

PSCI 342: Media, Public Opinion, Polling (Section: 001)
Fall 2018
MWF 2 p.m. – 3 p.m. LA 527
Department of Social Sciences and Cultural Studies
Montana State University Billings

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Office Hours: MW 10:30 a.m. – noon, TR 2 p.m. – 3 p.m., or by appointment

Course Description

This course provides an overview in how public opinion may or may not matter in how policymakers, including elected officials and bureaucrats, make decisions. This course also has an applied learning element as you will help develop the questions to be asked for the annual Montana Poll and work as a surveyor in the universities CATI (computer-assisted telephone interviewing) lab. Also important is how the media affects public opinion and policymakers. In the era of #FakeNews, it is important for citizens to understand what that means and what are the mechanisms that shape the media's influence on public opinion.

Course Objectives

At the conclusion of this course, you will be able to:

1. Describe the role public opinion plays in the policymaking process.
2. Develop and administer public opinion surveys.
3. Identify and describe the role the media plays in the political process in shaping public opinion and the affect the behavior of policymakers.

Required Text

Asher, Herbert. 2017. *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know*. 9th Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press (ISBN: 978-1-5063-5242-8)

Iyengar, Shanto. 2016. *Media Politics: A Citizen's Guide*. 3rd Edition. New York. W.W. Norton. (ISBN: 978-0-393-93779-4).

The textbook is available online through the MSU Billings Campus store and other online retailers.

You will also need to keep up with national news. I recommend visiting the NY Times, Washington Post, and Wall Street Journal, which all provide comprehensive news coverage. Also listen to NPZR news shows and public affairs shows such as "Face the Nation", Meet the Press", and "This Week" where political leaders try to influence the public on various issues.

Student Responsibilities

Please come to class prepared. This means you need to **read** and **take notes** on the assigned readings beforehand. Attending class and participating is important, as there will be material discussed only in lectures that will be tested on exams and quizzes. We will be discussing controversial issues throughout the semester, with some of you holding passionate opinions on these issues. Please treat your fellow classmates with respect. We each come to this course with diverse backgrounds and different ideas regarding various issues and how government should work. Please respect your classmates by not talking or interrupting when I or others are speaking. Late work will be accepted, however there is a **5 percent per day** late penalty. No late work will be accepted 72 hours after the original due date.

Technology Policy

Use of electronics for web surfing and communicating with others is generally inappropriate, and distracting to both myself and other students. If you need to call or text someone in an urgent situation, quietly leave the room. I reserve the right to ask students to leave if you are using your cell phone or clearly not using a laptop/tablet for note-taking.

Grading

Exam: 40% (Two at 20% each)

Research paper: 25%

Montana Poll participation (25%)

Montana Poll preparation (10%)

Final grade scale: A = 94% and above, A- = 90%-93%, B+ = 87%-89%, B = 83%-86%, B- = 80%-82%, C+ = 77%-79%, C = 73%-76%, C- = 70%-72%, D+ = 67%-69%, D = 60%-66%, F = 59% and below (Note: I do not round up final grades if you are just below the cutoff, such as having a 93.8%. I have to define the scale at some point, and some people are always going to fall on the other side of the divide).

Exams (Two at 20% each): Two exams will be administered during the semester. These exams will not be cumulative. The format of the exams will be short answer and essay. Exams will be given in class and make-up exams are only allowed with an approved excuse.

Research paper (25%): You will write a 13- to 15- page (12-point double-spaced Times New Roman font with 1-inch margins) where you will present your own analysis of the results of the Montana Poll. You will need to base your paper on public opinion using concepts discussed in class and in other academic work (books and academic journals). You must cite your sources using APA style and include a Works Cited section that does not count toward your page total.

Montana Poll participation (25%): Nearly a third of your grade will be based on participation the developing the Montana Poll and making calls in the CATI lab when the poll is fielded. The poll is tentatively scheduled to be fielded from Oct. 8-14 during the evenings and weekend days. You will need to work at least four shifts, which include at least one weekend day, if necessary,

to receive full participation credit. If you cannot commit to this, I suggest dropping the course as make-up work will not be allowed to substitute for working in the CATI lab.

Montana Poll preparation (10%): Developing questions for the Montana Poll is a requirement. To help develop questions, there will be two sessions devoted to questions development during Week 4 and a poll training session in Week 5. Attendance is required for full credit. You will also write a three-to-four-page reaction paper on the question development process.

Grading notes: Proper spelling, punctuation, grammar, and sentence structure will be assessed as part of your exam and paper grades. Developing the ability to write clearly is an important skill for your future careers. You are expected to carefully read, edit, and proofread their written work. If you would like help with your writing skills, there are on-campus resources that are there to help you. The university offers help in various subjects through the Academic Support Center. Assistance is free and is available in the Student Union Building. Drop-in writing help is available from 9 a.m. – 2 p.m. Monday-Thursday.

Plagiarism and Academic Honesty

Use of the intellectual property of others without attributing it to them is considered a serious academic offense, and I will generally fail students from the course for academic misconduct. It can also lead to a disciplinary hearing where sanctions can suspension or expulsion from the university. The university's policy on academic misconduct can be found in Section B of the student handbook. I will provide links to how to avoid plagiarism on D2L. I am available to help. However, you are responsible for learning how to properly cite your sources and avoid plagiarism.

Student Accessibility

MSU Billings is committed to providing equal access. If you anticipate barriers related to the format or requirements of this course, please meet with me so that we can discuss ways to ensure your full participation in the course. If you determine that disability-related accommodations are necessary, please contact Disability Support Services (657-2283; located in Room 135 in the College of Education). We can then plan how best to coordinate your accommodations.

Registration Requirement

University policy requires all students to be officially registered in each class they are attending. Students who are not officially registered for a course by published deadlines should not be attending classes and will not receive credit or a grade for the course. Please confirm enrollment in MyInfo. Registration errors must be corrected prior to university deadlines.

Class Schedule

Readings will come from the Asher and Iyengar textbooks, readings freely available online, and other readings I may post on D2L. You should be prepared to discuss the assigned reading on the day listed below. I may make changes to the schedule as needed.

Week 1 (Sept. 5 & 7)

Readings:

- Asher, Chapter 1 (Introduction)
- Edsall, Thomas B. 2014. "The Coming Democratic Schism." *New York Times*, 15 July.

Week 2 (Sep. 10, 12, & 14)

Readings:

- Asher, Chapters 2-3 (Problem of Nonattitudes; Wording and Context of Questions)
- Delli Carpini, Michael X., and Scott Keeter. 1991. "Stability and Change in the U.S. Public's Knowledge of Politics." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 55 (4): 583-612.
- Schuman, Howard, and Stanley Presser. 1980. "Public Opinion and Public Ignorance: The Fine Line Between Attitudes and Nonattitudes." *American Journal of Sociology* 85 (5): 1214-1225.
- Zaller, John, and Stanley Feldman. 1992. "A Simple Theory of the Survey Response: Answering Questions versus Revealing Preferences." *American Journal of Political Science* 36 (3):579-616.

Week 3 (Sep. 17, 19, & 21)

Readings:

- Asher, Chapter 4 (Sampling Techniques)
- Greenhouse, Linda. 1999. "Jarring Democrats, Court Rules Census Must Be by Actual Count." *New York Times* 26 January.
- Holmes, Steven A. 1996. "In a First, 2000 Census Is to Use Sampling." *New York Times*, 29 February.
- Pew Research Center, "Assessing the Representativeness of Public Opinion Surveys."

Week 4 (Sep. 24, 26, & 28)

Readings:

- Asher, Chapters 7 & 9 (Polls and Elections; Polling and Democracy)
- Carsey, Thomas M. and Geoffrey C. Layman. 2006. "Changing Sides or Changing Minds? Party Identification and Policy Preferences in the American Electorate." *American Journal of Political Science* 50 (2): 464-477.
- Prior, Markus, and Arthur Lupia. 2008. "Money, Time, and Political Knowledge: Distinguishing Quick Recall and Political Learning Skills." *American Journal of Political Science* 52 (1): 169-183.

Important Dates:

- Question Development lab (Sep. 24 & 26)

Week 5 (Oct. 1, 3, & 5)

Readings:

- Asher, Chapter 5 (Interviewing & Data Collection Procedures)
- Ansolabehere, Stephen, Jonathan Rodden, and James M. Snyder Jr. 2008. "The Strength of Issues: Using Multiple Measures to Gauge Preference Stability, Ideological Constraint, and Issue Voting." *American Political Science Review* 102 (2): 215-232.
- Pew Research Center, "What Low Response Rates Mean for Telephone Surveys."

Important Dates:

- Montana Poll training and test run (Friday, Oct. 5)

Week 6 (Oct. 8, 10, & 12)**Important Dates:**

- No class (Montana Poll)

Week 7- (Oct. 15, 17, & 19)**Important Dates:**

- No class (Montana Poll analysis)
- Question Development reaction paper due (Friday, Oct. 19)

Week 8 (Oct. 22, 24, & 26)**Readings:**

- Asher, Chapters 6 & 8 (Media and the Polls; Analyzing and Interpreting Polls)

Important dates:

- Midterm exam (Friday, Oct. 26)

Week 9 (Oct. 29, 31, & Nov. 2)**Readings:**

- Iyengar, Chapters 1-2 (Press and Democratic Process)
- Watts, Mark D., David Domke, Dhanvan V. Shah, and David P. Fan. 1999. "Elite Cues and Media Bias in Presidential Campaigns: Explaining Public Perceptions of a Liberal Press." *Communication Research* 26 (2): 144-175.
- Wallace, Chris. 2017. "The Media Is Giving Up Its Place In Our Democracy." *Washington Post*, 17 November.
- Whitehead, John W. 2011. "Why Local Newspapers Are the Basis of Democracy." *Huffington Post*, 25 May.

Week 10 (Nov. 5, 7, & 9)**Readings:**

- Iyengar, Chapters 3-4 (Media Marketplace and Decline of Adversarial Journalism)
- Carr, David. 2009 "Cable Wars are Killing Objectivity." *New York Times*, 19 April.
- Maheshwari, Sapna. 2016. "How Fake News Goes Viral." *New York Times*, 20 November.
- Prior, Markus. 2005. "News vs. Entertainment: How Increasing Media Choice Widens Gaps in Political Knowledge and Turnout." *American Journal of Political Science* 49 (3); 577-592.

Week 11 (Nov. 14 and 16)**Readings:**

- Iyengar, Chapter 5-6 (New Media and Campaigning through Media)
- Miller, C.C. 2008. "How Obama's Internet Campaign Changed Politics." *New York Times*, 7 November.
- Wells, Chris, Dhanvan V. Shah, Jon C. Pevehouse, JungHwan Yang, Ayellet Pelled, Frederick Boehm, Josephine Lukito, Shreenita Ghosh and Jessica L. Schmidt.

2016. "How Trump Drove Coverage to the Nomination: Hybrid Media Campaigning." *Political Communication* 33 (4), 669-676

Important dates:

- No class on Monday, Nov. 12 (Veterans Day observed)

Week 12 (Nov. 19)

Readings:

- Iyengar, Chapter 7 (Going Public)
- Auletta, Ken. 2004. "Fortress Bush: How the White House Keeps the Press Under Control." *New Yorker*, 19 January.
- Barrett, Andrew W. 2004. "Gone Public: The Impact of Going Public on Presidential Legislative Success." *American Politics Research* 32 (3): 338-370.

Important dates:

- No class on Wednesday, Nov. 21 or Friday, Nov. 23 (Thanksgiving break)

Week 13 (Nov. 26, 28, & 29)

Readings:

- Iyengar, Chapters 8-9 (Public Opinion and Campaigns)
- Lenz, Gabriel S. and Chappel Lawson. 2011. "Looking the Part: Television Leads Less Informed Citizens to Vote Based on Candidates' Appearance." *American Journal of Political Science*, 55 (3): 574-589.
- Scheufele, Dietram and David Tewksbury. 2006. "Framing, Agenda Setting, and Priming: The Evolution of Three Media Effects Models." *Journal of Communication* 57 (1): 9-20.
- Stockemer, Daniel and Rodrigo Praino. 2015. "Blinded by Beauty? Physical Attractiveness and Candidate Selection in the U.S. House of Representatives." *Social Science Quarterly* 96 (2): 430-443.

Important dates:

- No class on Wednesday, Nov. 21 or Friday, Nov. 23 (Thanksgiving break)

Week 14 (Dec. 3, 5, & 7)

Readings:

- Iyengar, Chapter 11
- Nyhan, Brendan and Jason Reifler. 2014. "The Effects of Fact-Checking on Elites: A Field Experiment on U.S. State Legislators." *American Journal of Political Science* 59 (3): 628-640.

Important dates:

- Research paper due (Friday, Dec. 7)

Finals Week

Important dates:

- Final exam (10:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m., Wednesday, Dec. 12)