

Political Science 244: Public Opinion and Survey Research

Dickinson College, Fall 2018
MR 1:30-2:45, Denny Hall – Room 304

Professor Sarah Niebler

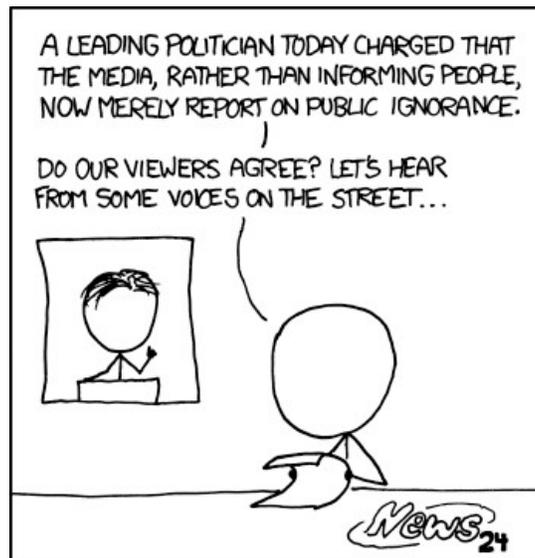
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Office Hours: Monday 10:30-12:00; Thursday 3:00-4:30; and by appointment



Source: xkcd (<https://xkcd.com/756/>)

Course Description and Learning Objectives

This course examines the nature of public opinion in contemporary American politics. We will discuss how to conceptualize and measure public opinion, where opinions or attitudes “come from,” as well as the status of American public opinion across a host of issues. Our analysis will draw both on classic readings in public opinion and on insights from modern political science, allowing us to examine important political phenomena from a variety of perspectives.

This course is a “methods-designated” course in political science and it also fulfills Dickinson College’s QR (quantitative reasoning) requirement. As such, we will spend some of our class time discussing the ways in which political scientists answer questions, focusing specifically on public opinion surveys. We will also learn some statistical techniques political scientists and pollsters use to conduct their research. Finally, because it is a midterm election year, students in this class will collect data from Cumberland County voters via an exit poll. Students will have a say in designing the survey instrument; then you will implement the survey by going into the community on Election Day and talking with voters; then you will learn to analyze the data using statistical inference, and finally, you will present your results to your peers.

Ultimately, the class has four learning outcomes. At the conclusion of the class, students should be able to:

1. Critically evaluate political science theories of how people form opinions and translate opinions into answers to survey questions.
2. Appreciate the nature of Americans' views on contemporary issues facing the United States.
3. Understand how survey research methods used in the study of politics are put to the task of answering research questions
4. Comprehend how surveys are conducted, including sampling and questionnaire design, and understand how to analyze, interpret, and present survey results.

Course Materials

There are three required books for this course (available at the bookstore):

- Asher, Herbert. 2017. *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know*. Ninth Edition. Sage, CQ Press.
- Cramer, Katherine J. 2016. *The Politics of Resentment: Rural Consciousness in Wisconsin and the Rise of Scott Walker*. Chicago University Press.
- Zaller, John R. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge University Press.

Additional readings are available on Moodle or online through the Dickinson College Library as specified in the syllabus.

Requirements and Grading

Active participation in course discussion is an essential element of the course and will be critical to successfully learning the material. The success of this course depends upon your regular attendance and contributions to class discussion. Course attendance is not optional. That said, I know things sometimes come up and, as such, you may have **two** absences throughout the course of the semester without penalty. I do not distinguish between excused and unexcused absences, so please use these two absences judiciously. Missing more than two classes will result in a reduction of your attendance and participation grade.

Additionally, simply showing up for class is not enough to guarantee a high participation grade. I also expect you to read the assigned material and to be prepared to ask questions and offer thoughtful, critical analysis about it during class. Attendance alone with little or no contribution to class discussions will earn you approximately a C in participation.¹

Beyond participation, your grade will be based on three response papers, two exams, a questionnaire analysis paper, and a group presentation and final paper. Further details on all assignments will be handed out and discussed in class at least one week prior to their due dates. The relative weight of each component and its due date is as follows:

¹ I recognize that some students are hesitant to speak in front of the class. If this is the case, please come talk with me during office hours early in the semester.

Attendance and Participation		10%
Response Papers (3)	September 10, 13, 17, or 20 September 24, 27, October 1 or 4 October 29, November 1, 5, or 12	15%
Exam #1	October 8	20%
Questionnaire Analysis Paper	October 25 (I would happily take this before fall pause if you are so inclined.)	10%
Exam #2	November 19	20%
Exit Poll Project – includes Surveying, Group Presentation, and Individual Paper	Thursday, December 20: 2:00-5:00 p.m.	25%

Final letter grades will be assigned in the following way:

A = 93-100	B- = 80-82	D = 60-69
A- = 90-92	C+ = 77-79	F = 0-59
B+ = 87-89	C = 73-76	
B = 83-86	C- = 70-72	

The Quantitative Reasoning Center

Dickinson College provides additional support for students taking quantitative courses across the curriculum through the Quantitative Reasoning (QR) Center. The QR Center offers general quantitative support. You can make an appointment via WCONLINE (<https://dickinson.mywconline.com/>).

The QR Center is located on the Main floor of the Waidner-Spahr Library, directly across from the Norman M. Eberly Multilingual Writing Center.

Academic Integrity

From Dickinson College's Community Standards... "Respect for ideas — our own and others' — is a hallmark of academic integrity. We show respect by acknowledging when we have used another's words or ideas in our work. We expect others to acknowledge when they use our ideas or words in their work. Students are expected to do their own work on quizzes, papers, examinations, class assignments, etc. Normally, a paper may be submitted in fulfillment of an assignment in only one course. Exceptions require permission from the instructors. Collaboration must be noted in writing and requires the consent of all instructors."

(http://www.dickinson.edu/info/20273/dean_of_students/867/community_standards/2)

With respect to the response papers, the questionnaire analysis paper, and the exams, I expect you do to you own work – no exceptions. In written work, including response papers, students are expected to cite all of their sources. With respect to the final project, students will have the option of working in groups. As we discuss expectations for that project throughout the semester, I will be more explicit about when and how it is acceptable to work together and when work must be done individually. If you ever have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism or cheating, please ask questions sooner rather than later.

Accommodations

Dickinson values diverse types of learners and is committed to ensuring that each student is afforded an equal opportunity to participate in all learning experiences. If you have (or think you may have) a learning difference or a disability – including a mental health, medical, or physical impairment– that would impact your educational experience in this class, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS) to schedule a meeting with Director Marni Jones. She will confidentially discuss your needs, review your documentation, and determine your eligibility for reasonable accommodations. To learn more about available supports, go to www.dickinson.edu/ODS, email DisabilityServices@dickinson.edu, call (717) 245-1734, or go to ODS in 106 Dana Hall.

I am fully committed to including all students in my courses. If you’ve already been granted accommodations at Dickinson, please let me know as soon as possible so that we can meet to review your Accommodation Letter and complete your “Blue Form” Implementation Plan. If you will need test proctoring from ODS, remember that you will need to provide them with at least one week’s notice.

Technology in the Classroom

A recent study conducted by psychologists Pam Mueller and Daniel Oppenheimer shows that students who take notes on a computer do less well answering conceptual questions than do students who take notes by hand (<http://www.vox.com/2014/6/4/5776804/note-taking-by-hand-versus-laptop>). However, I know that many students have become accustomed to using laptops and/or tablets for note-taking. I leave the decision to you as to what works best for you. As such, I do permit students to use technology in the classroom. In fact, there might be a few days I will explicitly encourage you to use phones and/or the internet during class. I will do my best to give you advance notice of those occasions so you can bring the appropriate materials to class.

With respect to audio recording, Pennsylvania is a “two-party consent” state, meaning that it is a crime to “intercept or record a telephone call or conversation **unless all parties to the conversation consent**” (<http://www.dmlp.org/legal-guide/pennsylvania/pennsylvania-recording-law>). Practically, what this means is that you should not be using any device to record class lectures or discussions. If a student with an accommodation from ODS is permitted to record class, all members of the class will be informed; students with ODS accommodations agree to strict guidelines with respect to how they use the recording.

Outline of the Course

*Unit 1:
What is Public Opinion? and
Where do Opinions Come From?*

September 3 – No reading – Course Overview and Syllabus

September 6 – Introduction

- Zaller, Chapter 1, pages 1-5
- Asher, Chapter 1, pages 1-41

September 10 – A Model of Public Opinion

- Zaller, Chapter 2, pages 6-39

September 13 – A Model of Public Opinion, cont.; Non-attitudes

- Zaller, Chapter 3, pages 40-52
- Asher, Chapter 2, pages 43-74

September 17 – Converting Opinions into Survey Responses

- Zaller, Chapters 4 and 5, pages 53-96

September 20 – Public Opinion Outside the World of Surveys

- Cramer, Chapters 1 and 2, pages 1-44

September 24 – Opinion Ingredients: Influence of Family and Generation

- Jennings, M. Kent, Laura Stoker, and Jake Bowers. 2009. “Politics Across Generations: Family Transmission Reexamined.” *Journal of Politics* 71(3): 782-799. (Available via Dickinson College Library)
- Putnam, Robert D. 2000. “From Generation to Generation” in *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. (Available on Moodle)

September 27 – Opinion Ingredients: Self Interest and Group Identities

- Cramer, Chapter 3, pages 45-89
- Schaffner, Brian F., Matthew MacWilliams, and Tatishe Nteta. 2018. “Understanding White Polarization in the 2016 Vote for President: The Sobering Role of Racism and Sexism” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 133(1): 9-34. (Available via Dickinson College Library)

October 1 – Opinion Ingredients: Media

- Zaller, Chapter 6, pages 97-117
- Gilens, Martin. 1996. “Race and Poverty in America: Public Misperceptions and the American News Media” *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 60(4): 515-541. (Available via Dickinson College Library)

October 4 – Opinion Ingredients: Media, continued

- Nyhan, Brendan and Jason Reifler. 2010. “When Corrections Fail: The Persistence of Political Misperceptions” *Political Behavior* 32: 303-330. (Available via Dickinson College Library)
- Miller, Joanne M., Kyle Saunders, and Christina E. Farhart. 2016. “Conspiracy Endorsement as Motivated Reasoning: The Moderating Roles of Political Knowledge and Trust” *American Journal of Political Science* 60(4): 824-844. (Available via Dickinson College Library)

October 8 – **Midterm #1**

*Unit 2:
Methodological Issues in Survey Design and Implementation
and Public Opinion in the Twenty-First Century*

October 11 – Wording and Context of Questions;

- Asher, Chapter 3, pages 75-106
- Fowler, Jr., Floyd J. 2009. “Designing Questions to be Good Measures” in *Survey Research Methods, 4th Edition*. SAGE Publications. (Available on Moodle)

October 15 – Sampling

- Asher, Chapter 4, pages 107-137

October 18 – Interviewing and Data Collection Procedures

- Asher, Chapter 5, pages 139-160

October 22 – **Fall Pause**

October 25 – Public Opinion and Resentment

- Cramer, Chapters 5 and 6, pages 111-168

October 29 – Public Opinion and Resentment, continued

- Cramer, Chapters 7 and 8, pages 169-225

November 1 – Public Opinion and Issue #1 (Class Decision)

- Readings TBA

November 5 – Polls and the 2018 Midterm Elections

- Asher, Chapter 7, pages 191-235
- Additional Reading TBA

November 6 (Tuesday) – **Election Day – Work Exit Poll Shifts as Assigned**

November 8 – **Class Canceled, Prof. Niebler at Northeast Political Science Conference**

November 12 – Public Opinion and Issue #2 (Class Decision)

- Readings TBA

November 15 – Public Opinion and Policymaking

- Gilens, Martin. 2005. “Inequality and Democratic Responsiveness.” *Public Opinion Quarterly* 69(5): 778-796. (Available via Dickinson College Library)
- Jacobs, Lawrence and Benjamin I. Page. 2005. “Who Influences U.S. Foreign Policy?” *American Political Science Review* 99(1): 107-123. (Available via Dickinson College Library)

November 19 – **Midterm #2**

November 22 – **No Class, Thanksgiving Break**

*Unit 3:
Analyzing and Interpreting Data*

November 26 – Analyzing Results

- Asher, Chapter 8, pages 237-278
- Workshop – Importing and Recoding Data

November 29 – Descriptive Statistics

- Halperin, Sandra, and Oliver Heath. 2012. “Quantitative Analysis: Description and Inference” in *Political Research: Methods and Practical Skills*. Oxford University Press. (Available on Moodle)
- Workshop – Toplines

December 3 – Bivariate Statistics

- Halperin, Sandra, and Oliver Heath. 2012. “Patterns of Association: Bivariate Analysis” in *Political Research: Methods and Practical Skills*. Oxford University Press. (Available on Moodle)
- Workshop – Crosstabs

December 6 – Bivariate Statistics, cont.

- Workshop – Linear Regression and ANOVA

December 10 – Workshop Catch-up Day

December 13 – Wrap-up; Presenting Survey Results

- Asher, Chapter 6, pages 161-189

December 20 (Thursday) at 2:00p.m. – **Final Presentations**