

**PLAP 2270: Public Opinion and Political Behavior
Spring 2014**

Mon & Wed 10:00–10:50am
Nau Hall 101

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

Professor Nicholas Winter

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S385 Gibson Hall

office hours:

Monday 12:30–2pm

& by appointment

Teaching Assistants

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This course will examine public opinion and assess its place in the American political system, and will emphasize 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.

Course Requirements

Requirements for this course include:

- attendance and participation in *section*,
- a *midterm* administered on Collab,
- a comprehensive *final*, administered on Collab
- a series of in-section and at-home research projects as part of section
- a final reflective paper on the section research project

Grades will be based on the following breakdown:

Item	Percentage	
Section participation	11 percent	
Midterm	20 percent	
Final	20 percent	
In-section research mini-projects	39 percent	(13 point for each of three projects)
Final reflective essay	10 percent	

Note however, that you cannot pass the course without receiving a passing grade on each of these items individually. Thus, for example, if you do not complete part of the in-section research project, you will not pass the course no matter how well you do on the remaining items.

Readings

There is one required book for this course:

Berinsky, Adam J. (editor). 2011. *New Directions in Public Opinion*. New York: Routledge.

The book is scheduled to arrive at the bookstore during the week of January 13. I will post on Collab copies of the first chapter, which we read the first week. The book is, of course, also available from online retailers.

All other readings for the course are available through Collab and/or links on the syllabus.

Tests

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 at during one sitting at a time of your choosing during that window.

The midterm and final will be multiple-choice format, and will focus on the material from reading and lecture.

Sections

The section meetings will provide the usual opportunity for you to clarify material from the course, discuss the lectures, readings, and current events. In addition, the bulk of section will be devoted to completing a series of research projects that use different methods to collect and analyze data about public opinion.

Specifically, each section will focus for the term on public opinion in an issue area of current debate in American politics. Over the course of the term you will employ a series of different research methods to explore opinion on that issue, including in-depth personal interviews, focus groups, and content analysis of media coverage.

Attendance at your weekly section meeting is required. This requirement is reflected, in part, in the 10% of your grade that comes from attendance and active participation in section, and the additional 39% from the in-section projects.

Sections *will* meet the first week.

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 Learning Needs and Evaluation Center (<http://www.virginia.edu/studenthealth/lhec.html>) as soon as possible, 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 LNEC 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/>).

Assignments turned in late without prior arrangement with your TA will not be considered for a grade.

Course Schedule and Outline

I. INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

January 13: Welcome and introduction to the course

Berinsky, Adam. "Introduction." *Reader*

II. MEANING AND MEASUREMENT

January 15: What is "public"? What is "opinion"? Does "public opinion"="public"+"opinion"?

Herbst, Susan. "The History and Meaning of Public Opinion." *Reader*, chapter 1.

January 20: No Class – MLK Day

January 22, 27, and 29: Measurement and analysis

Hillygus, D. Sunshine. "The Practice of Survey Research: Changes and Challenges." *Reader*, chapter 2.

Asher, *Polling and the Public*, chapters 3 and 8 ("Wording and Context of Questions" and "Analyzing and Interpreting Polls").

Mueller, John E. 1994. *Policy and Opinion in the Gulf War*, chapter 1 (1-11).

Hochschild, Jennifer. 1981. *What's Fair*, 17-26.

III. DEMOCRATIC COMPETENCE

February 3: The public's political information and sophistication

"Dunce Cap Nation." *Newsweek*. September 4, 2007. <http://www.newsweek.com/id/39529>

Gilens, Martin. "Two-Thirds Full? Citizen Competence and Democratic Governance." *Reader*, chapter 3.

February 5: 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

Wright, Robert. 2011. "Opinionator: First Comes Fear."

<http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/01/11/before-hatred-comes-fear/>

February 10: Ideology and the organization of opinion

Federico, Christopher M. "Ideology and Public Opinion." *Reader*, chap. 4.

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).

IV. INDIVIDUAL OPINION

February 12: Implicit and Explicit Attitudes

Wilson, Timothy D. 2002. *Strangers to Ourselves: Discovering the Adaptive Unconscious*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Chapter 6 (117-135).

Gladwell, Malcolm. 2005. "The Warren Harding Error: Why We Fall For Tall, Dark, and Handsome Men." In *Blink: the Power of Thinking Without Thinking*. New York: Little, Brown, Chapter 3 (72-98).

February 17: Self interest

Bartels, Larry M. 2004. "Unenlightened Self-Interest: The Strange Appeal of the Estate Tax Repeal." *The American Prospect* 15(6):A17-A19.

February 19: Groups I—political parties

Hetherington, Marc. "Partisanship and Polarization." *Reader*, chapter 5.

February 24: Groups II—race and gender

Burns, Nancy and Donald R. Kinder. "Categorical Politics: Gender, Race, and Public Opinion." *Reader*, chapter 7.

Junn, Jane, Tali Mendelberg, and Erica Czaja. "Race and the Group Bases of Public Opinion." *Reader*, chapter 6.

February 26: Core values

Brewer, Paul R. 2003. "The Shifting Foundations of Public Opinion About Gay Rights." *Journal of Politics* 65(4):1208-20.

March 3: Emotion

Brader, Ted. "The Emotional Foundations of Public Opinion." *Reader*, chapter 9.

March 5: Where have we been, where are we going?

Movie in lecture: "Magic Town"

Midterm exam on Collab

March 10 & 12: No class – spring break

V. OPINION IN POLITICAL CONTEXT

March 17 & 19: John Zaller's theory of opinion formation and expression

Zaller, John. 1994. "Elite Leadership of Mass Opinion: New Evidence from the Gulf War," In *Taken by Storm: The Media, Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy in the Gulf War*, ed. Lance Bennett and David Paletz, chapter 9 (186-209).

March 24: The media

Baum, Matthew. "Media, Public Opinion, and Presidential Leadership." *Reader*, chap. 12.

Mayer, Jane. 2007 (February 19). "Whatever It Takes: The Politics of the Man Behind '24.'" *The New Yorker* 83(1). http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2007/02/19/070219fa_fact_mayer

March 26: Framing

Price, Vincent, Lilach Nir, and Joseph N. Cappella. 2005. "Framing Public Discussion of Gay Civil Unions." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 69(2):179-212.

March 31 & April 2: The media and the campaign in practice

Movie in lecture: "Journeys with George"

April 7 & April 9: Campaigns & Elections

Sides, John & Jake Haselswerdt. "Campaigns and Elections." *Reader*, chap 11.

VII. CONCLUSIONS: PUBLIC OPINION IN POLITICS**April 14: Collective opinion**

Zaller, John R. 2001. "Monica Lewinsky and the Mainsprings of American Politics." In *Mediated Politics: Communication in the Future of Democracy*, ed. W. L. Bennett, and Robert M. Entman. New York: Cambridge University Press, 252-78.

Bartels, Larry M. 2008. "The Irrational Electorate." *Wilson Quarterly* 32(4):44-50.

April 16: Representation—how does (does?) opinion affect policy?

Campbell, Andrea Louise. "Public Opinion and Public Policy." *Reader*, chapter 271.

April 21 & 23: Campaigns & Elections II

Movie in lecture: "Street Fight"

April 28: Conclusions: Public opinion and American democracy

Ginsberg, Benjamin. 1986. *The Captive Public*, chapter 3 (59-85).

Zaller, John. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*, epilogue (310-332).

Sears, David O. "Conclusion: Assessing Continuity and Change." *Reader*.

Final Exam will be a timed, closed-book, assessment administered through Collab. It must be completed no later than **Tuesday, May 6 at noon.**