American Public Opinion (POL-UA 9342)

Fall 2014, Mondays, 1-4p

Location to be confirmed.

Instructor Details

Prerequisites

N/A

Class Description

This class will examine the origins of public opinion research, as well as the impact it has on news coverage, political campaigns, public discourse, elected officials, and in many cases, public policy outcomes. You will learn how to read, analyze, and critically-evaluate public opinion research; you will learn about “leading” and “trailing” research indicators; and you will understand why “character” attributes often matter more than “performance” attributes and issue position. You will see how political campaigns, lobbyists, public relations professionals and others leverage public opinion to impact perceptions, as well as political, policy and business outcomes. Because this course is being taught in the nation’s capital, where politics and policy converge—and against the backdrop of a close and hard-fought presidential campaign—we will be able to hear from political professionals from both political parties, congressional staffers, journalists, and others who will share their insights about how they apply public opinion research to conduct campaigns, shape policy, report the news, or address business challenges.

There is an existing and established core reading list for this course, which we will use as the foundational reading for the course. Each week’s lecture topic will cover the assigned reading topics and apply them to real-life examples, so that they can be more easily and clearly understood. My goal in this class is to merge the theory of public opinion with its application in the real world—to show you not just how research instruments are designed, fielded, weighted and interpreted, but also how they are used to get congressmen and senators and presidents elected; how they can be leveraged to help solve business or public policy challenges; and how the information they contain can be critical to understanding how to best protect or enhance the reputation or business interests of a company or an industry.

Young people often tell me how much they enjoy political campaigns, and sometimes ask whether it’s possible for them to make a career working on, running or analyzing campaigns (which depend on managing or shaping public opinion). If you are one of those young people, this course is designed to help you see the many ways you can do what you love, not just as an avocation, but as a career.

Classes will begin with a discussion of the reading assignment, and how it might apply to a
specific aspect of public opinion research. Since I will be speaking not only to you, but also with you, I expect everyone to be prepared every week. Following the discussion on the core materials, we will analyze and discuss a political or issue poll (including tracking and other polling from the previous week, since this is Washington, and there will be many public opinion research instruments released during the semester), and/or hear from a guest lecturer, who may be a public opinion researcher, a campaign operative, a congressional or committee staffer, or a member of the national news media who covers campaigns.

Desired Outcomes

1. You will learn how to read, analyze, and critically-evaluate public opinion research;
2. You will understand the differences between “thermometer” and “projective” polling; between “character” and “performance” attributes, and you will be able to dazzle your friends and family with your astute observations;
3. You will learn how political campaigns, lobbyists, public relations professionals and others leverage public opinion to impact perceptions and outcomes.

Assessment Components

Five separate components of this course contribute to your grade:

- Two short essays (each worth 20 percent of your grade). These papers, between 4 to 6 pages in length, will require you to briefly analyze a question regarding public opinion. Assignments with details about these papers will be handed out in class. These papers are due at the beginning of class on September 25th and November 20th. I grade based on two criteria: 1) a clear understanding of the material; and 2) an organized, thoughtful and well-written (and proof-read) expression of your ideas, beginning with a thesis statement or paragraph, and ending with a conclusion that persuasively argues for the conclusion you are reaching. Writing and grammatical skills are essential to success in life—and will be important to your success in this class, so please take the time to organize your thoughts and think about how to present them most effectively. And remember, this is how I grade not just essays, but exams, too.

- A midterm examination (20 percent). This in-class written exam will cover all material presented in class through October 2nd. It will include questions in short-answer and brief-essay format. This exam will be held on October 9th.

- A final examination (20 percent). This two-hour written exam will cover material from the entire semester, with a focus on material presented after the midterm exam. According to the Registrar’s office, this exam is currently scheduled to be held in our classroom on Tuesday, December 18th.

- Class attendance and participation (20 percent):

Attending class is expected. The lectures will present material not covered in the readings, synthesize ideas and concepts, and apply what you have read and studied to the world of campaigns, politics and public policy. To stress the importance of attendance, I will call roll for one or more randomly selected students at the beginning of every class session. NYU has a strict policy regarding class attendance, which is mandatory. If you seek to be excused from a class, please follow the NYU Washington procedures outlined in the “Attendance Policy” section below. And
please do not assume you have been excused until you are officially excused by NYU and can demonstrate that to my satisfaction.

Failure to submit or fulfill any required course component results in failure of the class.

**Assessment Expectations**

**Grade A:** The student makes excellent use of empirical and theoretical material and offers well-structured arguments in his/her work. The student writes comprehensive essays / exam questions and his/her work shows strong evidence of critical thought and extensive reading.

**Grade B:** The candidate shows a good understanding of the problem and has demonstrated the ability to formulate and execute a coherent research strategy.

**Grade C:** The work is acceptable and shows a basic grasp of the research problem. However, the work fails to organize findings coherently and is in need of improvement.

**Grade D:** The work passes because some relevant points are made. However, there may be a problem of poor definition, lack of critical awareness, poor research.

**Grade F:** The work shows that the research problem is not understood; there is little or no critical awareness and the research is clearly negligible.

**Grade conversion**

NYU Washington, DC uses the following scale of numerical equivalents to letter grades:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Numerical</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100-94</td>
<td>A</td>
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<tr>
<td>93-90</td>
<td>A-</td>
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<tr>
<td>89-87</td>
<td>B+</td>
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<tr>
<td>86-84</td>
<td>B</td>
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<tr>
<td>83-80</td>
<td>B-</td>
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<tr>
<td>79-77</td>
<td>C+</td>
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<tr>
<td>76-74</td>
<td>C</td>
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<tr>
<td>73-70</td>
<td>C-</td>
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<tr>
<td>69-67</td>
<td>D+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-66</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>below 65</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Attendance Policy**

Study abroad at Global Academic Centers is an academically intensive and immersive experience, in which students from a wide range of backgrounds exchange ideas in discussion-based seminars. Learning in such an environment depends on the active participation of all students. And since classes typically meet once or twice a week, even a single absence can cause a student to miss a significant portion of a course. **To ensure the integrity of this academic experience, class attendance at the centers is mandatory, and unexcused absences will affect students’ semester grades.** Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence. Repeated absences in a course may result in failure. Beginning Fall 2014, at all Global Academic Centers, unexcused absences will be penalized with a two percent deduction from the student’s final course grade.

To seek an excused absence for medical reasons, students must email or discuss with the Program Coordinator for Academics in advance of their missed class. For an excused
absence, students must produce a doctor’s note dated with the exact dates of the missed class and/or exam.

Non-medical absences must be discussed with the Program Coordinator for Academics prior to the date(s) in question, who will communicate the absence to all relevant faculty members. If faculty members do receive notification, the student has not procured an excused absence.

NYU Washington, DC expects students to arrive to class promptly (both at the beginning and after any breaks), to be attentive, and to remain for the duration of the class. If full class attendance and participation becomes a problem, it is the prerogative of each instructor to apply the rule for unexcused absences, which may include a two percent deduction from the student’s final course grade.

Students are responsible for making up any work missed due to absence. This means they should initiate email and/or office hour discussions to discuss any missed lectures and assignments and arrange a timeline for submitting missed work.

Please note that for classes involving a field trip or other external visit, transportation difficulties are never grounds for an excused absence. It is the student’s responsibility to arrive at the announced meeting point in a punctual and timely fashion. Staff members may always be reached by cell phone for advice regarding public transportation.

(1) Written work due in class must be submitted during the class time to the professor.

2) Late work should be emailed to the faculty as soon as it is completed. If the assignment must be submitted in person, the Program Coordinator for Academics can collect on behalf of the faculty between the hours of 9-5, M-F.

3) Late work will be reduced for a fraction of a letter grade (e.g.; A to A-, A- to B+, etc.) for every day it is late, including weekends.

4) Written work during the semester that is submitted 5 days after the submission date (including weekends) without an agreed extension fails and is given a zero.

5) Students who arrive to class late for an exam do not have automatic approval to take extra time to complete the exam.

6) Students who miss an exam (including the final) without previously arranged permission will receive a zero on that exam.

7) Assignments due during finals week that are submitted more than 3 days late without previously arranged extensions will not be accepted and will receive a zero. Any exceptions or extensions for work during finals week must be discussed with the Site Director.
Academic accommodations are available for students with documented disabilities. Please contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980 or see their website (http://www.nyu.edu/life/safety-health-andwellness/students-with-disabilities.html) for further information.

As the University's policy on "Academic Integrity for Students at NYU" states: "At NYU, a commitment to excellence, fairness, honesty, and respect within and outside the classroom is essential to maintaining the integrity of our community. By accepting membership in this community, students take responsibility for demonstrating these values in their own conduct and for recognizing and supporting these values in others."

**Students at Global Academic Centers must follow the University and school policies.**

The presentation of another person’s words, ideas, judgment, images or data as though they were your own, whether intentionally or unintentionally, constitutes an act of plagiarism.

NYU Washington, DC takes plagiarism very seriously; penalties follow and may exceed those set out by your home school. All your written work must be submitted as a hard copy AND in electronic form to the instructor. Your instructor may ask you to sign a declaration of authorship form.

It is also an offense to submit work for assignments from two different courses that is substantially the same (be it oral presentations or written work). If there is an overlap of the subject of your assignment with one that you produced for another course (either in the current or any previous semester), you MUST inform your professor.

For guidelines on academic honesty, clarification of the definition of plagiarism, examples of procedures and sanctions, and resources to support proper citation, please see:

http://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/academic-integrity-for-students-at-nyu.html

http://gls.nyu.edu/page/gls.academicintegrity

http://cas.nyu.edu/page/academicintegrity


**Required Text(s)**


**Make sure you read this [8th] edition, which is updated with**
latest polling and election results.

(EPA) Pollock III, Philip H. 2005. The Essentials of Political Analysis Washington: CQ Press. 3rd edition. You may also buy the 2nd edition; if so, let me know and I'll tell you the corresponding page numbers.


Additional readings will be made available on Blackboard—they are marked with a (B) on this syllabus—or in a reader (R) that may be purchased at New University Copy, 11 Waverly Place.

Supplemental Texts(s) (not required for purchase)  N/A

Internet Research Guidelines

Additional Required Equipment

I assume everyone has or has easy access to a computer and the internet for outside reading and research assignments. I will be assigning additional reading on current topics via email between classes for discussion in class. Other outside reading will include real-time polling and analysis from websites like realclearpolitics.com, which we will be discussing in class each week. If you do not have access to email, a computer or the internet, please let me know.

Session 1

Public Opinion; Why it Matters and How Public Opinion Research is Done Today

Monday,
September 8
- Susan Herbst (1993), Numbered Voices: How Opinion Polling Has Shaped American Politics. Ch. 3. (B)
- Ann E. Marimow, "Last Minute Push Polls Send Some Voters Over the Edge." Washington Post, November 3, 2006. (B)

Plus, skim/surf:
- "Recent SFGate Polls." online at http://www.sfgate.com/polls
- Polimetrix, Inc. Polls at http://pollingpoint.com
- Realclearpolitics.com [take a look at the 2014 senate polls online]
- Politico.com [read whatever stories about politics and/or campaigns that interest you]

Session 2
History and How Polling is Done; Key Concepts and Terms; Polling Pitfalls

Monday, September 15
- APO, Ch. 1.
- Apo, Sections 2.1-2.4
- EPA, Chapter 2.

Session 3
Political Information, Response Instability, and Survey Response

Monday, September 22
- WAK, Introduction and Ch. 2.
- APO, Ch. 3.

Session 4
Analyzing Data and the Consequences of Political Knowledge

Monday, September 29
- WAK, Ch. 6 and 7.
Behavior in California's Insurance Reform Elections. " American Political Science Review 88:63-76. (B)

- EPA pp. 54-67; 78-90; 94-110.

FIRST SHORT ESSAY DUE AT BEGINNING OF CLASS

Session 5

The Role of Self-Interest; Socializing Citizens and Partisans

Monday, October 6W

- APO, Ch. 5.
- Green, Donald, Bradley Palmquist and Eric Schickler (2002). Partisan Hearts and Minds. pp. 75-82. (R)

Session 6

MID-TERM EXAM, A Look at the Previous Week’s Polls, and a Special Guest Speaker

Week of Monday, October 13

Because Monday, 10/13 is a holiday, we will schedule the mid-term exam sometime that week that works for everyone's schedule.

Session 7

The Miracle of Aggregation and Trends Over Time

Monday, October 20

- TRP, Ch. 1 - 2
- PLUS: Polling on the 2010 midterms.
- APO, Ch. 4
- TOC, Ch. 2
Session 8
The Nation’s Attitudes: What’s Changed and The Role of Media

Monday, October 27
- TOC, Ch. 3
- TRP, Ch. 8
- APO, Ch. 8
- TRP, Ch. 9

Special Guest Lecturer

Session 9
Media Effects and The Upcoming Election. Pre-Election Polls and Predictions

Monday, November 3
- TOC, Ch. 4

Special Guest Lecturer

Session 10
Election Returns, Exit Polls and What Happened. Were the Pre-Election Polls Right?

Monday, November 10
Reading to be assigned each day from election day till 11/12 via email, and will include election analysis, exit polls, demographic breakdowns, and why various groups voted as they did.

Special Guest Lecturer

Session 11
Elections, Aggregate Results and Exit Polls: Were the Pre-Election Polls Right?

Week of Monday, November 17

NOTE: This class will combine the readings below with lectures from NYU’s LaPietra Post-Election conference in Florence, which will be held from 11/12-11/14 and available online. We will meet at an alternative time this week.
• Fair, Ray C. (2002) Predicting Presidential Elections and Other Things. Ch. 3 (R)
• Read Ray Fair's prediction for the 2008 presidential and Congressional elections at http://fairmodel.econ.yale.edu/vote2008/index2.htm

• APO, Ch. 9
• Paul R. Abramson, John H. Aldrich, and David W. Rohde (2007). Change and Continuity in the 2004 and 2006 Elections. Ch. 8 (R)
• APO, Section 2.5
• National Election Pool Election Day Questionnaire, 2004. (B)
• 2008 National exit poll results, at http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/results/polls/#USPOO p1

Session 12
Do Elected Officials Listen to Us?

Week of Monday, November 24

• APO, Ch. 10 and Section 11-1.

SECOND SHORT ESSAY DUE AT BEGINNING OF CLASS

Session 13
Who’s Leading Whom? Opinion Leaders and Opinion Followers

Monday, December 1


Session 14
Can The People Govern? Do they?

Monday, December 8

• APO, Sections 11-2 and 11-3.
• TRP, Ch. 10.
• (Reread) WAK, Ch. 7.

Session 15
Leveraging Public Opinion to Impact Policy or Business Outcomes: Examples from Health Care Reform, BP and McDonald’s; and

FINAL EXAM

Classroom
Phones and other electronic devices should be turned off and put away during class.
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<tr>
<th>Etiquette</th>
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<td>Required Co-curricular Activities</td>
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<td>Suggested Co-curricular Activities</td>
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