

POS3931: Special Topics in Politics

Political and Civic Engagement: Polling the Public (82732)

(TR: 1630--1745) POS2041, or consent of the Instructor

Location: 39A/1034

Public Opinion Research Lab: 51/2222

Instructor: Paul G. Harwood

Office: 51/2404.

Office Hours: TR: 10.45-11.45 am and 3-4.30pm only.

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Course Description:

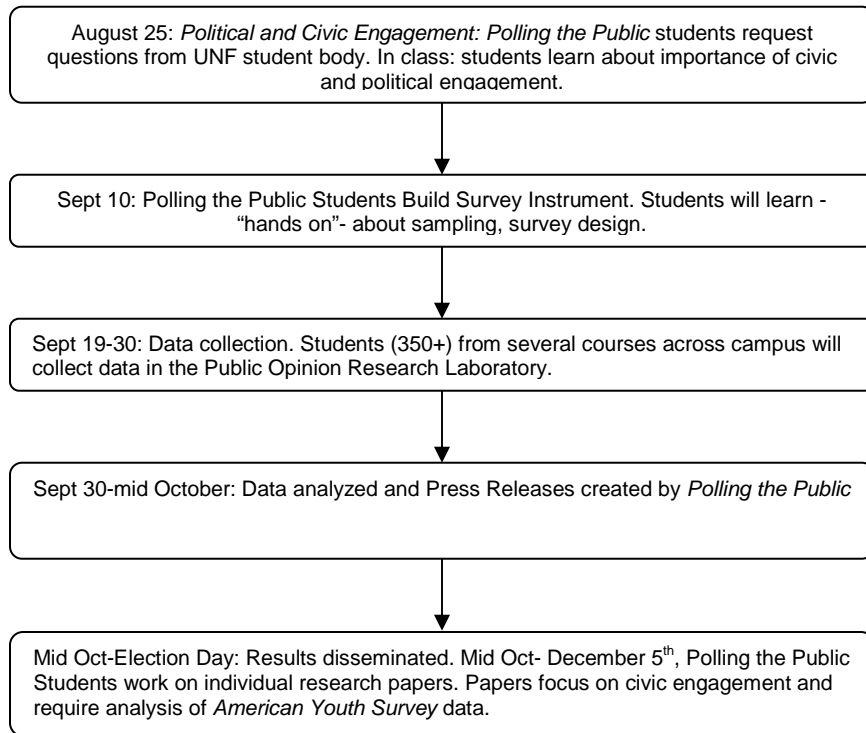
Special Topics courses explore selected major political issues of the day. This course explores the importance of political and civic engagement, especially for today's youth. This semester we will 1) explore the decline of social capital and civic engagement in America, and the impact of today's youth in its revival. Here the works of De Tocqueville, Putnam and the like will feature, providing a theoretical grounding in civic engagement; 2) build a survey instrument focusing on issues of concern to America's youth in this election, put it into the field [nationwide N=1000], and disseminate its results to the news media. One of the primary causes of low political and social capital among today's youth is their perception of alienation from the political process. In short, the issues that dominate the U.S. polity (prescription drugs, homestead exemptions etc.) are remote from the concerns of college students. This course will allow the issues which concern college students- America's youth- to be heard and illustrate the necessity to be responsible, civically engagement citizens.

Course Format/Requirements:

The format of this course is applied. It is not a traditional "book 'n lecture" course, particularly the first half of the course, but instead will require you to work with others to successfully apply a real world outcome- the fielding of a nationwide survey. Several tasks will be completed during the semester. First, you will request questions/subjects of interest from the UNF student body. You will complete this during the first two weeks of the semester. By week three, solicitation of questions and/or possible subject matters will end, and attention will turn to building the survey instrument. This will take no more than two weeks. By building a survey instrument, you will get a hands-on experience concerning survey sampling, question wording and ordering. Once the instrument is built, you will then put the instrument into the field- budgeting for the sample, randomization of the sample etc. The data will be collected at the Public Opinion Research Laboratory. The Survey will be entitled "*The American Youth Survey.*" The collection of the data (Sept 19-30th) will not only be undertaken by students enrolled in this course--- so don't panic. You will be required to collect data for one 4 hour period (5-9pm or 9pm-1am). Students from a variety of classes across campus are assisting in data collection efforts. This class though serves as the overseer in terms of conducting and executing the project. By the end of September data collection will end, and the analysis of the data will begin. By October 10th, the data will have been analyzed and press releases of its findings prepared. In the latter part of the course, therefore, you will learn how to disseminate survey results and how to respond to media enquiries. After the data have been analyzed and release, you will then turn to producing an individual research paper on civic engagement. This will be the focus of the last nine weeks of the semester. You will be encouraged to submit these to an undergraduate research conference for presentation. Throughout the course you will complete several 1-2 page reports, addressing a

specific question pertaining to the project's development. These reports will form a time diary/journal of your experiences (what they learned, when etc.) working on this project.

Project Timeline (*subject to change*):



Learning Outcomes:

Students will learn

- 1) civic and political engagement. They will learn about civic engagement in early America, reading the works of De Tocqueville, for example, into the last century and the decline of social capital, reading the scholarship of Robert Putnam, William Galston, and Robert Wuthnow, among others.
- 2) Survey research. Students will learn how a survey instrument is constructed, along with data collection methods and how to analyze data. Students will combine what they learn about civic and political engagement, with their survey research work, in the production of an individual research paper.

As mentioned above, you will during the class work in groups at times, deciding what questions to place on the survey, where to place them. You will have to work collaboratively on this project. The main goal is the skills gained in this course will proved an applied skill set to serve each of you well in an increasingly competitive job market.

Required Readings

Herbert Asher, 2007. *Polling and the Public* (7th Ed.) CQ Press. [B]

Robert Putnam, 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Simon & Schuster. [B]

Martin Wattenberg. 2008. *Is Voting for Young People?* Pearson Longman.

Cliff Zukin et al. 2006. *A New Engagement?* Oxford University Press.

All other readings are available on-line. [O]

Computer Account

For this course you must have an email account and access to blackboard.

Course Requirements/ Grade Breakdown

Attendance:

Attendance is required. In fact, **more than three absences will result in an automatic "F"** for the course.

Journal: Project Development Reports: 20%

Throughout the semester you are required to submit four 1-2 page papers (5% each) that address a specific question pertaining to the project's development. These papers allow an opportunity for you to enunciate what you've learned from the texts and applied in building/fielding the survey.

Grammar and writing style will be taken seriously in the grading of this assignment.

The paper should be 1-2 pages, double-spaced.

Submit all reports in hardcopy only.

Data Analysis: 25%

During the semester you will be required to analyze and collect data in the Public Opinion Research Lab.

You will, to fulfill the data analysis component of the course, submit a 1-2 page report about your analysis of some of the data, plus complete one four hour period of data collection. As a class you will be responsible for analyzing all of the variables collected. These 1-2 page reports will be collated and form the project's "final report."

If you've never done data analysis, don't panic. No prior knowledge of statistics is required. Tutorials on SPSS will be given in this course.

Submit in hardcopy and electronic version to porl@unf.edu

Take Home Essays: 25%

There will be two take home essays. The questions will be given out one week prior to the due dates. The paper must be typed using 12pt. font, Times- New Roman, double-spaced, with one-inch margins. The paper should be no more than five pages in length, excluding the references. Grammar and writing style will be taken seriously in the grading of this assignment. The paper should be free of misspellings and grammatical errors. Correct citation of materials is also required. **Plagiarism is unacceptable and anyone caught engaging in the practice will receive an automatic F for the assignment and may also expect to fail the course.**

Due: (1) 10/30 and (2) 11/25

Research Paper: 30%

Paper: 25%

Project presentation: 5%

You are required to write a paper related to the topics discussed in the course. You have latitude here, so please use it to research some aspect of political and civic engagement that is of particular interest to you.

The paper must be typed using 12pt. font, Times- New Roman, double-spaced, with one-inch margins. The paper should be no longer than ten pages in length, excluding the cover page and references. Grammar and writing style will be taken seriously in the grading of this assignment. The paper should be free of misspellings and grammatical errors. Correct citation of materials is also required. The goal is to produce a paper of high quality (substantively and formally) that might be submitted for an undergraduate research conference. **Plagiarism is unacceptable and anyone caught engaging in the practice will receive an automatic F for the assignment and may also expect to fail the course.**

The paper, worth 25% of your final grade, is due in class the first **Tuesday December 2nd 2008**. Please note, this is the first class period after Thanksgiving. **Papers not submitted in class on the 2nd, or in person prior to this date, will be marked down a letter grade every 24 hours.**

As well as the completion of a paper you will be required to present your work to the class in a short presentation (5%).

The presentations will take place beginning December 2nd 2008. Since there is an advantage of a later presentation date, to be fair, the order of presentations will be decided by picking your presentation time out of a hat!

Submit hardcopy only.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism is unacceptable and anyone caught engaging in the practice may expect to fail the course. The instructor may submit all course papers to turnitin.com, a plagiarism detection service retained by the Political Science and Public Administration Department.

Important Notices

The University of North Florida is committed to making reasonable accommodation to individuals with disabilities. If you wish to discuss academic accommodations for this course please inform the professor prior to the first assignment. Students should not expect that, if they do poorly on an assignment, to claim, at that time, a disability. This statement is to preclude that problem, and allow people with disabilities to be treated fairly and appropriately.

The instructor reserves the right to change the course syllabus at his discretion to enhance the learning process.

Course Schedule

08/26: Introduction and "Attitude v. Non-attitudes."

Course objectives, introduction to polling, and attitude v. non-attitudes.

08/28: Survey Lab Training and Introduction to Survey Design

NOTE: Location: 51/2222

Survey Lab Training- Guest Lecturer: Mark Swanhart, Asst Dir of PORL.

Read and be prepared to discuss:

Asher, ch. 1 & 2.

09/02: Survey Design II : Question Wording and Context

Read and be prepared to discuss:

Asher, ch. 3 & 4.

09/04: Survey Design II: Sampling and Data Collection Procedures

Read and be prepared to discuss:

Asher, ch. 5

09/09-09/11: Building the Instrument

Read and be prepared to discuss:

No readings.

We will build the instrument and file the IRB paperwork for the assignment this week.

09/16-09/18: Fielding the Survey

Read and be prepared to discuss:

Asher, ch. 6 & 7.

No class 18th: due to data collection requirement.

09/23-09/25: Analyzing and Interpreting Survey Results

Read and be prepared to discuss:

Asher, ch. 8.

No class 23rd: due to data collection requirement.

09/30: Polling and Democracy

Read and be prepared to discuss:

Asher, ch. 9.

10/02-10/09: Analyzing Results

Read and be prepared to discuss:

No reading

Data Analysis Assignment due: 10/09

10/14-10/16: Civic and Political Engagement - Definition of Terms

What is civic engagement? What is political engagement? What is social capital?

Read and be prepared to discuss:

Tocqueville- TBA

Putnam c. 1-3.

10/21-10/23: Trends in Civic Engagement and Social Capital

Read and be prepared to discuss:

Putnam, ch. 4-9

Mark S. Granovetter, The Strength of Weak Ties, American Journal of Sociology, 78 (1973): 1360-1380. [O- go to JSTOR]

10/28-10/30: Exploring the Decline

Read and be prepared to discuss:

Putnam, Section III (Ch. 10-15)

Eric M. Uslaner, Social Capital, Television, and the Mean World: Trust, Optimism, and Civic Participation, in J. Mondak, Psychological Approaches to Social Capital, Political Psychology, 19 (1998) [O]

Take Home Essay 1 is due: 10/30

11/04-11/06: Role of Youth in Civic Engagement: New Hope?

Read and be prepared to discuss:

Putnam, Ch. 16-22.
Zukin, ch1 &2

11/11- 11/13: Engaging Youth Civically and Politically

Read and be prepared to discuss:

Zukin, ch. 3&4
Wattenberg: ALL

11/18-11/20: Engaging Youth

Read and be prepared to discuss:

Zukin, 5&7

11/25: What Is to Be Done About Decline in Social Capital?

Read and be prepared to discuss:

Putnam, ch. 23-24

Zukin, ch. 7.

Take-Home Essay 2 is due 11/25

11/27: Thanksgiving

University Closed

12/02- Exam Period

Presentation of Research
