POLS/COM 467: PUBLIC OPINION AND POLITICAL COMMUNICATION
Fall Semester, 2008

Dr. Graber

The course focuses on the role played by public opinion in today's America. It addresses important, complex 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? Most importantly, what impact does public opinion have on American politics?

The first five weeks of the course cover the general nature of public opinion, public opinion polling, and the substance of U.S. and foreign opinions. This is followed by a more intensive study of the major social forces that influence the dynamics of public opinion formation and affect the intensity and stability of opinions. The final five weeks of the course deal with the impact of public opinions on public officials and public policies.

The books listed below are required reading for this course; you should buy them:

Additional assignments will be made from the following books:


The bibliographies in your assigned texts and many social science journals are rich data sources. Public Opinion Quarterly and the International Journal of Public Opinion Research are especially useful for discovering recent public opinion research. The Internet is a treasure trove for locating public opinion polling data. There are polls published by news organizations, by specialized groups like PIPA (Program on International Policy Attitudes) and PollingReport.com which covers U.S. opinions. Public opinion data can also 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. For listings of websites, see the Asher book, pp. 219-220.

EXAMINATIONS AND REPORTS

Open-book exams (1 hour) will be based on lectures and assigned readings. The first exam, on Sept. 25th, will cover topics 1-5. The second, on Oct. 30th, will cover topics 6-10. The third, on Dec. 4th, will cover topics 11-15. Exams count for 45% of the grade. In addition, three
brief reports, which will be described in class, count for 45% percent of the grade. The remaining 10% of your grade will reflect your participation in class discussions. All assignments must be completed on time and will NOT be accepted after the due date. Graduate Students must 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.

**Tentative Time Schedule and Reading Assignments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Topic and Assignment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 28</td>
<td>1. The political significance of political communication systems. What is public opinion? Comparing mass and elite publics. <strong>Read:</strong> Glasser, Intro &amp; ch. 1, 2.</td>
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<td>Sept. 4</td>
<td>2. The context for public opinion polling. <strong>Read:</strong> Glasser, ch. 3-6.</td>
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<td>Sept. 11</td>
<td>3. Opinion measurement techniques and their successes and failures. <strong>Read:</strong> Asher, ch. 1-5.</td>
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<td>Sept. 18</td>
<td>4. Measuring public opinion – current theories and practices. <strong>1st report Read:</strong> Asher, ch. 6-9; Glasser, ch. 18.</td>
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<td>Sept. 25</td>
<td>5. The substance of public opinions about public policies. <strong>1st exam Analysis:</strong> Using PEW and/or PIPA polling data, analyze Americans' and foreigners' opinions about one public policy issue. Be prepared to report your findings in class.</td>
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<td>Oct. 2</td>
<td>6. The impact of agents of political socialization. <strong>Read:</strong> Glasser, ch. 8; Glyn, ch. 4.</td>
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<td>Oct. 9</td>
<td>7. Creating and maintaining belief systems; the impact of opinion change. <strong>Read:</strong> Glyn, ch. 5-6, Glasser, ch. 16.</td>
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<td>Oct. 16</td>
<td>8. Information-processing research and findings. <strong>Read:</strong> Graber, ch. 1-4; Glasser, ch. 9, 10.</td>
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<td>Oct. 23</td>
<td>9. Cross pressures in opinion formation. Dealing with multiple interests. <strong>2nd report Read:</strong> Graber, ch. 5-7; Glasser, ch. 11, 13.</td>
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<td>Oct. 30</td>
<td>10. The impact of mass media on opinion formation. <strong>2nd exam Read:</strong> Bennett/Paletz, ch. 8, 9, 10; Bennett et al. ch. 4, 5</td>
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<td>Nov. 6</td>
<td>11. Consensus and dissensus and their effects on governmental performance. The tactics of protest movements. <strong>Read:</strong> Glasser, ch. 12, 17; Dalton, ch. 3, 4; Bennett et al., ch. 6</td>
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<td>Nov. 13</td>
<td>12. Linkage of public opinion to governmental performance. <strong>Read:</strong> Glasser, ch. 7, 14-16.</td>
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<td>Nov. 20</td>
<td>13. How public opinion shapes politics. Is it democracy or manipulation? <strong>Read:</strong> Stimson, ch. 1, 2, 3.</td>
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<td>Nov. 27</td>
<td>14. THANKSGIVING -- NO CLASS. 3rd report due Dec, 2nd or before. <strong>Read:</strong> Stimson, ch. 4, 5, 6.</td>
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<td>Dec. 4</td>
<td>15. Conclusions: Does the idea of popular government still make sense? <strong>3rd exam Read:</strong> Three relevant articles published in Political Science journals. Be prepared to report your findings in class.</td>
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Instructor's office: 1110 BSB. Office hours: By appointment. E-mail: dgraber@uic.edu.
AN ECLECTIC SHORT LIST OF GOOD READINGS ABOUT PUBLIC OPINION


