JOUR 542

Public Opinion and Persuasion

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Office Hours*: TBD and by appointment.*

Spring 2023
SJMC 321
Tuesday and Thursday, 11:40am–12:55pm

> "To speak with precision of public opinion is a task not unlike coming to grips with the Holy Ghost."
>
> — V.O. Key, 1961, *Public Opinion and American Democracy*, p. 8

Course Description

This is a course introducing the concepts of public opinion and persuasion with emphasis on their relevance in the domains of civic life and strategic communication. Students will gain a foundation in the psychological study of attitudes, the role of public opinion in democracies, and how communication shapes and reflects beliefs of society. The course progresses to review major theories of persuasion and public opinion change. Ultimately, students will gather public opinion data and submit a report on their findings.

Student Learning Outcomes

Students who successfully complete this course will:

- Understand the meaning of public opinion and its role in a democracy.

- Be familiar with the predominant methods for scientific measurement of opinion.

- Know how mass media influence and reflect public opinion.

- Gain an understanding of the psychological and historical forces that help to explain the great diversity of opinions in free societies.

- Learn how to apply theories of persuasion for strategic communication purposes.

- Be savvy consumers of reporting of information that purports to be about public opinion.

Required Materials

Textbooks and readings

There are no required textbooks. All readings will be posted to Blackboard in advance of the class session for which they are due.

Technology requirements

Links to articles, assignments, quizzes, and rubrics are located on Blackboard. To participate in learning activities and complete assignments, you will need:

- Access to a working computer that has a current operating system with updates installed, plus speakers or headphones to hear lecture presentations

- Reliable Internet access and a UofSC email account

- A current Internet browser that is compatible with Blackboard (Google Chrome is the recommended browser for Blackboard)

- Microsoft Word as your word processing program

- Reliable data storage for your work, such as a USB drive or Office365 OneDrive cloud storage

If your computer does not have Microsoft Word, Office 365 ProPlus package is available to you free of charge and allows you to install Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Outlook, OneNote, Publisher, and Access on up to 5 PCs or Macs and Office apps on other mobile devices including tablets. Office 365 also includes unlimited cloud storage on OneDrive. To download Office 365 ProPlus, log into your student (University) email through a web browser, choose Settings (top right corner), and select software. If you have further questions or need help with the software, please contact the Service Desk (https://www.sc.edu/about/offices_and_divisions/university_technology_services/support/servicedesk.php).

Minimal technical skills needed

Minimal technical skills are needed in this course. Most course work will be completed and submitted in Blackboard. Therefore, you must have consistent and reliable access to a computer and the Internet. The minimal technical skills you need to have include the ability to:

- Organize and save electronic files

- Use UofSC email and attached files

- Check email and Blackboard daily

- Download and upload documents

- Locate information with a browser

- Use Blackboard.

Evaluation

This class will use the standard USC grading scheme:

A	90-100%	**B+**	85-89.99%	**B**	80-84.99%
C+	75-79.99%	**C**	70-74.99%	**D+**	65-69.99%
D	60-64.99%	**F**	0-59.99%		

Assignments

This class enrolls both undergraduate and graduate students, who will have slightly different grading criteria.

For undergraduates, the final grade in the class will tentatively consist of the following:

Assignment	% Total
Discussion Questions	15%
Methods Critique	20%
Media Analysis	10%
Topic Presentation	20%
Annotated Bibliography	10%
Quizzes	25%
Total	100%

For graduate students, the final grade in the class will tentatively consist of the following:

Assignment	% Total
Discussion Questions	15%
Methods Critique	20%
Media Analysis	10%
Topic Presentation	10%
Topic Paper	20%
Quizzes	25%
Total	100%

Discussion Questions

These will be required to be posted to Blackboard by 11:59pm on the day before each class meeting unless otherwise stated. These should be questions or comments that you would like to raise in class and that would add to a larger discussion. You are expected to contribute one question for each assigned reading, except when the reading schedule says otherwise.

Methods Critique

This is a written assignment in which students will locate and analyze a recently published report---either from a mass media source, research firm, or academic journal---that describes the results of a public opinion poll. The analysis will focus on the strengths and weaknesses of the methods used to collect the data and the conclusions the source drew from that information. Students are expected to draw upon the readings and discussion on survey methodology to make their arguments. It will not be a research paper per se, but will require references to sources from assigned readings or elsewhere to justify arguments.

Media Critique

This short paper requires students to identify a publicly available persuasive communication, such as an advertisement, and analyze it in relation to theories and concepts from class. Students should describe the communication and the extent to which it uses — or fails to use — insights from persuasion research.

Topic Presentation

This assignment requires students in teams (undergraduates) or alone (graduates) to use what they have learned to research a public opinion topic of interest and present a detailed report of findings. Drawing upon existing data from academic and other sources, they will describe the state of knowledge about the chosen topic. The guidelines for choosing a topic are deliberately broad to allow for students to be creative and pursue their own interests. Acceptable ideas include how different social groups differ in their opinions, an in-depth analysis of opinions on a particular issue, or the way a particular media source covers public opinion on an issue.

Annotated Bibliography (Undergraduates)

The Topic Presentation should be based on thorough research, but discussion of one's sources in detail is typically difficult and counterproductive in oral presentations. To supplement the oral presentation, teams will submit an annotated bibliography describing the sources used to research the topic and explain each source's usefulness to the overall project.

Topic Report (Graduates)

The Topic Report is the research paper companion to the oral presentation. It will include all references used to support the claims made in the oral report and will focus more on the quality of evidence.

Quizzes

There will be two non-cumulative quizzes covering course materials. The second quiz will be administered during the final exam period, but will not be weighted any differently than the first. These will be taken outside of class, via Blackboard. You will have a 2-3 day period in which to start taking the quiz, after which you will have 45 minutes to complete it.

Grade Disputes

Any dispute about a grade must be done within one week of the grade posting. You should compose an email, making clear that you are challenging the grade, with information about the assignment and details (using the rubric and/or guidelines) of why you feel you should receive a different score. I may request that we meet to discuss it further. There is no guarantee of a grade change in response to such a challenge, but you can rest assured that you will not be penalized even if additional errors are discovered.

Course Policies

Reasonable Accommodation Policy

Reasonable accommodations are available for students with a documented disability. If you have a disability and may need accommodations to fully participate in this class, contact the Student Disability Resource Center: 777-6142, TDD 777-6744, email sasds@mailbox.sc.edu, or stop by LeConte College Room 112A. All accommodations must be approved through the Student Disability Resource Center.

Late policy

Late work may be accepted with full credit under most circumstances *with the important exceptions of quizzes and discussion questions*. Communication with the instructor is essential for receiving credit on late work. The goal is to be flexible, but not fall behind in the course. This policy may be changed at short notice if students are struggling to keep up without the motivation of late penalties.

Faculty feedback and response time

Allow 10-14 days for grades on major assignments, although sometimes you will receive feedback sooner. In general, expect a response to emails within 24 hours on business days. If you haven't gotten a response after a couple of days, feel free to reach out again.

Written assignments

All written work must be typed and should conform to APA formatting, citing, and referencing guidelines (see http://www.apastyle.org/ and https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/). Title pages and abstracts are never required, however. You will not be graded for adhering to all the details of APA formatting, but you must communicate clearly so as to avoid plagiarism and confusion.

Unless otherwise noted, assignments must be submitted no later than 11:59 p.m. on the assigned due date.

Academic misconduct

Honor Code

Every student has a role in maintaining the academic reputation of the university. It is imperative that you refrain from engaging in plagiarism, cheating, falsifying your work and/or assisting other students in violating the Honor Code. Two important components of the Honor Code:

- Faculty members are required to report potential violations of the Honor Code to the Office of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity.

- When a student is uncertain as to whether conduct would violate the Honor Code, it is their responsibility to seek clarification from the appropriate faculty member.

Your enrollment in this class signifies your willingness to accept these responsibilities and uphold the Honor Code of the University of South Carolina. Please review the Honor Code Policies. Any deviation from this expectation can result in a referral to the Office of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity.

Copyright

Lectures and course materials (which is inclusive of my presentations, tests, exams, outlines, and lecture notes) may be protected by copyright. You are encouraged to take notes and utilize course materials for your own educational purpose. However, you are not to reproduce or distribute this content without my expressed written permission. This includes sharing course materials to online social study sites like Course Hero and other services.

Students who publicly reproduce, distribute or modify course content maybe in violation of the university's Honor Code's Complicity policy, which states: sharing academic work with another student (either in person or electronically) without the permission of the instructor. To best understand the parameters around copyright and intellectual property review http://www.sc.edu/policies/acaf133.pdf.

Collaboration

A student's grades are to represent to what extent that individual student has mastered the course content. You should assume that you are to complete course work individually (without the use of another person or un-cited outside source) unless otherwise indicated by the instructor. It is your responsibility to seek clarification if you are unclear about what constitutes proper or improper collaboration. For skills assignments, you will be given a more specific definition of what constitutes collaboration because seeking outside help is one of the skills you should develop.

Reusing course materials

The use of previous semester course materials is not allowed in this course. This applies to homework, projects, and quizzes. Because these aids are not available to all students within the course, their use by any individual student undermines the fundamental principles of fairness and disrupts your professor's ability to accurately evaluate your work. Any potential violations will be forwarded to the Office of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity for review.

Diversity and inclusion

The university is committed to a campus environment that is inclusive, safe, and respectful for all persons, and one that fully embraces the Carolinian Creed. To that end, all course activities will be conducted in an atmosphere of friendly participation and interaction among colleagues, recognizing and appreciating the unique experiences, background, and point of view each student brings. You are expected at all times to apply the highest academic standards to this course and to treat others with dignity and respect.

Changing nature of this syllabus

The assignments, policies, and readings in this syllabus are subject to change at any time. If this occurs, the changes will be announced and an updated version of the syllabus will be posted to Blackboard.

Unless otherwise specified, quizzes, discussion posts, and other assignments are due at 11:59 PM on the date they are due.

If the information on Blackboard contradicts this syllabus, assume the information on Blackboard is correct.

Schedule

This schedule provides a broad overview of the topics covered for the course and due dates for assignments. More details will be available on Blackboard, where you will access any necessary materials.

January 10 and 12: Introduction and Defining Attitudes

Perloff, R. M. (2017). Attitudes: Definition and structure. In *The dynamics of persuasion: Communication and attitudes in the twenty-first century* (6th edition, pp. 83–110). Routledge.

January 17 and 19: Defining Public Opinion

Herbst, S. (2015). The history and meaning of public opinion. In A. J. Berinsky (Ed.), *New directions in public opinion* (2nd edition, pp. 21–33). Routledge.

Kinder, D. R. (1998). Opinion and action in the realm of politics. In D. T. Gilbert, S. T. Fiske, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *Handbook of Social Psychology* (4th ed., pp. 778–867). McGraw-Hill.

January 24 and 26: Measuring Opinions I

Hillygus, D. S. (2015). The practice of survey research. In A. J. Berinsky (Ed.), *New directions in public opinion* (2nd edition, pp. 21–33). Routledge.

Perloff, R. M. (2017). Attitude measurement. In *The dynamics of persuasion: Communication and attitudes in the twenty-first century* (6th edition, pp. 189–218). Routledge.

January 31 and February 2: Measuring Opinions II

Schwarz, N. (1999). Self-reports: How the questions shape the answers. *American Psychologist*, *54*(2), 93–105. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.54.2.93

February 7 and 9: Knowledge and Competence

Bishop, G. F. (2005). Illusory opinions on public affairs. In *The illusion of public opinion: Fact and artifact in American public opinion polls* (pp. 18–45). Rowman & Littlefield.

Delli Carpini, M. X., & Keeter, S. (1993). Measuring political knowledge: Putting first things first. *American Journal of Political Science*, *37*(4), 1179. https://doi.org/10.2307/2111549

February 14 and 16: Media I

Thursday, February 16: Methods Critique due

Donohue, G. A., Tichenor, P. J., & Olien, C. N. (1975). Mass media and the knowledge gap: A hypothesis reconsidered. *Communication Research*, *2*(1), 3–23. https://doi.org/10.1177/009365027500200101

Prior, M. (2005). News vs. Entertainment: How increasing media choice widens gap in political knowledge and turnout. *American Journal of Political Science*, *49*(3), 594–609.

Tichenor, P. J., Donohue, G. A., & Olien, C. N. (1970). Mass media flow and differential growth in knowledge. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *34*(2), 159–170. https://doi.org/10.1086/267786

February 21 and 23: Media II

Bennett, W. L. (2003). The burglar alarm that just keeps ringing: A response to Zaller. *Political Communication*, *20*, 131–138.

Zaller, J. (2003). A new standard of news quality: Burglar alarms for the monitorial citizen. *Political Communication*, *20*, 109–130. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584600390211136

February 28 and March 2: Attitudes and Behavior

Friday, March 3: Quiz #1

Ajzen, I. (2020). The theory of planned behavior: Frequently asked questions. *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies*, *2*(4), 314–324. https://doi.org/10.1002/hbe2.195

Cappella, J. N. (2008). Planned Behavior, Theory of. In W. Donsbach (Ed.), *The International Encyclopedia of Communication* (p. wbiecp040). John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405186407.wbiecp040

Perloff, R. M. (2017). Attitudes: Functions and consequences. In *The dynamics of persuasion: Communication and attitudes in the twenty-first century* (6th edition, pp. 167–188). Routledge.

March 7 and 9: No class, Spring Break

March 14 and 16: Processing Messages

O'Keefe, D. J. (2016a). Elaboration likelihood model. In *Persuasion: Theory and research* (Third edition). SAGE.

O'Keefe, D. J. (2016b). Social judgment theory. In *Persuasion: Theory and research* (Third edition). SAGE.

March 21 and 23: Emotional Appeals

Brader, T. (2005). Striking a responsive chord: How political ads motivate and persuade voters by appealing to emotions. *American Journal of Political Science*, *49*(2), 388–405. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0092-5853.2005.00130.x

Witte, K. (1992). Putting the fear back into fear appeals: The extended parallel process model. *Communication Monographs*, *59*(4), 329–349. https://doi.org/10.1080/03637759209376276

March 28 and 30: Social Groups

Thursday, March 30th: Media Critique due

Czaja, E., Junn, J., & Mendelberg, T. (2015). Race, ethnicity, and the group bases of public opinion. In A. J. Berinsky (Ed.), *New directions in public opinion* (2nd edition, pp. 104–123). Routledge.

April 4 and 6: Misperceptions

Jerit, J., & Zhao, Y. (2020). Political misinformation. *Annual Review of Political Science*, *23*(1), 77–94. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-050718-032814

Munger, K., Egan, P. J., Nagler, J., Ronen, J., & Tucker, J. (2022). Political knowledge and misinformation in the era of social media: Evidence from the 2015 UK election. *British Journal of Political Science*, *52*(1), 107–127. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123420000198

Vraga, E. K., & Bode, L. (2020). Defining misinformation and understanding its bounded nature: Using expertise and evidence for describing misinformation. *Political Communication*, *37*(1), 136–144. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2020.1716500

April 11 and 13: TBD

Thursday, April 13: Graduate student presentations (if any)

April 18 and 20: Presentations and Wrap-up

Undergraduate student presentations both days

Annotated Bibliography due on presentation date

Wednesday, April 20: Topic paper due (graduate students)

Tuesday, May 2: Quiz #2