PLAP 2270: Public Opinion and Political Behavior

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S385 Gibson Hall
office hours: after class/by appointment

Summer 2010 (Session I)
Mon-Fri 1:00–3:15pm
Gibson Hall 141 (South Lawn)
https://collab.itc.virginia.edu/

This course will examine public opinion and assess its place in the American political system. The course will emphasize both how citizens’ thinking about politics is shaped and the role of public opinion in political campaigns, elections, and government. While the course will focus on research on the current state of public opinion, throughout the course we will also discuss historical change in opinion’s place in politics. We will also consider normative questions, including the role opinion should play in American democracy.

Course Requirements
Requirements for this course include attendance and participation in class, an in-class midterm examination, one paper, and a comprehensive final examination, held during the allotted final exam time slot for this class. There may be additional short writing assignments, quizzes, and the like as part of class.

The paper assignment and midterm study guides will be posted to Collab and announced in class.

Grades will be based on the following breakdown:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance &amp; participation</td>
<td>25 percent</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midterm</td>
<td>20 percent</td>
<td>Friday, May 28 in class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper</td>
<td>25 percent</td>
<td>June 10 at the beginning of class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final exam</td>
<td>30 percent</td>
<td>Friday, June 11, 1:00-3:30pm</td>
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Readings
All readings for the course are available through Collab.

Other Policies
I respect and uphold University policies and regulations pertaining to the observation of religious holidays; assistance for physically handicapped and visually and/or hearing impaired students; plagiarism; racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, or religious discrimination; and all forms of harassment.

If you have (or suspect you have) a learning or other disability that requires academic accommodations, you must contact the Learning Needs and Evaluation Center (http://www.virginia.edu/studenthealth/l nec.html) as soon as possible, at least two to three weeks before any assignments are due. I take learning disabilities very seriously and will make whatever accommodations you need to be successful in class but they must be properly documented by LNEC.

Plagiarism, or academic theft, is passing off someone else’s words or ideas as your own without giving proper credit to the source. You are responsible for not plagiarizing and are expected to abide by the University of Virginia Honor Code (see http://www.virginia.edu/honor/fraud.html).

Participation in this class implies permission from students to submit their written work to services that check for plagiarism; you may be required to submit both hard and digital copies of your papers.

Papers turned in late without prior arrangement will not be considered for a grade.
Course Schedule and Outline

I. INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE
M May 17 Introduction to the course

II. MEANING AND MEASUREMENT
T May 18 What is “public”? What is “opinion”? Is “public opinion” the intersection of the two?

W May 19 Measurement and analysis
For more on the mechanics of polling and survey research, you may want to skim other chapters that interest you—the book is available used on-line.

III. DEMOCRATIC COMPETENCE
R May 20 The public’s political information and sophistication
Political tolerance

F May 21 Movie Day 1
Boogie Man: The Lee Atwater Story

M May 24 Ideology and the organization of opinion
Self-interest and opinion

T May 25 Groups
W May 26  Core values  
Emotion  


R May 27  Movie Day 2  
The War Room

F May 28  Midterm

M May 31  No Class (Happy Memorial Day!)

V. OPINION IN POLITICAL CONTEXT

T June 1  Zaller's theory of opinion formation & expression  
In Taken by Storm: The Media, Public Opinion and U.S. Foreign Policy in the Gulf War, ed. Lance Bennett and David Paletz, chapter 9 (186-209).

W June 2  The media and framing  

The New Yorker 83(1).
http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2007/02/19/070219fa_fact_mayer

R June 3  More framing  
Implicit Attitudes  

In Blink: the Power of Thinking Without Thinking. New York: Little, Brown, Chapter 3 (72-98).


F June 4  Movie Day 3  
Journeys with George

M June 7  Political campaigns  

T June 8  Collective opinion
Political discourse

W June 9  Representation

VII. CONCLUSIONS

R June 10 Conclusion & Movie Day 4
In Class: By the People: The Election of Barack Obama

F June 11 Final Examination