

Pol-Sci 309: Public Opinion
Spring 2016
Haag Hall 307
TR 10-11:15am

Professor: Dr. Beth Vonnahme
Office Location: Manheim 303i
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Course is on Blackboard

Department: Political Science
Office Hours: W 10am-12pm, or by appointment.
Course is on Blackboard

Course Description: This course explores public opinion in the United States, surveying theories and empirical research on the measurement, formation, and distribution of public opinion.

Course Catalog Information

Course Component: Lecture
Course Format: Lecture
Course Instructional Mode: Classroom-based
Pre-requisite: None
Course Attributes: Focus C
Credit hours: 3

Student Learning Outcomes: As an advanced undergraduate course, this class prepares students to understand the subfield of public opinion. The learning objectives for this class are:

1. Discuss the distribution of public opinion in the United States
2. Explain the formation of public opinion including the role of human values, the media, socialization, self-interest, and group identities
3. Discuss and employ survey methodology
4. Evaluate research done by other scholars, noting the strengths and weaknesses of the theory, research design, and evidence

Course Assessment: Students completing all assignments thoroughly and demonstrating competency of these learning outcomes will pass the course. However, students will be strongly encouraged to aim for excellence. Assessment will be based on attendance, participation in course discussion, quizzes, lab assignments, exams, and a short paper.

Attendance & Participation	10 %
Quizzes	10%
Lab Assignments	10%
Exams	60%
Short Paper	10%

The grading scale for this course is as follows:

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

Course Assignments:

Participation—Participation and attendance in this course are required. Two absences will be excused with no questions asked. Any other excused absences need proper documentation. Proper documentation includes doctor's note or evidence of university activities. You will not be excused for any personal absences (vacation, work, etc.). For each additional absence, your participation grade will fall by five points. Excuses will not be accepted through email. Please bring a printed explanation of your absence along with proper documentation to the next class period. Repeatedly arriving late for class will also reduce your participation grade.

Quizzes—quizzes will cover reading material assigned for the day of the quiz. The quizzes will be given at the beginning of class. If you arrive late for class, you will not be given extra time to complete the quiz. If you miss class on the day of a quiz, you must provide proper documentation to make-up any quiz. All approved make-up quizzes will be given on **May 5th**.

Exams— you will have two exams, which will be short answer and essay and will cover material presented in lecture, discussion and the reading. The midterm exam will cover the first part of the course and the final exam will cover the second half. Make-up exams will be given **only** if notification is provided in advance of the exam and the reason is properly documented (e.g., if the reason is illness, documentation from a health care provider).

Lab Assignments—you will complete two lab assignments using survey data. You will be able to complete the assignment from any computer connected to the Internet, but we will work on the assignments in class on specific days. Lab assignments are due via Blackboard (Turnitin) at midnight on the due dates listed below. Five points will be deducted for each day that your assignment is late.

Short Paper—you will choose a political issue—gun control, the death penalty, taxes, etc.—and then write a short paper (approximately 8-10 pages) **describing** public opinion on that issue. Details of this assignment are provided separately. The papers are due via Blackboard (Turnitin) at midnight on **May 9th**. Five points will be deducted for each day the assignment is late.

Required Texts: Required readings are available on Blackboard.

Resources & Policy Statements

Writing Assistance: You are responsible for ensuring that your assignments are well-written (free of grammar and spelling errors) and well-organized. The Writing Center is available to assist you in improving your writing and may be required in certain cases.

Computer Issues: some assignments in this course are digital assignments. As a result, it is your responsibility to back-up your work. You are required to keep a digital copy on your computer's hard drive **and** a digital depository (Dropbox or Google Documents). Do not keep your sole copy on a flashdrive. You will not receive any additional time or consideration for computer malfunctions.

Technology: Please turn off all cell phones and **put them away** before class. Laptops may be used, but only for note taking. The purpose of these rules is to enhance your learning experience (and those around you) and ensure class engagement.

Academic Calendar: Students are encouraged to review important add, drop or withdraw dates: <http://www.umkc.edu/registrar/acal.asp>

Academic Honesty: The Board of Curators of the University of Missouri recognizes that academic honesty is essential for the intellectual life of the University. Faculty members have a special obligation to expect high standards of academic honesty in all student work. Students have a special obligation to adhere to such standards. Academic dishonesty, including cheating, plagiarism or sabotage, is adjudicated through the [University of Missouri Student Conduct Code](#) and [Rules of Procedures in Student Conduct Matters](#). Your assignments must be individual and original work for this course. UMKC has access to software (Turnitin) which will be used to examine the originality of your assignments. Any violations of academic honesty will result in a zero on the assignment and a report filed with the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

Academic Inquiry, Course Discussion and Privacy: University of Missouri System Executive Order No. 38 lays out principles regarding the sanctity of classroom discussions at the university. The policy is described fully in [Section 200.015 of the Collected Rules and Regulations](#). In this class, students may not make any audio or video recordings of course activity (including those recordings prepared by an instructor), except students permitted to record as an accommodation under Section 240.040 of the Collected Rules. All other students who record and/or distribute audio or video recordings of class activity are subject to discipline in accordance with provisions of Section 200.020 of the Collected Rules and Regulations of the University of Missouri pertaining to student conduct matters. Those students who have written permission from the course instructor to record are not permitted to redistribute any audio or video recordings of statements or comments from the course to individuals who are not students in the course without the express permission of the faculty member and of any students who are recorded, including those recordings prepared by an instructor. Students found to have violated this policy are subject to discipline in accordance with provisions of Section 200.020 of the Collected Rules and Regulations of the University of Missouri pertaining to student conduct matters.

Campus Safety: Inclement weather, mass notification, and emergency response guide: <http://www.umkc.edu/umkcalert/>

Counseling and Health Services Available at UMKC: UMKC students may experience many challenges in their lives while attending college – stress, depression, suicidality, trauma, relationship issues, health concerns, etc. As your professor I care about your success and well-being, and want to make you aware of some helpful resources on campus. The UMKC Counseling Center (www.umkc.edu/counselingcenter), located at 4825 Troost in Room 206, offers a wide range of supportive services to students. Appointments can be made by calling 816.235.1635. UMKC Student Health and Wellness (<http://info.umkc.edu/studenthealth/>), located at 4825 Troost in Room 115, offers a full range of health care and promotion services. Appointments can be scheduled online or by calling 816.235.6133. The MindBody Connection (www.umkc.edu/mindbody) is located in the Atterbury Student Success Center in Room 112 and offers a variety of stress-reduction services.

Disability Support Services: To obtain disability related accommodations and/or auxiliary aids, students with disabilities must contact the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (OSSD) as soon as possible. To contact OSSD, call (816) 235-5696. Once verified, OSSD will notify the

course instructor and outline the accommodation and/or auxiliary aids to be provided. For more information go to: <http://www.umkc.edu/disability/>

English Proficiency Statement: Students who encounter difficulty in their courses because of the English proficiency of their instructors should speak directly with their instructors. If additional assistance is needed, students may contact the UMKC Help Line at 816-235-2222 for assistance.

Grade Appeal Policy: Students are responsible for meeting the standards of academic performance established for each course in which they are enrolled. The establishment of the criteria for grades and the evaluation of student academic performance are the responsibilities of the instructor. The [University grade appeal procedure](#) is available only for the review of allegedly capricious grading and not for review of the instructor's evaluation of the student's academic performance. Capricious grading, as that term is used here, comprises any of the following:

- The assignment of a grade to a particular student on some basis other than the performance in the course;
- The assignment of a grade to a particular student according to more exacting or demanding standards than were applied to other students in the course; (Note: Additional or different grading criteria may be applied to graduate students enrolled for graduate credit in 300- and 400-level courses.)
- The assignment of a grade by a substantial departure from the instructor's previously announced standards.

Discrimination Grievance Procedures for Students: Discrimination Grievance Procedures for Students can be found here: http://www.umsystem.edu/ums/rules/collected_rules/grievance/ch390/grievance_390.010

Statement of Human Rights: The Board of Curators and UMKC are committed to the policy of equal opportunity, regardless of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, national origin, age, disability and status as a Vietnam era veteran. Commitment to the policy is mentored by the [Division of Diversity, Access & Equity](#), but it is the responsibility of the entire university community to provide equal opportunity through relevant practices, initiatives and programs.

Title IX: Under the University of Missouri's Title IX policy, discrimination, violence and harassment based on sex, gender, and gender identity are subject to the same kinds of accountability and support applied to offenses based on other protected characteristics such as race, color, ethnic or national origin, sexual orientation, religion, age, ancestry, disability, military status, and veteran status. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you can find the appropriate resources by visiting UMKC's Title IX Office webpage (<http://info.umkc.edu/title9/>) or contacting UMKC's Title IX Coordinator, Mikah K. Thompson (816.235.6910 or thompsonmikah@umkc.edu). Additionally, you can file a complaint using UMKC's online discrimination complaint form, which is located at <http://info.umkc.edu/title9/reporting/report-online/>.

While most UMKC employees are required to report any known or suspected violation of Title IX, students may seek confidential guidance from the following campus locations:

UMKC Counseling Service Volker Campus 4825 Troost Ave, Suite 206 Kansas City, MO 64110 Phone – (816) 235-1635	UMKC Counseling Service Health Sciences Campus Health Sciences Building 1418 2464 Charlotte Kansas City, MO 64108 Phone – (816) 235-1635 (open Tuesdays, 1-5pm)	Student Health and Wellness 4825 Troost Ave., Suite 115 Kansas City, MO 64110 Phone - (816) 235-6133
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UMKC Connect: Important information is available to undergraduate students in UMKC Connect accessed through Blackboard. Throughout the term, students may receive emails regarding course grades or academic performance. Students are expected to address information posted in a timely fashion. This information may be shared with the student's Success Network made up his or her academic advisor(s) and other campus resources so that UMKC may fully support the student's success.

College of Arts & Sciences Course Policies & Resources

Please refer to the following web page and the linked resources for critical information regarding course policies and resources. You are expected to abide by all the rules and regulations regarding student conduct referenced in these pages. <http://cas.umkc.edu/CPR/>

Course Schedule

Section 1: What is Public Opinion?

Weeks 1-3: Defining and Measuring Public Opinion

During the first few weeks of the semester, we will focus on defining and measuring public opinion. We will start by defining public opinion and distinguishing opinions from values and beliefs. We will then discuss various elements of survey design and administration including questionnaire design, sampling, and survey administration. We will also address experimentation including basic experimental design.

January 19: First Day of Class—No Reading

January 21: Reading

- Bardes, Barbara A. and Robert W. Oldendick. 2012. “How Are Opinions Measured” in *Public Opinion: Measuring the American Mind*. Rowman and Littlefield: Lanham.

January 26: meet in Royall Hall 310 to work on Lab Assignment #1

January 28: Reading

- Christian, Leah, Scott Keeter, Kristen Purcell and Aaron Smith. “Assessing the Cell Phone Challenge to Survey Research in 2010.” Presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association for Public Opinion Research, Chicago, Illinois.
- **Quiz 1 over today’s readings**

February 2: Reading

- Ross, Abraham S., and Malcolm Grant. 1996. Chapter 1 in *Experimental and Nonexperimental Designs in Social Psychology*, pgs. 2-43.

February 4: Reading

- Ross, Abraham S., and Malcolm Grant. 1996. Chapter 2 in *Experimental and Nonexperimental Designs in Social Psychology*, pgs. 2-43.

Section 2: The Culture War

Week 4: The Culture War

The USA Today and Washington Post series will introduce the concepts of red and blue America.

February 9: No Reading

- **Lab Assignment #1 Due at Midnight via Turnitin**

February 11: Reading

- USA Today Series
- Washington Post Series

Week 5: Myth of a Culture War?

This week's readings outline the essence of the argument by Fiorina and Abrams and present evidence addressing the question: is America polarized?

February 16-18: Reading

- Fiorina, Morris P. and Samuel J. Abrams. "Political Polarization in the American Public." *Annual Review of Political Science* 11: 563-588.

Week 6: Resurgence of a Culture War

Though Fiorina and colleagues present a persuasive argument, Abramowitz and Saunders disagree with the conclusion. They argue that the American public is indeed polarized.

February 23-25: Reading

- Abramowitz, Alan and Kyle Saunders. 2008. "Is Polarization a Myth?" *Journal of Politics* 71(2):542-555.
- **Quiz 2 over readings (on Feb. 23)**

Week 7: Culture War Revisited

Our discussion of the Culture War ends with Fiorina's rebuttal.

March 1: Reading

- Fiorina, Morris, Samuel Abrams, and Jeremy Pope. 2008. "Polarization in the American Public: Misconceptions and Misreadings." *Journal of Politics* 71(2): 556-560.
- Choose political issue for Short Paper

March 3: **Midterm Exam**

Section 3: Satisfaction with Government

Week 8: Attitudes toward Government

We will turn our attention to the public's attitudes toward the political process and the institutions of government.

March 8: No Reading

March 10: meet in Royall Hall 310 to work on Lab Assignment #2

Week 9: Policy vs. Process

We will consider two competing explanations for weak confidence: policy and process.

March 15: Reading

- Miller, Arthur H. 1974. "Political Issues and Trust in Government: 1964-1970." *The American Political Science Review* 68(3): 951-972.
- **Quiz 3 over today's readings**

March 17: Reading

- Hibbing, John R. and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse. 2001. "Process Preferences and American Politics: What the People Want Government to Be." *The American Political Science Review* 95(1): 145-153.

Week 10: Reforming Democracy

We will conclude our discussion of the public's attitudes by focusing on whether reforms to government would actually improve attitudes.

March 22: Reading

- Hibbing, John R. and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse. 1998. "Too Much of a Good Thing: More Representative Is Not Necessarily Better." *PS: Political Science and Politics* 31(1): 28-31.

March 24: meet in Royall Hall 310 to work on Short Paper

- **Lab Assignment #2 Due at Midnight via Turnitin**

Section 4: The Formation of Public Opinion

Week 11: Political Socialization

How are political attitudes shaped by those around us? This week we will focus on the role of political socialization paying particular attention to the political attitudes of children and socialization in adulthood.

April 5: Reading

- Clawson, Rosalee A. and Zoe M. Oxley. 2013. "Political Socialization" in *Public Opinion: Democratic Ideals, Democratic Practice*. Sage: Los Angeles.

April 7: Reading

- Van Deth, Jan W., Simone Abendschön, Meike Vollmar. 2011. "Children and Politics: An Empirical Reassessment of Early Political Socialization." *Political Psychology* 32(1): 147-173.
- **Quiz 4 over today's readings**

Week 12: The Media

Continuing our discussion of socialization, we will focus on the role of the media in shaping political attitudes. In doing so, we will examine the different effects the media can have on attitudes: agenda setting, priming, framing, and persuasion.

April 12: Reading

- Iyengar, Shanto. 2011. "News and Public Opinion" in *Media Politics: A Citizen's Guide*. W. W. Norton: New York.

April 14: Reading

- Nelson, Thomas E., Rosalee A. Clawson, and Zoe M. Oxley. 1997. "Media Framing of a Civil Liberties Conflict and Its Effect on Tolerance." *American Political Science Review*, 91: 3, pgs. 567-583.

Week 13: Self-Interest and Group Identities

Are political attitudes influenced by self-interest? What about group identities? Ethnic conflict around the world demonstrates the importance of group identities to politics. The readings this week will provide evidence questioning the role of self-interest in guiding political attitudes and the ways in which group identities might affect political attitudes in the US.

April 19: Reading

- Sears, David O., and Carolyn Funk. 1990. "The Limited Effect of Economic Self-interest on the Political Attitudes of the Mass Public." *The Journal of Behavioral Economics* 19(3): 247-271.

April 21: Reading

- Kinder, Donald R., and Nicholas Winter. 2001. "Exploring the Racial Divide: Blacks, Whites, and Opinion on National Policy." *American Journal of Political Science* 45(2): 439-56.
- **Quiz 5 over today's readings**

Week 14: Political Sophistication

What do Americans know about politics? This week's readings present seemingly disturbing evidence regarding the political knowledge of the American public. Should we be concerned?

April 26: Reading

- Delli Carpini, Michael X. and Keeter, Scott. "What Americans Know about Politics" in *What Americans Know about Politics and Why It Matters?*

April 28: Reading

- The Daily Beast. 2007. Dunces-Cap Nation.

Week 15: Motivated Reasoning

We will conclude the semester by examining the extent to which individuals are likely to change their attitudes. Specifically, we will explore the tendency individuals have to maintain their prior beliefs in the face of competing evidence.

May 3: Reading

- Taber, Charles S. and Milton Lodge. 2006. "Motivated Skepticism in the Evaluation of Political Beliefs." *American Journal of Political Science* 50(3): 755-769.

May 5: Makeup Quizzes

***May 9: Short papers due at midnight via Turnitin.

***May 10: Final Exam from 10:30am-12:30pm