

**POLS 4510: Public Opinion and American Democracy**  
**Fall 2016, TuTh 3:30-4:45 pm, Journalism 504**

**Instructor:** Kristin Garrett  
**Office:** Bank of America Building 419  
**Office Hours:** TuTh 12:00-1:30 pm, or by appointment  
**Email:** kngarrett@uga.edu

**“Public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it, nothing can succeed. Consequently he who molds public sentiment goes deeper than he who enacts statutes or pronounces decisions.” ~ Abraham Lincoln**

## **Course Overview**

This course is designed to teach students about the empirical study of public opinion in the context of American politics. More specifically, the class will challenge students to think about the factors that influence public attitudes on a wide variety of political issues, and it will equip students with the basic statistical knowledge and techniques they need to analyze public opinion data. The course involves three general components: 1) lectures, where I will present substantive content; 2) group work, where we will brainstorm ideas and practice skills related to data gathering and analysis; 3) and discussions, where we will apply class content to relevant political issues and talk about normative questions regarding public opinion and democratic ideals.

## **Course Objectives**

- Expand students’ understanding of the factors that influence public opinion in the U.S. and of the important role public opinion plays in American politics
- Teach students the basic statistics needed to interpret public opinion data
- Equip students with practical skills in data gathering and data analysis that will benefit them on the job market
- Strengthen critical thinking, writing, communication, and teaming abilities by completing group research projects

## **Required Texts and Technology**

- Rosalee A. Clawson and Zoe M. Oxley. 2013. *Public Opinion: Democratic Ideals, Democratic Practice*. Third edition. Los Angeles: CQ Press.
- Any additional readings will be posted on eLearning Commons (<https://uga.view.usg.edu/>)
- Qualtrics Research Suite ([https://eits.uga.edu/stories/free\\_qualtrics\\_survey\\_tool\\_available/](https://eits.uga.edu/stories/free_qualtrics_survey_tool_available/))
- Survey Documentation and Analysis (<http://sda.berkeley.edu>)
- Top Hat (<http://ctl.uga.edu/top-hat/students>)

## **Course Requirements and Grading**

### **Participation (15%)**

I expect every student to participate in lectures, class discussions, and group activities. The participation portion of the final grade includes both attendance and active engagement with group discussions and activities. While this portion of the final grade should help everyone who works hard and actively contributes in class, it is by no means a freebie.

As one tool to facilitate participation and keep track of attendance, we will utilize the Top Hat classroom response system. This system allows students to submit answers to in-class questions using web-enabled devices and text messaging. Each class period, you will be asked various multiple choice, short answer, and discussion questions, and Top Hat will keep track of your responses and attendance. At the end of each class, you will also be asked to submit a brief statement through Top Hat about a point that you found interesting or a question that you found confusing from that class. While responses to Top Hat questions will help your grade, active engagement in group work and discussions is equally important.

Students who feel that their participation was subpar for the day are encouraged to email me their thoughts about the topic of class discussion or a news article that addresses an issue we considered in class, along with a few comments explaining why the article is pertinent to what we learned. Also, students can stop by and share their thoughts about the topic of class discussion during office hours. To get credit, you must email me or stop by my office within the same week that we discuss an issue in class. Please come talk to me early in the semester if you have any questions or concerns about the participation requirement for the class.

### **Assignments (10%)**

Short assignments will be given throughout the semester in order to practice the material we cover in class. The assignments are meant to sharpen your skills and verify that you understand key concepts. In-class assignments may be emailed directly to the instructor at the end of class, and out-of-class assignment must be submitted to eLC by **3:30 pm** on the date they are due. All out-of-class assignments will be announced and posted on eLC well in advance.

### **Exams (40%)**

There will be two exams in this course: a midterm scheduled for **October 4** (worth 20%), and a final scheduled for **December 8** (worth 20%). Neither exam will be cumulative. Additional information about each exam will be communicated to students before the exam.

### **Research Project (35%)**

The research project is a primary focus of this course and, as such, makes up a large portion of the final grade. This project will allow you to apply the information you learn in class to a political issue that you care about. For the project, you will be randomly assigned to a group of four students. Your group will work together to determine an original research question about a topic of public opinion, to develop a theoretical answer to that question, to test your theory by collecting and analyzing survey data, to compare your findings with national survey results, to present your project to the class, and to write a final research paper. The project and overall distribution of points will be divided into four sections, and a document providing more detailed instructions about each section will be posted on eLC. Please let me know if you have questions or concerns about any aspect of the project.

Research Proposal (5%): Each group must turn in a brief 1-2 page research proposal at the start of class on **September 8**. This proposal should include a brief description of your research question and an initial idea of your theory and hypotheses. You do not need to include any literature or citations, but you should address why your research topic is important. The proposal should display critical thinking, a preliminary understanding of your topic, and solid grammar and writing mechanics. Please make an appointment to talk with me during the first few weeks of class if your group is having a hard time figuring out what research topic you would like to pursue.

Survey Questions (5%): Each group must submit a copy of their Qualtrics survey questions and a list of the SDA questions they plan to utilize for comparison by the start of class on **September 29**. You must get instructor approval before administering your Qualtrics survey, and you can get a head start on data

collection by submitting your questions prior to the assigned due date. Your grade on this portion of the project will be based on how well you apply class concepts about strategic question wording and survey design, as well as the level of critical thinking and creativity you display in selecting questions to accurately operationalize concepts from your hypotheses.

**Preliminary Data Analysis (5%):** In order to ensure that students use proper statistical methods on the final paper, each group must submit its preliminary data analysis at the start of class on **November 1**. This short document should provide a brief explanation of the relevant statistical outputs you got from your analysis, as well as a comparison of the findings from the Qualtrics survey data and SDA data you used.

**Presentation (5%):** Toward the end of the semester, each group will present their research. The dates of the presentations are **November 10**, **November 15**, and **November 17**. Each presentation will be relatively short and will be followed by a brief time for Q&A. Presentation grades will be based on the accuracy of content, application of class concepts, level of critical thinking, fluency of communication, and ability to answer follow-up questions. Each member of the group will receive a separate grade for the presentation based on their own unique contribution. Students are encouraged to use the feedback and questions they get on their presentation to improve the quality of the final research paper they submit.

**Final Paper (15%):** Each group will turn in one research paper at the beginning of class on **December 1**, which is the culmination of all the work you have done throughout the semester. The paper should include an introduction, literature review, theory, data and methods, analysis and results, discussion, and conclusion section. I expect solid academic writing, accurate citations (APA or MLA are both acceptable), and proper grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Your paper grade will be based on the quality of your research question, the quality of your theory and hypotheses, the accuracy of your statistical analysis, the critical thinking you display as you discuss your results, the overall quality of your writing, and how well you apply concepts from lectures and readings.

### **Grade Scale**

A	93-100	C+	77-80
A-	90-93	C	73-77
B+	87-90	C-	70-73
B	83-87	D	60-70
B-	80-83	F	0-60

## **Course Expectations and Guidelines**

### **Attendance**

Class attendance is required and will influence your grade in this course. On exams, you will be held responsible for material covered in the lectures, discussions, and presentations. Please talk to me if you miss class for an excused reason and want to go over any material that you missed. I expect all students to be on time to class, prepared to participate, and ready to contribute to a thriving learning environment for fellow students. As such, I will take points off your participation grade if you do not attend class. Also, you will receive a zero for any in-class assignments that you miss due to an unexcused absence.

### **Civility and Respect**

All conversation during class must be civil, reasoned, and respectful of others' opinions. An important component of this course is discussing ideas with, learning from, and working together with your peers. Such engagement will facilitate learning and sharpen critical thinking abilities, so I want to create an environment where you feel comfortable, confident, and excited about sharing your thoughts and applying what you have learned to issues we discuss.

## **Statistical Analysis**

This class does not assume nor require a large amount of previous mathematical knowledge. We will focus on a limited set of statistical methods that are directly relevant to the study of public opinion. Also, we will focus on understanding the intuition behind statistical analysis and the application of statistical methods, rather than on learning the math behind each test statistic. That said, this class does require a basic desire to learn about statistics in the context of public opinion research.

## **Readings**

Reading assignments should be completed prior to class on the date they are assigned. There will be a fair amount of reading each week, but as you can see by the number of technology platforms we will use this semester, the course is more focused on hands-on learning than routine reading.

## **Collaborative Learning**

Students will collaborate on the research project in small groups. While collaborative work poses some challenges, the benefits you will gain from learning how to work together successfully as a team will serve you well in all facets of your life, from the classes you take in the future, to the career you pursue after graduation, to the personal interactions you have with friends and family.

Each group can determine how it wants to divide up the work for the project, but groups should make sure that every member contributes in some way to every section of the project and that the workload for the entire project is divided evenly. Class time will be allotted throughout the semester for groups to work together on their project, but groups should also expect to invest time collaborating outside the classroom.

When it comes to group work, two problems often occur: 1) one member of the group dominates the project, or 2) some members of the group “free ride” by relying on other group members to do their work for them. The instructor will try to prevent both of these problems. For example, in order to discourage free riding, the instructor will ask each student to assess group members’ contributions to various parts of the project. This information will be used to inform each student’s research project grade. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns about the collaborative nature of the research project. Also, please communicate with me over the course of the semester if problematic group dynamics arise.

## **Grades**

Grading standards are intended to be high, but fair. If you have any questions about your grade on an exam, you may set up an appointment with me to discuss the questions you missed. If you have any questions about your grade on the final paper, please re-read your paper, re-read my comments on your paper, email me a list of your specific concerns about your grade, and suggest an appointment time to meet and discuss your list of concerns. Please follow the same course of action if you have any questions about your grade on the final presentation.

## **Makeup Exams and Late Assignments**

Makeup exams will NOT be allowed except in the case of an excused absence, such as a documented illness, family emergency, or travel for university activities. If you know you are unable to take an exam on the scheduled date, please contact me in advance to make alternative arrangements. If you miss an exam due to an emergency situation, please contact me as soon as possible after the event to schedule a makeup exam. Documentation of the excused absence is required, and I reserve the right to alter the format and content of the makeup exam.

Late assignments will NOT be accepted unless you have an excused absence. In this case, you must follow the same policy of contacting me and showing documentation of your excused absence.

## **Extra Credit**

There are no extra credit assignments in this course. Students are expected to put forth their best effort in the class and to communicate with the instructor if they are having trouble with the material.

## **Student Disabilities**

If you anticipate needing classroom or exam accommodations due to the impact of a disability or medical condition, you must register for services with the UGA Disability Resource Center (DRC). Students with registered disabilities will be accommodated according to university policy. If you have documentation for accommodations from the DRC, please present it to me at the start of the semester and let me know if you need additional assistance. For more information, visit <https://drc.uga.edu> or call 706-542-8719.

## **Student Resources**

You can increase your chance of success in this course by taking advantage of UGA's academic services. The Division of Academic Enhancement (<http://dae.uga.edu/student-resources/>) provides a range of resources, including study tips, tutoring, and workshops, to help students develop solid learning strategies. Also, the Writing Center (<https://writingcenter.english.uga.edu>) and Miller Learning Center (<http://mlc.uga.edu/>) offer resources to assist students with their research and writing.

## **Academic Honesty**

Academic integrity is a core value of institutions of higher learning, and it is your responsibility to avoid plagiarism, cheating, and dishonesty. All course work must meet the standards established in the University of Georgia Academic Honesty Policy. You can access the policy here:

<https://ovpi.uga.edu/academic-honesty/academic-honesty-policy>.

## **Research Ethics**

In this class, we will be conducting surveys for “training and education... with no intent to contribute to generalizable knowledge.” For this reason, students will not be required to get Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval of their research projects. They should still, however, make sure to uphold the highest ethical standards when they conduct their surveys, such as informing participants about the voluntary nature of participation, maintaining participant privacy and confidentiality, and avoiding questions that could harm participants or damage their reputation. For more information, see UGA’s IRB Policies and Guidelines: <http://research.uga.edu/hso/irb-guidelines/>. For more details about best practices for conducting survey research, check out The American Association for Public Opinion Research’s code of ethics and research standards: <http://www.aapor.org/Standards-Ethics.aspx>.

## **Contact**

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or concerns you might have over the course of the semester. Email is the best way to reach me. If you are struggling to understand the course material, please come talk to me early in the semester so that we can work together to get things on track before too much time has passed and your grade has suffered.

## **Summary**

In this class we will work hard, and we will hopefully have fun in the process.

## **Technology**

### **eLearning Commons**

Additional reading assignments and other documents that are helpful for the course will be posted to the eLearning Commons (<https://uga.view.usg.edu/>), so you should check in to the course site throughout the semester. You can sign into the eLC using your UGA MyId and password.

## Qualtrics Research Suite

Students will use Qualtrics Research Suite to design and administer their own surveys. Qualtrics is a powerful online survey tool for building surveys and gathering data. UGA provides free Qualtrics accounts for students. I have already requested account access for students enrolled in the class at the start of the semester. If you join the class late and do not have a UGA Qualtrics account, please let me know so we can get you set up. You can access Qualtrics at <https://ugeorgia.qualtrics.com/ControlPanel/>. Qualtrics provides several several free training videos and support resources at <https://www.qualtrics.com/support/>.

## Survey Documentation and Analysis

We will use Survey Documentation and Analysis (SDA) to compare student survey data to national survey data. SDA is a free Web-based data analysis program developed by the University of California, Berkeley. You can access SDA here: <http://sda.berkeley.edu>.

## Top Hat

Students should register for Top Hat before the first day of class, or as soon as possible after signing up for the course. An invitation to register for Top Hat will be sent to you by email, but if you fail to receive this email, you can register by visiting our course website: <https://app.tophat.com/e/869151>. Our Course Join Code is 869151. Top Hat requires a paid subscription, and a full breakdown of all subscription options can be found here: [www.tophat.com/pricing](http://www.tophat.com/pricing).

For more information about how to register for Top Hat, as well as an overview of how to use the system, visit <https://success.tophat.com/s/article/Student-Top-Hat-Overview-and-Getting-Started-Guide>. If you need assistance with Top Hat at any time, please contact their support team directly by email at [support@tophat.com](mailto:support@tophat.com) or by calling 1-888-663-5491.

## Tentative Course Schedule\*

Date	Class Description	Assigned Reading/Due Dates
Aug. 11	Course Overview and Intro to Public Opinion	Course Syllabus
Aug. 16	Public Opinion in a Democracy	Clawson and Oxley, Ch. 1**
Aug. 18	Studying Public Opinion Empirically	Clawson and Oxley, Appendix
Aug. 23	Political Socialization	Clawson and Oxley, Ch. 2
Aug. 25	Research Design	King, Keohane, and Verba, Ch. 1
Aug. 30	Mass Media	Clawson and Oxley, Ch. 3
Sept. 1	Intro to Survey Research	TBA
Sept. 6	Attitude Stability and Attitude Change	Clawson and Oxley, Ch. 4
Sept. 8	Survey Design and Questionnaire Wording	Weisberg, Krosnick, and Bowen, Ch. 4 <b>Project Proposal Due</b>
Sept. 13	Ideology, Partisanship, and Polarization	Clawson and Oxley, Ch. 5
Sept. 15	Qualtrics Research Suite	Intro Video
Sept. 20	Pluralistic Roots of Public Opinion: Personality, Self-interest, Values, and History	Clawson and Oxley, Ch. 6
Sept. 22	Descriptive Statistics	TBA
Sept. 27	Pluralistic Roots of Public Opinion: The Central Role of Groups	Clawson and Oxley, Ch. 7
Sept. 29	Catch up and Review	<b>Survey Approval Due</b>
Oct. 4	<b>Midterm Exam</b>	NA
Oct. 6	Sampling Theory and Hypothesis Testing	TBA
Oct. 11	Pluralistic Roots Continued	Skitka, Washburn, and Carsel 2015
Oct. 13	Cross-tabs and Two-variable Statistics	Rea and Parker, Ch. 10

Oct. 18	Public Opinion and the 2016 Election	TBA
Oct. 20	Knowledge, Interest, and Attention to Politics	Clawson and Oxley, Ch. 8
Oct. 25	Interpreting and Analyzing Results	Asher, Ch. 8
Oct. 27	Support for Civil Liberties	Clawson and Oxley, Ch. 9
Nov. 1	Support for Civil Rights	Clawson and Oxley, Ch. 10 <b>Preliminary Data Analysis Due</b>
Nov. 3	Trust in Government, Support for Institutions, and Social Capital	Clawson and Oxley, Ch. 11
Nov. 8***	Impact of Public Opinion on Policy	Clawson and Oxley, Ch. 12
Nov. 10	<b>Group Presentations</b>	NA
Nov. 15	<b>Group Presentations</b>	NA
Nov. 17	<b>Group Presentations</b>	NA
Nov. 22, 24	NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING BREAK	NA
Nov. 29	Polling and Democracy	Clawson and Oxley, Ch. 13 Asher, Ch. 9
Dec. 1	Course Recap and Review	<b>Final Paper is Due</b>
Dec. 6	NO CLASS: READING DAY	NA
Dec. 8	<b>Final Exam (3:30-6:30 pm)</b>	NA

\* I reserve the right to modify this syllabus and the tentative course schedule over the course of the semester. All changes to the syllabus will be clearly communicated in class and posted on eLC.

\*\* "Clawson and Oxley" indicates readings from *Public Opinion: Democratic Ideals, Democratic Practice*. The other readings will be made available on eLC.

\*\*\* 2016 presidential election