

Public Opinion, Media, and Technology

Political Science (POLS) 3313 – 001

CRN: 16991

The University of Texas at El Paso

Fall 2018

TR: 10:30am - 11:50am

EDUC 301

Instructor: Dr. Gregory S. Schober

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Office Hours: Monday: 3-5pm

Tuesday: 3-5pm

Wednesday: 3-5pm

(and by appointment)

Class Website: Blackboard through your MY UTEP PORTAL

Course Description

This course focuses on the politics of public opinion, and the role of media and technology in the formation of public opinion. The course is designed for political science majors and minors, but all students who meet the prerequisites for this course are welcome. We will concentrate our study on public opinion in the United States, but we will also consider public opinion in other contexts as well. In addition, the course focuses on the contemporary period, due to data constraints that will become obvious to you later in the course. Public opinion will be analyzed at both the micro and macro levels.

Each class session will contain a lecture component and/or a discussion component. During the lecture component, the assigned readings will be considered and/or new material will be introduced. Students are required to read the assigned readings before arriving to each class session, so that they can follow the lectures and/or participate in class discussion.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the semester, students should be able to:

- Understand the role of public opinion in a democratic society
- Explain the role of the media in the formation of public opinion in the United States
- Explain the relationship between public opinion and recent technological changes in the United States
- Critically examine and understand reports of public opinion in the media
- Apply insights from the course to understand public opinion data

Also, by the end of the semester, students should make improvements in the following skill areas related to the UTEP Edge initiative:

- Leadership
- Communication
- Critical thinking

Required Readings (available at the UTEP Bookstore or elsewhere):

- American Public Opinion
 - Authors: Robert S. Erikson and Kent L. Tedin
 - Edition: Ninth Edition

Course Requirements

- **Midterm Exam:** The midterm exam will likely consist of multiple choice questions and short answer questions, and it will cover material from the course readings, lectures, and/or discussion up to the date of the midterm exam. Through this requirement (and in line with the UTEP Edge initiative), students will have opportunities to exercise the following skills: communication and critical thinking (35% of grade).
- **Final Exam:** The final exam will likely consist of multiple choice questions and short answer questions, and it will cover material from the course readings, lectures, and/or discussion after the midterm exam. Through this requirement (and in line with the UTEP Edge initiative), students will have opportunities to exercise the following skills: communication and critical thinking (30% of grade).
- **Essay:** Students will be required to carefully read a newspaper article that reports on public opinion data (or a recent poll) in the United States, and they will write a short essay. **Late papers will be penalized one full letter grade for each class day they are late.** Through this requirement (and in line with the UTEP Edge initiative), students will have opportunities to exercise the following skills: communication and critical thinking (15% of grade).
- **Class Attendance and Participation:** Students will be able to earn participation points each class session by attending and participating in class discussions. Through this requirement (and in line with the UTEP Edge initiative), students will have opportunities to exercise the following skills: leadership, communication, and critical thinking (20% of grade).

University Policies

This instructor abides by university policies, such as excused absences and attendance, as stated in the UTEP undergraduate catalog: <http://catalog.utep.edu/undergrad/academic-regulations/curriculum-and-classroom-policies/>. It is the student's responsibility to understand their rights and university policies. In addition to university policies, I add the following policies below.

Attendance Policy

UTEP expects that students will not miss classes without valid excuses. Students will be asked to sign an attendance sheet for each class meeting. It is expected that you do not miss classes, which will result in a penalty to your grade. More specifically, after two unexcused absences, I will begin to deduct points from your attendance and participation grade for each subsequent unexcused absence. Note that the class participation portion of each student's grade is left solely to the discretion of the instructor.

Here are specific situations of absence and whether or not excuses will be accepted as valid or not:

- Valid university excuses include religious holy days, officially recognized university activities (with Dean of Students letter), and military leave. Students must follow the required documentation procedure for each valid university excuse.
- The instructor reserves the right to accept, or not, excuses related to medical issues. Naturally, it is not usually feasible to document in advance any time lost due to illness. The exception is planned surgeries and appointments (not normal check-ups). Any class time missed will not be excused without medical or other valid documentation. Documentation from Mexico is permissible. Students with severe medical problems that result in missing a majority of the semester may want to consider a complete withdrawal from the university for medical purposes.
- Absences due to conflicts with work, child care, etc. that make it impossible for you to regularly attend this class are not permitted. If you know you will have scheduling conflicts with this class, then you should make other arrangements or postpone this class until a future semester.
- According to UTEP Curriculum and Classroom Policies, "When, in the judgment of the instructor, a student has been absent to such a degree as to impair his or her status relative to credit for the course, the instructor can drop the student from the class with a grade of W before the course drop deadline and with a grade of F after the course drop deadline."
- Missed exams due to family hardship or family medical problems may not be accepted by the instructor as valid excuses. For example, helping family members move, picking up at the airport, driving family members to medical appointments when you know they conflict with class, and other such activities, will not be permitted as valid excuses. Emergencies such as deaths in the family must be documented, unfortunately.
- Missing any course assessments and work due to vacations and pre-booked travel arrangements are not valid excuses.

Final Exam Policy

The date of the final exam is listed below in the Schedule of Classes. The final exam is considered over when the instructor is no longer in the room (all other students present have completed the exam), so do not be late. The exam must be taken on this day unless you have a valid university accepted excuse.

Midterm Exam Policy

The date of the midterm exam is listed below in the Schedule of Classes. No make-up midterm exam will occur without a student having provided to the instructor valid documentation explaining or excusing the absence. The instructor has the discretion to decide if a make-up is allowable outside the university excused absences. If you miss an exam due to an emergency or illness, you must notify me (and confirm with me that I have received your notification attempt) as soon as possible to arrange a make-up exam. A make-up exam may be of a different format than the original exam.

Essay

In this paper, you will have the opportunity to read a newspaper article that reports on public opinion data (or a recent poll) in the United States. Students will critically analyze the findings in the newspaper article, and they will write their conclusions about the article in a short essay. More details and instructions will be provided in class. The due date for this paper is listed below in the Schedule of Classes, and students will submit a printed copy of the paper at the start of class on the due date. **Late papers will be penalized one full letter grade for each class day they are late** (about 750 words, 15% of grade).

Other Course Policies and Expectations

- Debate and discussion are important in the critical evaluation of politics. It is expected that students will treat the instructor and other students with respect, including refraining from disparaging remarks, personal insults, derogatory comments, and other unprofessional behavior, in person or electronically. Any problem related to disruptive or threatening behavior may result in immediate and follow-up responses by the instructor and/or relevant UTEP offices, including (but not limited to) the student being asked to leave the class and the student being dropped from the course.
- At the discretion of the instructor, a student can be dropped from a course because of excessive absences or lack of effort. A grade of “W” will be assigned before the course drop deadline and a grade of “F” after the course drop deadline. A grade of “F” received due to disciplinary action imposed by the University overrides a grade of “W” received through a student-initiated or faculty drop. Students will be notified of their drop through their UTEP e-mail account. Students may also be administratively withdrawn from a course during the semester for other reasons, with the concurrence of the instructor and department chair, or dean. Approved requests will be forwarded to the Registration and Records Office for processing. Students are responsible for checking their class schedules in Goldmine and for checking their official UTEP preferred e-mail accounts to determine if they have been dropped from a class.
- Outside work and other non-class related activities are not permitted in our classroom.
- Cell phone/smart phone/PDA usage is not permitted during exams or at other times when it might pose a class disruption. Laptops, tablets, or other electronic devices used for note-taking are permissible, but students using such must not engage in any activities that disrupt other students.

Email Protocol

When emailing me, please put the course and section number in the subject line. In the body of your email, clearly state your question. At the end of your email, be sure to put your first and last name. Please do not email me about information you can obtain from the syllabus. I generally do not answer substantive material from lectures or readings via email, as it is not an effective means of communicating. If there is class material you are confused about, please come see me during my office hours.

Academic Integrity and Dishonesty

As stated in the UTEP undergraduate catalog, “Any student who commits an act of academic dishonesty is subject to discipline. Academic dishonesty includes, and is not limited to cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, taking an examination for another person, and any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts. Proven violations of the detailed regulations, as printed in the *Handbook of Operating Procedures (HOP)*, and available in the Office of Student Life and on the homepage of the Office of Student Life at www.utep.edu/dos, can result in sanctions ranging from disciplinary probation, to a failing grade on the work in question, to a failing grade in the course, to suspension or dismissal, among others.”

Students with Different Abilities

If you have a disability and need classroom accommodations, please contact The Center for Accommodations and Support Services (CASS) at 747-5148, or by email to cass@utep.edu, or visit their office located in UTEP Union East, Room 106. For additional information, please visit the CASS website at www.sa.utep.edu/cass. CASS’ staff are the only individuals who can validate, and if need be, authorize accommodations for students with disabilities. The student is responsible for presenting to the instructor any CASS accommodation letters and instructions before arrangements need to be made for exams or other needs.

Other Resources for Students

- UTEP Writing Center
 - Library Building, Room 227
 - (915) 747-5112
 - <http://uwc.utep.edu/>
- UTEP Career Center
 - 103 W Union Building
 - 915-747-5640
 - <https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/careers/>
- UTEP Counseling and Psychological Services
 - Union West, Room 202

- 915-747-5302
- After Hours Crisis Line: 915-747-5302
- <http://sa.utep.edu/counsel/>
- University Police Department
 - 915-747-5611
 - <https://www.utep.edu/police/>
- UTEP Student Health Center
 - 915-747-5624
 - <https://www.utep.edu/chs/shc/>
- Center Against Sexual and Family Violence
 - 580 Giles Road
 - 915-593-7300
 - 24/7 Crisis Hope Line: 1-800-727-0511
- UTEP Student Food Bank (Student Engagement and Leadership Center)
 - Union West, Room 106
 - 915-747-5670
- UTEP Student Support Services for Challenges with Finances (FHAR)
 - Academic Advising Center
 - 915-747-5290
- If you would like to access other resources, please contact me and I will do my best to help you search for additional resources.

Schedule of Classes

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| Tues | 8/28 | Introduction to the Course |
| Thurs | 8/30 | No Class |
| Tues | 9/4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Erikson and Tedin, first half of Ch. 1, Public Opinion in Democratic Societies |
| Thurs | 9/6 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Erikson and Tedin, second half of Ch. 1, Public Opinion in Democratic Societies |
| Tues | 9/11 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Erikson and Tedin, first half of Ch. 2, Polling: The Scientific Assessment of Public Opinion |
| Thurs | 9/13 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Erikson and Tedin, second half of Ch. 2, Polling: The Scientific Assessment of Public Opinion |
| Tues | 9/18 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Erikson and Tedin, first half of Ch. 3, Microlevel Opinion: The Psychology of Opinion-Holding |
| Thurs | 9/20 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Erikson and Tedin, second half of Ch. 3, Microlevel Opinion: The Psychology of Opinion-Holding |

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| Tues | 9/25 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Erikson and Tedin, first half of Ch. 4, Macrolevel Opinion: The Flow of Public Sentiment |
| Thurs | 9/27 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Erikson and Tedin, second half of Ch. 4, Macrolevel Opinion: The Flow of Public Sentiment Essay is Due at the Beginning of Class (printed copy) |
| Tues | 10/2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Erikson and Tedin, first half of Ch. 5, Political Socialization and Political Learning |
| Thurs | 10/4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Erikson and Tedin, second half of Ch. 5, Political Socialization and Political Learning Review Session |
| Tues | 10/9 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comparative Public Opinion: Public Opinion in Other Contexts No assigned reading |
| Thurs | 10/11 | Midterm Exam |
| Tues | 10/16 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional Development Workshop No assigned reading |
| Thurs | 10/18 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Erikson and Tedin, first half of Ch. 6, Public Opinion and Democratic Stability |
| Tues | 10/23 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Erikson and Tedin, second half of Ch. 6, Public Opinion and Democratic Stability |
| Thurs | 10/25 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Erikson and Tedin, first half of Ch. 7, Group Difference in Political Opinions |
| Tues | 10/30 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Erikson and Tedin, second half of Ch. 7, Group Difference in Political Opinions |
| Thurs | 11/1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Erikson and Tedin, first half of Ch. 8, The News Media and Political Opinions |
| Tues | 11/6 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Erikson and Tedin, second half of Ch. 8, The News Media and Political Opinions |
| Thurs | 11/8 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Erikson and Tedin, all of Ch. 9, Elections as Instruments of Popular Control |
| Tues | 11/13 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Erikson and Tedin, first half of Ch. 10, The Public and Its Elected Leaders |
| Thurs | 11/15 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Professional Development Workshop No assigned reading |
| Tues | 11/20 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Erikson and Tedin, second half of Ch. 10, The Public and Its Elected Leaders |
| Thurs | 11/22 | No Class (University Holiday) |
| Tues | 11/27 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Erikson and Tedin, first half of Ch. 11, Public Opinion and the Performance of Democracy |
| Thurs | 11/29 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Erikson and Tedin, second half of Ch. 11, Public Opinion and the Performance of Democracy |
| Tues | 12/4 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> New Frontiers in Public Opinion Research Review Session |

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| Thurs | 12/6 | • Final Lecture |
| Thurs | 12/13 | Final Exam: 10am-12:45pm |