

## **COMM 4820: Public Opinion & Communication Autumn 2016**

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Lecture Times: Tuesday & Thursday 9:35am - 10:55am

Lecture Location: 360 Journalism Building

Course Web site: [www.carmen.osu.edu](http://www.carmen.osu.edu)

### **Course Description**

The official description of this course is as follows:

*Investigation of public opinion from social, political, and psychological perspectives, and study of the role communication (including the media) plays in the process. Prereq: Not open to students with credit for 620 or 620H.*

This course will address the various ways people have conceptualized and measured “public opinion” throughout history, the central role that communication plays in these definitions, the factors that influence public opinion, and the influence that public opinion has on individuals and society. In order to do so we will draw on theory and research from communication, political science, psychology, and sociology.

By the end of this course, you should:

- Understand both of what public opinion is commonly understood to mean and the limitations of that definition.
- Know the predominant methods by which public opinion is measured as well as their pitfalls.
- Understand the social and psychological processes involved in the formation and maintenance of opinions.
- Have a working knowledge of major theories relating communication and public opinion.
- Be able to see connections between individual opinions, group dynamics, and larger institutions such as the government and mass media.
- Be savvy consumers of present-day reporting of information that purports to be about public opinion.

## Requirements & Grading

There is a required textbook for the course:

Berinsky, A. J. (2016) *New directions in public opinion* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). New York: Routledge.

In addition, there will be required readings from other sources posted on the course Carmen site. Additional readings will be available on Carmen in PDF format.

I will expect you to have read and understood the assigned readings *before* class, and that you will be present and prepared to discuss them *in* class. Sometimes we will discuss content from the readings in class, but other times I will simply assume that you have read and understood the material and present additional, related material in class. If you have questions about the readings, don't hesitate to visit me in office hours!

Key readings are listed on this syllabus, but for many topic areas I also will be posting brief additional readings (e.g., news articles, blog posts) that come up during the semester that will help shape discussion and must also be read (and will be fair game for exams). I will notify the class via Carmen when additional readings are posted.

More generally, you will also find it useful to keep up with local, national, and world political events during this class – both through text-based media (e.g., online newspaper sources) and in video format (e.g., political talk and/or opinion programs on cable television). These sources of information will not only keep you up-to-date on political events of the day – something all of us should do as citizens of a democracy, especially in an election year – but they will also be the source of examples and assignments that will be used to illustrate concepts discussed in class. You'll be better off knowing and understanding a political topic used as an example in class if you've already read about it that morning in a newspaper.

Your grade for the semester will be based on the following evaluation criteria:

In Class Assignments:		10%
Mid-term #1:	9/29	20%
Mid-term #2:	11/3	25%
Group project:	12/1	20%
Final exam:	12/12	25%

The grading scale for this course follows the standard OSU grading scheme, which does not use rounding:

A =	93-100%	C =	73-76%
A- =	90-92%	C- =	70-72%
B+ =	87-89%	D+ =	67-69%
B =	83-86%	D =	63-66%
B- =	80-82%	D- =	60-62%
C+ =	77-79%	E =	0-59%

When letter grades are given for an assignment, they will be converted into the following numeric values for final grade calculation:

A+, A, A- = 100, 95, 91

B+, B, B- = 88, 85, 81

C+, C, C- = 78, 75, 71

D+, D, D- = 68, 65, 61

E (F) = 0

In Class Assignments: Throughout the semester, there will be five in-class assignments (ICAs). These assignments will range from brief reaction papers to readings written *at the start of class*, to brief reaction papers to lecture content written *at the end of class*, to small group projects completed sometime *during class*. Each in-class assignment is worth 2% of your course grade (for a total of 10%). Most ICAs will be graded on a three-point scale: full credit for meeting expectations (i.e., depth and originality of thought), half credit for completing the assignment but not meeting full expectations, and no credit for not turning in the assignment due to non-attendance or complete failure to meet expectations. The dates for in-class assignments will not be announced in advance. Students who are not present for an in-class assignment cannot make up the assignment. Students who have a prior, formally excused absence from class (e.g., student athletes, prior documentation for a funeral) will have the missed in-class assignment dropped and the weighting of remaining in-class assignments increased to compensate.

Midterms and Final Exams: This course will employ two midterms and a final exam. These exams will be designed to evaluate your recall, comprehension and ability to apply the information presented in the course. The exams will cover both lecture and reading material. If the times/dates for the exams conflict with religious holiday, bring this to my attention by the end of the first week of class so we can negotiate potential alternative arrangements. Having more than one exam on the same day, or plans to miss class to travel for a holiday, does not constitute a reason to miss an exam in this course.

After the first week of class, only those with a *prior* formal, written excuse from a doctor indicating they were physically unable to come to the exam will have exams rescheduled; rescheduled exams will NOT be the same exam given to the rest of the class. Any others who miss an exam will receive a zero for that exam and, most likely, fail the course. Each exam is worth 30% of your course grade.

Group Project: The purpose of the group project is to give you hands on experience in finding, analyzing, and interpreting public opinion data on real-world issues. It will also allow you the chance to apply some of the concepts and theories you've learned about in class in the same way that a public opinion professional would. The end product – a written report – can be seen as the equivalent of a report delivered to a client. There will be ten groups with 5-6 students per group. I will give you the opportunity to form your own groups if you choose to do so. Written reports are due to the Carmen dropbox by the start of class on December 1<sup>st</sup>, but there are a series of deadlines that you must meet.

- Sept. 1: Send proposed group compositions to me if you have them

- Sept. 8: I will formalize final groups
- Sept. 15: Use class time for face-to-face group planning meeting, research on topics
- Oct. 25: Formally submit topic proposal for feedback
- Dec. 1: Submit final project report including group member assessment

The final paper should be submitted in PDF format, with 1” margins and in Times New Roman 12-point font. **No late written reports will be accepted regardless of the reason (i.e., hard drive crash, WiFi issues), so don’t wait to upload your report until the last minute. Point deductions will be taken for failure to meet other deadlines for the project.** There will be a separate document with much greater detail on this project posted to Carmen in the first week of class.

### Office Hours

I will hold regular office hours (see above) during which I encourage you to come to see me to discuss course-related matters. If your schedule does not permit visiting me during formal office hours, please let me know and I will attempt to arrange an alternative time by appointment.

Please do take advantage of this resource to ask questions or clarification, seek additional information, and so forth. It is my job to make sure that you have every opportunity to learn the course material, and I will make every effort to do so. But, it is also incumbent upon you to seek help when you think you need it. If you do not seek input when your grades indicate you need it, there is little I can do to help you. ***For those of you who are graduating seniors do not put yourself in the position to miss graduation because of your performance in this course – take advantage of every opportunity I can offer to do well.***

### Course Policies

**Schedule Conflicts.** All exams must be taken on the designated exam dates and times. It is your responsibility to note the day/time of exams/assignments now and make sure you will be able to attend all the exams and complete the assignments. If you have any schedule conflicts, you should either rearrange your schedule so that you can complete all of the work or drop the class. No make-ups are allowed except in the case of an extreme emergency. In the rare event that an emergency arises, it is the student’s responsibility to 1) inform the instructor prior to the exam time, and 2) provide the instructor with written documentation of the emergency. Documentation must be a written doctor’s note explaining the necessity of the absence or the professor’s **PRIOR** approval of a copy of the “Explanatory Statement for Absence from Class” (see <http://shs.osu.edu/posts/documents/absence-excuse-form2.pdf>). Please keep in mind that any falsification of the information on this form is considered academic misconduct and can lead to severe consequences.

**Student Performance.** All students (especially graduating seniors!) who “need” this course for whatever reason (scholarships, completing minors, graduating) should work especially hard to ensure that they will pass it. There will NOT be opportunities for students to re-take exams or re-complete assignments in order to raise grades. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that he or she receives a passing final grade by working diligently and responsibly throughout the quarter. No exceptions will be made. Grades will be calculated strictly by the criteria set forth in the syllabus.

**Email Etiquette.** At times I will use the Carmen system to send a mass email to the class. Use of a “reply to all” function or other means of contacting fellow students en masse without their permission is considered spam. Any instance of a student spamming members of the class (e.g., seeking lecture notes) will result in a 2-point deduction from the course grade for each occurrence.

### **Classroom Civility**

We want to build a classroom climate that is comfortable for all. In a communication class, it is *especially* important that we (1) display respect for all members of the classroom – including the instructor and students, (2) pay attention to and participate in all class sessions and activities; (3) avoid unnecessary disruption during class time (e.g., having private conversations, reading the newspaper, surfing the Web or watching videos on a laptop or tablet computer, doing work for other classes, receiving cell phone calls and text messages); and (4) avoid racist, sexist, homophobic or other negative language that may unnecessarily exclude members of our campus / classroom. This is not an exhaustive list of behaviors; rather, they represent the minimum standards that help make the classroom a productive place for all concerned. If you cannot maintain these standards, you WILL be asked to leave the classroom so that others have the opportunity to learn unimpeded. I encourage students to express their views in a civil manner, and to debate and critique one another’s arguments on the basis of evidence and logic.

### **Student Use of Technology in the Classroom**

Although I believe the use of laptops or tablets can be used for productive purposes in class, it is my observation (reinforced by academic research) that they primarily serve as distractions – both to those who use them, and those nearby. Although some might argue laptops are beneficial for taking notes, considerable scientific research demonstrates that **USING LAPTOPS FOR TAKING NOTES IMPEDES LEARNING COMPARED TO PAPER AND PEN NOTETAKING.** If you’d like to read a brief summary of just some of the evidence, [click here](#) or check out the *Scientific American* article “A Learning Secret: Don’t Take Notes with a Laptop” on Carmen under “General Information.” Here are a few quotes from that paper that might get you thinking about whether or not you should bring your iPad or laptop in class:

*When participants were given an opportunity to study with their notes before the final assessment, once again those who took longhand notes outperformed laptop participants. Because longhand notes contain students’ own words and handwriting, they may serve as*

*more effective memory cues by recreating the context (e.g., thought processes, emotions, conclusions) as well as content (e.g., individual facts) from the original learning session...*

*...In the Mueller and Oppenheimer studies, all laptops were disconnected from the internet, thus eliminating any disruption from email, instant messaging, surfing, or other online distractions. In most typical college settings, however, internet access is available, and evidence suggests that when college students use laptops, they spend 40% of class time using applications unrelated to coursework, are more likely to fall off task, and are less satisfied with their education.*

It's your money, and your education. So, as long as you use your laptop or tablet in a responsible manner that is not distracting to other students, I'll permit it. But, cellphone use in this class is banned; those who use cellphones in class will lost any class participation credit earned in the class that day. And, with regards to tablets and laptops, anyone using their device in a manner that is distracting to others (using email or social media, watching movies, playing games, online shopping) will be asked to leave class and/or will have any class attendance points for that day scored as zero.

### **Some Words About Academic Honesty**

It is your responsibility to complete your own work as best you can in the time provided. The Ohio State University's *Code of Student Conduct* (Section 3335-23-04) defines academic misconduct as: "Any activity that tends to compromise the academic integrity of the University, or subvert the educational process." Examples of academic misconduct include (but are not limited to) plagiarism, collusion (unauthorized collaboration), copying the work of another student, possession of unauthorized materials during an examination, and falsification of laboratory or other data. Ignorance of the University's *Code of Student Conduct* is never considered an excuse for academic misconduct, so I recommend that you review the *Code of Student Conduct* and, specifically, the sections dealing with academic misconduct at [http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/resource\\_csc.asp](http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/resource_csc.asp)

Academic misconduct is a serious offense, and it is my responsibility to make sure it does not occur. If I suspect that a student has committed academic misconduct in this course, I am obligated by University Rules to report my suspicions to the Committee on Academic Misconduct (COAM). If COAM determines that you have violated the University's *Code of Student Conduct*, the sanctions for the misconduct could include a failing grade in this course and suspension or dismissal from the University. If you have any questions about this policy or what constitutes academic misconduct, please contact your professor or TA or visit the COAM web page at <http://oaa.osu.edu/coam.html>.

## **Helpful Hints to Get the Most Out of This Class**

**Alter Your Expectations for Studying.** Research consistently shows that college students greatly underestimate the effort and time it takes to do a quality job of learning the new and complex material that is a part of most of your courses. Academic experts generally agree spending at least 2-3 hours per week outside of class per credit hour is the norm for good achievement. However, if the course is particularly difficult or if your skills are not as great as the typical students', you will likely need to spend even more time to do well in the course.

**Keep the Big Picture in Mind.** Not only must you learn quite an amount of information that you might consider rather detailed, but you should also strive to understand the broader themes and context at all times. Keep in mind what you have learned in previous readings and lectures. Themes work best when understood together rather than in isolation. In fact, individuals who, after a course is completed, have gone back and reread the required readings, report considerably greater understanding of material partly because the context has changed (e.g., they perceive a reading in Week 2 differently after having read information during Weeks 3 and 4).

**If You Have Problems, Seek Solutions Early.** For example, if you do poorly on an exam, see me at that time (instead of later in the course). In addition, the office of Counseling and Consultation Service offers a variety of services aimed at helping students resolve personal difficulties and acquire the skills, attitudes, and knowledge that will enable them to take full advantage of their experiences at Ohio State. It is located at the Younkin Success Center (4<sup>th</sup> Floor), 1640 Neil Avenue, Columbus, OH 43210, phone: 614-292-5766, email: [ccs@studentlife.osu.edu](mailto:ccs@studentlife.osu.edu), Web page: <http://www.ccs.ohio-state.edu/> If I can help you or point you in the right direction, I certainly will, but you must ask for help first.

## **SPECIAL ACCOMODATIONS**

This syllabus is available in alternative formats upon request. Students with disabilities are responsible for making their needs known to the instructor and seeking available assistance in a timely manner. If you need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, you should contact me to arrange an appointment by the second week of classes. At the appointment we can discuss the course format, anticipate your needs and explore potential accommodations. If you have not previously contacted the Office for Disability Services (ODS) but believe you may need accommodations, I encourage you to do so. I rely on the Office for Disability Services at 614-292-3307 in Rm. 150 Pomerene Hall for assistance in verifying the need for accommodations and developing accommodation strategies.



## Course Schedule and Readings

(Students are responsible for any changes to this syllabus announced in class.)

DATE	TOPIC	REQUIRED READINGS
8/23	Course Introduction	
8/25, 8/30, 9/1	History & Conceptualization of Public Opinion	Berinsky Ch. 1 Gallup & Rae Ch. 3 Blumer "Public Opinion and Public Opinion Polling"
9/6, 9/8, 9/13, <del>9/15</del>	Measuring Public Opinion	Berinsky Ch. 2 Pew Report on Online Surveys (pp. 1-36)
9/20, 9/22	Assessing the Quality of Public Opinion	Berinsky Ch. 3 Yankelovich Ch. 2
<b>9/29</b>	<b>Exam #1</b>	
10/4, 10/6	Foundations of Preference: Ideology & Partisanship	Berinsky Ch. 4 Berinsky Ch. 7
10/11, <del>10/13</del> , 10/18	Foundations of Preferences: Race, Gender & Religion	Berinsky Ch. 5 Berinsky Ch. 6 Berinsky Ch. 11
10/25	Affect and Public Opinion	Berinsky Ch. 10
10/27, 11/1	Deliberation, Discussion & Public Opinion	Gastil Ch. 2 Fishkin & Farrar "Deliberative Polling"
<b>11/3</b>	<b>Exam #2</b>	
11/8, 11/10	Use of Polls	Eisinger "The Use of Surveys by Governments and Politicians" Brettschneider "The News Media's Use of Opinion Polls"
11/15, 11/17	Perceptions of Public Opinion	Glynn et al. Ch. 7 Scheufele "The Spiral of Silence" Hardmeier "The Effects of Published Polls on Citizens"
11/22, <del>11/24</del> , 11/29	Campaigns and Media Influence	Berinsky Ch. 12 Roessler "Agenda-Setting, Framing, & Priming"
12/1, 12/6	Public Opinion and Public Policy	Berinsky Ch. 3 (pp. 71-74) Berinsky Ch. 16
<b>Fri. 12/12</b>	<b>Final Exam</b>	<b>Noon to 1:20pm in our normal classroom; 80 minutes exam time</b>

**Note: No classes on 9/15 (group meetings), 10/13 (Fall Break) and 11/24 (Thanksgiving).**

### Full Citations for Non-Berinsky Assigned Readings

- Blumer, H. (1948). Public opinion and public opinion polling. *American Sociological Review*, 13, 542-549.
- Brettschneider, F. (2008). The news media's use of opinion polls. In W. Donsbach & M. W. Traugott (Eds.) *The SAGE handbook of public opinion research* (pp. 479-486). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Eisinger, R. M. (2008). The use of surveys by governments and politicians. In W. Donsbach & M. W. Traugott (Eds.) *The SAGE handbook of public opinion research* (pp. 487-495). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Fishkin, J., & Farrar, C. (2005). Deliberative polling: From experiment to community resource. In J. Gastil & P. Levine (Eds.) *The deliberative democracy handbook: Strategies for effective civic engagement in the twenty-first century* (pp. 68-79). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Gallup, G., & Rae, S. F. (1940). *The pulse of democracy: The public-opinion poll and how it works* (pp. 16-33). New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Gastil, J. (2008). *Political communication and deliberation* (pp. 15-41). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Glynn, C. J., et al. (2016). *Public opinion* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed., pp. 176-211). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Hardmeier, S. (2008). The effects of published polls on citizens. In W. Donsbach & M. W. Traugott (Eds.) *The SAGE handbook of public opinion research* (pp. 504-513). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Kennedy, C., Mercer, A., Keeter, S., Hatley, N., McGeeney, K., & Gimenez, A. (2016, May 2). *Evaluating online nonprobability surveys*. Pew Research Center.  
<http://www.pewresearch.org/files/2016/04/Nonprobability-report-May-2016-FINAL.pdf>
- Roessler, P. (2008). Agenda-setting, framing and priming. In W. Donsbach & M. W. Traugott (Eds.) *The SAGE handbook of public opinion research* (pp. 205-217). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Scheufele, D. A. (2008). Spiral of silence theory. In W. Donsbach & M. W. Traugott (Eds.) *The SAGE handbook of public opinion research* (pp. 175-183). Los Angeles: Sage.
- Yankelovich, D. (1991). *Coming to public judgment: Making democracy work in a complex world* (pp. 24-37). Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.