POLI 4030 Political Attitudes and Public Opinion
Spring 2009

Basic Information
Class meets: Tuesday and Thursday, 1:40-3:00, 129 Allen Hall
Instructor: Professor Ondercin
Office: 208C Stubbs Hall
E-mail: ondercin@lsu.edu
Office Phone: 578-2550
Office hours: Tuesday 3:00-5:00 pm and by appointment.

E-mail is an effective way to reach me, I check my messages several times a day. In addition to my office hours, I will be available most days after class. If these times don’t work, talk to me and we can make an appointment. Never hesitate to talk to me if you have a problem, comment, or concern.

Course Description

This class is a survey of the scientific study of public opinion in the United States. We will review the work conducted in political science and the other social sciences on the attitudes and beliefs of the U.S. electorate. Then we will study public opinion at both the micro-level and macro-level. Micro-level studies of public opinion focus on the individual. We will begin by reviewing how public opinion is measured. This review will focus primarily on the use of surveys; however, we will touch on alternative ways of measuring public opinion. Then we will examine how individual’s form their beliefs and what factors cause changes in those beliefs. Studies of public opinion at the macro or aggregate level explore the attitudes of the electorate as a whole. We will be concerned with how the electorate’s attitudes change over time and the responsiveness of government to these changes.

We will pay particular attention to contemporary public opinion in the United States. Since the 2000 presidential election the political landscape of the United States has been colored either red (conservative) or blue (liberal); painting the picture that American is deeply divided. We will assess the accuracy of this claim and explore the similarities and differences held by various sub-populations of the electorate.

Course Objectives

- Think critically about how public opinion is measured and used in the United States.
- Analyze contemporary public opinion in the United States.
- Assess the role of public opinion in democracy.
• Develop written and oral communication skills.

**Class Policies**

The format of this class is a mixture of lecture, class discussion, small group projects and individual projects. Two things are very important to the success of this class: 1) your participation in class; and 2) that you have completed the readings **before** the class in which we will discuss them. Not having completed the reading adversely affects your ability to participate in class and, subsequently, your grade. You cannot learn from each other, and I cannot learn from you, if you are not prepared for class. I encourage you to ask questions you may have about lectures, class discussions, readings, and things you see in the news. Do not be passive; class will be much more interesting, and you will learn the material better, if you are an active participant.

Class attendance is the responsibility of the student. The student is expected to attend all classes. A student who finds it necessary to miss class assumes responsibility for making up examinations, obtaining lecture notes, and otherwise compensating for what may have been missed. I will not take attendance in the class; however, it will be hard to do well in the class if you do not regularly attend. It goes without saying that attending class will prove very useful; a **great deal** of the material for which you will be responsible for can only be learned in class. Participation is graded and you can not participate if you are not present. If doing the readings and attending class will be too difficult, please give serious thought to dropping this class.

Students are expected to show up on time and stay for the entire class period. It is distracting to me and your fellow students having people coming and going throughout the class period. If you need to leave early please position yourself near a door and exit discreetly. I will let you know when the class period has ended, so you do not need to pack up your notes, books, etc until I dismiss you. Additionally, I will be summarizing the main points of class discussion and giving important announcements for future classes. If at the end of class you pack up early, you are likely to miss this information.

All assignments are due on the date listed in the tentative course schedule. I will collect assignments within the first 10 minutes of the scheduled class period. I do not accept assignments slipped under my office door or put in my mail box. **I do not** accept late assignments. All assignments are to be typed.

There will be no make-up exams. You have plenty of warning in advance of when exams are and you should plan accordingly. The only exception to this policy is in the case of emergency. It is completely up to the instructor’s discretion if you will be allowed to make up the exam and the validity of the emergency will be determined by the instructor in accordance with LSU policy (PS 22). Under these circumstances, you need to contact me as soon as physically possible. We will schedule a make-up exam to take place within the same calendar
week that the original exam was scheduled. You will also have to provide appropriate proof of said emergency.

If you are experiencing problems of any sort please talk to me as early as possible. Everyone learns in different ways and has different strengths and weaknesses. I try to develop class activities and ways to assess your progress that accommodates these various learning styles. With that said there may be parts of this class that you will find challenging. If you come and talk with me we can work on those issues to ensure your success in the class. However, if you wait until the day before the exam or an assignment is due it will be too late. So please talk to me as soon as you begin to experience problems.

This is a class about the study of public opinion and political attitudes. It is not a class about politics. However, in this class we will engage in discussions about politics and policies. During our discussion I want everyone to feel free to share their opinions with each other. Each of us brings a unique perspective to the class and we can all learn from this diversity. In order to make this possible you need to be respectful of other people’s opinions, even if they are the direct opposite of your own beliefs. I will not tolerate personal attacks on each other or the use of disrespectful language. There is no room for an atmosphere of intimidation, and I will not tolerate it in this class. If there are any issues that you feel uncomfortable with please feel free to talk to me.

Please shut your cell phones off before coming to class. It is disturbing to me and your fellow students. I reserve the right to confiscate phones if this becomes a problem. Please leave the newspaper, cross word puzzles, and other work at home. NO LAPTOPS ALLOWED.

All students are expected to work independently on all assignments. Group and collaborative work is not permitted unless specific instructions are given. Proper citations must be used to acknowledge any ideas, concepts, theories, organizational formats, and writing that is not your own. If you are not clear on how to properly give credit to others, please see me before turning in any assignment. All students are required to read and be familiar with the Code of Student Conduct found at www.lsu.edu/judicialaffairs as well as all other university policies and procedures. If you have questions about what constitutes plagiarism see: http://www.lib.lsu.edu/instruction/plagiarism/html. I take this issue very seriously and will check all things turned into me for signs of plagiarism.

If you are a graduate student enrolled in this course for graduate credit please see me. You will be required to complete additional readings and assignments to receive graduate credit.

Students with disabilities: Reasonable accommodations will be made for any student with documented disabilities to ensure that the student is able to participate in class to the best of their abilities. While Stubbs Hall, the building where my office is located, is not ADA compliant, I am more than willing to meet with students at alternative locations. If you
anticipate needing any type of accommodation in this course or have questions about physical access, please tell the instructor as soon as possible. Reasonable accommodations will be made for all students with disabilities, but it is the student’s responsibility to inform the instructor early in the term. It is also the student’s responsibility to register with the disability service office on campus. Do not wait until just before an exam to decide you want to inform the instructor of a learning disability; any accommodations for disabilities must be arranged well in advance.

If you did not attend the first day of class and/or added the class late, all class policies apply equally to you. It is your responsible to find out any information gone over during the class periods you missed. Deadlines will not be adjusted on an individual basis.

Grading

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<th>Table 1: Assignments and Due Dates</th>
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<td>Participation</td>
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<td>Quizzes</td>
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<td>Writing Assignment 1</td>
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<td>Writing Assignment 2</td>
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<td>Midterm Exam</td>
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<td>Final Exam</td>
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Grades for the class will be based on participation, pop quizzes, two short papers, and two exams. A total of 100 points are available, below you will find a description of each of the factors that go into the final grade, the due dates, and the grade distribution.

**Participation.** Participation is worth 10% of your final grade. You are expected to be engaged in class discussions, ask questions, and contribute to group work. Participation is not simply about quantity or quality. You should participate on a regular basis in a meaningful way. Additionally, there will be short assignments that you are expected to complete in class or at home. Completion and performance of these assignments contribute to your participation grade.

**Quizzes.** There will be pop reading quizzes randomly throughout the semester that will make-up 5% of the final grade. No make-ups will be administered. Quizzes will take place in the first ten minutes of class, if you are not there for the quiz you will not be able to take it later in class. The quizzes will test your knowledge of the readings assigned for that day. The best way to do well on the quizzes is to be on-time for class, attend class regularly, complete all the readings before coming to class, and bring the readings with you to class.
The quizzes will be open book, open notes.

**Papers.** In each assignment you will be asked to explore some aspect we are studying in class in more depth. There are a total of two papers, the due dates are indicated in the tentative course schedule. Papers are due in class on the date indicated. I will not accept late assignments, paper e-mailed to me, slipped under my office door, or placed in my mailbox. Please read over the class polices and the assignment instructions for more detailed information.

They should be typed, double spaced, with standard margins, and using 12 point or smaller font size. In writing the essay, you should make sure that your paper develops a specific argument and provides supporting evidence for the argument you develop. It is better to develop the argument more in-depth rather than being too general.

The papers should be your own work: **group work is not allowed.** The paper will be graded on the completion of the assigned task, analysis, documentation and writing. These papers are not intended to be summaries of the readings or class, rather, you are to engage with the readings and material covered in class. The arguments you develop in the paper should be supported by evidence found in the readings, class, or on the websites. Emotional reactions or personal experiences do not constitute support for your arguments. I have also included in the syllabus a brief sheet on what constitutes strong evidence. **Writing counts.** Part of this assignment is to construct an argument and clearly communicate this agreement to others. Being able to construct and communicate an argument is a skill necessary no matter what path you take in the future. Finally, make sure that you cite correctly, giving credit to other for ideas that are not your own. This includes using page numbers and references to authors and quotation marks when appropriate. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. If you have any questions about properly citing work please talk to me or consult a style guide.

Neither of the papers should require considerable outside research. However, if you feel it is necessary to do additional research please use the following guidelines. First, make sure to properly cite any additional material you use. Second, use resources on the web selectively. There is a lot of incorrect information out on the Internet, so make sure the site you are finding information on is credible. I **do not consider** Wikapedia credible, the entries can be written by anyone without fact checking. If you have a question about whether a source is credible check with me.

See grading rubric located below for how grades will be assessed.

**Exams.** There will be two exams in the class. The mid-term exam is worth 25% of your final grade. The final exam is worth 25% of your final grade. Exams will be short-essay questions. You will need to bring a blank blue book to class. While grammar and spelling is not graded in the exam you will be expected to write clear, complete, and legible sentences.
See the policy above for make-up exams.

See grading rubric located below for how grades will be assessed.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>100 – 90</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>89 – 80</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>79 – 70</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>69 – 60</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>59 and below</td>
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**Table 2: Grade Distribution**

Grade Appeal. I will not discuss changes in grades on exams or papers for 24 hours after the paper or exam has been handed back. If you feel that I missed an important point that you made or there is some other problem with your grade, after 24 hours you may submit a grade appeal. Your appeal should be a typed argument for why your grade should be changed. It should be no longer than 1 page. You will need to hand the appeal and the original paper or exam back into me for review. I will then ask you to schedule a time to meet with me to discuss the appeal. Appealing the grade does not mean that I will automatically increase your grade.

Extra Credit. Extra credit will not be given on an individual basis. Everyone in the class has the opportunity to earn extra credit by completing the extra credit assignment listed below. You can earn up to 3 points of extra credit. Simply completing the extra credit does not guarantee that you will receive a full 3 points.

**Required Books**

One book is required for this class and is listed below. Any additional readings can be found on Moodle. When readings are on Moodle it is indicated with a Moodle in the course outline.

Tentative Course Outline

Week One What is public opinion?

- Tuesday, January 13th
  - Overview of class.

- Thursday, January 15th
  - Chapter 1 Clawson and Oxley

Week Two Measuring Public Opinion: Sampling and Question Wording

- Tuesday, January 20th
  - Erikson and Tedin, p 24-38 Moodle
  - How Serious Is Polling’s Cell-Only Problem? Scott Ketter Moodle

- Thursday, January 22nd
  - Erikson and Tedin, p 38-43 Moodle

Week Three Measuring Public Opinion: Non-Attitudes and Alternatives

- Tuesday, January 27th
  - “Non-Attitudes” Polling and the Public by Herber Asher Moodle
  - “Getting It Wrong” New York Times Jan 10, 2008 by Andrew Kohut Moodle

- Thursday, January 29th
  - “Deliberative Polling: Toward a Better-Informed Democracy” by James S. Fishkin
    http://cdd.stanford.edu/polls/docs/summary/ link also available through Moodle

Week Four Political Socialization

- Tuesday, February 3rd
  - Chapter 2 Clawson and Oxley

- Thursday, February 5th

1Any changes to this schedule will be announced verbally in class. It is the student’s responsibility to note changes and adhere to the new schedule.
Week Five Mass Media

- Tuesday, February 10th
  - Chapter 3 Clawson and Oxley

- Thursday, February 12th
  - Chapters 1, 3, and 7 in News that Matters by Iyengar and Kinder Moodle

Week Six Ideology and Constraint

- Tuesday, February 17th
  - Chapter 5 Clawson and Oxley

- Thursday, February 19th
  - Chapters 1-3 in Culture Wars? The Myth of a Polarized America by Morris P. Fiorina with Samuel J. Abrams and Jeremy C. Pope. Moodle

Week Seven

- Tuesday, February 24th – Mardi Gras Break

- Thursday, February 26th
  - “Left and Right Movement in Preferences” by Jim Stimson in Tides of Consent Moodle

Week Eight Alternatives to Ideological Thinking

- Tuesday, March 3rd
  - Chapter 6 Clawson and Oxley

- Thursday, March 5th
  - No Readings

Week Nine Exam and Stability in Political Attitudes

- Tuesday, March 10th
  - Exam 1

- Thursday, March 12th
  - Chapter 4 Clawson and Oxley, p 93-106

Week Ten Theories of Public Opinion

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• Tuesday, March 17th
  – TBA
• Thursday, March 19th
  – Chapter 4 Clawson and Oxley, p 106-121

**Week Eleven** Political Sophistication

• Tuesday, March 24th
  – Chapter 7 Clawson and Oxley, p 181-204
• Thursday, March 26th
  – Chapter 7 Clawson and Oxley, p 204-211

**Week Twelve** Civil Liberties and Civil Rights

• Tuesday, March 31st
  – Chapter 8 Clawson and Oxley
• Thursday, April 2nd
  – Chapter 9 Clawson and Oxley

**Week Thirteen**

• Tuesday, April 7th – Spring Break
• Thursday, April 9th – Spring Break

**Week Fourteen** Trust and Institutions

• Tuesday, April 14th
  – Chapter 10 Clawson and Oxley
• Thursday, April 16th
  – “Between Campaigns” by Jim Stimson in *Tides of Consent* [Moodle]

**Week Fifteen** Policy and Public Opinion

• Tuesday, April 21st
– Chapter 11 Clawson and Oxley
– Final Paper Due Today

• **Thursday, April 23rd**


**Week Sixteen** What We Make of Public Opinion and Democracy Now

• **Thursday, April 28th**

  – Chapter 12 Clawson and Oxley

• **Tuesday, April 30th**

  – Wrapping things up. No reading

**Thursday, May 7th, 12:30-2:30** Final Exam
What Constitutes Strong Evidence
(Adopted from Lee Ann Banaszak)

You are required to use evidence to back up your arguments. Evidence consists of facts that support the specific point that you are making; they are not merely opinion or assertion. Evidence is also not simply an appeal to or citation of some other scholar. Consider the following examples that try to use evidence to back up an argument about how women think about politics.

1. Women are raised from childhood not to be interested in politics. They are encouraged to play games that emphasize the home and interpersonal relationships.

2. Women are raised from childhood not to be interested in politics (Greenstein 1969: 112). They are encouraged to play games that emphasize the home and interpersonal relationships (Greenstein 1969: 120).

3. Women are raised from childhood not to be interested in politics. A survey of American children in New Haven showed that by the age of ten, boys were already more interested in politics than girls (Greenstein 1969: 112). The boys in the sample were particularly likely to mention international events, particularly war, as being of interest. They also mentioned playing more war-related games than the girls in the sample, who tended to play games related to the family (Greenstein 1969: 120).

As written, number 1 is not evidence. It is a set of assertions, since there is no reference to any factual source. Number 2 is slightly better, since it at least cites a source of information. However, it does not provide any detail on the (quite general) statements made. Number 3 uses information and data well. It furnishes facts to support the general statements, giving a sense of how the author knows that women were raised differently from men. Of course, it also gives the source of the information. Even better would be to use multiple sources to verify that this particular study was correct.

In addition, not all facts are of the same quality. For example, if I tell you "I always eat Cheerios for breakfast," you might use this as evidence for the fact that I eat cereal for breakfast. However, it would be better to actually observe the behavior. I may be exaggerating or even lying. More importantly, my statement or even observing me eat the cereal does NOT provide evidence for a widespread phenomenon (i.e., Professors always eat Cheerios for breakfast). To provide good evidence for the statement, "professors always eat Cheerios for breakfast," you need to have information about more than one professor in more than one department at more than one university. In writing essays and in reading the works of others, you should always consider the quality of the evidence.
Grading Rubric

These are the standards that will be used in grading both the exams and writing assignments. Three major factors will be considered when grading both the exams and the writing assignments:

1. Completion of the assigned task or question.
2. Analysis, including argumentation and documentation.
3. Writing.

Since some assignments or answers may contain some characteristics of an “A” and other of a “C”, the final grade will reflect the weight assigned to each criteria. A paper that is outstanding in only one area may still receive a lower grade if it is inadequate in other areas.

- **The “A” Paper**
  - The “A” paper should fully answer the question or complete the assigned task. As a whole the paper or assignment provides a coherent answer to the question or task. Additionally, if the assignment or question has sub-sections, each sub-section answer is fully developed.
  - The analysis in this paper or question is well articulated and coherent. The arguments are fully formed, internally consistent and supported by evidence. The response should engage with the readings, lecture and class discussion. Additionally, all the arguments are properly documented.
  - The assignment or answer should be clearly written. Overall, the answer or assignment should be clearly organized with an introduction, middle and conclusion. This means that thoughts are expressed in complete sentences and there are very few to no grammar or spelling mistakes.

- **The “B” Paper**
  - The “B” paper should provide a complete answer to the question or assignment. Sub-sections of the question or assignment are addressed.
  - The answer to the question or the assigned task has analysis to support it with documentation. The response employs the readings, lectures, and class discussions.
  - Overall, the paper is clearly written and organized. It has an introduction, middle, and conclusion. Answers and assignments have no serious grammar or spelling errors.
• **The "C" Paper**
  
  − The "C" paper provides only an adequate response to the assignment or question.
  
  − The analysis is limited in its development and only references the readings, discussion, and lectures as support. The use of evidence and documentation are limited.
  
  − The paper is clear, but could use some help with organization. There are few serious grammar and spelling mistakes.

• **The "D" Paper**
  
  − The "D" paper provides a very limited answer to the question or assignment.
  
  − The analysis and arguments are not fully developed in support of the answer to the question or assignment. References to the readings, lecture and class discussions are limited and incomplete. Documentation is inadequate.
  
  − The assignment or answer lacks clear organization. There are spelling and grammar mistakes throughout the paper.

• **The "F" Paper**
  
  − The "F" paper fails to answer the question or complete the assignment.
  
  − There is little or no analysis, poorly developed arguments with no clear evidence. The author fails to use proper documentation.
  
  − The answer or assignment is not organized and does not have adequate introduction, middle, and end. The paper is also full of grammar and spelling mistakes.