Political Science 244: Public Opinion and Survey Research

Dickinson College, Spring 2021
TR 10:30-11:45
Zoom Link for Class and Office Hours: [REDACTED]
Althouse 204

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Student Office Hours: Wednesday 10:00-11:00, Friday 1:00-2:00, and by appointment

<u>Course Description and Learning Objectives</u>
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. We will also read about best practices in survey research from polling organizations who engage in survey work every day.

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. Students will engage in their own survey research projects in small groups on a topic of the group's choosing, learning to design a survey instrument, implement the survey, analyze, interpret, and present survey results.

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, questionnaire design and sampling, and understand how to analyze, interpret, and present survey results.

In an effort to meet with students in-person who are on campus and also allow students to take the course remotely, we will be meeting in a variety of different ways. Sometimes we will all meet via zoom, sometimes half the class will meet via zoom and half in-person, each for part of the class period. Sometimes, we will have workshop days, which will be kind of like class-wide office hours. I will do my absolute best to make sure it is clear who is meeting when and via

which mode. Please refer to Moodle for the most up-to-date information on that and if, after checking there, it is still unclear, please don't hesitate to email me!

Course Materials
There are two required books for this course:
- 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.

Requirements and Grading
Active participation in course discussion is an essential element of the course, and will be critical to successfully learning the material. Students learn best by directly engaging with course materials and thinking about (and discussing) readings. I expect students to answer questions that are posted, ask questions about concepts that are not clear, engage viewpoints that are presented moving beyond simple "agree" or "disagree" statements, and think critically.

It is my hope that students will be able to participate in synchronous zoom sessions throughout the semester. As noted earlier, some of the class meetings will be remote with the entire class and others will be in-person with students on campus and via zoom with students not on campus. When we do meet remotely, I am hopeful students will be able to participate in class largely with their cameras on, but you are not required to have your video on during class. We will talk about participation and how best to engage in class discussion on the first day of the semester.

We will talk about all graded assignments in-depth on the first day of class and throughout the semester. Assignments marked with an asterisk (*) are part of the Group Survey Project. Guidelines for the entire group project and for Response Papers can be found on Moodle. Both exams will be take-home, open-book exams. Exam #1 will cover material from January 26 – March 4. Exam #2 will cover material from March 9 – April 8. The relative weight and due date of each component is as follows:

Assignment	Percent of Overall Grade	Due Date(s)
Engagement	10%	
Response Papers (3)	3 @ 5% each 15% total	February 2, 4, or 9 February 16, 18, March 2, or 4 March 23, 25, or 30
*Group Survey Instrument and Individual Paper	10%	March 4
Exam #1	15%	March 11 by 11:59 p.m.
*Group Toplines and Methods Statement Due	5%	April 8
Exam #2	15%	April 15
*Individual Graphics Papers	5%	April 22
*Group Presentation	10%	May 4 or 6
*Group White Paper and Individual Reflection Paper	15%	Thursday, May 13 by 5:00 p.m.

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	

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 response papers and exams, I expect you to do your own work – no exceptions! Exams will be open-book, take-home exams, but you may not collaborate or talk with anyone about the exam or the material on the exam for the duration of the exam window. Sources cited in response papers and exams should be cited with in-text (parenthetical) citations. If the materials you cite are assigned as course readings, there is no need to include a formal bibliography. If you cite sources outside the course readings, please include full citations in a bibliography so I can track down the sources if I wish.

The survey design project is a group project, so you will work with your team members on many aspects of the project. However, there will be some components I ask you to work on more independently. Expectations are more clearly articulated in the "Group Survey Project Assignment Guidelines" document on Moodle.

Accommodations
Dickinson values diverse types of learners and is committed to ensuring that each student is afforded equitable access 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 hinder your access to learning or demonstrating knowledge in this class, please contact Access and Disability Services (ADS). They will confidentially explain the accommodation request process and the type of documentation that Dean and Director Marni Jones will need to determine your eligibility for reasonable accommodations.

To learn more about available supports, go to www.dickinson.edu/ADS or email access@dickinson.edu.

If you've already been granted accommodations at Dickinson, please follow the guidance at www.dickinson.edu/AccessPlan for disclosing the accommodations for which you are eligible and scheduling a meeting with me as soon as possible so that we can discuss your accommodations and finalize your Access Plan. If test proctoring will be needed from ADS, remember that we will need to complete your Access Plan in time to give them at least one

week's advance notice.

Covid-19 and the Spring Semester
These are extraordinary times in the country and the world, and this course is meeting (at least partially) remotely because of these circumstances. I know this is not the semester you imagined, but I hope we can work together to make the best of a challenging situation. Please know that I value your health and well-being and am happy to work with you if unexpected things arise throughout the semester. I do ask you to communicate with me if possible. I do not expect you to disclose particular circumstances of any challenges you are facing (although I am happy to try to recommend resources as I am able) but I cannot work with you if we are not in touch.

Outline of the Course

January 26 – (Zoom for everyone)
- Introductions and Expectations, No Reading
January 28 – (Zoom for everyone)
- Zaller, Chapter 1
- PEW Research Center, "Can We Still Trust Polls?" Video available at: https://www.pewresearch.org/2018/05/14/video-can-we-still-trust-polls/
- FiveThirtyEight, "How to Read Polls in 2020" Available at: https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/how-to-read-2020-polls-like-a-pro/
- Vox, "One Pollsters' Explanation For Why The Polls Got It Wrong" Available at: https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2020/11/10/21551766/election-polls-results-wrong-david-shor

Unit 1:
Where do Opinions Come From?
Survey Design and Implementation

February 2 – (Zoom for everyone) – A Model of Public Opinion
- Zaller, Chapter 2, pages 6-39
February 4 – (Zoom for everyone) – A Model of Public Opinion, cont.
- Zaller, Chapter 3, pages 40-52

February 9 – (Zoom for everyone) – Converting Opinions into Survey Responses
- Zaller, Chapters 4 and 5, pages 53-96
- Discussion of Potential Topics for Group Survey Projects and Issues
February 11 – (Zoom for those off campus from 10:30-11:05; In-Person for those on campus from 11:10-11:45) – Public Opinion Outside the World of Surveys
- Cramer, Chapters 1 and 2, pages 1-44

February 16 – (In-Person for those on campus from 10:30-11:05; Zoom for those off campus from 11:10-11:45) – 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.
- Putnam, Robert D. 2000. "From Generation to Generation" in *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*.

February 18 (Zoom for everyone) – Opinion Ingredients: Self Interest and Group Identities
- SKIM Cramer, Chapter 3, pages 45-89
- Cramer, Chapter 4, pages 90-110
- 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." *Political Science Quarterly* 133(1): 9-34.
- Fill out Online Questionnaire about Group Preferences (in class)

February 23 – (Zoom for everyone) – Wording and Context of Question
- Pew Research Center, "Questionnaire Design" Video available at: https://www.pewresearch.org/methods/u-s-survey-research/questionnaire-design/
- Fowler, Jr., Floyd J. 2009. "Designing Questions to be Good Measures" in *Survey Research Methods, 4th Edition*. SAGE Publications.
- Workshop on Sources of Good Questions (in class)
    - Polling Report (https://pollingreport.com/)
    - Roper Center iPoll (https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/ipoll/)
- Survey Groups Announced

February 25 – (In-Person for those on campus; Zoom for those off campus) – Workshop Day in Groups
- **Using the databases and/or principles we discussed, bring 5 potential questions – including response options – with you to class.**

March 2 – (Zoom for those off campus from 10:30-11:05, In-Person for those on campus from 11:10-11:45) – Opinion Ingredients: Media and Political Elites
- 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.

March 4 – (Zoom for everyone) – Opinion Ingredients: Media and Political Elites, Part 2
- Nyhan, Brendan. 2020. "Facts and Myths about Misperceptions" *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 34(3): 220-236.
- Google Forms Demo
- **Submit Group Survey Instrument and Individual Paper to Moodle by 11:59 p.m.**

March 9 – (Zoom for everyone) – Survey Sampling
- Pew Research Center "Random Sampling" Video available at: https://www.pewresearch.org/methods/2017/05/12/methods-101-video-random-sampling/
- Asher, Herb. 2017. "Sampling Techniques" from <u>Polling and the Public</u>, pages 107-122.
- Midterm Review

March 11 – No class
- **Submit Midterm Exam to Moodle by 11:59 p.m.**

March 16 – No class, Spring Break
March 18 – No class, Spring Break

Unit 2:
Public Opinion and Contemporary Issues
Survey Implementation, Analysis and Presentation

March 23 – (Zoom for everyone) – Methods of Data Collection
- Asher, Herb. 2017. "Interviewing and Data Collection Procedures" from <u>Polling and the Public</u>, pages 139-160.

March 25 – (In-person for new arrivals from 10:30-11:05, Zoom for all others from 11:10-11:45) – Politics of Resentment
- Cramer, Chapters 5 and 6, pages 111-168
- **Revised Group Survey, programmed in Google Forms, Link Due by Email**

March 30 – (Zoom for everyone) – Politics of Resentment, cont. & Inferential Statistics
- Cramer, Chapters 7 and 8, pages 169-225

April 1 – (In-Person by Groups) – Data Cleaning Workshop
- **Survey Responses Due**

April 6 – (In-Person with Half from 10:30-11:05, Zoom with Half from 11:10-11:45) – Public Opinion and Issue #1, Elections
- Zukin, Cliff. 2015. "A Primer on Pre-Election Polls: Or, Why Different Election Polls Sometimes Have Different Results" *American Association for Public Opinion Research*. Available at: https://www.aapor.org/getattachment/Education-Resources/Election-Polling-Resources/Election-Polling-AAPOR-2015-primary_cz120215-FINAL.pdf.aspx
- Kennedy, Courtney. 2020. "Key things to know about election polling in the United States" *Pew Research Center*. Available at: https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/08/05/key-things-to-know-about-election-polling-in-the-united-states/
- Keeter, Scott, Courtney Kennedy, and Claudia Deane. 2020. "Understanding how 2020 election polls performed and what it might mean for other kinds of survey work" *Pew Research Center*. Available at: https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/11/13/understanding-how-2020s-election-polls-performed-and-what-it-might-mean-for-other-kinds-of-survey-work/

April 8 – (In-Person with Half from 10:30-11:05, Zoom with Half from 11:10-11:45) – Public Opinion and Issue #2, Race
- Menasche Horowitz, Juliana, Kim Parker, Anna Brown, and Kiana Cox. 2020. "Increased Focus on Race Will Lead to Major Policy Change" *Pew Research Center*. Available at: https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2020/10/06/amid-national-reckoning-americans-divided-on-whether-increased-focus-on-race-will-lead-to-major-policy-change/
- Jardina, Ashley. 2019. "The New American Minority" from White Identity Politics, pages 1-20.
- **Methods Statement and Toplines Due**

April 13 – (In-Person by Groups) – Graphics Workshop
- No Readings

April 15 – No class
- **Submit Midterm Exam to Moodle by 11:59 p.m.**

April 20 – (In-Person by Groups) – Workshop Day
- No Readings

April 22 – (In-Person with Half from 10:30-11:05, Zoom with Half from 11:10-11:45) – Public Opinion and Issue #3, TBD
- Readings TBD
- Graphics Due

April 27 – (In-Person with Half from 10:30-11:05, Zoom with Half from 11:10-11:45) – Public Opinion and Issue #4, TBD
- Readings TBD

April 29 – (In-Person by Groups) – Workshop Day
- No Readings

May 4 – (Zoom for everyone) – Group Presentations
May 6 – (Zoom for everyone) – Group Presentations

Thursday, May 13 by 5:00 p.m. – White Papers and Final Reflection Due