POSC 318: PUBLIC OPINION

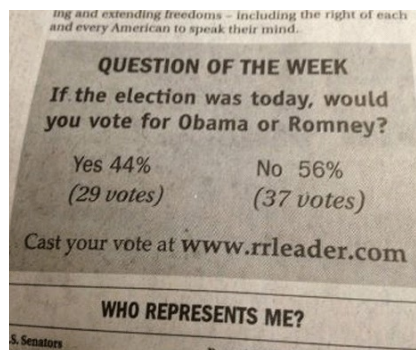SPRING 2018
MWF 2.30-3.20
GORE 219

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

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ABOUT THE COURSE

This course explores public opinion and the role it plays in democratic politics. We'll approach the topic from several angles, each asking different questions, and requiring different skills to assess. We'll examine:

- The <u>role</u> of public opinion in a democracy. We will discuss normative theories of what the public's job is in a democracy, and evaluate what we should make of the attitudes citizens say they have in surveys.
- The <u>measurement</u> of public opinion. We will dissect all the choices that go into a scientific survey — which people to interview, what questions to ask, and how to collect and weight their responses.
- The <u>sources and structure</u> of public opinion. We will learn how to analyze quantitative survey data and test theories of why Americans think and feel the way they do about politics.

At the end, we'll re-assess what role the public can and should play in a democracy. Do we want politicians to lead or to follow public opinion? Can they do either? Whose opinions count the most in our democracy?

WHAT YOU'LL GET FROM THIS COURSE

In addition to gaining substantive knowledge of the topics above, students who successfully complete the course will be able to:

1. Understand and critically analyze the decisions behind modern opinion surveys	2. Interpret basic quantitative evidence to evaluate theories of public opinion	3. Analyze survey data by selecting, recoding, cross-tabulating and comparing variables	4. Construct tables and figures of statistical data that communicate findings effectively

WHAT YOU NEED FOR THE COURSE

1. Clawson, R.A., & Oxley, Z.M. (2017). *Public opinion: Democratic ideals, democratic practice* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press.

2. Access to the course website on Canvas (www.udel.edu/canvas/). All announcements, other readings, and grades are posted here.

HOW YOUR WORK WILL BE ASSESSED

Your proficiency at the course learning outcomes will be assessed in various ways in the course. These will be weighted in your final grade as follows:

Exam #1	20%
Exam #2	20%
Research assignment #1	16%
Research assignment #2	22%
Empirical analysis of survey data	16%
Class participation and quizzes	6%

More details about these assignments will be given in class and on the website.

Final letter grades will be assigned using the following cutoff points:

A	93	B+	87	C+	77	D+	67
A-	90	B	83	C	73	D	63
		B-	80	C-	70	D-	60

ACTIVE LEARNING AND CLASS EXPECTATIONS

Research shows that people learn better when classes are "active" rather than passive. Our classes will emphasize interactive discussions and group problem-solving. I expect everyone to engage with, and contribute to, the learning process. To facilitate this, let me make four expectations very clear:

1. I expect everyone to attend every meeting, having carefully read and thought about the assigned readings. Being present and prepared to learn is a minimum requirement for passing the course.

2. I expect you to arrive on time and to spend all of our class time in the room. Coming in late, or leaving during the class for bathroom or snack breaks, distracts me and your classmates from learning. It also means we miss an opportunity to learn from you while you're absent.

3. To ensure everyone is fully present, this class is an **electronics-free zone**. All laptops, tablets, and cellphones must be turned off and put away in regular class sessions, although you are free to use them during the empirical analysis lab sessions. [Students who have a documented reason for laptop use should talk to me about accommodating your needs.]

4. If you are encountering difficulties in the class, come meet with me. My office hours are open door, first come first served. Please don't wait; I will always try my best to help students who reach out.

CLASS PARTICIPATION

Your participation is critical, both for your own learning and for others' in the class. For each of our regular class sessions, you will be scored on the following scale:

2 — Present and contributing to discussion

1 — Present but not contributing to discussion

0 — Not present   //   Not fully present (late, using phone, etc)

Excused absences (see below) are treated as NAs. I will periodically update you on your scores; at the end of the semester, they will be converted into a percentage of the highest score possible.

ABSENCES AND LATE ASSIGNMENTS

UD has a clear policy on excused absences — see the Provost's statement at http://facultyhandbook.udel.edu/handbook/3113-student-class-attendance-and-excused-absences. If you are unable to attend an exam or submit an assignment for an excusable reason, you must:

1. Contact me <u>before</u> that class begins to let me know of your absence.
2. Contact the Dean's Office to document the reason for your absence. They will then send a letter of verification to all your professors, saving you explaining the situation repeatedly, etc.

I expect you to complete assignments on time and in full. If you fail to do so, I will still accept your work. However, it will be subject to a 10% deduction for each calendar day it is overdue (beginning on the day it is due). Missed assignments result in a score of zero.

Note well that in an era of free online backups, I will not accept computer failure as a valid excuse for missing any assignment deadline. You should get in the habit now of using a desktop-based backup system (e.g., Dropbox, iCloud) or cloud-based computing (e.g., Google Docs) for all your work.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

I have zero tolerance for academic dishonesty. You should familiarize yourself with UD's student Code of Conduct, available at: http://www1.udel.edu/stuguide/17-18/code.html. Any academic dishonesty will automatically result in a failing grade for the entire course and an official referral to the Office of Student Conduct.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students with disabilities are welcome in this class. If you think that you may need an accommodation, please contact Disability Support Services (DSS) as soon as possible and we will will work with them to meet your needs. See: www.udel.edu/DSS

COURSE SCHEDULE

The schedule for this course is not set in stone, although it is rare that I make major changes during the semester, and never to assignment/exam dates except in emergency situations. You can expect any changes to be announced with adequate notice in class and via Canvas. The exams and assignment dates are all clearly highlighted in the schedule that follows; you will want to make good note of them now.

You should make sure to read each of the assigned readings before the class date they are listed under. I recommend you read them in the order given, as many build on each other. All of the non-textbook readings are available on the course site. Do not assume that these are less important than the textbooks! You are responsible for all of the material listed here.

I. DEMOCRACY AND PUBLIC OPINION

In this section of the course, we consider the role that the public should play in a democracy. Do public opinion polls facilitate a return to classical democracy (as Gallup hoped)? Or do they just reveal that most people's thoughts about politics are a jumbled mess (as Converse suggested)? Fundamentally, what does it mean when citizens express a policy preference in a survey — and should government listen?

The role of public opinion in democracy

2/7   Clawson & Oxley, Ch. 1

Fishkin, J.S. (1997). *The voice of the people: Public opinion and democracy*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. [p71–80]

2/7   Complete brief Qualtrics survey by 10.00pm

Non-attitudes: Democracy without opinions?

2/9   Thompson, D. (July 15, 2014). Millennials' political views don't make any sense. *The Atlantic*. [Extract]

Clawson & Oxley, Ch. 5 [focus on Converse's claims, p139-146]

Clawson & Oxley, p107-111

2/12   Clawson & Oxley, Ch. 5 [focus on the critiques of Converse, p146-155 and p167-168]

Opinions and the survey response

2/14   Re-read Clawson & Oxley, p17–19 ["Attitude and Opinion"]

Zaller, J., & Feldman, S. (1992). A simple theory of the survey response: Answering questions versus revealing preferences. *American Journal of Political Science*. [p579–586]

Print and bring your own responses to the Qualtrics survey you completed earlier

II. MEASURING PUBLIC OPINION

In this section, we examine how polls that interview 1,000 people can accurately measure what millions of Americans think. We'll dissect the choices going into a scientific survey — who to interview, what to ask, how to collect and weight their responses — before looking at how we should interpret the results.

Sampling theory

2/16   Nardi, P. (2003). *Doing survey research: A guide to quantitative methods*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon. [Extract from Ch. 5, "Sampling"]

American Association of Public Opinion Researchers (AAPOR). (2018). "Margin of sampling error/ Credibility intervals".

Survey sampling in practice

2/19   Piazza, T. (2010). "Fundamentals of applied sampling". In Marsden, P.V., & Wright, J.D. (Eds.).
        Handbook of survey research, 2nd Ed. London: Emerald. [Extracts]

        Weisberg, H.F. (2005). *The total survey error approach.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
        [Extract from Ch. 9, "Coverage error"]

2/21   Pew Research Center. (2018). "Sampling" and "Collecting survey data". [Extracts]

        Keeter, S., Hatley, N., Kennedy, C., & Lau, A. (2017). What low response rates mean for telephone
        surveys. *Pew Research Center*. [Extracts]

2/23   Schonlau, M., Fricker, R.D., & Elliott, M.N. (2002). "Choosing among the various types of Internet
        surveys". In *Conducting research surveys via e-mail and the web*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND
        Corporation.

        Pew Research Center. (September 22, 2015). *Coverage error in Internet surveys.*

Asking questions

2/26-28 Re-read your notes from 2/14

        Clawson & Oxley, p34–37 ["Experiments"]

        Weisberg, H.F. (2005). *The total survey error approach.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
        [Extract from Ch. 2, "Survey error"]

        Rea, L.M., & Parker, R.A. (2014). "Developing survey questions" in *Designing and conducting
        survey research*, 4th Ed. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

        Pew Research Center. (2018). "Questionnaire design". [Extracts]

3/2   Weisberg, H.F. (2005). *The total survey error approach.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
        [Ch. 4, "Measurement error due to interviewers"]

3/2   Research assignment #1 due at start of class

Weighting the responses

3/5   Corbetta, P. (2011). *Social Research: Theory, Methods and Techniques*. London: Sage.
        ["Weighting"]

        Cohn, N. (May 31, 2017). A 2016 review: Why key state polls were wrong about Trump. *New York
        Times.*

Reporting and interpreting the results

3/7   Asher, H. (2017). *Polling and the public: What every citizen should know*. 9th Ed. Thousand Oaks,
        CA: CQ Press. [Extracts from Ch. 6, "The media and the polls" and Ch. 8, "Analyzing and
        interpreting polls"]

        Mercer, A. (September 8, 2016). "5 key things to know about the margin of error in election polls."
        Pew Research Center.

3/9   Catch-up and review

3/12   Exam #1

III. THE SOURCES AND STRUCTURE OF PUBLIC OPINION

Here, we explore where Americans get their beliefs about politics from, and what explains citizens' differing attitudes about government and public policy. Our time will be split between the classroom, where we will discuss theories of why people hold the opinions they do, and the computer lab, where we will learn how to evaluate those theories through the quantitative analysis of survey data.

Socialization

3/14   Clawson & Oxley, Ch. 2

3/16   Empirical analysis #1 Pearson 305

The media

3/19   Clawson & Oxley, Ch. 3

3/21   Empirical analysis #2 Pearson 305

3/23   No class [POSC department retreat]

Political knowledge and awareness

4/2   Clawson & Oxley, Ch. 8

         Breitman, K. (Feb. 3, 2015). Poll: Majority of millennials can't name a senator from their home state. *Politico*.

4/4   Empirical analysis #3   Pearson 305

4/6   No class [Professor at MPSA conference]; use time to start prepping Research Assignment #2

Cues from elites: Zaller's R-A-S model

4/9   Clawson & Oxley, p124-129 ["Zaller's Receive-Accept-Sample Model" and "Resistance to Persuasion"]

         Zaller, J. (1994). Elite leadership of mass opinion. In W.L. Bennett, & D.L. Paletz (Eds.), *Taken by storm*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. [Extracts]

4/11   Empirical analysis #4   Pearson 305

Self-interest

4/13   Nardi, P. (2003). *Doing survey research: A guide to quantitative methods*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon. [Extract from Ch. 3, "Designing research"]

         Clawson & Oxley, p182-184 ["Self-Interest"]

         Chong, D. (2013). "Degrees of rationality in politics". In Huddy, L., Sears, D.O., & Levy, J.S. (Eds.), *Oxford handbook of political psychology* (2nd Ed.). New York, NY: Oxford University Press. [Extract]

4/16   Empirical analysis #5   Pearson 305

Values and attitudes towards others

4/18-20   Clawson & Oxley, p184-188 ["Values"]

           Clawson & Oxley, Ch. 9

4/18   Progress report #1 due at start of class

4/18   Empirical analysis #6   Pearson 305

Group interests I: Party and partisan attitudes

4/23   Clawson & Oxley, p155-159 ["Party Identification"]

           Green, D. P., Palmquist, B., & Schickler, E. (2002). *Partisan hearts and minds*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. [Extracts from Ch. 2, "Partisan groups as objects of identification"]

4/25   Empirical analysis #7 Pearson 305

4/25   Progress report #2 due at start of class

4/27   Clawson & Oxley, p159-167 ["Polarization"]

           Pew Research Center (October 5, 2017). *The partisan divide on political values grows even wider*. [Extracts]

Group interests II: Race and racial attitudes

4/30   Clawson & Oxley, p193-208

5/2   Empirical analysis #8   Pearson 305

5/4   Take the Race IAT at: https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html

           Mooney, C. (December 1, 2014). The science of why cops shoot young black men. *Mother Jones*. [Extracts]

5/4   Research assignment #2 due at start of class

IV. CONCLUSIONS: DEMOCRACY AND PUBLIC OPINION

In concluding the course, we return to the questions posed at the beginning of the semester. What role can and should public opinion play in democratic policy-making?

The public opinion-public policy link

5/7-9   Re-read your notes from 2/7 class

           Clawson & Oxley, Ch. 12

5/11   Catch-up and review

5/14   Exam #2