Apr. 25: Make up day/Big Picture

Reading:
- No additional reading

**Paper prospectus due in class today. Bring 2 copies!**

W, Apr. 27: Small group critiques of paper prospectus and course evaluations

Reading:
- Prospectuses from 4 classmates.

**Week 15:**

M, May 2: Exam 2

M, May 9: Research paper due in Packard 210 by 11am (hardcopies only!)