Course Description.

This course surveys major themes in theory and research on electoral behavior, public opinion, and political participation generally. Readings will cover topics in public opinion and elections including: the nature of belief systems within the public; how people reason about politics and the process of attitude change; the role of the media; the dynamics of public opinion; political participation; presidential and congressional vote choice and election outcomes; race and gender in political behavior; and representation. The primary goal is to immerse students in the substance and research of political behavior and to get students to think about questions and how to answer them. This means seeing what other people have done and synthesizing it, framing questions, developing methods, and considering measurement. To that end, students will be required to do extensive reading and writing. Seminar participants will be expected to write a research proposal over the course of the semester.

Grading

Your course grade will be based on

• Three short papers: 10% each
• Two written book reviews (10% each) and presentations (5% each).
• Class participation: 15%
• Final paper: 25%

Short Papers

Throughout the course, you will be responsible for three short reading response papers. These are not summaries of the week readings but should discuss the theoretical contributions and findings of the readings in some way that situates the work in a larger context. They may:

• Provide a critique of the theory or methods and discuss the implications of your critique for the authors’ conclusions.
• Propose extensions of the research in the form of additional questions and approaches for answering those new questions (data and methods) or alternative (better) designs to test the authors’ theory or empirical implications of the theory.
• Compare and contrast the readings with those in a previous week.
• Compare and contrast the approaches, theories, assumptions of the different readings for the week and the implications for their designs, findings, etc.
Strong papers will be well-crafted as well as make good points. You will be responsible for sharing your thoughts in class each week you write a response paper. You will sign up for the weeks you are writing your three papers by September 10th. Papers should be single-spaced and 2-3 pages in length. You will distribute your papers to your classmates and to me before class the week they are due.

Book Reviews and Presentations

In most weeks 1-3 optional books will be listed on the syllabus. You are to choose 2 books over the course of the semester from those listed to read, review, and present to the class. You will select the 2 books you will read by September 10 (if you want to read Zaller for the 10th, let me know as soon as possible). Each of you will read different books to ensure that a variety of books are covered. A good book review will discuss the book’s objective(s), approach, and theoretical argument, the contribution the book makes to the (debates in the) field, whether the book was successful in achieving its objectives, as well as how well it was written and how it compares with other research on the topic. You will distribute your review to your classmates and to me before the class period in which it is listed on the syllabus. Book reports must be single-spaced and should be 2-3 pages in length. Your presentation should be prepared as a PowerPoint or other professional presentation and will be given the class period in which it appears on the syllabus.

Literature Assessment OR Research Paper

You have two options for your final course paper. The first is a literature assessment paper. If you are early in your graduate career, I recommend this option. For this writing assignment you are to assess the current literature on a topic of your choosing, given my approval. This essay should be six to ten single spaced pages in length and is due near the end of the semester. The goal of the paper will be to assess and summarize the research about a particular topic, to identify the central question or questions, highlight the most important literature related to the topic, and provide commentary about the strengths and weaknesses of the current research in the area. If you are later in your graduate career, you should consider a research paper in public opinion or voting behavior. For this writing assignment you are encouraged to begin with a replication and to extend the work in some way. Paper topics should be approved by me.

Books

Academic Dishonesty

The Department of Political Science, along with the College of the Liberal Arts and the University, takes violations of academic dishonesty seriously. Observing basic honesty in one’s work, words, ideas, and actions is a principle to which all members of the community are required to subscribe.

All course work by students is to be done on an individual basis unless an instructor clearly states that an alternative is acceptable. Any reference materials used in the preparation of any assignment must be explicitly cited. Students uncertain about proper citation are responsible for checking with their instructor.

In an examination setting, unless the instructor gives explicit prior instructions to the contrary, whether the examination is in-class or take-home, violations of academic integrity shall consist but are not limited to any attempt to receive assistance from written or printed aids, or from any person or papers or electronic devices, or of any attempt to give assistance, whether the one so doing has completed his or her own work or not.
Lying to the instructor or purposely misleading any Penn State administrator shall also constitute a violation of academic integrity.

In cases of any violation of academic integrity it is the policy of the Department of Political Science to follow procedures established by the College of the Liberal Arts. More information on academic integrity and procedures followed for violation can be found at: http://laus.la.psu.edu/current-students/academics/academic-integrity/ college-policies.

Note to students with disabilities:

Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University's educational programs. If you have a disability-related need for reasonable academic adjustments in this course, contact the Office for Disability Services (ODS) at 814-863-1807 (V/TTY). For further information regarding ODS, please visit the Office for Disability Services Web site at http://equity.psu.edu/ods/. Instructors should be notified as early in the semester as possible regarding the need for reasonable accommodations.
Course Calendar: TENTATIVE Part 1: Introduction to the Study of Political Behavior

Week 1 August 27: Introduction

Week 2 September 3: Why and how should we study political behavior?

• Readings:

• Optional books for summary presentation: None

Week 3 September 10: Meaning and Measurement of Public Opinion

• Reading:

• Optional books for summary presentation:


Part 2: Public Preferences

Week 4 September 17: Reasoning About Politics

• Reading:
• Optional books for summary presentation:
Week 5 September 24 Attitudes and Attitudes Change: The Role of the Media
Readings:


• Optional books for summary presentation:


Week 6 October 1: Attitudes and Attitudes Change: The Role of Framing

Readings:

• Ledgerwood and Boydstun. 2014. “Sticky Prospects: Loss Frames are Cognitively Stickier than Gain Frames.”

• Optional books for summary presentation:
Week 7 October 8: Dynamics of Public Opinion

• Readings: Presidential Approval, Consumer Sentiment, Mood,
  • Optional books for summary presentation:

Week 8 October 15: Party Identification

• Reading:
  • Optional books for summary presentation:
Part 3: Voting and Elections

Week 9 October 22: Participation

- Readings:
  - Optional books for summary presentation:

Week 10 October 29: Vote Choice

- Readings:
  - Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde, Change and Continuity in the 2008 and 2010 Elections.
    - Chapter 5. “Social Forces and the Vote”
    - Chapter 6. “Candidates, Issues, and the Vote”
    - Chapter 7. “Presidential Performance and Candidate Choice.”
  - Optional books for summary presentation:
Week 11 November 5: Election Outcomes

• Readings:
  • Optional books for summary presentation:

Week 12 November 12: Congressional Elections

• Readings:
  • Optional books for summary presentation:
Week 13 November 19: Identity—Race and Gender

• Readings:

• Optional books for summary presentation:

Week 14 November 26: Thanksgiving Break

Week 15 December 3: (Dynamic) Representation

• Readings:

• Optional books for summary presentation:

Week 16 December 10: Presentations