This course will survey research on American political behavior. When you complete this course successfully, you will be familiar with findings from both classic and recent studies of political behavior. This field is dominated by research that leverages quantitative analysis—often using data drawn from political surveys. Thus, this course will also enhance your ability to read quantitative political research with a critical eye. You will be able to recognize shortcomings of existing research and identify ways to extend and improve on previous work.

1 Course Requirements and Expectations

READING. You are required to complete all of the assigned readings for each class meeting in time for that meeting. Most readings are available through online databases like JSTOR (you should be able to click on the title of each article to link to the PDF). Selected book chapters are available under “Resources” on Sakai. You also need to purchase three books.

Books you need to buy


DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: 20%. For class meetings 2 through 14 each student should email me a list of 3-5 suggested discussion questions for our class meeting by midnight on the Tuesday before we meet. Discussion questions should be designed to stimulate class discussion by raising clear empirical or normative questions about the readings. Strong discussion questions often will cite a specific portion (or portions) of a reading (or readings) as a starting point. For example, a discussion question might take a form like: “On page X, Author A says that her evidence supports the conclusion that Y. Does the evidence presented in Table 2 really support Y or might it be interpreted as supporting Z?” or “On page X Author A says Y, but on page X Author B says Z. Can these competing claims/conclusions be reconciled? If so, how? If not, why do they authors reach different conclusions?” You may also ask broad questions about the readings (e.g., What do the findings presented by Author A suggest about the public’s ability to fulfill its role in a democracy?), specific questions about empirical evidence (e.g., How could Author A’s measures of the public’s policy preferences be improved?), or substantive or technical questions that you want the class (or I) to answer about the readings (e.g., “What does the author mean when she says X?”; “How do you interpret the numbers in Table A? What do they mean?”).

I will aggregate and organize these discussion questions prior to our class meeting. My hope is that through the course of the semester you will develop a sense of what types of questions stimulate discussion and which do not. Thus, as the semester progresses I expect that you will write increasingly effective discussion
questions. Note that in order for these discussion questions to be useful I must receive them in time to prepare them for use in our class meeting—they will not be accepted late.

Participation: 10%. This class will run primarily as a student discussion-driven seminar. Although I will do some lecturing, this will be limited (typically less than 30 minutes) and will be designed to provide background information and a framework for our discussion. My efforts will focus on facilitating and moderating discussion and establishing incentives to ensure that students are prepared to participate. All students are expected to participate during class meetings and 10% of your grade will be based on your participation. Note that this grade will be based on both quality and quantity of participation. Also, note that high quality participation comes in many forms: effectively making connections between readings or between comments made by your fellow seminar participants, asking questions that demonstrate that you are engaged with the class discussion, asking substantive/technical questions that help you and your fellow students better understand the material, etc.

Analysis Papers: 5% each (x 6). You will write 6 brief (2-3 pages, double-spaced, 12 pt Times New Roman font) analysis papers. **These papers should NOT be summaries of the readings.** Instead they should critique a specific aspect of a reading (or readings) or compare/contrast readings from the week (with one another or with readings from previous weeks of the course). Some of the approaches you may consider taking when writing these response papers include (but are not limited to):

1. critiquing or comparing the approaches authors use to test their theories;
2. synthesizing and/or contrasting findings from different readings from the week and earlier in the course;
3. critiquing or comparing how authors conceive of and measure a concept;
4. carefully considering the implications of the findings from the readings: What do they tell us about the forces that shape people’s political attitudes and behavior? Do the findings help us understand how politicians communicate with the public? Might they change how we think about the role public opinion should play in the policy making process?;
5. identifying unanswered questions and how researchers might attempt to answer them.

These are brief papers that allow “room” for you to pursue one argument or point. They must be tightly focused (e.g., addressing one of the above questions). If you are spending one paragraph on each of 3 different points then you are doing it wrong. Papers should also be clearly written and demonstrate that you have completed the readings and reflected on them. You cannot write a response paper for the first or second class meeting, so you must write papers for 6 of the remaining 12 meetings. I strongly encourage you to plan ahead and not put yourself in a situation where you have to write response papers every week for six weeks straight.

Papers about readings for a given class meeting must be submitted via Sakai by the start of that class meeting. These papers must demonstrate your efforts to wrestle with course materials. **Papers on a given week’s readings will not be accepted after that class meeting begins.**

Final Exam: 40%. The final exam will cover all material from the semester. The exam will consist exclusively of essay questions. You will be graded on your ability to demonstrate a grasp of course material, including how it fits together, the methods used, and the findings particular articles/chapters report.

---

1Example: if you make an argument in your paper that one author’s approach could be improved in a particular way and fail to discuss the fact that another reading from that week does exactly what you are suggesting, this would suggest that you have not completed the readings for the week.
1.1 Course Grade

Components of Your Course Grade | Letter Grade Ranges
---|---
Participation: 10% | A = 93.00% or higher C+ = 77.00 - 79.99%
Discussion Questions: 20% | A- = 90.00 - 92.99% C = 73.00 - 76.99%
Analysis Papers x 6: 5%/each | B+ = 87.00 - 89.99% C- = 70.00 - 72.99%
Final Exam: 40% | B = 83.00 - 86.99% D+ = 67.00 - 69.99%
B- = 80.00 - 82.99% | D = 60.00 - 66.99%

Grades for each set of assignments will be averaged. They will then be weighted according to the percentages outlined above to calculate your letter grade for the course.

1.2 Additional Policies and Notes

Office hours: Office hours are held Wednesdays from 2:15-4:15pm and Fridays from 10:30-11:30am. If you need to schedule another meeting time, email me.

Students with disabilities: If you have a documented disability and wish to discuss academic accommodations, please contact me as soon as possible.

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. All papers will be automatically submitted to Turnitin.com. This service compares your paper with materials available through the internet, published work, and papers submitted by other students (from Loyola and elsewhere). You must properly cite any outside sources. If you are not sure about when and how to cite your sources, please refer to this useful guide: [http://www.luc.edu/english/writing.shtml#source](http://www.luc.edu/english/writing.shtml#source).

Incidents of plagiarism or cheating will result in a grade of F in the course. The behavior will be reported to the department chair and to the Dean.

Disclaimer: The schedule, policies, and assignments described in this document are subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances.

2 Class Schedule and Reading Assignments

Week 1: August 26. Course Introduction


Survey Methodology

Week 2: September 2. Surveys and Survey Response


PUBLIC OPINION AND CITIZENSHIP


WEEK 4: SEPTEMBER 16. Heuristics, Selective Attention, and Aggregation


WEEK 5: SEPTEMBER 23. Tolerance and Democratic Values

ROOTS OF PUBLIC ATTITUDES

WEEK 6: SEPTEMBER 30. Party Identification


WEEK 7: OCTOBER 7. Race


WEEK 8: OCTOBER 14. Self-interest, Personality, and Genetics


Week 9: October 21. Social Influences


Week 10: October 28. What Changes Attitudes?


Week 11: November 4. Media and Elite Communication


Political Participation

Week 12: November 11. Participation I: Who Participates?


Week 13: November 18. Participation II: Increasing Turnout


Thanksgiving Break: NO CLASS

Week 14: December 2. Voting and Elections


Final Exam: December 9.