

POLS 210: Public Opinion (Spring 2019)

Tuesday & Thursday 9:30-10:45am

Classroom: CSB 380

Instructor: Andre P. Audette

Email: audette@monmouthcollege.edu

Andre's Office: CSB 330

Politics Party Time (Office Hours): 1:30-3 MWF, 11-12:30 Tues-Thurs, and by appointment

Course Description

Peoples' values and opinions matter. In the U.S., corporations spent over 20 billion dollars on market research in 2018 to learn about what people want. Every day, a journalist somewhere will report on the latest polling data about politics, the economy, crime, housing, education, the popularity of celebrities, or even the best condiment (answer: hot sauce). Moreover, public opinion is supposed to be the backbone of a strong and healthy representative democracy. But how do we know what the public actually wants?



This class will explore how people think and talk about politics, what they believe, why people hold the opinions that they do, how those opinions change, and whether there can actually be a reasonable “public opinion” to base our government on. Along the way, you’ll also learn important skills like how to design informative survey questions, the fundamentals of survey data analysis, and writing skills for presenting quantitative research. We’ll conduct a national survey on a topic that we choose and experience the real, hands-on world of public opinion polling. By the end, you should have a better idea of the role that opinion *should* play in American society and government.

Course Objectives

After successfully completing this course, you will be able to better:

- Understand the concepts, theories, and methodology of public opinion research
- Apply the principles of public opinion research to current political phenomena
- Interpret, critique, and analyze polls and public opinion data
- Articulate the proper role of public opinion in society and government
- Synthesize and intelligently express your own points of view, both orally and in writing

Required Texts

There are no required texts for this course; all assigned readings will be made available on Moodle or by email.

In lieu of a textbook, you are required to contribute \$25 to collect data for our class survey project. This must be paid to Andre by Tuesday, Feb. 5th in order for us to have access to the data for the final project. (Talk to me if this is not financially possible. Not refundable.)

Course Requirements

To help you achieve the course objectives, final grades will be assessed through the following evaluations:

- 9 quizzes, 8 which count for your final grade (20%)
- 4 short homework assignments (20%, 5% each)
- Survey topic proposal (10%)
- Survey questions proposal (10%)
- Final paper (30%)
- Participation (10%)

Further information on these course requirements will be distributed in class

Quizzes

Over the course of the semester there will be 9 quizzes, 8 of which will count for your final grade. I will drop the lowest score. Regularly being quizzed on course material is shown to help college students retain information better, so it will serve you well to study for the quizzes in preparation for the other course requirements. The quizzes will include multiple choice and short answer questions and are closed-book. They will mostly include material from class or readings since the last quiz, but a few may be “cumulative” (on the big-picture questions of the course). They are not meant to trick you.

Short homework assignments

The short homework assignments are designed for you to respond to our readings from class or gain hands-on experience with the topic we are studying at the time. For example, you may be asked to respond to the question of the proper role of public opinion in the government or to find and analyze a public opinion poll. Any written component will be limited to about three (double-spaced) pages or less.

Survey topic proposal

In about 5 double-spaced pages, I will ask you to design a public opinion survey that we will consider for our final class project. You should describe what you propose to measure, your expected findings, and why this topic is important to understand. I will schedule meetings with each of you to provide resources for your topic proposal.

Survey questions proposal

Once we have collectively determined a topic for our final project, I will ask you to submit 10 questions for us to consider including on the survey. Each question should have a short explanation for why it is a good question and a defense of its design.

Final paper

After we've designed and fielded our survey together, you will get hands-on experience analyzing the data. For your final paper, you will then write a research paper similar to those we will read in class, including (at least): an introduction, literature review, data and methods section, analysis of the results, and conclusion. Resources and guidance for all of these sections will be built into the class. Although the survey will be designed and analyzed together, the papers must be written individually. There is no strict page requirement, but I would suggest about 15 double-spaced pages. (Once we cover this in class, this will be easier than it sounds! ☺)

Participation

A large part of our class will be based on discussion; therefore, it is essential that you come to class ready to actively participate. This includes (but is not limited to): attending class regularly, carefully reading the assigned texts, sharing your thoughts, opinions, and insights in discussion, considering and raising opposing viewpoints, engaging in respectful dialogue with others, listening attentively to others' perspectives, and following the discussion policies listed in this syllabus. You will receive an advisory midterm participation grade to help you assess where you are at halfway through the course.

Course Engagement Expectations

- Classroom activities (2.5 hours/week)
- Reading and class prep (7 hours/week)
- Papers and data analysis (2.5 hours/week)
- Quiz prep (1 hour/week)

Total: 13 hours/week

Grade Scale

A (93-100), A- (90-92.9), B+ (87-89.9), B (83-86.9), B- (80-82.9), C+ (77-79.9), C (73-76.9), C- (70-72.9), D+ (67-69.9), D (63-66.9), D- (60-62.9), F (<60)

Course Policies and Additional Resources

Academic Honesty

It is your responsibility to be familiar with and uphold the academic honesty policy of MC, as defined in the Scots Guide (<http://ou.monmouthcollege.edu/life/residence-life/scots-guide/academic-regulations.aspx>). Any student found to have violated these policies of academic integrity will receive a failing grade on the assignment and may be subject to further penalties by the College, including suspension or expulsion. If you have any questions about avoiding plagiarism or any of the other policies, please come talk to me.

Late Work/Extra Credit

An important part of academic and career preparation is the ability to meet deadlines and fulfill the requirements of your work. Therefore, late assignments will be subject to a half-letter grade reduction for every 0-24 hour period that the assignment is late. Additionally, there will be no extra credit given on an individual basis.

Laptops and Electronic Devices

Unless instructed otherwise, you are permitted to use laptops in class for note-taking purposes only. Cell phones and other electronics should be put away during class. To do otherwise detracts not only from your learning, but from other students' as well.

Attendance

Class attendance is expected, but not required, in this course. Beware that it is difficult to pass this course if you have a number of unexcused absences, as it is impossible to participate if you do not attend class or make other arrangements with me. Furthermore, you are responsible for all of the material covered in class, and it is thus in your best interest to attend every class. If you must miss a class, it is your responsibility to get notes from another student and to contact me about any makeup work.

Discussion Policies

The goal of discussion is to understand and learn from the viewpoints and experiences of others in order to better understand our own opinions and the functioning of the world around us. Specifically, our goal in this course is to consider various components of and to think critically about American democracy. Just as multiple voices are necessary for a healthy democracy, your participation is important for the learning experiences of your fellow classmates and your instructor. Therefore, participation will be graded on the quality, and not just quantity, of your contribution to this endeavor. To create an environment where everyone has the opportunity to participate, respect for individual differences and viewpoints will be maintained at all times. In sum, you are allowed and encouraged to disagree with other students, the professor, or the texts, but disagreement should always be expressed in a respectful manner inside and outside of the classroom.

Exceptions, Extensions, and Exemptions

Exceptions to the policies and schedule on this syllabus are granted only in the cases of a true emergency. Please make arrangements with me if an emergency arises.

Disabilities and Learning Differences

Any student who feels they may need support or accommodation for a disability should visit the Teaching and Learning Center on the 2nd floor of Poling Hall to establish eligibility and coordinate reasonable accommodations. I am happy to work with you and Disability Services to provide those accommodations. For more information, visit:

<http://ou.monmouthcollege.edu/life/disability-services/default.aspx>.

Writing Center and Tutoring – take advantage of these resources!!

The Writing Center offers unlimited, free peer tutoring sessions for MC students. Peer writing tutors are trained to work with writers from any major of any writing ability, on any type of writing assignment, and at any stage of their writing processes, from planning to drafting to revising to editing. The Writing Center is located on the 3rd floor of the Mellinger Teaching and Learning Center, and is open Sunday-Thursday 7-10pm and Monday-Thursday 3-5pm on a first-come, first-served basis. No appointment necessary!

All students can also make a free appointment with a Teaching and Learning Center tutor or stop by during drop-in hours. Information about tutoring services is available at:

<http://ou.monmouthcollege.edu/academics/teaching-learning-center/tutoring.aspx>.

Counseling Services

Counseling Services assists students in addressing personal, social, career, and study problems that can interfere with your academic progress and success. All services are free and can include individual and group counseling, crisis consultations, and wellness groups. The Counseling Center is located in the lower level of Poling Hall, and appointments can be made by calling Student Affairs at x2114 or by email to hfisher@monmouthcollege.edu or cbeadles@monmouthcollege.edu. You can find more info online at:

<https://ou.monmouthcollege.edu/life/counseling-services/appointments.aspx>.

Syllabus Changes

I reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus or the course schedule if it will benefit all students. Advance notice will be provided for any changes.

Questions, Concerns, Comments

If you have any questions at any point, please do not hesitate to contact me! I encourage you to come to my office hours even if you just want to discuss politics or some other subject, and I can set up appointments if you are unable to meet during the scheduled times. (Please try to give me at least 24 hours notice if you'd like to make an appointment.)

Course Outline and Schedule

*Reading assignments are to be completed before the date they are listed.

*Please bring all assigned readings to class (paper or electronic).

Tuesday, Jan. 15th – The (literal) practice of public opinion

- Re-read this syllabus after class...there will be a syllabus question on quiz #1

Thursday, Jan. 17th – Polls: what we can learn from them and how they affect democracy

- Asher – *Polling and the Public* chapter 1

Tuesday, Jan. 22nd – Finding (and creating) good polls

- Hillygus – *The Practice of Survey Research: Changes and Challenges*
- Flanigan & Zingale – Appendix to *Political Behavior of the American Electorate*

Thursday, Jan. 24th – More of why Andre spends hours writing survey questions

- **QUIZ 1**
- Asher – *Polling and the Public* chapter 3
- Schwarz – *Self-Reports: How the Questions Shape the Answers*

Tuesday, Jan. 29th – What happens in peoples' heads before the poll?

- **HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT 1 DUE BY 9:30AM**
- **SCHEDULE MEETING WITH ANDRE ABOUT SURVEY TOPIC PROPOSAL**
- Zaller – Excerpts from *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*
- Zaller & Feldman – Excerpts from “A Simple Theory of the Survey Response: Answering Questions versus Revealing Preferences”

Thursday, Jan. 31st – Is it knowledge? Ideology? (ha!)

- Erikson & Tedin – *American Public Opinion* chapter 3
- Gilens – *Two Thirds Full? Citizen Competence and Democratic Governance*

Tuesday, Feb. 5th – Political learning or... changing one's mind?!

- **QUIZ 2**
- **MONEY FOR FINAL PROJECT DATA DUE TO ANDRE BY TODAY**
- Gilens – Intro, discussion, and conclusion to “Political Ignorance and Collective Policy Preferences”
- Nyhan & Reifler – *When Corrections Fail: The Persistence of Political Misperceptions*

Thursday, Feb. 7th – Political socialization: the political learning OG

- Erikson & Tedin – *American Public Opinion* chapter 5

Tuesday, Feb. 12th – Rationality and self-interest (?)

- **SURVEY TOPIC PROPOSAL DUE BY 9:30AM**
- Popkin – *The Reasoning Voter* chapter 1
- Sears et al. – Self-Interest vs. Symbolic Politics in Policy Attitudes and Presidential Voting

Thursday, Feb. 14th – Falling in love with public opinion

- Audette & Weaver – Five Stars, Would Elect Again: A Cohort Analysis of Extremity in Survey Response Scales
- Busby et al. – The Political Relevance of Irrelevant Events
- Edwards-Levy & Sparks – Here's All the Valentine's Day Polling You Never Knew You Needed

Tuesday, Feb. 19th – Public opinion and the media

- **HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT 2 DUE BY 9:30AM**
- **QUIZ 3**
- Mutz & Martin – Facilitating Communication across Lines of Political Difference: The Role of Mass Media
- Prior – News vs. Entertainment: How Increasing Media Choice Widens Gaps in Political Knowledge and Turnout

Thursday, Feb. 21st – Fighting about politics with our dearest friends and family

- Mutz – *Hearing the Other Side* chapter 2

Tuesday, Feb. 26th – What's this all for?

- **SURVEY QUESTIONS PROPOSAL DUE BY 9:30AM**
- Campbell – Public Opinion and Public Policy
- Gilens – Inequality and Democratic Responsiveness

Thursday, Feb. 28th – Where we're headed with our project

- **QUIZ 4**
- Weisberg – *The Total Survey Error Approach* chapters 14-15

*Tuesday, March 5th – Thursday, March 7th – **NO CLASSES (SPRING BREAK)***

Tuesday, March 12th – The one about public opinion and religion

- Campbell et al. – A Jump to the Right, A Step to the Left: Religion and Public Opinion
- Pew Forum – Is There a Culture War?

Thursday, March 14th – The one about public opinion and race

- **QUIZ 5**
- Masuoka & Junn – *The Politics of Belonging* chapter 1

Tuesday, March 19th – The one about public opinion, class, and place

- **HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT 3 DUE BY 9:30AM**
- Howard et al. – Poverty
- Walsh – Putting Inequality in Its Place: Rural Consciousness and the Power of Perspective

Thursday, March 21st – The one about public opinion and foreign affairs

- Choose one of two articles:
 - Berinsky – Assuming the Costs of War: Events, Elites, and American Public Support for Military Conflict
 - Kam & Kinder – Terror and Ethnocentrism: Foundations of American Support for the War on Terrorism

Tuesday, March 26th – The one about public opinion and the environment

- **QUIZ 6**
- Schuldt et al. – “Global Warming” or “Climate Change?” Whether the Planet is Warming Depends on Question Wording
- Singh & Swanson – How Issue Frames Shape Beliefs About the Importance of Climate Change Policy Across Ideological and Partisan Groups

Thursday, March 28th – The one about public opinion and... your choice of topic!

- Readings will be assigned for the political issue you select

Tuesday, April 2nd – The one about public opinion and our paper topic

- **QUIZ 7**
- Readings will be assigned based on our survey topic

Thursday, April 4th – NO CLASS (Andre in Chicago for a conference)

Tuesday, April 9th – The one about public opinion and tolerance

- **FINAL PAPER LIT REVIEW DRAFT DUE**
- Gibson – Measuring Political Tolerance and General Support for Pro-Civil Liberties Policies: Notes, Evidence, and Cautions

Thursday, April 11th – The one about public opinion and democratic values

- **QUIZ 8**
- Chong – How People Think, Reason, and Feel about Rights and Liberties
- Hibbing & Theiss-Morse – Process Preferences and American Politics: What the People Want Government to Be

Tuesday, April 16th – NO CLASS (SCHOLARS DAY)

Thursday, April 18th – Back to public opinion and what it means for democracy

- Asher – *Polling and the Public* chapter 9

Tuesday, April 23rd – Is public opinion dangerous?

- **BRING OUTLINE OF FINAL PAPER TO CLASS**
- Ginsberg – *The Captive Public* chapter 7

Thursday, April 25th – Lies, damned lies, and statistics

- **QUIZ 9**
- Wheeler – Excerpts from *Lies, Damn Lies, and Statistics*

Tuesday, April 30th – The last day ☺

- **HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT 4 DUE BY 9:30AM**
- Dionne & Mann – *Polling & Public Opinion: the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*

Friday, May 3rd – Public opinion graduation

- **FINAL PAPER DUE VIA EMAIL AND PAPER BY 8AM**