

PSC 401F
Public Opinion and Political Behavior
Fall 2007

Instructor: Dr. David Damore
Time: Tu Th 2:30 – 3:45
Location: WRI C237

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Scope and Purpose:

This course offers an in-depth understanding of the antecedents and consequences of public opinion and political behavior in American politics. Particular emphasis is given to the theoretical and methodological approaches central to scholarship in this area. The course is divided into three sections. Part one serves as an introduction and examines the normative and empirical underpinning of public opinion and the classic model of individual opinion and behavior. Part two focuses on revisionist models and approaches to the study of individual and collective opinion and behavior. Part three examines the processes and institutions (i.e., elections, political parties, and interest groups) by which public opinion is aggregated, infused, and diffused into the governing and policy-making processes.

Readings:

Asher, Herbert. 2007. *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know*, 7th ed. Washington DC: Congressional Quarterly Press.

Erikson, Robert S. and Kent L. Tedin. 2007. *American Public Opinion*, Updated 7th ed. New York: Pearson Longman.

Fiorina, Morris P., with Samuel J. Abrams, and Jeremy C. Pope. 2006. *Culture War? The Myth of A Polarized America*, 2nd ed. New York: Pearson Longman.

Flanigan, William H. and Nancy H. Zingale. 2007. *Political Behavior of the American Electorate*, 11th Edition with 2007 Midterm Election Supplement. Washington DC: Congressional Quarterly Press.

Lippmann, Walter. 1922. *Public Opinion*. New York: Free Press.

Course readings (available via WebCampus).

Requirements:

1. Exams (90%) – Three in class exams. Exams occur after each section and are not cumulative. Highest exam score counts for 35% of course total; middle exam score counts for 30% of course total; and lowest exam counts for 25% of course total.
2. Classroom Contribution (10%) – Determined by students' attendance, willingness to ask question, and enter into discussions as they arise.

Policies and Miscellaneous:

1. Any concerns or questions about WebCampus should be directed to that office, not the instructor.
2. The honor code is strictly enforced. Any evidence of collaboration, plagiarism, or other violations of the honor code will be immediately referred for investigation.
3. UNLV requires all members of the university community to be familiar with the honor code and to follow copyright and fair use requirements. You are individually and solely responsible for violations of copyright and fair use laws. To familiarize you with copyright and fair use policies, visit the University's copyright web page (<http://www.unlv.edu/committees/copyright>).
4. Make-ups are granted for documented illnesses or deaths in the immediate family (documented as well) and will be administered in the afternoon of the last day of the semester, December 7, 2007 (no exceptions). If the assignments for this course conflict with other obligations, plan ahead and either adjust your schedule or study habits accordingly. If you need to miss class because of observance of a religious holiday or because you represent UNLV at any official extracurricular activity you must notify me no later than week three of the semester.
5. Lecture begins at 2:30 and ends at 3:45. If you choose to attend lecture, plan to do so for its duration. Do not disrupt class by showing-up late, leaving early, or talking. Repeated interruptions, including ringing cell phones and pagers, will adversely affect your final grade. It is your choice to take this course; if the subject matter is not of interest to you or you are unable to meet its expectations, do not enroll in this course.
6. It is expected that assigned reading will be completed prior to lecture.
7. The successful completion of course assignments require more than simple regurgitation of material presented in lecture and readings. Rather, students are expected to synthesize course material in a coherent and succinct manner that demonstrates both the depth and breadth of their understanding (e.g., you will need to think and apply yourself to do well in this course).
8. If you have a documented disability that requires assistance, you need to contact Disability Service (DS) for coordination of your academic accommodations (the DS is located within the Learning Enhancement Services office in the Student Services Complex, Room 137, 895-0866, <http://studentlife.unlv.edu/disability/>).
9. If you need assistance developing your studies skills or other academic assistance, please visit Student Academic Success Support Organizations at http://tlc.unlv.edu/student_success.htm.
10. Cut-offs for final grades:

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

Course Calendar and Reading Assignments

Date	Topic	Reading
August 28	Course Overview and Introduction	
Part I: Normative and Empirical Underpinning and the Classic Model		
August 30	Normative Underpinnings and Empirical Testing	Erikson and Tedin: chapter 1
September 4, 6	Survey Research Methods	Asher: chapters 1 – 5, 8, 9 Erikson and Tedin: chapter 2, Appendix Flanigan and Zingale: Appendix Reader: “Measuring Opinion versus Non-Opinion”
September 11, 13	Political Socialization	Erikson and Tedin: chapter 5 Fiorina: chapter 1 Flanigan and Zingale: chapters 1, 5
September 18, 20	Beliefs, Ideology, and Opinion Formation	Erikson and Tedin: chapters 3, 6 Fiorina: chapter 2 Flanigan and Zingale: chapter 2
September 25, 27	Political Sophistication	Flanigan and Zingale: chapter 6
October 2	Exam 1	
Part II: Revisionist Models of Individual of Opinion and Behavior		
October 4, 9	Alternative Criteria for Opinion Formation	Erikson and Tedin: chapter 7 Fiorina: chapter 3 Flanigan and Zingale: chapters 3, 4 Lippmann: parts 1, 2
October 11, 16	Rational Choice Models of Individual Behavior	Fiorina: chapter 4 Lippmann: parts 3, 4 Reader: “Fractured Franchise”
October 18, 23	Political Psychological Approaches	Fiorina: chapter 5 Lippmann: parts 5, 6
October 25, 30	Macro Level Processes	Erikson and Tedin: chapter 4

November 1

Exam 2

November 2

Drop Deadline

Part III: Aggregation, Infusion, and Diffusion of Public Opinion

November 6

Elite Influences

Fiorina: chapter 6

November 8, 13

Media Influences

Asher: chapter 6
Erikson and Tedin: chapter 8
Fiorina: chapter 7
Flanigan and Zingale: chapter 7
Lippmann: part 7
Reader: "Misperceptions, the Media, and the Iraq War," "Telling Secrets"

November 15

Institutions and Public Opinion

Erikson and Tedin: chapter 10
Lippmann: Part 8

November 20,
27, 29

Linking Institutions

Asher: chapter 7
Erikson and Tedin: chapter 9
Fiorina: chapters 8, 9
Flanigan and Zingale: chapter 8, Supplement

December 4, 6

Governmental Responsiveness

Erikson and Tedin: chapter 11

December 12

Exam 3 (3:10 – 5:10)

This syllabus provides a general plan for the course, deviations may be necessary.