

**PUBLIC OPINION & COMMUNICATION  
COMMUNICATION 4820  
SP 2016**

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Office hours: 12:30-1:30 p.m. Wednesdays & Fridays, and by appointment.

Classroom: Room 014, Psychology Building  
9:10 to 11:15 a.m. Mondays  
9:10 to 10:05 a.m. Wednesdays  
3 credits

Course Description:

We will be studying the nature and history of public opinion, ways it is measured through survey research and other means, and its relationship to communication and governance. The theoretical meaning of public opinion is quite broad and diverse, but public opinion usually is measured by representative population surveys.

We will consider carefully the relationships among public opinion and various forms of communication. This includes interpersonal conversations among friends and family, but also mass communication, newer forms of Interactive Communication Technologies (ICTs), and social media. Of particular interest are newer forms of public opinion and deliberation, often called “public consultation.” This includes such innovations as Deliberative Polling and related technologies. Public consultation is more than public opinion – it attempts to measure informed opinion, or opinions that are formed after one has had an opportunity to learn about a topic and discuss it with others. Such consultation is now widely used in a range of situations in which the mature, informed opinions of people are needed to inform decision-making and public choice. Upon completion of the class you should understand the key theoretical issues involved in the study of public opinion, the main methods used in measuring public opinion and public consultation, and to appreciate the significant new opportunities that arise from new forms of assessment of quality public opinion.

Requirements:

Attendance:

The course will be conducted in a lecture and discussion format. *Attendance is required at all class sessions.* We will take attendance at random class sessions, or possibly more often. You will need to participate actively in order to get maximum benefit from the course. Evidence clearly shows that students who come to class regularly and engage in discussion learn more and generally do better in the class. This means you will need to come to the class, stay for the entire period, and be

prepared for it by reading the assigned materials in advance. This is very important. Please make an effort to be on time for the class. Class is not the time to catch up on texts, social media, Tumblr, Instagram, etc. You are responsible for signing the attendance sheet at each class meeting. Do not sign in for another person. This can be treated as an instance of academic misconduct.

Required readings:

Some weeks have supplemental required readings. These can be accessed on the web, at the OSU Libraries, or through the course web site at [carmen.osu.edu](http://carmen.osu.edu). The required reading includes the following text:

Berinsky, Adam J. (2012). *New directions in public opinion*. New York: Routledge.

Web site:

We will use Carmen for distributing and maintaining records and documents such as the syllabus, assignments announcements, handouts, grades and other useful web-links and materials. Access this from on or off campus by pointing to <https://carmen.osu.edu>. All papers should be turned in to the appropriate Carmen dropbox.

Exams:

We will have six quizzes and two midterm exams. These will be conducted online using Carmen's quiz function and will deal with the readings and lecture materials.

Final paper: You will write a final paper for the class that sums up some key concepts. This will be due no later than at the time of the final exam.

Grades:

The OSU "standard scheme" of points grading as implemented by Carmen is used and I will try to keep the grades on Carmen's grade book. Here is the OSU "standard scheme": 93 - 100 (A), 90 - 92.99 (A-), 87 - 89.99 (B+), 83 - 86.99 (B), 80 - 82.99 (B-), 77 - 79.99 (C+), 73 - 76.99 (C), 70 - 72.99 (C-), 67 - 69.99 (D+), 60 - 66.99 (D), Below 60 (E). Note that there is *no rounding* in the points system.

The following are the components of your grade for the term:

Quizzes: 30% (6@5 points each)

Midterm Exams: (2@25 points each)

Final paper: 20%

Your grade will be determined according to your performance on these items. There will be no opportunities to re-take exams, redo assignments, or complete additional or extra credit work.

Quizzes must be taken on the designated days/times. No early or late exams are allowed except in the case of an illness or family emergency. In the rare event that

an illness or emergency arises, it is your responsibility to inform me *prior* to the scheduled exam time, and provide me with written documentation of the emergency.

Academic Misconduct:

All students at the Ohio State University are bound by the Code of Student Conduct (see [http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/resource\\_csc.asp](http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/resource_csc.asp)). Suspected violations of the code in this class, especially pertaining to 3335-23-04 Section 1 on Academic Misconduct, will be taken through the procedures which the university has set up to deal with violations of the code.

The university's [Code of Student Conduct](#) defines academic misconduct as "any activity that tends to compromise the academic integrity of the University, or subvert the educational process." While many people associate academic misconduct with "cheating," the term encompasses a wider scope of student behaviors which include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Violation of course rules;
- Violation of program regulations;
- Knowingly providing or receiving information during a course exam or program assignment;
- Possession and/or use of unauthorized materials during a course exam or program assignment;
- Knowingly providing or using assistance in the laboratory, on field work, or on a course assignment, unless such assistance has been authorized specifically by the course instructor or, where appropriate, a project/research supervisor;
- Submission of work not performed in a course: This includes (but is not limited to) instances where a student fabricates and/or falsifies data or information for a laboratory experiment (i.e., a "dry lab") or other academic assignment. It also includes instances where a student submits data or information (such as a lab report or term paper) from one course to satisfy the requirements of another course, unless submission of such work is permitted by the instructor of the course or supervisor of the research for which the work is being submitted;
- Submitting plagiarized work for a course/program assignment;
- Falsification, fabrication, or dishonesty in conducting or reporting laboratory (research) results;
- Serving as or asking another student to serve as a substitute (a "ringer") while taking an exam;
- Alteration of grades in an effort to change earned credit or a grade;
- Alteration and/or unauthorized use of university forms or records.

### NOTE: Students with disabilities

This syllabus is available in alternative formats upon request. Students with disabilities are responsible for making their needs known to the instructor and seeking assistance in a timely manner. Any student who feels he/she may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss your specific needs, or contact the office for disability services at 292-3307 in Room 150 Pomerene Hall to coordinate your documented disabilities.

### Technology in the Classroom

I encourage you to bring your laptop computer, iPad, Kindle, Nook or whatever you have to class if you want to use it to take notes or to access reference reading materials and PDF files containing the course readings. However, these devices must be used ONLY for the intended purpose of furthering your education and participation in the class and must not become a distraction to yourself or others. That means other uses are strictly prohibited: You should not be using such devices or smart phones for web surfing, texting, using Skype, playing games or whatever else that is not related to our class discussions and activities. I reserve the right to ban such devices from the classroom if this rule is abused.

In addition, please turn off phones, PDAs, or other devices that make noise during class. When you are in class, it is important to give your full attention to any person who is speaking (e.g., professor, TA or another student). During class, avoid reading newspapers, sending text messages or email, browsing online, sleeping, talking while others are talking, etc. If you engage in these or other disruptive behaviors during class, you will be asked to leave.

### Use of Email and Carmen for class announcements

You are responsible for all information sent to you via your OSU email account and/or posted on the Carmen website. It is important for you to check your OSU email account regularly and to clear out unnecessary material so that new messages can get through. Check your spam settings to be certain that class emails from us are getting through to your mailbox. Check Carmen regularly for any updates or announcements posted there.

### Attendance while having flu and other flu-like illnesses

You should *not* attend class while ill with influenza. Students with flu-like symptoms will be asked to leave class. The illness and self-isolation period will usually be about a week. It is very important that individuals avoid spreading the flu to others. Most students should be able to complete a successful quarter despite a flu-induced absence. If you are absent due to the flu, you will be provided with a reasonable opportunity to make up missed work. Completion of all assignments and exams

assures the greatest chance for students to develop heightened understanding and content mastery. The opportunity to complete all assignments and exams supports the university's desire to enable students to make responsible situational decisions, including the decision to avoid spreading a contagious virus to other students, staff, and faculty, without endangering their academic work. Students with the flu do not need to provide a physician's certification of illness. However, ill students should inform their teachers (but not through personal contact in which there is a risk of exposing others to the virus) as soon as possible that they are absent because of the flu.

## **COMMUNICATION 4820: PUBLIC OPINION & COMMUNICATION**

CLASS SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS (SUBJECT TO REVISION AND ADDITIONS)

### **Week 1, January 11, 13**

Course introduction

Basic concepts and resources for studying public opinion

Berinsky, Introduction, pp. 1-16.

### **Week 2, January 18, 20**

Meaning of public opinion

Berinsky, Chapter 2, History and meaning of public opinion, pp. 19-31.

January 18 is the Martin Luther King Holiday. No class. University is closed.

### **Week 3, January 25, 27**

Enduring problems of public opinion

Public opinion in world and American political history

Berinsky, Chapter 6, Race and the Group Bases of Public Opinion, pp. 119-138.

Quiz 1 online on Carmen's quiz function. The exam window will open after class on Wednesday and remain open until Monday, February 1, at 9 a.m.

### **Week 4, February 1, 3**

Practice of survey research: Research methods and measurement

Other methods of assessing public opinion

Berinsky: Chapter 3, The practice of survey research, pp. 32-51.

### **Week 5, February 8, 10**

Causes and consequences of the financial meltdown of 2007-8

World Economic Forum. Digital wildfires in a hyperconnected world.

<http://reports.weforum.org/global-risks-2013/risk-case-1/digital-wildfires-in-a-hyperconnected-world/>

Additional reading TBA

Quiz 2 online on Carmen's quiz function. The exam window will open after class on Wednesday and remain open until Monday, Feb. 15 at 9 a.m.

**Week 6, February 15, 17**

Citizen competence and democracy  
Issues in public judgment

Berinsky, Chapter 3, Two-thirds Full: Citizen competence and democratic governance, pp. 52-76.

Nyhan, B. (2010). Why the death panel myth wouldn't die: Misinformation in the health care reform debate. *The Forum*, 8,1, Article 5.

Quiz 3 online on Carmen's quiz function. The exam window will open after class on Wednesday and remain open until Monday, Feb. 22, at 9 a.m.

**Week 7, February 22-24**

Public consultation: Deliberative Polls  
Why deliberation can work

Fishkin, James S. (2006). The nation in a room: Turning public opinion into policy. *Boston Review*. (Carmen)

Lukensmeyer, C.J. & Brigham, S. (2002). Taking democracy to scale: Creating a town hall meeting for the Twenty-First Century. *National Civic Review*, 91, 4, 351-366.  
Public deliberation: How it might work and why it sometimes doesn't. (Carmen)

First midterm exam begins Wednesday, February 24, online at Carmen.

**Week 8, February 29, March 2**

Riots, mobs, and panics

Wilkinson, S.I. (2009). Riots. *Annual Review of Political Science*. 12: 329-43.

**Week 9, March 7, 9**

Belief systems: How are issues connected to each other?

Berinsky, Chapter 4, Ideology and public opinion, pp. 79-100.

Berinsky, Chapter 5, Partisanship and polarization, pp. 101-118.

Quiz 4 online on Carmen's quiz function. The exam window will open after class on Wednesday and remain open until Monday, March 14, at 9 a.m.

### **Week 10, March 14, 16**

Spring Break – No classes. University is closed.

### **Week 11, March 21, 23**

Media and public issues part 1: Agenda-setting and the Issue-Attention Cycle

Berinsky, Ch. 13, Public opinion and public policy, pp. 271-291.

Downs, A. (1972). Up and down with ecology: The Issue-Attention Cycle. *Public Interest*, 28, pp. 38-50. (Carmen)

Quiz 5 online on Carmen's quiz function. The exam window will open after class on Friday and remain open until Monday, March 28, at 9 a.m.

### **Week 12, March 28, March 30**

Media and public issues part 2: Framing and media priming

Berinsky, Chapter 12, Media, public opinion and presidential leadership, pp. 258-270.

Goldenberg, S. & Pilkington, E. (2013). ALEC calls for penalties on 'freerider' homeowners in assault on clean energy. *The Guardian*, December 4. (Carmen)

Humes, Edward. (2014). Throwing shade: Fearing lost profits, the nation's investor owned utilities are moving to blot out the solar revolution. *Sierra*, June. (Carmen)

Quiz 6 online on Carmen's quiz function. The exam window will open after class on Wednesday and remain open until Monday, April 4, at 9 a.m.

### **Week 13, April 4, 6**

Fake public opinion expression: Astroturf vs. grassroots opinion and activism

Fang, Lee (2014). Cable companies are astroturfing fake consumer support to end net neutrality. June 5. *Vice*. (Carmen)

Cave, Tasmin & Rowell, Andy. The corporate PR industry's sneaky war on Internet activism. *Vice*. (Carmen)



**Week 14, April 11, 13**

Campaigns

Berinsky, Chapter 11, Campaigns and elections, pp. 241-257.

Birney, Mayling, Graetz, Michael J. Graetz, & Shapiro, Ian (2006). Public opinion and the push to repeal the estate tax. *National Tax Journal*, 59, 3, 439-461. (Carmen)

Second midterm exam begins April 13 on Carmen.

**Week 15, April 18, 20**

Race and Gender in Public Opinion Research

Difference and Inequality: Knowledge Gap and the Digital Divide

Berinsky, Chapter 7, Categorical Politics: Gender, Race and Public Opinion, pp. 139-167.

**Week 16, April 25 (Last class day)**

Final summary and conclusions

Berinsky, Conclusion, pp. 292-310.

Please be sure to complete your online SEI (course/instructor evaluation).

**Week 17, Final Exam paper. Friday, April 29, at 10 a.m.**