

# Public Opinion

## PLSC 313 Section 001

### Fall 2017

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#### Course Goals

At the heart of a representative democracy lies the transmission of the will of the citizenry to the government. In order to have a full understanding of the shape of government and the choices made by the citizens, we must first comprehend what the “public will” is and how it is formed. The truth about American public opinion is that it is often fractious and malleable.

At the end of the course, the students should be able to answer the following questions: What does the fractious and malleable nature of public opinion mean for our democracy? How do Americans form opinions? How do Americans process information to create our political evaluations? How is American public opinion measured? What is the role of the media with respect to our opinions?

#### Student Learning Outcomes

At the end of the course, students will better understand the process by which individuals form opinions and apply those opinions to their political evaluations and actions based on those evaluations, such as voting.

#### Prerequisites

Students must have completed PLSC 201 with a grade of “C” or better.

#### Student Learning Activities

Grades will be calculated using the following formula:

Exam 1	20%	Wednesday, September 27, 2017
Exam 2	20%	Monday, October 30, 2017
Final Exam	20%	Monday, December 11, 2017 at 11:30am
Group Project	20%	Mon. Oct. 9 & Wed. Oct 11, 2017
Poll Paper	20%	Wednesday, November 29, 2017

Material for the exams will be drawn from readings, lectures, and class discussions. Make up exams must be scheduled two weeks in advance in the case of an *unavoidable* planned absence; otherwise, make ups will be given only in the case of a **documented** illness or emergency. “Documented” means a legitimate doctor’s note dating from *prior* to the exam. Any student

health center note describing vague symptoms dated the day of or after the exam will not be acceptable.

### Group Project

You will be assigned to a group which will make a class presentation regarding the background, trends, and current status of American public opinion for a randomly selected issue (I will randomly assign the issue to the group). Presentations should be approximately 10 – 15 minutes and should be multi-media in nature. Further details will be discussed in class. **Presentations will occur the week of Mon. Oct. 9 & Wed. Oct 11, 2017.**

### Poll Paper

The primary way we measure public opinion in America is through polling. The class will be participating in a telephone poll that will be conducted Oct. 22 – Nov. 5; HOWEVER, you must go through professional caller training one to two weeks prior. Your grade on this will be based on your overall contribution to the completion of the project (including working a caller shift) and a 5 – 7 page paper where you discuss your polling experiences and relate the overall experience back to the readings from the section titled, “Measuring Public Opinion.” (double-spaced with 1 inch margins and a font approximately the size of this one [12 pt Times New Roman], there will be no “headers,” you will use a title page [not counted toward total number of pages], bottom-center pagination, and an upper left-hand corner staple [no “paper covers”]...these are the basic “rules” of the paper; *failure to follow **any** of these precepts will result in an automatic deduction of one full letter grade*) **You may required to work weekend “shifts” during this time period in order to achieve your required number of shifts.**

The Polling Paper is due by the beginning of class **Wednesday, November 29, 2017. Papers will be penalized one full letter grade if it is not received by the beginning of class on the due date AND one full letter grade for each day late it is received thereafter.** (What matters is when *I* get the paper....not when you slide it under my door...give it to the Administrative Specialist....put it in my departmental mailbox...). All papers must be submitted to Turnitin.com. Papers not submitted to Turnitin.com will not be graded. Instructions on how to submit papers will be given in class.

Why do we do a poll? The answer to this question is two-fold: (1) as noted above, the primary way to gauge public opinion is through survey research. This is a wonderful way to get **real world, hands-on survey research** experience. When you talk about measuring public opinion in the future, you will speak from *experience*. (2) as an institution, Winthrop is committed to Service Learning. This is the integration of community service and learning. In doing the poll, not only are you learning valuable lessons and skills, you are also serving the community. I am a firm believer that each of us has a duty as a citizen to serve her or his community. We use these polls to serve the community by providing local organizations and government with valuable information. These are ***real*** surveys and the results have ***real*** policy implications.

Class announcements will be made via the class listserv. **If you have an active winthrop.edu email account, you should be automatically added to the listserv, otherwise you must add yourself to the listserv. You are EXPECTED to regularly check your email for class**

announcements! If you are not on the class listserv, go [HERE](#) for instructions on how to sign up (the course designator to sign up is: PLSC313001).

Note key dates for the university on the University Calendar here.

**Withdrawal Date:** The last day to withdraw from the course with an automatic grade of “N” is October 20, 2017

### **Students with Disabilities**

Winthrop University is dedicated to providing access to education. If you have a disability and require specific accommodations to complete this course, contact Services for Students with Disabilities at 323-3290 and make an appointment to see a professional staff member. Once you have your official notice of accommodations from Services for Students with Disabilities, please inform me as early as possible in the semester.

### **Required Texts**

Erikson, Robert S. and Kent L. Tedin. "American Public Opinion: Its Origins, Content, and Impact" (NINTH Edition). Routledge Publishers. (denoted “E&T” on the reading list)

All other readings will be on either on a password protected site ([PLSC 313 Readings](#)), on Blackboard, or emailed via the Listserv.

### **Academic Misconduct**

Academic misconduct will not be tolerated. Winthrop’s *Conduct Code* defines academic misconduct as:

”Academic misconduct includes but is not limited to providing or receiving assistance in a manner not authorized by the professor in the creation of work to be submitted for academic evaluation including papers, projects, and examinations; presenting, as one's own, the ideas or words of another for academic evaluation without proper acknowledgment; doing unauthorized academic work for which another person will receive credit or be evaluated; and presenting the same or substantially the same papers or projects in two or more courses without the explicit permission of the professors involved. In addition, academic misconduct involves attempting to influence one's academic evaluation by means other than academic achievement or merit. More explicit definitions of academic misconduct specific to certain academic disciplines may be promulgated by academic departments and schools.”

I will prosecute cases of academic misconduct to the fullest extent of university policy, and that can mean expulsion from the university. Obviously, any student caught cheating or plagiarizing, in any manner, on an exam or assignment will receive a zero for that assignment in addition to

academic prosecution. Additionally, I reserve the right to award the student an "F" in the course for ANY act of academic misconduct if I feel it is warranted. This is in addition to academic prosecution by the Dean of Students.

**\*\*ADDITIONALLY**, the Department of Political Science has it's own policies on plagiarism and academic misconduct: [Poli Sci Statement on Plagiarism](#) In the immortal words of Brad Hamilton: "Learn it; Know it; Live it!"\*\*

**Syllabus Changes: This syllabus is subject to change by the instructor throughout the semester. In fact, there is a 100% chance that it will change!!! I still have readings to add ... stay tuned!!!**

**Class Policies:**

Please provide a respectful learning environment for your fellow students. Repeated tardiness, cell phone disruptions, reading materials unrelated to the course (such as the student newspaper), and use of communication technologies (e.g., web browsing/ IMing/ texting during class) during class will adversely affect your grade.

Attendance Policy: Beginning with the third time a student is declared absent, the student will lose a full letter grade for each absence. Any student caught IMing, texting, or browsing the web will be declared "Absent" for that class. Since I don't take roll, this is the only way to be declared absent.

Please arrive at class on time and **switch off** all pagers, cell phones, and alarms during class. The only exceptions to this rule are if you have children or an emergency family situation (e.g. family member in surgery). For these circumstances, you may leave your phone **onvibrate** and you **must** leave the class to answer a call.

I do not provide lecture notes for students under any circumstances.

Grade Appeals: If you wish to dispute a grade on a particular assignment for any reason other than an obvious arithmetic error on my part, you will need to type a one-page explanation of your position and turn it in, along with the original graded assignment, at least one week after the assignment is returned to you. I will then consider your appeal and make a determination.

Appeals must be submitted in hard copy format; no appeals submitted via email will be considered.

For appeals regarding your final grade in the course, please consult the Student Handbook and Catalog for procedures.

## Topics and Readings

### Introduction to Public Opinion

► E&T Chpt. 1

- Zaller: “Information, predispositions, and opinion” (chpt. 2 from *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*)

### Measuring Public Opinion

► E&T Chpt. 2

- Oldendick & Bardes: “How public opinion data are used” (chpt 3 from *Public Opinion: Measuring the American Mind*)
- Oldendick & Bardes: “How are opinions measured” (chpt 4 from *Public Opinion: Measuring the American Mind*)
- Kuru, Ozan, Josh Paesk, and Michael w. Traugott. 2017. “Motivated Reasoning in the Perceived Credibility of Public Opinion Polls.” *Public Opinion Quarterly*. Col. 81 num. 2 pp. 422-446.

### Is the American Public Stupid?

#### Understanding Uncertainty and Inconsistency in Public Opinion

Zaller: “Making it up as you go along” (chpt. 5 from *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*) [RAS Model](#)

- Alvarez and Brehm – Abortion
- Alvarez and Brehm – IRS
- Alvarez and Brehm -- Race

#### The Dumbing Down of America

- Lawrence, Christopher N. and Scott H. Huffmon. 2015 “Keeping Up with the Congressmen: Evaluating Constituents’ Awareness of Redistricting.” *Social Science Quarterly* vol. 96 no. 1 pp.65-75

### Opinion Formation I: Socialization

► E&T Chpt. 5

- Sears & Levy: “Childhood and adult political development” (from *Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*) ([Parent-Child Income](#))

### Opinion Formation II: Role of Information in Creation of Opinions and Evaluations

- Rahn, Aldrich, & Borgida: “Individual and Contextual Variations in Political Candidate Appraisal” (from March 1994 *American Political Science Review*)
- [Huffmon: “Revisiting the Role of Information Format in Candidate Evaluation: An ‘Update’ Model of Evaluation” \(from 2003 \*Journal of Political Science\*\)](#)
- Drew Westen, Pavel S. Blagov, Keith Harenski, Clint Kilts, and Stephan Hamann . 2006. “Neural Bases of Motivated Reasoning: An fMRI Study of Emotional Constraints on Partisan Political Judgment in the 2004 U.S. Presidential Election”

*Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience* 18:11, 1947-1958

► Kahan, Dan M. and Peters, Ellen and Dawson, Erica Cantrell and Slovic, Paul, Motivated Numeracy and Enlightened Self-Government (September 3, 2013). Behavioural Public Policy, 1, 54-86; Yale Law School, Public Law Working Paper No. 307. Available at

SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2319992> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2319992>

► Nyhan, Berndan and Thomas Zietzoff. 2017. "Fighting the Past: Perceptions of Control, Historical Misperceptions, and Corrective Information in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict." Forthcoming in *Political Psychology*

► Baekgaard, M., Christensen, J., Dahlmann, C., Mathiasen, A., & Petersen, N. (2017). The Role of Evidence in Politics: Motivated Reasoning and Persuasion among Politicians. *British Journal of Political Science*, 1-24. doi:10.1017/S0007123417000084

### **Trends in Public Opinion**

► E&T Chpt. 4 and Chpt 7

► Huffmon, Scott H., H. Gibbs Knotts, and Seth C. McKee. Forthcoming. "Down with the Southern Cross: Opinions on the Confederate Battle Flag in South Carolina." *Political Science Quarterly*.

► [Barth, Overby, & Huffmon: "Community Context, Personal Contact, and Support for an Anti-Gay Rights Referendum"](#)

### **The Media and Public Opinion**

► E&T Chpt. 8

► Zaller: "The myth of massive media impact revived: New support for a discredited idea." (chpt 2 from *Political Persuasion and Attitude Change*)

► Miller & Krosnick: "News media impact on the ingredients of presidential evaluations: A program of research on the priming hypothesis" (chpt 3 from *Political Persuasion and Attitude Change*)

► Druckman, J. N., Levendusky, M. S. and McLain, A. (2017), No Need to Watch: How the Effects of Partisan Media Can Spread via Interpersonal Discussions. *American Journal of Political Science*. doi:10.1111/ajps.12325

### **Headlines**

### **The Opinion Connection: The Public and its Leaders**

► E&T Chpt 10

► Kuklinski & Hurley: "It's a matter of interpretation" (Chpt. 5 from *Political Persuasion and Attitude Change*)

► Huffmon, Scott H., H. Gibbs Knotts, and Seth C. McKee. 2016. "Similarities and Differences in Support of Minority and White Republican Candidates." *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics*. vol. 1 no. 1 pp.91-116

### **The Electoral Connection**

► E&T Chpt. 9

► Huffmon, Scott H., H. Gibbs Knotts, and Seth C. McKee. 2016. "History Made: The Rise of Republican Tim Scott." *PS: Political Science & Politics*, volume 49, issue 03, pp. 405- 413.

### Extra Credit

Buy a journal (the black & white type). Take at least one journal page worth of notes on each individual reading / chapter we cover in class. You will be awarded extra points – up to a **FULL LETTER GRADE** on an exam - based on the total number of readings for which you have taken notes. I will be checking journals to tally points regularly throughout the semester.