PLSC 486U: Public Opinion in International Relations
Fall 2017
Downtown Center 122
Wednesdays 1:40-4:40pm

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Office hours: T 1-2:30pm, F 10-11:30am and by appointment

Course Description

This course is an advanced undergraduate seminar designed for students who are interested in the dynamics of public opinion in international relations. The democratic ideal assumes and even requires an informed and opinionated public, whose members are expected to express their ideas and preferences on a wide range of policy issues, including foreign policy. Issues of perpetual concern include war and armed intervention, global trade and foreign investment, immigration and foreign aid. Policy-makers, in turn, are assumed and expected to know and abide by the will of the people. How can we know that democratic governance lives up to this ideal? What the public thinks and wants—and why—and to what extent policy is shaped by public opinion are key questions this course will investigate through classic readings, contemporary research in political science, and direct experience with empirical data.

By the end of the semester, students will have acquired (1) an understanding of the role(s) of public opinion in democratic politics and international relations, (2) an overview of the drivers of public opinion on a range of foreign policy issues, (3) basic competence in reading and interpreting the results of public opinion polls, and (4) experience designing original research. In addition, the course is designed to engage and develop analytical, argumentation, and writing skills. The course assignments are also designed to train students to become clear-eyed consumers of polls and what is often (mis-)represented as the ‘majority opinion.’ A final goal of this course is to establish habits of keeping informed about current events and of engaging sources and materials critically.

Course Materials

Required reading for this class will consist of articles and book chapters, available either through the Binghamton University library or on the Blackboard/MyCourses site (marked [BL] in the schedule below). Students are strongly encouraged to follow current events and pay particular attention to the discussion of public opinion and foreign policy. Examples of useful sources include major daily newspapers (New York Times, Financial Times, Wall Street Journal) and weekly journals (e.g., The Economist), as well as other popular news outlets (Fox News, CNN, MSNBC etc.). Keeping up with current events will enrich class discussions. Most importantly, it will allow students to participate in public life as informed citizens.
Course Requirements

Successful participation in this course requires regular and active participation in class, short written assignments, weekly discussion questions (to be submitted before class in writing), and a 12-15 page research paper. For purposes of assigning a final grade, the following weighting factors will be applied:

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<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>30%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discussion questions</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Written assignments (in-class and homework)</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research paper</td>
<td>40%</td>
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Grading Scale. Your semester grade for the course will be computed on a 100-point scale as follows:

- 95-100 A
- 84-87 B
- 74-77 C
- 0-64 F
- 91-94 A-
- 81-83 B-
- 71-73 C-
- 88-90 B+
- 78-80 C+
- 65-70 D

Participation (30%). Participating in class discussions by asking questions, answering questions, and offering opinions is one of your responsibilities as a student in this course. It is a major component of the course grade. Your participation grade will be based both on your attendance and the quality of your contribution to discussion. Active and productive discussion in class requires that students complete the readings listed for each day on the syllabus before class begins. Be advised that class discussions are designed to clarify the material and its implications, not to introduce it. Attendance is no substitute for completing the readings. If you are unsure how you are doing in the course, I encourage you to come see me in office hours at any point during the semester.

Discussion questions (15%). For each week, each student will submit 2-3 discussion questions about the readings. These questions are meant to stimulate conversation and should address problems and puzzles raised in the readings for that week. Accordingly, they should not be simple factual questions (“What is this article about?” or “When did X happen?”). Questions for each week must be submitted by 10am on Wednesday (the day of the class meeting).

Written assignments (15%). For Weeks 5-12, each week 2-3 students will prepare 1-page papers proposing an explanation for public opinion/public knowledge on a policy issue discussed in that week’s readings. During the class meeting, we will then together try to test those explanations using actual public opinion data. The written assignments for each week will be due at 5pm on the Tuesday before class (to give the instructor time to gather the relevant poll data).

Research paper (40%). Each student will produce a 12-15 page paper (exclusive of endnotes and bibliography) containing original research question of his/her choice related to public opinion in international relations. The paper should propose a research project that will fall into one of three broad categories: 1) What determines public opinion on Issue X?, 2) How does media reporting/coverage influence public opinion on Issue X?, or 3) How does public opinion influence policymaking on Issue X?
Some ground rules:

• Paper topics must be cleared in advance with the instructor.
• A 2-4 page paper outline (topic and possible data) is due on Wednesday, September 27.
• The final paper is due at 5pm on Friday, December 8 AND must be submitted through Turnitin on Blackboard/MyCourses by that time.

Detailed instructions for the research paper assignment will be provided during the third class meeting (September 6).

Course Policies

Classroom electronics. The use of laptops, tablets, smartphones, and any other electronic devices is not permitted in this course. Exceptions will be made for students with documented special needs.

Attendance. Students are expected to attend every class meeting. Although I will not take roll to enforce this policy, repeated absences will have a negative impact on your final grade. Student participation and in-class writing assignments are important aspect of this course. Obviously, you cannot participate if you are not present. You are also responsible for all readings and materials covered, as well as all any announcements made in class.

Grade appeals. All grade appeals must be made in writing. If you believe that I grade I have as-signed you is incorrect, you should write a brief letter detailing your concerns and submit it to me along with the original graded assignment. I will review the materials and respond to you in writing.

Academic dishonesty and plagiarism. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. All work submit-ted in this course must be original work. Sources must be properly cited. You may use any citation style of your choice, as long as it is used consistently throughout the paper. You may not give or receive any unauthorized assistance during exams, quizzes, or assignments. Any and all instances of academic dishonesty will result in a failing grade for the course and will be reported to the Harpur College Academic Honesty Committee for possible further disciplinary measures. You can find out more about the Honesty Code in the bulletin: http://bulletin.binghamton.edu (Click on Academic Policies and Procedures - All Students).

Classroom civility. In order to create a productive learning environment in our classroom, you will be asked to observe a few simple rules of behavior:

• Be on time.
• Be prepared for class.
• Turn off your cell phone/smartphone/etc.
Students are strongly encouraged to contribute opinions and observations in ways that invite discussion. Please keep in mind that students in our classroom will have divergent perspectives, unique life experiences, and different strategies for defending their views. Please state your opinions constructively and respectfully. Just as importantly, listen carefully when your colleagues are speaking. If at any time you are offended by something that is said in class, please come speak to me.

Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD). Students requiring particular accommodations for participation in this course must contact the Binghamton University office of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD), located in the University Union, Room 119. (Phone: 607-777-2686, email: ssd@binghamton.edu). Students are strongly encouraged to register with SSD and obtain the necessary documentation by the Drop/Add date, September 5.

A Note on Stress and other challenges. Binghamton University has available a wide range of resources for students who may be experiencing undue stress and other challenges in connection with this class or the college experience (or anything else, really). Please come talk to your instructor and/or see the Announcements section of the Blackboard/My Course page for an overview of how we may try to help, as well as relevant contact information.

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SCHEDULE OF TOPICS & READINGS
I reserve the right to add/change readings. Any changes will be announced at least one week in advance through Blackboard/MyCourses.

Week 1 (August 23): Introduction
*Course syllabus
*No reading

Week 2 (August 30): Written Assignment [No class meeting]
*Assignment details are posted under “Announcements” on the Blackboard/MyCourse site for this class.

September 5 – Add/Drop deadline (11:59pm)

Week 3 (September 6): Democracy, Policy, and Public Opinion

**Week 4 (September 13): Is there (a) public opinion?**


**Week 5 (September 20): Knowing versus Caring about Foreign Policy**


**Week 6 (September 27): Mass Media, Framing, and the Shaping of Public Opinion**

*NOTE: Paper topics/ outlines are due today!*


**Week 7 (October 4): The Use of Force I**


**Week 8 (October 11): The Use of Force II**


**Week 9 (October 18): International Trade & Investment I**


**Week 10 (October 25): International Trade & Investment II**


**Week 11 (November 1): Migration**


November 3 – Course withdraw (with “W”)/Change grade option deadline

**Week 12 (November 8): International Cooperation**


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**Week 13 (November 15): Policy Implications I**


**Week 14 (November 29): Policy Implications II**


Research design papers are due at 5pm on Friday, December 8 (Must be submitted through Turnitin to count as completed.)