

SYLLABUS: POLS 4510, Public Opinion and American Democracy

Instructor: Simon Williamson

Email: Sjw48916@uga.edu (this is the best way to contact me)

Office: Baldwin 413 (Although I do not plan to be in it this semester.)

Student hours: Mondays and Wednesdays, 3.30PM – 4.30PM on Zoom (Meeting ID: 956 1693 6171), or by alternative arrangement.

Reserve instructors in case I die from Covid-19: Dr John Maltese (jmaltese@uga.edu) and Dr Scott Ainsworth (sainswor@uga.edu).

Zoom

Class: meeting ID: 813 639 9796

Student Hours: meeting ID: 956 1693 6171

Due to the nature of the current moment, this syllabus may change at any time. You will be given plenty of warning if this is the case.

Meeting times:

Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 1.50PM to 2.40PM. We will meet synchronously in the classroom and Zoom on Mondays and Wednesdays, and on Zoom only on Fridays.

Meeting place:

Baldwin 301, or on Zoom, meeting ID: 813 639 9796. We will meet synchronously in the classroom and Zoom on Mondays and Wednesdays, and on Zoom only on Fridays.

Baldwin 301 has a capacity limited to 11 people. There are 45 of you. This means you will only be allowed to attend class in person once every two weeks. Please find further discussion of this below.

Course introduction

Public opinion is a vital component of American politics. In this class we will pay attention to how public opinion is measured, what causes public opinion to change, and the effects of public opinion on other players in our political system. We will delve into contrasting arguments about partisanship and ideology, and examine some of the foundational pieces of political science in these areas, and then more recent scholarship to see what is maintained over time. We will consider public opinion across gender, race and sexual identity, and consider whether commonly accepted measures are picking up the same information within different groups. We will consider some commonly accepted wisdom among the public and find evidence for or against it. We will also dip our toe into some political psychology and examine the impact of identity, as well as take a gander at some psychological phenomena that relate to politics. And throughout we will take very seriously the measurements in survey data. There is also a methods aspect to this class as we will be analyzing data – you will be Excel champions by the time the semester is over, which is a really valuable skill to have on your CV.

Warning:

This class will involve a fair amount of reading. The upside is that it will make you much cleverer. All readings should be completed by the Monday before we are scheduled to discuss them.

Office/Student Hours:

Most professors call these office hours but, inspired by Dr Andrew Heiss at GSU, I am going to call them student hours because they are **YOUR** time. I will be at my computer, on Zoom, awaiting your presence to talk over anything you might be extra interested in, you may not have understood, any further discussion about research you may want to do. I like public opinion immensely and am always keen to talk about. These student hours are YOUR time and please do not be shy to use them. My scheduled student hours are Mondays and Wednesdays from 3.30PM to 4.30PM, but you can also email me to set up another time if you have classes or commitments during those times.

Grading scale:

I will use the traditional UGA grading scale, and all grades will be rounded up to the next full percentage point. Why yes, that means both 86.1 and 86.9 will be rounded up to 87, for example.

100-94: A	86-84: B	76-74: C	66-64: D
93-90: A-	83-80: B-	73-70: C-	63-60: D-
89-87: B+	79-77: C+	69-67: D+	59-0: FF

Grade breakdown:

Midterm presentations and feedback: 20%

Final project: 40%

Five in-class assignments: 40%

There is no exam.

Please note there is no opportunity for bonus grades or any of that. I am currently writing a dissertation and have no time for extra grading.

The final project will be an analysis, done by you, of some element of American Public Opinion. The world is your oyster – be bold. Think about something that interests you, how it can be measured, develop a theory and hypothesis, and write up your project and its findings. The stuff we will cover in class will, quite literally, prepare you to write this. I will help you get data and assist in the development of your research designs. You do not need to know statistics to produce this.

The midterm presentations and feedback will be done over four class periods. You will briefly present your idea, explain why you want to research it, what your theory and hypothesis/hypotheses are, where you will get data, and why your research question is important. You will also be responsible for providing feedback to some of your classmates (to whom you will be assigned). This feedback will be handed in to me and I will distribute it.

The in-class assignments will be varied, but will usually involve interpreting data. These will be done during class time like a normal test or quiz would be. If you are unable to attend class on the day these are scheduled, please let me know *in advance*.

Course Requirements:

You won't need:

Books: there are no books required for this course. I will provide any readings to you that are not available through the UGA library. Please familiarize yourself with how to find articles through the UGA library website: libs.uga.edu.

You will need:

A word processor: Microsoft Word is also available to download through the University (https://ugamail.uga.edu/download_office_proplus/), and is available on university computers around campus.

Microsoft Excel: This can also be downloaded through the University, and is available on university computers around campus. We will use Excel every Friday throughout the semester.

Access to Zoom: this implies a reliable internet connection. If you are on campus you can use PAWS or eduroam, or any other publicly available wifi. If campus closes at some point during the semester we will re-evaluate. If you are unable to access the internet during class time please let me know. I don't quite know what we can do about it but we can do our best to figure something out.

Attendance policy

There is no in-person attendance policy. You are not expected to come to the classroom at all, even if it is the assigned day for your group of 11. No one will be penalized for not coming to class in person. This course has been designed with that in mind. If you have any suspected Covid-19 symptom PLEASE DO NOT COME TO CLASS. If you have had a test and are waiting for results PLEASE DO NOT COME TO CLASS. If you have family at risk PLEASE DO NOT COME TO CLASS. Do not take any risks with your health whatsoever. This class can be taken fully on Zoom.

As you can see from the grades breakdown, there is no grade for your attendance, however I will be keeping track of who attends class and will withdraw you from the class if I feel your attendance is too low.

Please let me know if you are unable to attend class due to a religious holiday, a family matter, military service or any other such reason.

When attending class on Zoom please make sure I can tell who you are by making sure your name is somewhere on your screen. You can have your camera on or off – that is your choice – but if you have it on please just make sure everything that should be covered is covered. You can be as creative as you like with your Zoom picture and background ,although obviously within publicly acceptable constraints. And please mute your microphone. If you have to look after children while you are in class please feel free to do so. It is likely you will hear my exceptionally loud children over Zoom while we are in class anyway.

If campus closes we will re-evaluate how this works.

Late assignments, grade appeals, incompletes, etc

I will not accept any late assignments for the final project, as it is due the exact time your final exam would end. You will also have flexibility in scheduling your midterm presentation. If you miss any in-class assignments I will require an official UGA excuse in order to create a make-up.

All grade appeals may only be requested 24 hours after I return your assignments, and must be done so in writing, including an explanation of why you think your grade should be changed. If you are still unsatisfied once we have discussed your grade appeal I will ask a colleague to grade your assignment. It is possible that your grade will go down if this happens, but this is the door you opened.

If I have added your grade up incorrectly, or something like that, you are welcome to hustle me about it willy-nilly.

Requests to take an incomplete will only be given under exceptional circumstances.

Culture of Honesty Policy

The University of Georgia has an academic honesty policy. You are responsible for knowing and complying with the policy and procedures relating to academic honesty. To understand what constitutes dishonest work, as defined by the University, please carefully review the policy here: <https://ovpi.uga.edu/academichonesty/academic-honestypolicy>. All students enrolled in University courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own can result in disciplinary action. Students caught cheating or plagiarizing will automatically receive an F in the course.

Disability Resource Center

Every student in this class has the same right to the same education as everyone else. If you require any sort of accommodation please register with the DRC (<http://drc.uga.edu/>). If anything impacts your ability to take this course in a way that works for you, please let me know. You do not have to disclose anything to me that you do not want to, but you can give me the outlines and we can figure out a solution.

Withdrawal Policy

Undergraduate students can only withdraw from four courses and receive a withdrawal passing (WP) grade while enrolled at the University. Students can drop any class without penalty during the drop/add period at the beginning of every semester. Dropped courses during the drop/add period do not qualify as withdrawals. Instructors have the ability to withdraw a student from the class due to excessive absences. Please carefully review the policy in its entirety here: <http://www.reg.uga.edu/policies/withdrawals>

Mental Health and Wellness Resources:

- If you or someone you know needs assistance, you are encouraged to contact Student Care and Outreach in the Division of Student Affairs at 706-542-7774 or visit <https://sco.uga.edu>. They will help you navigate any difficult circumstances you may be facing by connecting you with the appropriate resources or services.
- UGA has several resources for a student seeking mental health services (<https://www.uhs.uga.edu/bewelluga/bewelluga>) or crisis support (<https://www.uhs.uga.edu/info/emergencies>).
- If you need help managing stress anxiety, relationships, etc., please visit BeWellUGA (<https://www.uhs.uga.edu/bewelluga/bewelluga>) for a list of FREE workshops, classes, mentoring, and health coaching led by licensed clinicians and health educators in the University Health Center.
- Additional resources can be accessed through the UGA App.