

POLS/COM 467: PUBLIC OPINION AND POLITICAL COMMUNICATION  
Spring Semester, 2002  
Dr. Graber

The course focuses on the role played by public opinion in today's America. It answers questions such as: How is public opinion formed? Why does it change? How sound are various opinions? Who thinks what, about what, and for what reason? What impact does public opinion have on American politics? As you will discover, there are a variety of interesting answers to these important questions.

The course is divided into three parts. The first five weeks deal with the nature of public opinion in general, its substance in the American context in the domestic and foreign policy areas, and public opinion polling and other measurement techniques. This is followed by a study of how a variety of factors influence the formation of public opinions and how the dynamics of this process affect the intensity and stability of opinions. The final five weeks of the course deal with the impact of public opinion on public officials and on public policies.

The books listed below are required reading for this course and should be purchased.

1. Herbert Asher, Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know. 5<sup>th</sup> ed.,  
Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2001.
2. Theodore L. Glasser and Charles T. Salmon, eds. Public Opinion and the Communication of Consent. New York: Guilford Press, 1995.
3. Doris A. Graber, Processing Politics: Learning from Television in the Internet Age.  
Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.
4. Lawrence R. Jacobs & Robert Y. Shapiro. Politicians Don't Pander: Political Manipulation and the Loss of Democratic Responsiveness. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

Additional brief assignments will be made from the following books:

1. Russell J. Dalton, Citizen Politics, 2nd ed. Chatham, NJ: Chatham House, 1996.
2. Carroll J. Glynn, Susan Herbst, Garrett J. O'Keefe, Robert Y. Shapiro, Public Opinion,  
Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999.

OTHER INFORMATION SOURCES (not required):

Public Opinion Quarterly and Journalism Quarterly are useful for checking recent research and book reviews. The Gallup Opinion Index and The Public Perspective magazine contain compilations and analyses of recent public opinion polls on political, social, and economic trends. Public opinion data also can be retrieved from surveys gathered by the Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR), the National Opinion Research Center (NORC), the Pew

Research Center for the People and the Press, and the University of Connecticut's Roper Center. All of these data and more are available on-line.

#### EXAMINATIONS AND REPORTS

Examinations will be based on lectures and assigned readings. Since lecture materials differ from readings, regular class attendance is essential to pass the course. The first open-book examination, on February 5th, will cover topics 1-5. The second open-book examination, on March 12th, will cover topics 6-10. The third examination, on April 23rd, will cover topics 11-15. Examinations will count for 60 percent of the grade. In addition, three brief reports, which will be described in class, count for 40 percent of the grade. NO LATE REPORTS WILL BE ACCEPTED. Class attendance and participation will also be considered in evaluating your performance in the course.

Graduate Students will be required to prepare a literature review (5-10 pages) for a research project dealing with the interaction of public opinion and politics in an area chosen by each student. Details of the project will be discussed in class during the third week of the course. The reviews are due by April 2nd (12th week.)

#### Tentative Time Schedule and Reading Assignments

Readings should be completed by the due date indicated. Class discussions will be based on the assumption that you are familiar with the assignment. It is therefore essential that you keep your reading up-to-date.

<u>Due Date</u>	<u>Topic and Assignment</u>
Jan. 8	1. The nature and significance of political communication systems. What is public opinion? Mass and elite publics. Responsible citizenship. <u>Read:</u> Glasser, Intro & ch. 1, 2.
Jan. 15	2. The context for public opinion polling. <u>Read:</u> Glasser, ch. 3-6.
Jan. 22	3. Opinion measurement techniques and their successes and failures. <u>Read:</u> Asher, ch. 1-5.
Jan. 29	4. Opinion measurement techniques and their successes and failures. <u>Read:</u> Asher, ch. 6-9; Glasser, ch. 18.
	<u>First Report due</u>
Feb. 5	5. The substance of public opinions about public policies
EXAM 1	<u>Read:</u> Jacobs, ch. 9-10; Download poll data.
Feb. 12	6. Cultural, psychological, political and economic factors in public opinion formation. The impact of agents of political socialization. <u>Read:</u> Glasser, ch. 8; Glyn, ch. 4.
Feb. 19	7. Social aspects of opinion formation -- creating /maintaining belief systems. <u>Read:</u> Glyn, ch. 5-6, Glasser, ch. 16.

Feb. 26 8. Information-processing research; the impact of opinion change.

Read: Graber, ch. 1-4; Glasser, ch. 9, 10.

March 5 9. Cross pressures in opinion formation. Dealing with multiple interests.

Read: Graber, ch. 5-7; Glasser, ch. 11, 13.

Second Report due

March 12 10. The impact of mass media on opinion formation.

EXAM 2

Read: Jacobs, ch. 5-7.

March 26 11. Consensus and dissensus and their effects on governmental performance. The tactics of protest movements.

Read: Glasser, ch. 12, 17; Dalton, ch.4;

Outside reading report on

"What Are the Limits to Dissent?"

April 2 12. Linkage of public opinion to governmental performance: models and studies.

Read: Glasser, ch. 7, 14-16.

Graduate Student Literature Review due.

April 9 13. How politicians build public opinion. Is it democracy or manipulation?

Read: Jacobs, ch. 1-2.

April 16 14. Linkage through legislative and executive representation

Read: Jacobs, 3, 4, 8.

Third Report due

April 23 15. Conclusions: Does the idea of popular government still make sense?

EXAM 3

Read: Free choice.

Instructor's office: 1110 BSB. Office hours: By appointment. E-mail:dgraber@uic.edu.