PLAP 2270: Public Opinion and Political Behavior
Fall 2011

Mon & Wed 10:00–10:50am
Wilson Hall 301

Course web page:
https://collab.itc.virginia.edu/

Professor Nicholas Winter
nwinter@virginia.edu
http://faculty.virginia.edu/nwinter
S385 Gibson Hall
office hours:
Wednesday 3:30-4:30

Teaching Assistants
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Thursdays 10-11        Mondays 11-12        Mondays 11-12
Gibson S195        Wilson Foyer        Outside Gibson Starbucks

This course will examine public opinion and assess its place in the American political system, and
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 developments in
opinion and its place in politics, including changes that arose with the development of polling and
with the advent of television and other electronic media. 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 section, submission of weekly
identification items, an in-class midterm examination, two papers, and a comprehensive final
examination, during the allotted final exam time slot for this class. Your TA may assign additional
short writing assignments, quizzes, and the like as part of your section participation grade.

The assignments for the papers will be posted to Collab and announced in lecture.

Grades will be based on the following breakdown:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Section participation</td>
<td>15 percent</td>
<td>—</td>
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<td>Weekly IDs</td>
<td>5 percent</td>
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<tr>
<td>First Paper</td>
<td>15 percent</td>
<td>Wednesday, October 5 at the beginning of lecture</td>
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<td>Midterm exam</td>
<td>15 percent</td>
<td>Wednesday, October 12, in class</td>
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<tr>
<td>Second Paper</td>
<td>25 percent</td>
<td>Monday, December 5 at the beginning of lecture</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final exam</td>
<td>25 percent</td>
<td>Friday, December 9, 9am-noon</td>
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Note however, that you cannot pass the course without receiving a passing grade on each of these
items individually. Thus, for example, if you never turn in an ID, you will not pass the course
despite the fact that it is only worth 5 percent of the final grade.
Readings
There is one required book for this course:


This book is newly published (as of August 23), and the publisher is rushing copies to the UVA Bookstore. I will post on Collab copies of any chapters that we read before the book comes in at the bookstore. The book should be available from online retailers soon, although I cannot guarantee that you will get it in time from those sources.

All other readings for the course are available through Collab.

Sections
The section meetings will provide an opportunity for you to clarify material from the course, discuss the lectures, readings, and current events. Your TA may also assign periodic brief written work in or out of section.

Each week you will be required to submit an identification item (a term or concept) from the week’s reading or lectures, along with a short paragraph defining the item. The midterm and final exams will include a section of identification items, drawn from among those you have submitted during the term. Your TA will explain the mechanics of turning in your IDs, as well as further details on expectations, and weekly due dates. You will be allowed to miss one week with no penalty.

**Attendance at your weekly section meeting is required.** This requirement is reflected, in part, in the 15% of your grade that comes from attendance and active participation in section.

Sections will not meet the first week; they will meet for the first time on August 31, September 1, and September 2.

Other Policies
We respect and uphold University policies and regulations pertaining to the observation of religious holidays; assistance available to the physically handicapped, 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. We take learning disabilities very seriously and we will make whatever accommodations you need to be successful in this class but they must be properly documented by the 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/proc/fraud.html).

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

I. INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

August 24: Welcome and introduction to the course
Berinsky, Adam. “Introduction.” Reader

II. MEANING AND MEASUREMENT

August 29: What is “public”? What is “opinion”? Is “public opinion” the intersection of the two?

August 31 & September 5: Measurement and analysis
Asher, Polling and the Public, chapters 3 and 8 (“Wording and Context of Questions” and “Analyzing and Interpreting Polls”).

III. DEMOCRATIC COMPETENCE

September 7: The public’s political information and sophistication

September 12: Political Tolerance

September 14: Ideology and the organization of opinion

IV. INDIVIDUAL OPINION

September 19: Implicit and Explicit Attitudes
September 21: Self interest

September 26: Groups I—political parties
Hetherington, Marc. “Partisanship and Polarization.” Reader, chap. 5.

September 28: Groups II—race and gender

October 3: Race and campaigns
We will watch the beginning of the movie Boogie Man in lecture. You are responsible for watching the rest of the movie before your section meeting this week. (Available online through Collab)

October 5: Guest Speaker
CPT Damon Armeni

The first paper is due at the beginning of lecture.

October 10: No class (reading day)

October 12: Midterm examination in class

October 17: —

October 19: Core values

October 24: Emotion
V. OPINION IN POLITICAL CONTEXT

October 26 & 31: John Zaller’s theory of opinion formation and expression

November 2: Political campaigns
Sides, John and Jake Haselswerdt. “Campaigns and Elections.” Reader, chap. 11.

November 7: The media

November 9: In-Class Movie
Journeys with George

November 14: Framing

VII. CONCLUSIONS: PUBLIC OPINION IN POLITICS

November 16: Collective (and rational?) opinion

November 21: Guest Speaker
Cara Carter, Opinion Research Business
(Reading TBA)

November 23: No Class (Thanksgiving Break)

November 28: In-Class Movie: Campaigns in practice
“By the People: The Election of Barack Obama”
(You will be responsible for finishing the movie; it will be available online)

November 30: Representation—how does (does?) opinion affect policy?
December 5: Conclusions: Public opinion and American democracy
Sears, David O. “Conclusion: Assessing Continuity and Change.” Reader.
The second paper is due at the beginning of lecture.

Friday, December 9: Final Examination (9:00am–noon)