Overview:
In a democratic society such as ours, public opinion holds a special place. Although research on the relationship between public opinion and the actions of policy makers has produced mixed findings, most generally believe that government policies and actions should follow the will of the people. Given the evolution of American politics and the industry of public opinion polling over the last 70-plus years, we tend to think of “public opinion” as that which is measured by modern survey research, which accords equal value to the answers of each respondent whether they are highly-educated individuals who follow politics with a passion (such as yourselves perhaps), or just those who happened to be caught by a telephone when the interviewer called. However, we have always known that these responses often vary in quality and thoughtfulness, which raises important questions concerning the value of public opinion as we commonly think about it, and its proper role in modern democracy.

Over the past few decades, political theorists, political scientists and communications scholars have all helped to develop a rich literature dealing with these questions. For the most part this literature focuses on deliberative democracy, which is here understood as a conception of the democratic process that modifies the basic notion articulated above by adding that legitimate government policies and actions should respond to public preferences formed as a result of deliberation, or at least rational discussion of competing alternatives. In this seminar, we will begin by exploring some of the roots of contemporary interest in democratic deliberation as they are found in classic discussions of opinion quality and the value of public opinion as represented by traditional polling. From there we will move on to a discussion of deliberative democracy itself, considering classic theoretical statements as well as more practically oriented examples, such as deliberative polling. For the remainder of the term, we will examine the growing body of empirical research inspired by the notion of deliberation. We will conclude with a consideration of related policy proposals. Throughout, we will strive to broaden our understanding of public opinion research by dedicating serious thought to the ways in which it intersects with normative principles and assumptions.
Readings
The following texts are required reading for this course. Additional readings will be circulated in pdf format via email or through Moodle.


Expectations
You are expected to attend all class sessions and make positive contributions to course discussion. A substantial portion of your grade in this class will be based on the amount of work you put into understanding and mastering this literature, as well as helping your classmates to do so through active participation. Participation consists of answering discussion questions posed by the professor or fellow students, posing questions to the class, and generally sharing your thoughts as you work through the issues raised by our readings. Adequate preparation will thus include not only completing the assigned readings prior to each meeting, but also dedicating sufficient time to critical reflection on our material and possibly even further reading to fully develop your thoughts and reactions. Twice during the semester, each of you will also be required to write a response paper for that week’s readings and to serve as a discussion leader for that session. Response papers must be circulated to the professor and your fellow students via email at least two days before our meeting. In addition to this, there will be a mid-semester take-home exam, and a seminar paper. The exam will include questions on materials from our first seven meetings, and will also require you to propose a topic for your seminar paper. The paper should ideally be a piece of original work suitable for submission to a conference or journal, but in lieu of this a detailed research design may also be submitted.

Grading and Assignment Detail

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<th>Component</th>
<th>Points</th>
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<tr>
<td>Response Papers (2 @ 10)</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discussion Leads (2 @ 5)</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regular Participation</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mid-semester Exam</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper</td>
<td>40</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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A total of 90 or more will earn an “A,” 80 or more a “B,” and so on.
**Response Papers:**

Response papers should first and foremost center on an evaluative thesis on that week’s material that relates it to the broader literature on public opinion and American politics. Model papers will identify the key arguments and findings within the set of readings at hand and offer value-added commentary, such as criticism of conceptualization or measurement issues (accompanied by examples or suggestions of how things could have been done better), arguments concerning the contributions of the work under study (including examples or suggestions for how ideas have been or might be carried further in other research), or other extensions that go beyond a simple summary of what has been assigned. Be forewarned: that summary-only paper will earn you a no-questions-asked grade of “C” or lower for the assignment, depending on the quality of the summary.

The point of these papers is to supply your fellow classmates with a brief (5-6 page) piece of supplementary material to help frame our discussion in seminar; as such they should also be accompanied by a page of discussion questions for us to consider. An ideal collection of questions should include a roughly equal mix of small questions (designed mainly to refresh the material in our minds), medium questions (including those to which you might not know the answer, or that otherwise come up as a point of clarification during your reading of the material), and big questions that go to the heart of the readings, challenging their most central assumptions and/or findings. An example set of discussion questions will be circulated in the first session. As noted earlier, the papers and accompanying discussion questions are due (to the professor and your fellow classmates via email attachment) 48 hours prior to the meeting to which they correspond. Papers will be returned with comments and a grade at the end of the session in which you present them. Response days will be assigned in the first session.

**Discussion Leads**

During weeks that you have written a response paper and supplied questions, you will also serve as a discussion leader for that session. In that role, you are expected to provide a brief presentation of your response paper, pose and explain your discussion questions, and generally take a slightly greater role in responding to the regular commentary and questions offered by the professor. Feedback on discussion lead performance will be provided via email in the week following each session.

**Regular Participation**

During meetings in which you are not designated as a discussion leader, your principal role is that of discussion participant. Discussion participants are expected to do many of the same things as discussion leaders, just without the formality of a specifically graded written performance. That is, you are expected to form your own thoughtful reactions to the week’s readings (perhaps in response to that offered by the discussion leader), pose and answer questions big and small, and generally contribute to our collective enterprise of making sense of this literature. Participation grades will be based on both quantity and quality of contribution to seminar discussion.
**Mid-Semester Exam**
The mid-semester exam will be a take-home exercise, distributed via email on February 23rd and due in class on March 5th. The exam will consist of a single synthetic essay that summarizes the state of theory and research on deliberation and public opinion as encountered in the first seven weeks of class, and makes an argument for future work on a particular question or area within that literature. In that sense, the mid-semester exam will ideally contain seeds of the more advanced paper that comes later in the semester. During our March 5th session, you will present, and we will discuss your conclusions and proposals.

**Final Paper**
If you have an active research project related to the course themes already in progress, it is strongly recommended that you take the opportunity to submit a complete conference-paper or article-length work as your final paper. Naturally, standard ethical rules apply in terms of the requirement that your paper for this class be an original work that does not double as your paper for another course. However, if you are able to further develop an ongoing project through this course, this will likely be the most efficient use of your time.

Alternatively, the final paper can also take the form of a research design that examines some dimension of public opinion as it relates to principles of deliberative democracy. The research design could be a proposal for an experiment to test specific hypotheses derived from deliberative democratic theory, or a proposal for analysis of non-experimental data that is either publicly available or that could be collected in a subsequent semester. Proposals should include a review of relevant literature, a statement of research questions or hypotheses, a plan for data collection and/or analysis, as well as a thorough discussion of expected and plausible findings along with their potential implications. Proposals should be 15-20 pages in length.

**Final papers are due on April 27th, at noon.** Please deposit a hardcopy of your paper in my mailbox at the Political Science department office in Stubbs Hall. You are also encouraged to circulate your paper to your classmates, although this is by no means required. On April 30th, we will conclude our seminar with a roundtable discussion of all of the final papers.
SCHEDULE


Required readings:


January 22nd: Aggregation as a solution to the problem of opinion quality

Required readings:

Recommended:


January 29th: Deliberation as an alternative to aggregation

Required readings:

Recommended:


February 5th: The Deliberative Poll

Required readings:

Recommended:

February 12th: Deliberation within?

Required readings:


February 19th: Reviews of empirical studies

Required readings:


February 26th: Deliberation and political communication

Required readings:

Recommended:

March 5th: Discussion of exam answers and research topics

Mid-Semester exams due.

March 12th: Deliberation and opinion quality

Required readings:


March 19th: Deliberation and political sophistication

Required readings:


March 26th: Other effects of deliberation
Required readings:


Recommended:
Gastil, J., & Xenos, M.A. (Forthcoming). Of attitudes and engagement. (available on Moodle)

April 2nd: Informal conversation

Required readings:

April 16th: A critical perspective – do people really want to deliberate?

Required readings:

April 23rd: Deliberation and elections – a practical proposal

Required readings:

April 30th: Wrap-up, conclusions, and paper presentations.

A panel discussion of final papers. Refreshments will be provided.