

POL 220 – PUBLIC OPINION AND PROPAGANDA - Fall 2010

Kutztown University of Pennsylvania

3.0 credit hours 9:30-10:50 A.M. TH – Graduate Center 2

COURSE SYLLABUS

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Office Hours: 11:05-11:35 MWF; 2:00-2:45 MW; 11:00-noon TH
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OVERVIEW:

In public opinion one can find a profound paradox of democracy. Over time, the broad undulations of public sentiment seem to have served democracy well. Major issues of governance have been debated and resolved through the political process, and violent resolution of conflict has been limited. In short, despite numerous challenges and setbacks, as the twenty-first century unfolds, democracies across the planet can claim to be uniquely adapting and thriving in a rapidly changing world.

Yet, the individuals from which public opinion is comprised seem a curiously unlikely foundation upon which to erect democratic civilization. Public opinion surveys indicate most Americans can't name the men and women who represent them in Congress. Citizens often lack knowledge about major policy concerns, or are misinformed. Clever campaign consultants take advantage of emotional appeals that are particularly powerful given the way our brains work. How can democracy work so well when it rests so much on citizens who know so little?

Similar questions have engaged scholars since at least the time of Plato and Aristotle, the great Greek philosophers. Today, the study of public opinion explores what the public thinks, how it thinks, how public opinion affects government and how modern political communication techniques may influence voters' hearts and minds.

Perhaps the most fundamental criticism of public opinion and propaganda, however, is that social institutions help to produce images that mislead the public, creating the appearance of rational democracy while at the same time obscuring structural inequity, discouraging critical evaluation of policy and thwarting true citizen involvement in democratic politics. Such criticisms are perhaps never more timely than they are during times of war such as we find ourselves in during the Fall of 2010.

This course will essentially approach these questions on two levels, the individual and the social. On the individual level, we will examine how people think about politics: where they get their information and why, and how well that information prepares citizens for democratic engagement. We will also consider the role emotion plays in the "political brain." On the social level, we will examine the extent to which powerful interests are able to shape what we see and even what we think, and the consequences that has for popular self-government.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

- * Students should be able to demonstrate knowledge of several major issues pertaining to how people perceive and process political information in objective, fixed-response examination, participation in class discussion and other activities.
- * Students should be able to examine critically the extent to which the institutions of American society inform or misinform citizens about fundamental political issues, as demonstrated by performance on objective, fixed-response examinations, essays, class discussions and other activities.
- * Students should be able to demonstrate knowledge of specific theoretical approaches to political thinking, political communication, public opinion and propaganda in objective, fixed-response examinations, class discussions, and other activities.

- * Encourage students to *apply* the theories and concepts of the academic study of public opinion and propaganda to the current political environment as demonstrated by participation in class discussions and other activities.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

One midterm examination, two take-home essays, various assignments as announced in class and a final exam.

GRADING:

Grades will be awarded in terms of the percentage of total points each student earns.

Grading Scale:

90-100 = A
 80-89 = B
 70-79 = C
 60-69 = D
 < 60 = F

ASSIGNMENTS:

NOTE: ALL ASSIGNMENTS ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE AS ANNOUNCED IN CLASS.

***** Please be sure to back-up all of your computer files. Do not turn in your only copy of any assignments. *****

Assignment	Due Date	Points
Exam I	Thursday, September 23	25
Take-Home Essay I	Tuesday, October 19	25
Take-Home Essay II	Tuesday, November 16	25
In-class assignments and Quizzes	T B A	15
Optional Assignment	Thursday, December 9	10
Final Exam	Tuesday, December 14	10
TOTAL	August 30-December 14	110

PLEASE NOTE: *If a class examination is scheduled or a class assignment due on a day when classes are cancelled, the exam will be given or the assignment will be due on the next day classes do meet.*

Examinations (Exam I 25 points; Final 10 points)

There are two scheduled examinations: September 23 and December 14 (Final). In-class exams may consist of a combination of multiple-choice, short answer and essay questions. The material will be drawn directly from the class readings, discussions, lectures, and current events pertaining to public opinion and propaganda as reported in the *New York Times*. Exam items will be designed to allow you to demonstrate your deep and detailed mastery of class materials. Multiple-choice items will be graded by optical scan. *You must bring your own scantron forms to class. Failure to do so will result in a 10-point penalty and your exam may not be scored and returned before the end of the semester.* The instructor reserves the right to correct any erroneously scored items or improperly recorded scores with correct values; *under no circumstances will any miscored items be counted as correct if **any** erasure marks appear on the item in question.*

Take-Home Essays (25 points)

Essays (5-7 pp.) require students to apply class readings and concepts to specific political events and political communication as it unfolds during the semester. Detailed instructions to be provided by the instructor.

Optional Assignment (10 points)

Students can complete a journal/portfolio of entries pertaining to public opinion and propaganda based on events and experiences that occur during *this semester*. Journal/portfolios should consist of copies of articles from the *New York Times* relevant to concepts in the readings, lectures and other course activities; and typewritten responses of approximately one to two double-spaced pages to each article. In general, entries extending the full two pages have scored higher than shorter entries. Journals will be evaluated in terms of their ability to *integrate and extend class concepts in depth and detail*. Each portfolio must include at least seven entries. Up to two entries may relate to conversations or experiences students have had relevant to the course materials. Portfolios should be neat and well organized; unprofessional work will be marked lower. Up to 10 points toward the final grade may be earned from this assignment. Optional journal/portfolios are due in class on Thursday, December 9.

Make-up Assignments

There will be **no** make-up assignments for unexcused absences. Acceptable excuses (medical or personal emergencies and university-related business) must be provided to the instructor **before** the assignment is due and **in writing** to be considered. Students who are unable to complete an assignment for legitimate reasons that do not qualify as excused under college guidelines, and who notify the instructor **before** the assignment is due, may, at the discretion of the instructor, turn in late assignments for partial credit.

NOTE: *Make-up tests and assignments will not be returned before the end of the semester. Make-up tests and assignments may differ from those given in class in terms of both content and form.*

Penalties for Late Assignments

Electronic submissions of assigned work will **not** be accepted. Assignments turned in on the day they are due but after assignments were collected in class will face a five-percent penalty. Each additional late day will accrue an additional ten percent deduction.

NOTE: *Late assignment penalties also apply where students fail to notify the instructor of an absence before an exam or assignment is due.*

ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION:

This course will use Desire2Learn for posting course-related information. A D2L student tutorial is available online at <http://www.kutztown.edu/academics/lt/ltc/KU_D2L_Student_Orientation/index.html>. Important announcements may also be posted on the class homepage <<http://faculty.kutztown.edu/richards/220/220.html>>.

If you wish to send me an e-mail, *please include a specific detailed subject line*. This helps me recognize your message as important and distinguishes it from the torrent of spam that arrives daily. If you do not receive a prompt reply from me, please do not hesitate to follow up with a second e-mail. While I try to respond quickly to all student e-mails, any message can easily become lost in the flood of messages that make its way to my inbox, and it is possible I may have inadvertently overlooked your message.

Students are responsible for monitoring and contributing to class electronic communication.

CLASSROOM ETIQUETTE

Students are expected to observe all rules of proper classroom conduct. In order to insure an appropriate environment conducive to learning there are three rules governing behavior in the classroom that you must be aware of:

- Use of electronic devices of any kind is **not** permitted in class. Students found “surfing,” “texting,” “sexting,” or otherwise engaged in electronic communication of any kind may be penalized by having points taken away from the total number of points they have earned in the course. Students with special needs should discuss accommodations with the instructor.

- Please refrain from talking, eating, leaving your cell phone ringers on, or other disruptive activity during class. Even one or two conversations quickly create distractions for other students and the instructor.
- Please do not leave class early. If you must do so, tell the instructor before hand and arrange to sit near the door so your exit will be less noticeable.

Serious violations of these rules may result in a request that the offending individual(s) leave the classroom. Grading penalties (up to a half-letter grade for first-time offenders and a full letter-grade for recidivists) may be imposed at the discretion of the instructor.

POLICY ON ACADEMIC ETHICS AND HONESTY

If a student has plagiarized or cheated in a course, the instructor may (in consultation with the Department Chairperson and the Dean) impose sanctions upon the student up to and including dismissal from the course with a grade of "F". The student forfeits all privileges of withdrawal from the course.

Plagiarism is stealing and passing off (the ideas, words, work, themes, reports, drawings, laboratory notes, computer programs or other products of another) as one's own. In short, it is using a created production without crediting the source. The surest way to avoid plagiarism is to provide proper citation to all works quoted directly or otherwise indirectly borrowed from. Proper citations include the title, date, and author of the work. If you are not familiar with the formatting of bibliographic citations, please consult a writer's style guide or manual. An excellent online guide to citation can be found on the internet at:

http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html

Guides for citing online materials specifically can be found on the web at:

<http://webster.commnet.edu/apa/online.htm>

or

<http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/online/cite6.html>

Cheating includes (but is not limited to) an attempt by one or more students to use unauthorized information in the taking of an exam; or knowingly to assist another student in obtaining or using unauthorized materials. Further specific delineation of academically dishonest behavior can be found in *The Key: Student Handbook 2010-2011* (pp. 50-51). If you have any doubts as to whether particular behavior would amount to cheating, please ask the instructor for clarification. Ignorance of the rules is not a valid defense.

CLASS MEETINGS:

Class meetings will be comprised of introductory and concluding comments from the instructor, lectures, video presentations, questions and discussions involving the whole class, and vigorous participation by students.

This format places some limits upon formal presentation by the instructor in order to maximize student engagement with the material. One requirement for this format to prove successful is that each student must come to each class prepared. That involves reading, studying, analyzing and often re-reading and re-analyzing materials before class. Inadequate preparation will virtually assure that much of what is said in the class, both by students and by the instructor, will make little sense.

You must also try to resist the temptation to discount the comments of your fellow students. The course is designed to give students the opportunity to articulate key concepts and criticisms. Many, if not most, of the important statements made in the class will be made by students. It is essential that you give the utmost respect to your classmates.

Also, keep in mind that in no case should any of the comments in the class be taken or directed personally. A college classroom is perhaps the singular place in our society where people gather for the purpose of giving deliberate

and reasoned consideration to a wide range of views, including many of great controversy. Indeed, I encourage you to present views you may not necessarily agree with in order to explore and develop relevant themes or issues.

TEXTBOOKS:

There are three required textbooks for this course:

Edelman, Murray. *The Politics of Misinformation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Graber, Doris A. *Processing Politics: Learning from Television in the Internet Age*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2001.

Westen, Drew. *The Political Brain: The Role of Emotion in Deciding the Fate of the Nation*. Public Affairs. 2007.

Textbooks are available at the KU Bookstore in the David E. McFarland Student Union Building.

NEWSPAPER:

Students are also required to read the *New York Times* (“[image edition](#)” available for free online to KU students through Rohrbach Library) for stories pertaining to public opinion, the media, propaganda, voting and the 2010 midterm congressional elections.

READING AND ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

WEEK ONE:

August 30-September 3

INTRODUCTION

POL 220 Course Syllabus.

I

PROCESSING POLITICS: INDIVIDUAL LEARNING AND THINKING

PUBLIC OPINION: PUZZLES AND PROBLEMS

“Political Television: Puzzles and Problems.” (Ch. 1 in Graber)

“Introduction.” (Edelman)

“Introduction.” (Westen)

“Winning States of Mind” (Ch. 1 in Westen)

WEEK TWO:

September 6-10

**LABOR DAY: Monday, September 6
(UNIVERSITY CLOSED)**

Calendar Adjustment Day: Follow Monday Schedule Tuesday, September 7.

PROCESSING POLITICS: POLITICAL THINKING

“Political Learning: How Our Brains Process Complex Information”—pp. 11-30. (first half of Ch. 2 in Graber)

**WEEK THREE:
September 13-17**

AUDIOVISUALS AND POLITICAL LEARNING

“Political Learning: How Our Brains Process Complex Information”—pp. 30-42 (second half of Ch. 2 in Graber)
“Images.” (Ch. 1 in Edelman)

**WEEK FOUR:
September 20-24**

“Rational Minds, Irrational Campaigns.” (Ch. 2 in Westen)

EXAM I: THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 23

**WEEK FIVE:
September 27-October 1**

**II
THE POLITICS OF MISINFORMATION:
SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS AND POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE**

SOCIAL CHANGE

“Social Change.” (Ch. 2 in Edelman)

Focus Questions:

- Why is talk about change so common and change that improves the conditions for most people so rare?
- What are some of the intellectual obstacles to meaningful social change?
- What are some of the institutional obstacles to meaningful social change?
- How do power, privilege and social roles serve to prevent meaningful social change?
- How does politics reflect and reinforce inequality?
- Why kind of impact do the changes that do occur have on fundamental inequalities?

“The Evolution of the Passionate Brain.” (Ch. 3 in Westen)

**WEEK SIX:
October 4-8**

AUTHORITY

“Authority.” (Ch. 3 in Edelman)

Focus Questions:

- How does political socialization structure our relations with and understanding of authority?

- How does social class structure our relations with and understanding of authority?
- In what ways are authority relationships dysfunctional?

WEEK SEVEN:
October 11-15

COLUMBUS DAY: Monday, October 11
(Classes do no meet.)

PUBLIC OPINION

“Public Opinion.” (Ch. 4 in Edelman)

Focus Questions:

- In what ways is public opinion a social construction and not an observable entity?
- What are some of the ways different perspectives shape public opinion?
- What are some of the ways resentments shape public opinion?
- What are some of the ways discontent over the plight of the poor becomes tolerable?
- How does the desire of individuals for self-esteem shape public opinion and reinforce inequality?
- How to attitudes toward the state and leadership shape public opinion?
- What are some of the ways misidentification serves to shape public opinion and reinforce inequality?

“The Emotions Behind the Curtain.” (Ch. 4 in Westen).

WEEK EIGHT:
October 18-22

***** TAKE-HOME ESSAY I DUE: TUESDAY, OCTOBER 19 *****

III
MAKING DEMOCRACY WORK:
TOWARD MORE EFFECTIVE POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

CIVIC KNOWLEDGE

“To Know or Not to Know: Questions About Civic Wisdom.” (Ch. 3 in Graber)

“Special Interests in Mind.” (Ch. 5 in Westen)

“Trickle Up Politics.” (Ch. 6 in Westen)

**WEEK NINE:
October 25-29**

NARRATIVES AND FRAMING

“Writing an Emotional Constitution.” (Ch. 7 in Westen)

**WEEK TEN:
November 1-5**

“Aborting Ambivalence.” (Ch. 8 in Westen)
 “Gunning for Common Ground.” (Ch. 9 in Westen)
 “Racial Consciousness and Unconsciousness.” (Ch. 10 in Westen)
 “Death and Taxes.” (Ch. 11 in Westen)

**WEEK ELEVEN:
November 8-12**

“Hope, Inspiration and Political Intelligence.” (Ch. 12 in Westen)
 “Positively Negative.” (Ch. 13 in Westen)
 “Terror Networks.” (Ch. 14 in Westen)
 “Civil and Uncivil Unions.” (Ch. 15 in Westen)

**WEEK TWELVE:
November 15-19**

***** TAKE-HOME ESSAY II DUE: TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 16 *****

VISUALIZING POLITICS

“Freeing Audiovisual Technologies from the Gutenberg Legacy.” (Ch. 4 in Graber)
 “Visual Storytelling and the Competition for Meaning in Campaign 2000.”
 < <http://acjournal.org/holdings/vol5/iss3/articles/visual/visual.htm> >
 “Ad Watch 3.0: < <http://faculty.kutztown.edu/richards/Foundations2006/AdWatch3.0.htm> >

TV: VAST WASTELAND OR
ENLIGHTENMENT FOR THE MASSES?

“The Battles Over Audiovisual Content.” (Ch. 5 in Graber)

**WEEK THIRTEEN:
November 22-26**

USER-FRIENDLY TV

“Making News Selection, Framing and Formatting More User-Friendly.” (Ch. 6 in Graber)

THANKSGIVING RECESS

Begins: Tuesday, November 23 at close of classes

Ends: Monday, November 29 at 8:00 AM

**WEEK FOURTEEN:
November 29-December 3**

INSTITUTIONS, LANGUAGE AND SCIENCE

“Institutions.” (Ch. 5 in Edelman)

“Language.” (Ch. 6 in Edelman)

“Science” (Ch. 7 in Edelman)

“Crime as an Example.” (Ch. 8 in Edelman)

WEEK FIFTEEN:

December 6-10

THE FUTURE

“Peering Into the Crystal Ball: What Does the Future Hold?” (Ch. 7 in Graber)

“Epilogue.” (p. 129 in Edelman)

WEEK SIXTEEN:

December 13-17

FINALS WEEK

***** FINAL EXAM: 8:00 A.M. TUESDAY, DECEMBER 14 *****
