

Comm./Pols. 389 — Public Opinion

MW 4-5:15

Office hours: W 10-11:45, MW 3-3:45 & by appt.

5 College Way No. 102

Professor Mike Schmierbach

schmierbachm@cofc.edu

Office: 843-953-5775

Mobile: 843-408-6140

All readings posted to WebCT

Course description and goals: “This course covers the formation, expression, and measurement of American public opinion, with a particular focus on the role of media in shaping and representing opinion, in order to better understand how citizens think about and react to the political world.” Students completing this class should expect the following outcomes:

- Familiarity with key theories of public opinion formation and effects
- Ability to read and understand empirical research into public opinion
- Knowledge of the most common techniques employed in the measurement of public opinion, along with some of the consequences of these techniques

Course expectations: The following “rules and regulations” apply to this class:

- Students should familiarize themselves with the syllabus, which provides a description of all grading and course procedures. Students are responsible for knowing this material, including the rules governing absences, and will be held to those standards. This syllabus may be changed if necessary; students will be informed of any changes.
- Students are encouraged to seek clarification of any course or grading questions in consultation with the instructor. Questions about numerical grades can be addressed only in e-mail sent from an official C of C account or in person. Students who believe a grade was in error should speak with the instructor as soon as possible. I will amend grades in any situation where evidence of a calculation or factual error is provided.
- Because this course significant discussion, students should immediately inform me if they feel my conduct or the conduct of fellow students is inhibiting learning. I am sensitive to such concerns, but I cannot address them unless I hear about them.
- Students should act in a manner that does not interfere with the ability of their fellow students to learn course material. Please behave in a polite and appropriate manner. Arrive to class on time, do not take phone calls or text message during class, excuse yourself quietly if necessary for personal reasons, and give your attention to whomever is speaking.
- *Students needing specific accommodations or arrangements, including those in the SNAP program, should contact me during office hours or whenever the student feels comfortable, within the first two weeks of class, to let me know about your situation and make necessary arrangements.*

Course grading: The course grade is calculated as a single numerical score (out of 100), with the following weights assigned to each element:

Unit 1 Portfolio.....	30%
Unit 2 Portfolio.....	30%
Unit 3 Portfolio.....	30%
Participation.....	10%

All graded elements will be given a percentage score (out of 100). The weighted average of these scores (as outlined above) will be used to calculate a final grade. The following final grade distribution represents the *most stringent* possible grade breakdown. Depending on average grades and student effort, students near the cutoff for a higher grade may receive that higher grade. In no case will a student receive a higher grade than another student if his or her numerical score is lower, and in no case will a student receive a grade worse than that listed below for his or her numerical score.

A.....	92-100	C.....	72-77.9
A-.....	90-91.9	C-.....	70-71.9
B+.....	88-89.9	D+.....	68-69.9
B.....	82-87.9	D.....	62-67.9
B-.....	80-81.9	D-.....	60-61.9
C+.....	78-79.9	F.....	-∞-59.9

Portfolios: At the end of each unit, students will submit a “portfolio” representing their accumulated work for that unit. This portfolio will include several elements, each of which will receive a grade. The overall grade will be based on the weighted average of these elements, as laid out in the specific guidelines you will receive near the end of each unit. Portfolios will be due roughly one week after the official “end” of the unit, to allow students time to reflect on the entirety of the material. Required portfolio elements will always include one or more reflective essays, selected from a list, one or more summaries of supplemental readings, either selected from a list or chosen by the student (with instructor permission), and multiple summaries of course readings. Additional information about the required elements for each portfolio will be distributed later in the semester.

Reading summaries: A major component of each portfolio will be edited summaries of the assigned course readings. Each day, we will focus on discussing a single reading dealing with public opinion. Most of these readings will represent original journal articles or book chapters written by public opinion scholars. These readings are of varying accessibility, but in general students should expect to put more time into processing the material than they might for a typical undergraduate textbook. A one-two page summary of each reading is due at the start of class on the day for which that reading is assigned. The following guidelines apply to all summaries:

- The summary should be typed, double-spaced, in 12 pt. Times or Times New Roman with typical (approx. 1 inch) margins and other standard formatting.
- The summary should succinctly explain the main elements of the article, including the topic, any relevant theoretical constructs, important hypotheses or research questions, the general method employed (if applicable), and the results or conclusions.
- In addition, the summary should briefly reflect upon the article. This reflection may take several forms. You may criticize apparent shortcomings in the research or analysis presented, highlight particularly interesting claims or findings and explain why you feel they are important, or offer outside evidence or examples as points of comparison to the article.
- Normal rules of academic honesty apply to this summary. Among other things, that means that all work submitted in the summary should be your own. Consultation with other class members about your summary is not appropriate. You will have ample opportunity to share your views in class. Any quoted material should appear in quotation marks with an appropriate APA citation. Taking language directly from the article, including the abstract, and failing to cite it will be considered plagiarism. You should be summarizing the article in your own words, not simply transcribing passages from the article, so there is no reason for large passages to “accidentally” appear without proper citation.

Each summary will be evaluated and receive one of two marks: acceptable or not acceptable. Acceptable summaries fulfill all the requirements above and may be used in your portfolio. Not acceptable summaries fail to fulfill those requirements. Students may revise up to three unacceptable summaries, submitting them for a new review. If appropriate changes have been made, the new summary will be acceptable. *Only acceptable summaries may be revised and submitted as part of a portfolio for a grade. You must submit the original summary along with the revised version.*

Once marked acceptable, summaries may be revised to whatever degree the student desires, but they should still be no more than two pages once revised. Students are required to submit **six (five for unit 1)** summaries for formal grading as part of their portfolio. Each summary will receive a letter grade; a summary may be deemed acceptable and still receive a relatively low grade, so careful copy editing and revision (if necessary) is advisable. Although the summaries are not the only element included in the portfolio, they are an important part of it and should be treated accordingly.

Note that the five summaries must be revised versions of summaries deemed acceptable, and that summaries will only be marked acceptable if they were submitted on time and in person. *Late summaries and summaries from absent students, regardless of reason, will not be accepted.* Each unit has more than five assigned readings. As a consequence, those “extra” readings give students a chance to miss class or fail to complete a summary without consequence. However, if you fail to submit at least five acceptable summaries over the course of a unit, you will lose points on your portfolio for those missing summaries.

Participation: Because this course is built around a seminar format, student participation is critical to learning. As such, active contribution to discussion, especially when that contribution is thoughtful, will be rewarded with a high participation grade. Students who do not participate, and especially those who actively detract from the classroom environment, will receive low or even failing participation grades.

Absences: Although I will take attendance to help track participation and ensure students were present to turn in summaries, this course has no formal attendance policy. Students who are absent, *regardless of reason*, cannot turn in a summary for that day's reading. Because we have many more readings than the number of summaries required each unit, this will not affect students who have to miss the rare class for legitimate, or even illegitimate, reasons. Students who are chronically absent, however, risk major point losses. The only circumstances in which a student will need to document or otherwise explain an absence is for days on which a portfolio is due. Students may submit late portfolios without penalty only if they have a valid absence (illness, family emergency). Students may submit a portfolio early for any reason, and students who have planned absences are expected to do so in advance of their departure. *Students who experience serious personal emergencies that result in significant absences may be able to arrange for exceptions to the general absence policy. Any exceptions will be negotiated on a case-by-case basis.*

Late work: Summaries cannot be submitted late, under any circumstances. Late portfolios will be accepted without penalty for excused absences, as noted above. Otherwise, students will lose 10 points per day a portfolio is submitted late (starting at -10 for the first 24 hours and then subtracting an additional 10 for each additional day).

Academic dishonesty: In keeping with College policy, any evidence of deliberate or serious academic dishonesty will be submitted to the Dean, and a conclusion of guilt in such matters, whether stemming from an admission by a student or a finding of guilt by the College Honor Board, will result in a grade of XF in the class. Prohibited behavior includes, but is not limited to, submitting work completed by another under your name, plagiarism, and submitting the same work in multiple classes without permission of all instructors. All materials submitted under your name must be entirely the result of your own efforts, and not stem from collaboration with others.

Course design: The course grid on the following page shows the topics and assigned readings for each class, along with the due dates for all three portfolios. All readings are posted to WebCT.

Jan. 8 Introductions	Jan. 10 Why study public opinion?
Jan. 15 MLK Day, no class	Jan. 17 Principles & theory
Jan. 22 Principles & theory	Jan. 24 Principles & theory
Jan. 29 Principles & theory	Jan. 31 Polling & measurement
Feb. 5 Polling & measurement	Feb. 7 Polling & measurement
Feb. 12 Polling and measurement End of unit 1	Feb. 14 Influences on opinion
Feb. 19 Influences on opinion Unit 1 portfolio due	Feb. 21 Influences on opinion
Feb. 26 Media and opinion	Feb. 28 Media and opinion
March 5 Spring Break, no class	March 7 Spring Break, no class
March 12 Media and opinion	March 14 Media and opinion
March 19 Media and opinion	March 21 Media and opinion End of unit 2
March 26 Opinion and politics	March 28 Opinion and politics Unit 2 portfolio due
April 2 Opinion and politics	April 4 Opinion and politics
April 9 Assessing opinion	April 11 Assessing opinion
April 16 Assessing opinion	April 18 "Case studies" in opinion
April 23 "Case studies" in opinion	Unit 3 Portfolio due no later than 4 p.m. Wed., May 2

Readings

Week 2

Wednesday, Jan. 17 — Noelle-Neumann, E. (1979). Public opinion and the classical tradition: A re-evaluation, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 43, 143-156.

Week 3

Monday, Jan. 22 — Korzi, M.J. (2000). Lapsed memory? The roots of American public opinion research, *Polity*, 33, 49-75.

Wednesday, Jan. 24 — Boggs, C. (1997). The great retreat: Decline of the public sphere in late twentieth-century America, *Theory and Society*, 26, 741-780.

Week 4

Monday, Jan. 29 — Barabas, J. (2004). How deliberation affects policy opinions, *American Political Science Review*, 98, 687-701.

Wednesday, Jan. 31 — Herbst, S. (1996). Public expression outside the mainstream, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 546, 120-131.

Week 5

Monday, Feb. 5 — Zaller, J. (1992). A simple theory of the survey response: Answering questions versus revealing preferences, *American Journal of Political Science*, 36, 579-616.

Wednesday, Feb. 7 — Patterson, T.E. (2005). Of polls, mountains: U.S. journalists and their use of election surveys, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 69, 716-724.

Week 6

Monday, Feb. 12 — Traugott, M.W. (2005). The accuracy of the national preelection polls in the 2004 presidential election, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 69, 642-654.

End of Unit 1

Wednesday, Feb. 14 — Davis, T.J. Jr. (2005). The political orientation of Blacks and Whites: Converging, diverging, or remaining constant?, *The Social Science Journal*, 42, 487-498.

Week 7

Monday, Feb. 19 — Huckfeldt, R., Johnson, P.E., & Sprague, J. (2002). Political environments, political dynamics, and the survival of disagreement, *The Journal of Politics*, 64, 1-21.

Wednesday, Feb. 21 — Shah, D.V., & Scheufele, D.A. (2006). Explicating opinion leadership: Nonpolitical dispositions, information consumption, and civic participation, *Political Communication*, 23, 1-22.

Week 8

Monday, Feb. 26 — Gunther, A.C. & Chia, S.C. (2001). Predicting pluralistic ignorance: The hostile media perception and its consequences, *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 78, 688-701.

Wednesday, Feb. 28 — Son, Y.J. & Weaver, D.H. (2005). Another look at what moves public opinion: Media agenda setting and the polls in the 2000 U.S. election, *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 18, 147-197.

Week 9

Monday, March 12 — Moy, P., Xenos, M.A., & Hess, V.K. (2005). Priming effects of late-night comedy, *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 18, 198-210.

Wednesday, March 14 — Nelson, T.E. & Oxley, Z.E. (1999). Issue framing effects on belief importance and opinion, *The Journal of Politics*, 61, 1040-1067.

Week 10

Monday, March 19 — Joslyn, M.R. & Haider-Markel, D.P. (2002). Framing effects on personal opinion and perception of public opinion: The cases of physician-assisted suicide and social security, *Social Science Quarterly*, 83, 690-706.

Wednesday, March 21 — Jasperson, A.E. & Fan, D.P. (2003). The news as molder of campaign ad effects, *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 16, 417-436.

End of Unit 2

Week 11

Monday, March 26 — Goldstein, K. & Ridout, T.N. (2004). Measuring the effects of televised political advertising in the United States, *Annual Review of Political Science*, 7, 205-226.

Wednesday, March 28 — Burstein, P. (2003). The impact of public opinion on public policy: A review and an agenda, *Political Research Quarterly*, 56, 29-40.

Week 12

Monday, April 2 — Canes-Wrone, B. & Shotts, K.W. (2004). The conditional nature of presidential responsiveness to public opinion, *American Journal of Political Science*, 48, 690-706.

Wednesday, April 4 — Jacobs, L.R., Lawrence, E.D., Shapiro, R.Y., & Smith, S.S. (1998). Congressional leadership of public opinion, *Political Science Quarterly*, 113, 21-41.

Week 13

Monday, April 9 — Powlick, P.J. (1995). The sources of public opinion for American foreign policy officials, *International Studies Quarterly*, 39, 427-451.

Wednesday, April 11 — Glynn, C.J., Hayes, A.F., & Shanahan, J. (1997). Perceived support for one's opinions and willingness to speak out: A meta-analysis of survey studies on the spiral of silence, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 61, 452-463.

Week 14

Monday, April 16 — Pan, Z., Abisaid, J.L., Paek, H., Sun, Y., & Houden, D. (2005). Exploring the perception gap in perceived effects of media reports of opinion polls, *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 18, 340-350.

Wednesday, April 18 — Evans, J.H. (2003). Have Americans' attitudes become more polarized? An update, *Social Science Quarterly*, 84, 71-90.

Week 15

Monday, April 23 — Scheufele, D.A., Nisbet, M.C. & Ostman, R.E. (2005). September 11 news coverage, public opinion, and support for civil liberties, *Mass Communication & Society*, 8, 197-218.