

POS 4233
M & W 3:30-4:45 p.m.
Primera Casa (PC) 241
Fall, 2002

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Public Opinion and Electoral Behavior

This course should be re-titled “Political Behavior and Public Opinion” to reflect the order of the course and the topics emphasized. The study of political behavior is the study of why (and how) individuals act particular ways in politics. For example, why do citizens vote? Why do they not vote? What affects the policies of various politicians and the legislation they attempt to enact? The study of public opinion, in contrast, is the study of how and why individuals adopt certain political beliefs. For example, why are Americans so negative about Vietnam and why do they have similar opinions about the economy? Is public opinion stable enough to create democratic policies? What causes public opinion to change?

This course will address these and other questions from an empirical and theoretical perspective. We will pretend to be scientists attempting to create general theories about human. Our goal will be to analyze these theories and see if they are consistent with the evidence and our personal understandings of human nature. We will start from a rational choice perspective and consider alternative conceptions of human behavior that come from a more psychological view. Both may contain logic and mathematics that will be reminiscent of economics. Students who loath economics may want to consider another section of this class, while students who find economics at least palatable should find the course interesting and useful for understanding politics in variety of contexts. Political behavior and public opinion are at the core of democracy. Understanding the reliability of these phenomena is critical for creating useful policy and understanding the effectiveness of democracy.

Grading

Your grade will consist of a homework assignment, a research paper, a mid-term exam, and a final exam. I expect students to attend all classes and assume that you are mature enough to understand what happens when you miss a class. Ask another student for notes if you miss a class and make sure that you have read the notes and reading assignment before you ask me or the T.A. for help.

Although I generally think of 90-100 as an A, 80-90 as a B, etc., your overall grade for the course will be determined by the following scale:

	A	94 or above	A-	90-93.99
B+	B	82-87.99	B-	80-81.99
C+	C	72-77.99	C-	70-71.99
D+	D	62-67.99	D-	60-61.99
F		59.99 or below		

Home Work Assignment

You will be assigned one home work assignment worth 10% of your grade. This assignment will test your ability to apply the analytic skills taught in the first half of the class and help you prepare for the midterm exam.

Term Papers

30% of your grade is reserved for a five page research paper that asks you to address one of the theoretical issues we learned in class. A short paper assignment such as this may be more difficult than a long paper assignment because it requires you to distill your thoughts into a concise argument. Although the paper topics are designed to make you think about the significance of the course, they may require a fair amount of analysis time and the use of interlibrary loan. I suggest that you start on your paper as soon as the assignment is handed out in class. You will not be able to complete a “term paper” over night.

Exams

The final part of your grade comes from a mid-term exam and a final exam. Both exams may contain multiple choice, fill in the blank, problem solving, and essay type questions worth 60% of your grade. The idea is to give you multiple types of questions to evaluate your understanding of the material, not to test your aptitude for a particular type of question.

	<u>Due Date</u>	<u>% of Grade</u>
HOME WORK ASSIGNMENT	Sept 30	10%
MIDTERM EXAM	Oct 21	30%
TERM PAPER	Nov 25	30%
FINAL EXAM	Dec 9	30%

Make-ups

Term papers and homework assignments require research and/or a fair amount of analysis time. Please plan ahead to avoid turning them in late. **Late assignments will be lowered one letter grade for every *working day* they are late.** If an assignment is late, it would be a good idea to stick it under my office door (DM 482B) as soon as possible to avoid any unnecessary late penalties. Grades are lowered for every *working day* they are late, not every class day they are late and no assignment will be accepted after the final exam!

If you miss the midterm exam for a good reason, you will be allowed to complete a make-up midterm on Monday, October 28 at 5:00-6:15 p.m., meeting in DM 482B. **THERE WILL BE NO OTHER TIME TO MAKE UP THE MID-TERM EXAM AND NO MAKE-UP EXAM FOR THE FINAL. NO EXCUSES!** It also should be noted that the make-up exam will be considerably more difficult than the regular mid-term exam and should be avoided. Please plan ahead.

Required Texts

We will read both theoretical and substantive works in this course that vary in length and difficulty. Many of the analytical assignments from Morton or from Schuessler are more difficult than substantive assignments from Page and Shapiro. The analytical assignments are likely to require two readings before they are fully comprehended. Please read the assignment before coming to class. Reading before class helps discussion run more smoothly, prevents over-lecturing, and allows you to better understand the materials. Remember, if you work hard and complete all the readings, this should be a very rewarding course. Expect two hours of reading for every hour of class time, except during exams.

Three books are required for this course. The first is available on-line, or in hard copy from the University Copy Center. You can purchase the latter two from the campus bookstore:

- 1) Morton, Rebecca. 2002. *Analyzing Elections*.

This book is not yet in print. With permission from the publisher, we can download it for free from:

<http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/politics/faculty/morton/elections.html>

Alternatively, you can purchase a hard copy from the University Copy Center. The University Copy Center is two doors down from the campus bookstore in the student union, University Park campus. Ask for the class notes under this course number.

- 2) Schuessler, Alexander. 2000. *A Logic of Expressive Choice*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- 3) Page, Benjamin and Robert Shapiro. 1992. *The Rational Public*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Schedule of Topics and Readings

I. ELECTIONS

1. A Framework for Understanding Elections

Aug 28 * Morton (the on-line book), Chapter 1 (p. 24-30).

Sept 2 NO CLASS: Labor Day!

2. Voter Choices of Candidates, Candidate Choices of Platforms

Sept 4 - * Morton (the on-line book), Chapters 2 & 3.

II. VOTER TURNOUT

1. The Rationality of Voting

Sept 16 - * Morton (the on-line book), Chapter 7.
25

2. Expressive Voting: an alternative explanation

Sept 30 - * Schuessler, Chapters 1 & 2.
Oct 2

Oct 7 - * Schuessler, Chapters 6 - 8.
14

Oct 16 CATCH-UP & MIDTERM REVIEW

Oct 21 MIDTERM EXAM

III. PUBLIC OPINION

1. Rational Public Opinion

Oct 23 - * Page and Shapiro, Chapter 1.
28

2. The Myth of Capricious Change

Oct 30 * Page and Shapiro, Chapter 2.

3. Opinions about Social Issues and Economic Welfare

Nov 4 - * Page and Shapiro, Chapters 3 & 4.
6

4. Vietnam, Detente, and the New Cold War

Nov 11 - * Page and Shapiro, Chapter 6.
13

5. The Causes of Collective Opinion Change

Nov 18 - * Page and Shapiro, Chapter 8.
20

NOV 25: TERM PAPERS DUE

6. Arrow's Impossibility Theorem and Public Opinion

Nov 25 - * Morton (the on-line book), Chapter 5 (p. 85-90).
Dec 2

Nov 27 No Class: Thanksgiving Holiday

Dec 4 CATCH-UP & REVIEW

Dec 9 FINAL EXAM (3:30 - 6:15 pm)