

UMBC UGC New Course Request: POLI 321: Public Opinion

Date Submitted: 2/19/2019

Proposed Effective Date: 9/1/2019

	Name	Email	Phone	Dept
Dept Chair or UPD	Carolyn Forestiere	forestie@umbc.edu	5-2845	POLI
Other Contact	Ian Anson	iganson@umbc.edu	5-2142	POLI

COURSE INFORMATION:

Course Number(s)	POLI 321
Formal Title	Public Opinion
Transcript Title (≤30c)	Public Opinion
Recommended Course Preparation	POLI 301
Prerequisite NOTE: Unless otherwise indicated, a prerequisite is assumed to be passed with a "D" or better.	
Credits	3
Repeatable?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Max. Total Credits	3 This should be equal to the number of credits for courses that cannot be repeated for credit. For courses that may be repeated for credit, enter the maximum total number of credits a student can receive from this course. E.g., enter 6 credits for a 3 credit course that may be taken a second time for credit, but not for a third time. Please note that this does NOT refer to how many times a class may be retaken for a higher grade.
Grading Method(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reg (A-F) <input type="checkbox"/> Audit <input type="checkbox"/> Pass-Fail

PROPOSED CATALOG DESCRIPTION (no longer than 75 words):

This course investigates the subject of American public opinion. It will focus on the following questions: what is public opinion, and what does it mean when the 'people speak?' How do democratic citizens form these political judgments? Are citizens capable of fulfilling the expectations of democratic theory, such that they can exert 'appropriate' control over the political process? Can citizens' opinions be manipulated? Under what conditions do politicians respond to the will of the electorate? By investigating key theoretical and empirical developments in the scholarship of public opinion, we will return to these central questions with special attention to a set of normative concerns. Foremost of these is whether citizens are capable of behaving in accordance with traditional notions of democratic governance.

RATIONALE FOR NEW COURSE:

a) Why is there a need for this course at this time?

This course is currently being offered as a special topics course in political science (POLI 309). Dr. Ian Anson will be offering the course regularly, meaning that it should no longer be treated as a repeatable special topic. It has been offered twice already since 2015. Instead, a new course listing should be created which provides students with a description of the subject matter.

b) How often is the course likely to be taught?

The course is likely to be taught every 4 semesters.

c) How does this course fit into your department's curriculum?

This course expands the department's curriculum in line with the thrust of recent scholarly research, by giving students an opportunity to learn about citizen politics at the micro-level. Currently, the department offers no courses that principally address the political behavior,

psychology, and political sophistication of individual citizens. This course works to fill this important gap by examining the longstanding and central literature on public opinion.

d) What primary student population will the course serve?

This course is intended primarily for upper-level political science majors and nonmajors. The course subject matter connects nicely with the curricula of students majoring in other disciplines, such as public policy, global studies, sociology, psychology, and MCS.

e) Why is the course offered at the level (ie. 100, 200, 300, or 400 level) chosen?

Because this course is a reading- and writing-focused course which asks students to produce a volume of written work across the semester, it is inappropriate for the 100- or 200-level. In addition, the course engages students in basic quantitative analysis. The course is not suitable for the 400 level, because the expectations of the course (including the total volume of writing) have been adjusted to accommodate juniors, seniors, and advanced sophomores.

f) Explain the appropriateness of the recommended course preparation(s) and prerequisite(s).

POLI 301 (or equivalent) is a recommended course for POLI 321, because it provides students with experience in the logic and practice of political science research methods. The final paper requirement in this course necessitates that students have at least some familiarity with inductive scientific inquiry. Familiarity with these tools, however, is by no means a requirement for success in the course.

g) Explain the reasoning behind the P/F or regular grading method.

This course should have a regular grading method, given that it is a seminar with a variety of assignments and requirements. The syllabus outlines expectations which are commensurate with an A-F grading scale.

h) Provide a justification for the repeatability of the course.

This course should not be repeated for credit, as its core subject matter will not greatly change from semester to semester. Therefore, students who wish to repeat the course should be able to do so only for the original 3 credits, not to add another 3 credits to their course history.

ATTACH COURSE OUTLINE (mandatory):

POLI 321: Public Opinion

Time TBA | Location TBA

Professor Ian G. Anson

Office Location: PUP 305

Office Hours: W 1pm-4pm

iganson@umbc.edu

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

This course investigates the subject of American public opinion. It will focus on the following questions: what is public opinion, and what does it mean when the ‘people speak?’ How do democratic citizens form these political judgments? Are citizens capable of fulfilling the expectations of democratic theory, such that they can exert ‘appropriate’ control over the political process? Can citizens’ opinions be manipulated? Under what conditions do politicians respond to the will of the electorate? By investigating key theoretical and empirical developments in the scholarship of public opinion, we will return to these central questions with special attention to a set of normative concerns. Foremost of these is whether citizens are capable of behaving in accordance with traditional notions of democratic governance. By the end of this course, my hope is that students will have experienced significant improvement in their ability to do the following:

- Critically interpret developments in public opinion through the use of *analytical tools*
- Gain a deep *theoretical* understanding of the causes and consequences of shifts in public opinion
- Gain an appreciation of, and skills pertaining to, the *measurement* of public opinion
- Critically assess the state of American democracy through the lens of public opinion research, especially as it pertains to political *representation*
- Perform *original research* on an area of public opinion that is interesting to the student
- Gain skills in research design, problem-solving, and written and oral communication
- Learn about research ethics and guidelines for human subjects research

ASSESSMENT AND COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

Note: specific grading rubrics are accessible through Blackboard.

FIVE-PAGE CRITICAL RESPONSE PAPER & MOCK POLL

Students are expected to complete several written assignments during the semester. The first is a short critical essay which examines public opinion polling in light of the assigned readings. Students are expected to argue for or against the accuracy and usefulness of polling in light of the arguments we study regarding the uses and misuses thereof. In the second section of the assignment, students will detail how they would go about crafting a poll that would tap public opinion on a topic of their choice; students will then assess the degree to which their own poll has avoided (or has failed to avoid) the possible pitfalls discussed in the readings.

CONTRIBUTION TO A CLASS ‘WIKI’

Students will be expected to make contributions to the course wiki, a page that functions like Wikipedia but can only be accessed and edited by the students in the course. Each student’s wiki should summarize and critically evaluate one of the readings for the course; a schedule will be distributed to the class so that no more than two students will create wiki pages for each reading. Students’ summaries and

critical analyses will be open to the class so that others may add to or edit the information available. The wiki project will be used by students as a collective study guide for the midterm exam and beyond.

MIDTERM

The midterm exam will be an in-class, open-note, five-question essay exam. Full points will be awarded for completeness, concision, and critical thinking.

FIVE-PAGE REFLECTION

Near the end of the course, students will be required to complete a five-page expository reflection piece which addresses one of the primary questions of concern in this course: is public opinion the product of elite influence? Full credit will be awarded based on a careful juxtaposition of ideas discussed in class and the construction of a compelling argument in favor of a definitive or qualified 'yes' or 'no' answer.

FINAL PROJECT & PROJECT PRESENTATIONS

Our final project will be discussed in greater detail in class, and relevant information will be provided on the Blackboard site. It will consist of original research on an aspect of public opinion that is of interest to the student. The project will incorporate research into the secondary literature on the subject, an analysis and interpretation of existing survey data, and the design and interpretation of an original survey. A successful project will use a strong understanding of the subjects discussed in the seminar to examine developments in the student's chosen topic. The assignment will consist of a research paper of roughly 10-12 pages in length, which critically analyzes the opinions of American citizens in relation to a topic of the student's choosing. The project will both summarize scholarly understanding of the topic and present new information related to recent developments in citizens' opinions (and an argument as to the reasons behind these developments). More information can be obtained by viewing the final project rubric on Blackboard.

CLASS PARTICIPATION AND ATTENDANCE:

Class participation is a requirement of this seminar, as the ideas we discuss are often subjective and will require active discussion in order to foster agreement (or disagreement) regarding the issue at hand. Students will be expected to come to class ready to contribute to our discussions. Full participation credit will be awarded as a product of active discussion, attendance, and the completion of in-class exercises.

My attendance policy is **excuse agnostic**. This means that you will not be excused from any missed classes for any reason besides a family emergency or religious observance (see me if this is the case). However, having an absence struck from the record is simple. To be absolved of an absence, write a **two-page reflection paper** on a reading of your choice from the week of your absence. Note that because of the one-day-per-week seminar style of this course, this policy applies to a maximum of **two class meetings**.

GRADING:

The grading breakdown is as follows:

PARTICIPATION, ATTENDANCE, & WIKI CONTRIBUTION	100 points (20%)
CRITICAL RESPONSE PAPER	75 points (15%)
MIDTERM	100 points (20%)
REFLECTION ESSAY	50 points (10%)
FINAL PROJECT	175 points (35%)
TOTAL:	500 points (100%)

LETTER GRADE SCALE:

A:	90%-100%	<i>Demonstrates mastery of the material and exceptional performance</i>
B:	80%-89.9%	<i>Demonstrates above-average effort, performance and comprehension</i>
C:	70%-79.9%	<i>Demonstrates average effort, performance and comprehension</i>
D:	65%-69.9%	<i>Clear deficiencies in effort and understanding of course material</i>
F:	< 65%	<i>Unacceptable levels of effort and comprehension</i>

COURSE & UNIVERSITY POLICIES:

Late Work

Assignments are due at the beginning of class on the day they are due. All assignments should be submitted **online** using the Blackboard site. For each day that an assignment is late, **one letter grade will be deducted.** This deduction goes into effect immediately after the start of class on the due date.

Assignments handed in more than three days late (including weekends) will be assigned a grade of F.

Make-up exams will only be given in advance. The exam must be made up within 3 days of the scheduled exam. Failure to reschedule make-up exams **in advance of the exam day** will result in a grade of F for that exam.

Academic Honesty

Cheating and plagiarism will not be tolerated. Students are expected to familiarize themselves with and observe UMBC's policies against cheating and plagiarism. For more information visit the UMBC Office of Undergraduate Education website at http://www.umbc.edu/undergrad_ed/index.php.

Students with Disabilities

UMBC is committed to providing reasonable accommodations for eligible students with disabilities, including students who have learning disabilities, health impairments, psychiatric disabilities, and/or other disabilities. If you believe you have a disability which requires accommodation, please contact me **and** visit Student Support Services (Math/Psychology Building Room 213, 410-455-2459, sss@umbc.edu) so that the necessary arrangements can be made. **Please make every effort to pursue these arrangements at the beginning of the semester.**

REQUIRED BOOKS:

Norrander, B., & Wilcox, C., (eds.). (2010). *Understanding Public Opinion, 3rd ed.* Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.

SCHEDULE AND READINGS:

Course Schedule		
Date	Topic	Reading
	Course Introduction: What is Public Opinion?	<i>None</i>
	No Class: Labor Day Holiday	<i>None</i>
	Public Opinion & Democratic Theory	Dahl; Schattschneider; Fishkin
	The Science of Opinion Measurement	Chong; Tourangeau et al.
	The Microlevel	Converse; Zaller & Feldman
	The Macrolevel	Erikson & Tedin; Wlezien
	Where do Opinions Come From?	N&W ch. 2-3, 6
	Parties and Perceptual Screens	N&W ch. 8-9; Brader <i>et al.</i>
	Midterm	<i>None</i>
	Media and Opinion Formation (and IRB process)	Prior; Scheufele & Tewksbury; Zaller
	Assessing Citizen Competence	N&W ch. 4, 10; Lupia
	Do Opinions Matter?: Elections & Representation (and final project peer review)	N&W ch. 11; Wlezien; Erikson et al.
	Do Opinions Matter?: Inequality	Enns & Wlezien; Bartels; Gilens
	New Directions in Contemporary Opinion	N&W ch. 7; Prior <i>et al.</i> , Canes-Wrone
	Project Presentations	<i>None</i>

No Final Exam

Bibliography

- Bartels, L. M. (2008). *Unequal democracy: The political economy of the new gilded age*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. (pp. 1-31).
- Brader, T. (2005). Striking a responsive chord: how political ads motivate and persuade voters by appealing to emotions. *American Journal of Political Science* 49(2): 388-405.
- Canes-Wrone, B. (2015). From mass preferences to policy. *Ann. Rev. Polit. Sci.* 18: 147-165.
- Chong, D. (1993). How people think, reason, and feel about rights and liberties. *American Journal of Political Science* 37(3), 867-899.
- Converse, P. E. (1964). The nature of belief systems in mass publics. In Apter, D., ed., *Ideology and discontent*. Free Press of Glencoe, New York. (pp. 1-64)
- Dahl, R. A. (2000). *On democracy*. New Haven: Yale University Press, Ch. 4; 8
- Enns, P. K., & Wlezien, C., (eds.). (2011). *Who gets represented?*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation. (pp. 1-34)
- Erikson, R. S., & Tedin, K. (2011). *American Public Opinion, 7th ed*. New York: Pearson Longman. (ch. 5)
- Fishkin, J. S. (2009). *When the people speak: Deliberative democracy & public consultation*. (Introduction)
- Gilens, M. (2012). *Affluence and influence: Economic inequality and political power in America*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. (Introduction)
- Lupia, A. (1994). Shortcuts versus encyclopedias: information and voting behavior in California insurance reform elections. *American Political Science Review* 88(1): 63-76.
- Norrander, B., & Wilcox, C., (eds.). (2010). *Understanding public opinion, 3rd ed*. Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.
- Prior, M. (2007). *Post-broadcast democracy: How media choice increases inequality in political involvement and polarizes elections*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Introduction)
- Prior, M., Sood, G., & Khanna, K. The impact of accuracy incentives on partisan bias in reports of economic perceptions. *Working paper*.
- Schattschneider, E. E. (1960). *The semisovereign people: A realist's view of democracy in America*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston. (Ch. 1)
- Scheufele, D. A., & Tewksbury, D. (2007). Framing, agenda setting, and priming: The evolution of three media effects models. *Journal of communication* 57(1):9-20.
- Tourangeau, R., Rips, L.J., & Rasinski, K. (2000). *The psychology of survey response*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (76-100).
- Wlezien, C. (1995). The public as thermostat: dynamics of preferences for spending. *American Journal of Political Science* 39(4): 981-1000.
- Zaller, J. (1992). *The nature and origins of mass opinion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Ch. 2).
- Zaller, J., & Feldman, S. (1992). A simple theory of the survey response: answering questions versus revealing preferences. *American Journal of Political Science* 36(3): 579-616.

POLI 321: Public Opinion

2 messages

Ian Anson <iganson@umbc.edu>

Tue, Feb 19, 2019 at 1:51 PM

To: Cynthia Hody <hody@umbc.edu>, Rose Drohan <rdrohan@umbc.edu>, Terrance Worchesky <Dr.Worchesky@umbc.edu>, Carolyn Forestiere <forestie@umbc.edu>

Hello,

I am writing to apply for a new course catalog number for my course on public opinion. It has been offered twice in recent years as a special topics course (POLI 309). Attached you will find the relevant course form. Please let me know if there is anything I can do to assist with the process.

Carolyn, I believe the UGC requires your (emailed) approval for this change to occur. Thanks in advance!

Best,

Ian

Ian G. Anson, Ph.D.
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UMBC Department of Political Science
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NewCourseForm_Anson_Poli321.doc

79K

Carolyn Forestiere <forestie@umbc.edu>

Tue, Feb 19, 2019 at 1:53 PM

To: Ian Anson <iganson@umbc.edu>

Cc: Cindy Hody <hody@umbc.edu>, Rose Drohan Drohan <rdrohan@umbc.edu>, Terrance Worchesky <Dr.Worchesky@umbc.edu>

As chair of political science, I approve this change.

Thank you,

Carolyn

[Quoted text hidden]