CONTACT

Joel Rivlin
E-mail: rivlin@polisci.wisc.edu

Office Hours:
Indie Coffee
1225 Regent St, Madison, WI 53715
7:45-8:45am Tuesday and Thursday, or by appointment

OVERVIEW
The democratic ideal of power lying with the populous is often portrayed as key to many aspects of American politics. The views and preferences of the population are often used to legitimize action (or inaction), and determine who gains power. Significant resources are continually employed to attempt to shape what people think. This course aims to place the role of public opinion into perspective, and to understand the nature, stability and impact of public opinion on the American polity.

By the end of the course you will have a fuller understanding of: the role of public opinion in a democracy; the details of how public opinion is measured (and mis-measured) and be a wise consumer of opinion research data; the political science theories of opinion formation and change; and how public opinion shapes, and is shaped by, policy makers.

MATERIALS
There is no textbook to purchase for this course and all the materials will be made available as downloadable PDFs on the course page on Learn@UW (https:learnuw.wisc.edu).

The readings come from a variety of sources and are in a mixture of styles. For each reading, it is worth trying to answer each of the following questions.

• What question is the reading trying to answer?
• What is their main argument?
• What data are they using to make their argument?
• Does the data they present convincingly match the argument?
• What is left unanswered, what other questions does the piece evoke?
In addition to the assigned readings, it is important to stay on top of political news, especially as it relates to public opinion. I would highly recommend you regularly read and check some of the following blogs about polling and public opinion:

http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/
http://pollingmatters.gallup.com/
http://themonkeycage.org/
http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/politics/polls/
http://pollsandvotes.com/PaV/

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

There are 4 components to your grade:
- Reaction papers (20%)
- Class attendance and participation (15%)
- Two midterm exams (20% each)
- Final exam (25%)

REACTION PAPERS (20%)

Reaction papers should be brought to the first class to which the assigned readings relate (for example, any reaction to the Schumpeter, Walker or Schlozman et al readings will be due on 9/10). You will be required to turn in a total of four reaction papers across the semester based on the readings assigned for a given week. Papers should be a 600-800 word reaction to one, some or all of the readings for that week (you should include a word-count at the end of the paper). Not all the readings lend themselves to reaction papers, so the readings that you can choose to base your reaction papers on are marked below with the "RP" notation.

Reaction papers should be your thoughts and reactions to one or more of the readings of the week and not simply be a summary of the readings. They really should address what you have learned from the reading, what you agreed with, what you disagreed with and what further questions the readings raised for you.

Each reaction paper will be worth 5 points, for a total of 20 points.

You must have completed at least three reaction papers before the second midterm. It is your responsibility to keep track of how many papers you have turned in. Late papers will not be accepted.
Class Attendance and Participation (15%)

Lectures will not always cover the same material as the readings. Both reading materials and attending classes are necessary to do well in the course.

**Attendance:** I will take attendance in every class. Students can miss up to two scheduled classes without affecting their attendance grade.

**Participation:** I will lecture most of the time but parts of the class will also be conducted as a discussion. The class will work best with active and thoughtful participation that engages the lecture content and readings. Please come prepared to discuss the reading materials each class; this means arguing about them in a thoughtful manner with your fellow classmates and me. Included in your participation grade will be short class assignments, including the first assignment passed out in the first class.

Two Midterm Exams (20% each)

The midterm exams will take place on Tuesday 10/8 and Tuesday 11/12 and will cover all the material up until those dates.

Final Exam (25%)

The final exam will take on 12/16/13 at 12:25-2:25 and will cover material from the entire course.

Grading

**Grading policy:** Numerical grades can be interpreted as below. Grades are not curved.

- 93-100 = A
- 88-92 = AB
- 83-87 = B
- 78-82 = BC
- 70-77 = C
- 60-69 = D
- Below 60 = F

There is NO extra-credit work in this course.

**Contested Grades** – If you believe your grade is inaccurate, you must wait at least 48 hours before contesting it. If you wish to contest a grade, you will need to write a letter explaining why you believe a mistake was made in grading your assignment. After I have received and read the letter, we will schedule an appointment to discuss the matter; however, if you ask for a grade to be reevaluated, I reserve the right to reevaluate the entire content of the assignment or exam, and your grade can go up or go down as a result. Whenever possible, I encourage you to ask questions and clarifications about course assignments before turning them in.
If a medical need will result in your missing or completing assignments, please communicate with me. I am willing to be accommodating but communication and documentation is necessary.

**Academic Honesty**

Plagiarism (presenting someone else’s words or ideas without giving credit) will not be tolerated, and it may be grounds for expulsion from the course. At a minimum, if a student is caught plagiarizing, he or she will receive a zero for the assignment and will be prosecuted to the fullest extent possible under University regulations. If you are unclear as to what constitutes plagiarism, you should consult the University of Wisconsin’s Code of Conduct and the UW Writing Center. When in doubt, always cite your source.

**Communication**

Please feel free to come by or call during office hours or send e-mail at any time to discuss course related or other matters. You are responsible for checking your e-mail regularly. The course website at learnuw.wisc.edu will contain copies of class materials (syllabus, readings). Students affiliated with the McBurney Center should contact me to arrange accommodations.
Class Calendar

Week 1 (Tues 9/3 and Thurs 9/5): Introduction to the Course and Public Opinion

Readings:

Week 2 (Tues 9/10 and Thurs 9/12): The Role of Public Opinion in a Democracy

Readings:
- Schumpeter, Joseph. 1943. Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy. Chapter 21

Week 3 (Tues 9/17 and Thurs 9/19): Measuring Public Opinion

Readings:
- Asher, Herbert. 2010. Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know. Chapters 2 & 4
- Schuldt, Jonathon P., Sara H. Konrath, and Norbert Schwarz. "“Global warming” or “climate change”? Whether the planet is warming depends on question wording." Public Opinion Quarterly 75.1 (2011): 115-124.

Week 4 (Tues 9/24 and Thurs 9/26): Measuring Public Opinion (continued)

Readings:
Week 5 (Tues 10/1 and Thurs 10/3): Measuring Public Opinion (continued)

Readings (and watching):
- [http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/PeterHar](http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/PeterHar) (first two hours)

Week 6 (Tues 10/8): MIDTERM 1 (in class)

(Thurs 10/10): Political Socialization and Generational Effects

Readings:

Week 7 (Tues 10/15 and Thurs 10/17): Political Socialization and Generational Effects (continued)

Readings:
- Sears, David O. 2002."Long-term psychological consequences of political events." In Kristen Renwick Monroe (ed.) Political psychology. RP

Week 8 (Tues 10/22 and Thurs 10/24): Groups and Self-Interest

Readings:
**Week 9 (Tues 10/29 and Thurs 10/31): Attitudinal Change and Stability**

Readings:

**Week 10 (Tues 11/5 and Thurs 11/7): Political Knowledge and Media Effects**

Readings:

**Week 11 (Tues 11/12) – MIDTERM 2 (in class)**

(Thurs 11/14): **NO CLASS**

Readings:
- No readings for this week, but the following few weeks are reading heavy, so try and get a start this week.

**Week 12 (Tues 11/19 and Thurs 11/21): Public Opinion and Elections**

Readings:
**Week 13 (Tues 11/26): Public Opinion and Elections (continued)**

Readings:

*(Thurs 11/28): THANKSGIVING*

**Week 14 (Tues 12/3 and Thurs 12/5): Public Opinion and Policy Making**

Readings:
- Heith, Diane. 2004. Polling to Govern: Public opinion and presidential leadership, Chapters 1 & 8 RP

**Week 15 (Tues 12/10 and Thurs 12/12): Public Opinion and Policy Making (continued)**

Readings: