PSC 2220
PUBLIC OPINION

Fall 2015
T + Th, 11:10 am-12:25 pm
Hall of Government 101

Professor Danny Hayes
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Monroe 471
T + Th, 2:00-3:30 pm and by appointment
202-994-4344

COURSE OVERVIEW AND GOALS
In a democracy, the views of citizens are expected to guide government activity and the creation of public policy. That makes public opinion a central concern in the study of democratic politics. In this course, we will endeavor to answer a variety of questions related to U.S. public opinion: Where do political attitudes come from, and how much do people really know about politics anyway? Do people make political judgments on the basis of their material self-interest, or do more abstract values shape their attitudes? Do Sean Hannity, Rachel Maddow, and their media ilk influence public opinion? If so, how so? Is the American public polarized? What explains people’s views of war, climate change, and other prominent issues? And finally, what is the connection between mass opinion, on one hand, and public policy outcomes, on the other? Does the government listen to the governed?

In the end, the course has five goals:

• To help you understand how people form attitudes about political issues and events
• To help you understand why sometimes public policy reflects the public’s will, and sometimes it does not
• To help you learn how social scientists ask and answer interesting questions about political behavior
• To help you learn to collect, analyze, and interpret quantitative data about Americans’ political attitudes
• To help you become a savvy consumer of public opinion data, which the news media will continue to bombard you with for the rest of your life

READING
There is one required book for this course, available at the GW Bookstore:


The majority of the other required readings—mostly journal articles and book chapters—are available for download through our course’s Blackboard page (http://blackboard.gwu.edu). On the left-hand menu, click the “Files” link, and then click the “Course Readings” folder. Here, you’ll find PDF versions of each week’s readings. It will be your responsibility to download the items as they are assigned. It might be worthwhile to print the readings early in the semester, which will keep you from having to do this every week. Any remaining readings are available online, with the URLs in the course schedule below.
Finally, it should come as no surprise that you are expected to keep up with political news. Our discussions will frequently touch on current events, often as a way to illustrate a concept from lecture or a reading. Regularly consuming the news will not only bring course material to life, but it will undoubtedly make the class more interesting. (And as a non-trivial side benefit, being a news junkie invariably gives you interesting things to talk about at parties when you find yourself in a conversation that has lapsed into awkward silence.)

**LEARNING ASSESSMENT**

Your grade will be based on regular quizzes, a research paper, and a final exam:

- Quizzes: 50%
- Research paper: 30%
- Final exam: 20%

At the end of the semester, your grade will be assigned based on the following scale:

A (93-100), A- (90-92), B+ (87-89), B (83-86), B- (80-82), C+ (77-79), C (73-76), C- (70-72), D+ (67-69), D (63-66), D- (60-62), and F (0-59).

There is no extra credit.

**Quizzes**

We will have 12 quizzes throughout the semester, always on Thursdays. Because I will drop your 2 lowest scores—a pair of get-out-of-jail-free cards—there are no makeups. If you miss a quiz, that’s one I will drop.

Here’s how the quizzes will work: Each will consist of five questions about the assigned readings. Showing up to take the quiz earns you 25 points. Each question is worth 15 points. If you answer four questions correctly, for instance, you would receive an 85. The quizzes will not be particularly difficult, but you will do well only if you keep up with the reading assignments. Here are the quiz dates and the readings you will be responsible for:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Readings</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9/10</td>
<td>C&amp;O, Ch. 1; Key; Zaller</td>
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<tr>
<td>9/17</td>
<td>C&amp;O, pp. 27-40; Asher; Zaller; Bump</td>
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<tr>
<td>9/24</td>
<td>C&amp;O, Ch. 2; Jennings and Niemi; Erikson and Stoker</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/1</td>
<td>C&amp;O, Ch. 5, 8; Lupia</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/8</td>
<td>Gilens; Bartels; C&amp;O, pp. 173-179; Green and Gerken; Sears</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/15</td>
<td>C&amp;O, Ch. 7 and pp. 284-291; Tesler; Brader et al.; Pew</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/22</td>
<td>C&amp;O, Ch. 3 and pp. 118-125; Gilens; Nelson et al.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/29</td>
<td>Hayes; Hetherington; Iyengar et al.</td>
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<td>11/5</td>
<td>Jacobson; Berinsky; Hayes and Guardino</td>
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<tr>
<td>11/12</td>
<td>Pew; Egan and Mullin; Boykoff</td>
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<tr>
<td>11/19</td>
<td>Brooks; Hayes and Lawless</td>
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<tr>
<td>12/3</td>
<td>Pew; C&amp;O, Ch. 12; Gilens; Gilens and Page; Sides</td>
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Research Paper
You will also conduct an original research project. For the assignment, you will both collect and analyze public opinion data about an issue. The specific topic will be of your choosing, but I will provide guidelines for the paper within the first few weeks of the semester. We will also have an in-class “workshop” September 29 to give you guidance on how to collect public opinion data from a variety of online sources. The paper (10 pages) is due in class November 12.

Missing the due date will cost you 5 points for each day the paper is late. For example, if you turn in your paper three days late, you can score no higher than an 85. These deductions are not negotiable.

Final Exam
At the end of the semester, you will take a exam that will assess whether you have acquired a basic knowledge of public opinion. The final will consist of essay questions. It will be cumulative – that is, you will be asked to draw on material from the entire semester. I will hand out a study guide before the final. The exam will be worth 20% of your grade.

A makeup exam will be given only in extreme circumstances, such as illness or family emergency. In order to qualify for a makeup, you must (1) notify me before the exam and (2) provide documentation of the illness or emergency. If you fail to do either of these things, you will not be eligible to take a makeup.

Scholastic Dishonesty and Academic Integrity
Thinking about cheating? Don’t do it. All members of the university community are expected to exhibit honesty and competence in their academic work. Students have a special responsibility to acquaint themselves with, and make use of, all proper procedures for doing research, writing papers, and taking exams. Members of the community will be presumed to be familiar with the proper academic procedures and will be held responsible for applying them. Deliberate failure to act in accordance with such procedures will be considered academic dishonesty. Academic dishonesty is defined as “cheating of any kind, including misrepresenting one’s own work, taking credit for the work of others without crediting them and without appropriate authorization, and the fabrication of information.” Acts of academic dishonesty are a legal, moral, and intellectual offense against the community and will be prosecuted through the proper university channels. The University Code of Academic Integrity can be found at http://www.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/code.html.

Academic Freedom
Each student is strongly encouraged to participate in class discussions. In any classroom situation that involves discussion and critical thinking, particularly about political ideas, there are bound to be many differing viewpoints. Students may not only disagree with each other at times, but the students and instructor may also find that they have disparate views on sensitive and volatile topics. It is my hope that these differences will enhance class discussion and create an atmosphere where all of us will be encouraged to think and learn from each other. Therefore, be assured that students’ grades will not be affected by any beliefs or ideas expressed in class or in assignments. Rather, we will all respect the views of others when expressed in classroom discussions.

Support for Students with Disabilities
GW’s Disability Support Services (DSS) provides and coordinates accommodations and other services for students with a wide variety of disabilities, as well as those temporarily disabled by
injury or illness. Accommodations are available through DSS to facilitate academic access for students with disabilities. Additional information is available at www.gwu.edu/~dss.

**RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES**
If a quiz, exam or assignment is scheduled for a date when you are observing a religious holy day, I will work with you to find an acceptable alternative time to complete the assignment.

**SHOULD THERE BE AN ALIEN INVASION OR SOME SUCH**
If we experience an emergency during class time, we will try to stay at this location until we hear that we can move about safely. If we have to leave the classroom, we will meet in front of the Hall of Government on G Street to account for everyone and to make certain that everyone is safe. Please refer to Campus Advisories for the latest information on the University’s operating status: http://www.campusadvisories.gwu.edu/.

**TECHNOLOGY**
Technology is great. (How else would we get the cat videos?) But the fact is that laptops, smart phones, and other electronic devices are a distraction to your classmates and to me. Not only that, but research has shown that we learn more when we take notes by hand:

http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2014/05/to-remember-a-lecture-better-take-notes-by-hand/361478/

Thus, you may not use electronic devices in class. If you have a unique reason for needing a laptop to take notes, please talk to me.

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**COURSE SCHEDULE**
(Subject to change as we proceed through the semester.)

**September 1:** Course introduction

**September 3:** No class

**PART 1: DEFINING AND MEASURING PUBLIC OPINION**

**September 8, 10:** What is public opinion?
- Clawson & Oxley, Ch. 1

**September 15, 17:** Basics of Survey Research
- Clawson & Oxley, pp. 27-40


**PART 2: WHY WOULD YOU THINK THAT? THE SOURCES OF ATTITUDES**

**September 22, 24:** Blame Mom and Dad: Political socialization (and genes?)

- Clawson & Oxley, Ch. 2


**September 29:** Collecting public opinion data: An in-class workshop. (Bring your laptop.)

**October 1, 6:** Ideological “innocence,” heuristics, and information

- Clawson & Oxley, Ch. 5

- Clawson & Oxley, Ch. 8


**October 8:** Rationality and emotionality: Self-interest vs. “symbolic politics”

- Clawson & Oxley, pp. 173-179


**October 13, 15: Race and ethnicity**

• Clawson & Oxley, Ch. 7 and pp. 284-291


**October 20, 22, 27: 90-pound weakling or 800-pound gorilla? Media effects on political attitudes**

• Clawson & Oxley, Ch. 3 and pp. 118-125


**PART 3: THE CONTOURS OF CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC OPINION**

**October 29: How polarized is the American public?**


November 3, 5: War and foreign policy


November 10, 12: Climate change and global warming


RESEARCH PAPER DUE NOVEMBER 12

November 17, 19: Perceptions of female politicians


November 24: Guns and gun control


PART 4: IS THE GOVERNMENT LISTENING? TO WHOM?

December 1, 3, 8: The Ludacris test and the opinion-policy link

- Clawson & Oxley, Ch. 12


December 15, 10:20am: Final exam