

**PUBLIC OPINION & COMMUNICATION  
COMMUNICATION 4820  
SP 2017**

Dr. Gerald Kosicki  
3138 Derby Hall  
Tel.: 292-9237  
E-mail: [kosicki.1@osu.edu](mailto:kosicki.1@osu.edu)  
Office hours: 10:30-11:30 p.m. Tuesdays, and by appointment.

Classroom: Room 239, Journalism Building  
Class time: 9:10 to 10:05 a.m. Tuesdays & Thursdays  
3 credits

Required textbook:  
Berinsky, Adam J. (2016). *New directions in public opinion*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. New York: Routledge.

Note that there are paperback and electronic Kindle editions of this book available at a somewhat reduced cost.

Course Format and Expectations:

This is a hybrid course that is comprised of online learning, (lectures, readings and videos) as well as twice-weekly classroom sessions. As reflected in the course schedule, you will be expected to keep up with a considerable amount of content outside of class. This will require some discipline on your end. All your exams, quizzes and other assignments will be completed online, and all the teaching materials are provided online on Canvas. The classroom sessions will supplement your learning, as I will provide further explanation of the material, and also challenge you in intelligently discussing complex concepts with your peers in-person.

To succeed in this hybrid course, which is largely online, it is essential that you have regular and reliable online access. I will from time to time post announcements, and/or send out individual and class emails with updated information about the class. This means you should regularly (that is, daily) check Carmen and your university email.

Course Description:

This course will help you better understand the complexities of public opinion – what it is, how it is measured and used by governments, businesses and scholars, what are its key ingredients, how it can be changed, and how it shapes governance and public policy. Our approach is communication-based, but we also draw on literature from many disciplines to help explain the key issues and examples.

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 and studied 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 goes beyond 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.

#### Course Goals:

Upon completion of the class you should develop a clear understanding of the key theoretical issues involved in the study of public opinion, the strengths and weaknesses of the main methods used in measuring public opinion in populations. We also consider public consultation, and to appreciate the significant new opportunities that arise from new forms of assessment of quality public opinion.

#### **Course Requirements:**

##### Attendance:

The hybrid format of this course means you have to be responsible for self-study of more material than in a normal lecture-discussion course. But please note that *attendance is required at all class sessions*. I will take attendance at every class session. This is designed to encourage you to participate actively in order to get maximum benefit from the course. Evidence clearly shows that students who come to class regularly and are prepared to 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 university's learning management system, Canvas.

#### Web site usage:

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

#### **Performance Evaluation:**

##### Quizzes and exams:

We will have five quizzes, a midterm and a final exam. These will be conducted online using Carmen's quiz function and will deal with the readings and lecture materials.

##### One-page papers:

Each of you will pick three week's readings and prepare essays dealing with the themes contained in those readings or other materials, e.g. videos. Each paper should be around 500 words (about one page, single-spaced). You will sign up for due dates for the essays, and they should be uploaded to Canvas before the start of class for the week you are writing about. I want your reactions to the course materials – not the lectures or class discussions – so the idea is that you write these before hearing the lectures or classroom discussion. The best essays will articulate a point of view with respect to the materials and then use facts from the materials to support this argument. These papers should not be a summary of the main points. I am more interested in your reaction to the information. This might involve the usefulness of the information, the level of interest you have in it, anything that you found particularly surprising or disappointing, etc. Note that although these essays are short, they should contain the elements of any well-written essay: A good, creative title, strong lead, and good introduction, transitions and conclusion. You will lose points if you exclude any of these components. Your point of view should be clearly identified and appropriate evidence should be cited. It is also very important to write accurate, factual information.

##### 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: 25% (5@5 points each)

One-page papers: 15% (3@5 points each)

Participation and assignments: 10%

Midterm Exam: 25%

Final Exam: 25%

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 Use and General Politeness

This is a hybrid course which is largely based online. Our time together meeting in the classroom should be focused on discussion – not for texting, web browsing, emailing, etc. Technology use such as noisy cell phones, Internet shopping, and text messaging at your desk are a distraction to me and your fellow students. Please be respectful of those around you by turning off or silencing your phone and putting it away before class begins.

Laptops and other portable electronic devices should NOT be used in the classroom unless explicitly required as part of the day's topic. This is becoming standard practice in our school by most every instructor. Violation of this policy can result in you being asked to leave the classroom.

Notes should be taken with paper and pen. This is courteous to those around you and beneficial to you as a student. Here's why: Although laptops and tablets can be used for productive purposes in a classroom, they primarily serve as distractions – to those who use them, to those nearby, and the person leading the class. Although some prefer to take notes electronically, there is considerable scientific research that demonstrates that using laptops for note taking impedes learning compared to paper and pen note taking. If you are curious about some of this evidence, take a look at "A learning secret: Don't take notes with a laptop" in *Scientific American*. <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/a-learning-secret-don-t-take-notes-with-a-laptop/>

### 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.

**Diversity Statement:**

The School of Communication at The Ohio State University embraces and maintains an environment that respects diverse traditions, heritages, experiences and people. Our commitment to diversity moves beyond mere tolerance to recognizing, understanding, and welcoming the contributions of diverse groups and the value group members possess as individuals. In our school, the faculty, students and staff are dedicated to building a tradition of diversity with principles of equal opportunity, personal respect, and the intellectual interests of those who comprise diverse cultures.

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

CLASS SCHEDULE AND ASSIGNMENTS (SUBJECT TO REVISION AND ADDITIONS)

### **Week 1, January 10, 12**

Course introduction

Basic concepts and resources for studying public opinion

Berinsky, Introduction, pp. 1-17.

Tilly, C. (1983). Speaking your mind without elections, surveys or social movements. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 47, 461-478.

### **Week 2, January 17, 19**

Meaning of public opinion

Berinsky, Chapter 2: Herbst, S., History and meaning of public opinion, pp. 21-33.

### **Week 3, January 24, 26**

Enduring problems of public opinion

Berinsky, Chapter 3: Gilens, M., Two-thirds full? Citizen competence and democratic governance, pp. 54-78.

Quiz 1 online on Carmen's quiz function. The exam window will open after class on Thursday and remain open until Tuesday, January 31, at 9 a.m.

### **Week 4, January 31, February 2**

Surveys for measuring public opinion

What are alternatives to survey research?

Berinsky, Chapter 3: Hillygus, D.S., The practice of survey research, pp. 34-53.

Recommended:

Weisberg, H. (2016). Total Survey Error. *Oxford Handbook of Polling and Polling Methods*.

**Week 5, February 7, 9**

Digital (mis)information

(Mis)understanding The Affordable Care Act

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/>

Pasek, J., Sood, G. & Krosnick, J.A. ( 2015). Misinformed about the Affordable Care Act? Leveraging uncertainty to assess the prevalence of misperceptions. *Journal of Communication*, 65, 660-673.

Obama's Deal. *Frontline*. Video resource. Available online at

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/obamasdeal/>

Quiz 2 online on Carmen's quiz function. The exam window will open after class on Thursday and remain open until Tuesday, Feb. 14 at 9 a.m.

**Week 6, February 14, 16**

Citizen competence and democracy

Issues in public judgment

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

Kaiser Family Foundation (2012). *Data note on Affordable Care Act*.

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 Thursday and remain open until Tuesday, Feb. 21, at 9 a.m.



## **Week 7, February 21-23**

Public consultation: Deliberative Polls

Fishkin, J. (2009). *When the people speak: Deliberative democracy and public consultation*. New York: Oxford University Press. Chapter 1, Democratic Aspirations, pp. 1-31.

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

Europe in one room: An experiment in democracy (Video Resource) Access from ODEE Secured Media Library. Go.osu.edu/SecuredMediaLibrary

First midterm exam begins Thursday, March 2, online at Carmen. The exam window will remain open until Tuesday, March 7, at 9 a.m.

## **Week 8, February 28, March 2**

Collective behavior: Riots, mobs, and panics

Berinsky, Chapter 14: Barreto, M.A. & Parker, C.S., Public opinion and reactionary movements: From the Klan to the Tea Party, pp. 299-317.

Boydston, A.E., et al. (2014). Two faces of media attention: Media storm versus non-storm coverage. *Political Communication*, 41, 509-531.

Hamel, L. et al. (2014). *Kaiser Health Policy News Index: Special Focus on Ebola*. Retrieved from <http://kff.org/global-health-policy/poll-finding/kaiser-health-policy-news-index-special-focus-on-ebola/>

## **Week 9, March 7, 9**

Belief systems: How are issues connected to each other?

Berinsky, Chapter 4: Federico, C.M., The structure, foundations and expression of ideology, pp. 81-103.

Berinsky, Chapter 5: Hetherington, M., Partisanship and polarization in contemporary politics, pp. 146-164.

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

Spring Break – No classes. University is closed.

**Week 11, March 21, 23**

Defining and framing public issues and bringing them to public attention

Berinsky, Ch. 16: Campbell, A.L. & Rigby, E., Public opinion and public policy, pp. 332-354.

Goode, E. & Nachman, B. (1994). Moral panics: Culture, politics and social construction. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 20, 149-71.

Aaron Huey: America's native prisoners of war. TED Talk.  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/aaron\\_huey#t-1594](https://www.ted.com/talks/aaron_huey#t-1594)

Quiz 4 online on Carmen's quiz function. The exam window will open after class on Thursday and remain open until Tuesday, March 28, at 9 a.m.

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

Understanding the nature of public issue campaigns

Berinsky, Chapter 15, Baum, M., Media, public opinion and presidential leadership, pp. 318-331.

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)

**Week 13, April 4, 6**

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

Walker, E.T. & Rea, C. (2014). The political mobilization of firms and industries. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 40, 281-304.

*Hot Coffee* (Video Resource) Access from ODEE Secured Media Library.  
[Go.osu.edu/SecuredMediaLibrary](http://Go.osu.edu/SecuredMediaLibrary)

Quiz 5 online on Carmen's quiz function. The exam window will open after class on Thursday and remain open until Tuesday, April 11, at 9 a.m.

**Week 14, April 11, 13**

## Campaigns and elections

Berinsky, Chapter 12: Sides, J. & Haselwerdt, J., Campaigns and elections, pp. 261-277.

Frankel, L.L. & Hillygus, D.S. (2014). Niche communication in political campaigns. *Oxford Handbook of Political Communication*.

Owen, D. (2014). New media and political campaigns. *Oxford Handbook of Political Communication*.

**Week 15, April 18, 20 (Last class day)**

## Race and gender in public opinion research

## Difference and inequality: Knowledge Gap and the Digital Divide

Berinsky, Chapter 6: Burns, N., et al., The politics of gender, pp. 124-145.

Berinsky, Chapter 5: Czaja, E., et al., Race, ethnicity and the group basis of public opinion, pp. 104-123.

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

**Week 17, Second Midterm Exam Due Monday, May 1, at 8 a.m.**