POLI 4030 Political Attitudes and Public Opinion  
Fall 2009  

Basic Information  
Class meets: Tuesday and Thursday, 1:40-3:00, 229 Tureaud Hall  
Instructor: Professor Ondercin  
Office: 118F Himes Hall  
E-mail: ondercin@lsu.edu  
Office Phone: If calling during office hours 578-4804. If calling some other time 578-2550.  
Office hours: Tuesday 8:30-11:30 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.  

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 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.

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. Assignments turned in late, but still within the normally scheduled class period will receive a penalty of a full letter grade for every 10 minutes the assignment is late. For example, your paper was turned in 30 minutes after the start of class and the grade on the paper was an 90, but because the paper was 20 minutes late your grade will be reduced to a 70. I do not accept assignments slipped under my office door or put in my mail box. Assignments turned in after the regularly schedule class period will not be accepted. 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. If you experience an emergency you need to contact me as soon as possible. Additionally, any excuses need to be verified by the Dean of Students. It is the students responsibility to have the Dean of Students verify that the emergency is in accordance with LSU’s policies. No make-up exams will be given without the excuse from the Dean of Students. All make-up exams need to be scheduled to take place within the same calendar week that the original exam was scheduled.

If you are experiencing problems of any sort please talk to me as early as possible. Everyone learns differently and has different strengths and weaknesses. I try to develop class activities and ways to assess your progress that accommodate these various learning styles. With that said there may be parts of this class that you 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.

I will not discuss or send grades via e-mail. E-mail is not a secure form of communication, meaning anyone can read your messages. In order to protect your privacy I will not e-mail you your grades. However, I am happy to discuss your grades with you in person anytime during office hours or by appointment.

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. Remember if you can find it on the Internet, so can I. 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. 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 respon-
sibility to inform the instructor early in the term. It is also the student’s responsibility to register with the disability services 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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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quizzes</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>Writing Assignment 1</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>Writing Assignment 2</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>Midterm Exam</td>
<td>25</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 quizzes randomly throughout the semester that will make-up 5% of the final grade. No make-ups will be administered. 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 and the material we are covering in class. 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, papers 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.

Papers 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 than be 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 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 any one without fact checking. If you have a question about whether a source is credible check with me.

I am more than willing to read over drafts of your papers or go over outlines with you. However, you need to come to office hours or schedule an appointment. I will not do this if you just e-mail me the paper.

**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.

A general grading rubric is provided on **Moodle**.
Table 2: Grade Distribution

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<tr>
<th>Grade</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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<td>C</td>
<td>79 – 70</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>69 – 60</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>59 and below</td>
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**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 or come in during office hours 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 on Moodle. 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\(^1\)**

**Week One** What is Public Opinion?

- **Tuesday, August 25th**
  - Overview of class.

\(^1\)Any 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.
• Thursday, August 27th
  – Chapter 1 Clawson and Oxley

Week Two Measuring Public Opinion: Sampling and Question Wording

• Tuesday, September 1st
  – Erikson and Tedin, p 24-38 Moodle
  – How Serious Is Polling’s Cell-Only Problem? Scott Ketter Moodle

• Thursday, September 3rd
  – No Class.

Week Three Measuring Public Opinion: Non-Attitudes

• Tuesday, September 8th
  – Erikson and Tedin, p 38-43 Moodle

• Thursday, September 10th
  – “Non-Attitudes” Polling and the Public by Herber Asher Moodle
  – “Getting It Wrong” New York Times Jan 10, 2008 by Andrew Kohut Moodle

Week Four Alternatives to Traditional Surveys and Political Socialization

• Tuesday, September 15th
  – “Deliberative Polling: Toward a Better-Informed Democracy” by James S. Fishkin
    http://cdd.stanford.edu/polls/docs/summary/ link also available through Moodle

• Thursday, September 17th
  – Chapter 2 Clawson and Oxley

Week Five Socialization and Mass Media

• Tuesday, September 22nd

• Thursday, September 24th
  – Chapter 3 Clawson and Oxley
Week Six Mass Media

- Tuesday, September 29th
  - Chapters 1, 3, and 7 in *News that Matters* by Iyengar and Kinder [Moodle](#)

- Thursday, October 1st
  - Fall Break

Week Seven Ideology and Constraint

- Tuesday, October 6th
  - Chapter 5 Clawson and Oxley
  - Paper 1 Due in Class

- Thursday, October 8th
  - Chapters 1-3 in *Culture Wars? The Myth of a Polarized America* by Morris P. Firorina with Samuel J. Abrams and Jermey C. Pope. [Moodle](#)

Week Eight Alternatives to Ideological Thinking

- Tuesday, October 13th
  - “Left and Right Movement in Preferences” by Jim Stimson in *Tides of Consent* [Moodle](#)

- Thursday, October 15th
  - Chapter 6 Clawson and Oxley

Week Nine Exam

- Tuesday, October 20th
  - No readings

- Thursday, October 22nd
  - Exam

Week Ten Theories of Public Opinion

- Tuesday, October 27th
  - Chapter 4 Clawson and Oxley, p 93-106
• Thursday, October 29th
  – “The Responsive Voter: Campaign Information and Candidate Evaluations” by Milton Lodge, Maro R. Steenbergen and Shawn Brau

Week Eleven Political Sophistication

• Tuesday, November 3rd
  – Chapter 4 Clawson and Oxley, p 106-121

• Thursday, November 5th
  – Chapter 7 Clawson and Oxley, p 181-204

Week Twelve Political Sophistication and Trust

• Tuesday, November 10th
  – Chapter 7 Clawson and Oxley, p 204-211

• Thursday, November 12th
  – Chapter 10 Clawson and Oxley

Week Thirteen Trust and Institutions

• Tuesday, November 17th
  – Paper 2 Due

• Thursday, November 19th

Week Fourteen Congressional and Presidential Approval

• Tuesday, November 24th
  – “Between Campaigns” by Jim Stimson in Tides of Consent Moodle
  – Final Day to turn in extra credit.

• Thursday, November 26th
  – Thanksgiving
Week Fifteen Policy and Public Opinion

- **Tuesday, December 1st**
  - Chapter 11 Clawson and Oxley

- **Thursday, December 3rd**
  - Chapter 12 Clawson and Oxley

**Wednesday, December 9th, 10:00-12:00** Final Exam