

**PSC 401F**  
**Public Opinion and Political Behavior**  
Tuesday and Thursdays 1:00 - 2:15 PM  
Church Fine Arts room 153  
Spring 2016

**Instructor:** Kevin Banda

**E-mail:** [kbanda@unr.edu](mailto:kbanda@unr.edu)

**Office:** 237 Mack Social Science Building

**Office Hours:** Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:30 - 3:30 PM or by appointment.

**Website:** <http://kevinbanda.weebly.com/>

## Course Description

This course is designed to provide students with an overview of two separate but related topics: public opinion and political behavior. The former refers to what people think while the latter refers to what people do. Students will learn about why citizens hold their political attitudes. Where do they come from? To what extent do they change over time? How does individual-level opinion differ from aggregate opinion? Students will also learn about the determinants of political behavior, especially when it comes to turnout and candidate choice. How do citizens' opinions inform their voting behavior? Why do some groups of people participate more in politics than do other groups? We will address these and many more questions in this course.

## Required Textbooks

The required textbooks are listed below and are available at the university bookstore. You may also be able to find them online at a substantial discount. I will refer to these books throughout the rest of the syllabus using the last name of the first author.

1. Rosalee A. Clawson and Zoe M. Oxley. 2013. *Public Opinion: Democratic Ideals, Democratic Practice*, Second Edition. CQ Press. ISBN: 978-1-60871-796-5. (*Clawson*)
2. Michael S. Lewis-Beck, William G. Jacoby, Helmut Norpoth, and Herbert F. Weisberg. 2008. *The American Voter Revisited*. The University of Michigan Press. ISBN: 978-0-472-05040-6. (*Lewis-Beck*)

Other readings will either be located in the Course Documents section of WebCampus or in ARES. I have included a link to ARES in WebCampus. A few readings can also be found online. I have included URLs for these in the course outline at the end of this document.

## Grading

Your grade in this course will be determined by each of the following components:

1. 25% – Midterm exam
2. 25% – Final exam
3. 25% – Analytical essay
4. 5% – Research paper presentation
5. 20% – Class participation

Below is a description of the grading system.

- A Mastery of course content at the highest level of attainment that can reasonably be expected of students at a given stage of development. The A grade states clearly that the student has shown such outstanding promise in the aspect of the discipline under study that s/he may be strongly encouraged to continue.
- B Strong performance demonstrating a high level of attainment for a student at a given stage of development. The B grade states that the student has shown solid promise in the aspect of the discipline under study.
- C A totally acceptable performance demonstrating an adequate level of attainment for a student at a given stage of development. The C grade states that while not yet showing any unusual promise, the student may continue to study in the discipline with reasonable hope of intellectual development.
- D A marginal performance in the required exercises demonstrating a minimal passing level of attainment for a student at a given stage of development. The D grade states that the student has given no evidence of prospective growth in the discipline; an accumulation of D grades should be taken to mean that the student would be well advised not to continue in the academic field.
- F For whatever reasons, an unacceptable performance. The F grade indicates that the student's performance in the required exercises has revealed almost no understanding of the course content. A grade of F should warrant questioning whether the student may suitably register for further study in the discipline before remedial work is undertaken.

The table below describes this course's grading scale. Grades will be rounded to the nearest percentage point and will be posted on WebCampus in a timely manner. I will not use a strict and predefined curve when assigning grades.<sup>1</sup> That said, I will curve grades to some extent if necessary to reflect the difficulty of the course assignments.

A	93-100	C	73-76
A-	90-92	C-	70-72
B+	87-89	D+	67-69
B	83-86	D	63-66
B-	80-82	D-	60-62
C+	77-79	F	0-59

---

<sup>1</sup>In other words, a certain percentage of students will not receive a given grade.

# Expectations and Procedures

## Discussions and the participation grade

The in-class discussions we will have are designed to explore a topic in greater depth than in the lecture. I expect everyone to be well-prepared and respectful to one another during these discussions. Your participation grade will be based on both the quantity and the quality of your contributions to our discussions. It is incumbent upon students to finish the daily reading before class begins so that we may have fruitful discussions.

## Exams

There will be two exams in this class: a midterm and a (somewhat) cumulative final. These exams will be made up of identification and short essay questions.

Missed examinations will be treated as a 0 unless the student has a documented or valid excuse, i.e. serious illness, deaths in the family, and required attendance at university-sponsored events. In other words, things like vacations and sorority/fraternity events are not excused. Students who have a valid excuse need to contact me before the day of the test (except in emergency circumstances). The required documentation needs to be given to me within a week of the examination.

## Analytical Essays

Your paper will focus on a topic selected by you and approved by me that is relevant to the course. In other words, it should in some way be related to public opinion and political behavior in the U.S. This paper will be due in class on **12/6** and is worth 25% of your course grade.

You must come up with a **research question** that is related to the topic of this course. You could, for example, have a research question that focuses on why citizens choose to support one candidate over the other.<sup>2</sup> I must approve this question, so do not put off speaking with me; I want to make sure you are on the right path as quickly as possible. **Your research question must be approved by 11/17.** Each student must have a unique research question.

Once a research question has been approved, students should perform a literature review. This review should make up a large portion of the papers. What have previous studies found? What are the limitations of the studies you read? What remains unanswered or inadequately answered? If you can find easily accessible data, feel free to include it in your paper (but this is not required). Sticking with the previous example of candidate choice, you might present the percentage of the popular vote won by Democratic or Republican presidential candidates over the past several election cycles. **You need at least 6 sources (see below on what constitutes a good source).**

The following is an outline for your papers:

1. Introduction: tell me what your research question is and why it is an important topic. Tell me your thesis statement. Tell me what your dependent and independent variables are (generally speaking, you should only have one independent variable and one dependent variable).

---

<sup>2</sup>Other examples: how does elite polarization influence public opinion? How do citizens respond to negative advertisements? How does candidate race influence vote choice?

2. Literature review: summarize the (minimum of 6) academic articles/books you read. Tell me the arguments put forth by the researchers and tell me what they found. This is the section in which you should criticize the work you've read if that is appropriate. You should group your discussion of papers that are related together if that is appropriate (depends on what you're doing). This will be the longest section of your paper.
3. Theory: this is the most important section of your paper. What is your explanation of how and why the world works the way it does? How does your independent variable affect your dependent variable (i.e. what's the direction of the relationship)? WHY does this process work the way you argue? If you're talking about citizens, what is going through their minds? If you're talking about candidates or parties, what are their strategic considerations? Make sure that your theory matches up with your unit of analysis. In other words, if your topic is a citizen's vote choice, you should talk about why citizens make the decisions they do and why they hold the attitudes they do. You can mention why candidates/parties choose certain strategies, but your focus should be on citizens in this case. Generally speaking, citations don't belong in this section. You are making an argument that should be somewhat unique (at least compared to what you have read); you shouldn't repeat a theory you've already read. So you need to make an argument that differs at least somewhat from the literature you reviewed. Note that this isn't quite the same as "opinion." Your theory should be logically cohesive and plausible. This section should probably be about 1-2 pages long.
4. Hypothesis: you must produce a falsifiable (i.e. you can be wrong) hypothesis. It should take the form of "as the *independent variable* increases/decreases, the *dependent variable* increases/decreases," (some of you may have more complicated expectations and that's okay, but we should probably talk about them before you write your paper). This hypothesis is falsifiable because you may observe no relationship between the variables or you may observe the opposite of what you expect. I have written a section here about hypotheses by itself, but your hypothesis should probably just be at the end of your theory section.
5. Design: In this section you should briefly discuss how you might test your hypothesis. Don't over think this; I don't expect you to design an entire survey or anything like that. If you're dealing with citizens, you should probably say you'd look at public opinion data, do an experiment, or look at aggregate voting statistics (depends on what's right for your paper). If you're doing a paper on advertising, say you'll look at advertising data (how many of this kind of ad was aired in a contest or whatever), and so forth. Then you need to tell me what you would observe in the data if you are right and what you might observe if you are wrong. This section should be pretty short.

Your grade will be determined by (1) the completeness of your argument, (2) the strength of your analysis, and (3) the strength of your writing. **Papers will be docked 10 percentage points for each day they are late. If you turn in your paper after but on the same day as class, that is considered one day late.**

**Format:** Your essay must be typed. Use twelve point Times New Roman font, justified text (see how the text at the margins in this document are even or "flat?") This is

what justified text looks like), double spacing, and one or 1.25 inch margins. Your paper should be no more than ten pages long. If you write more, be aware that the grader may stop reading at the end of the tenth page. Your paper may be shorter than ten pages, but be sure that you have carefully and fully answered each of the questions posed to you by the above essay prompt. If you turn in a five page paper, it is unlikely that you will have written an adequately detailed essay. If possible, please print on both sides of the paper. There should not be an extra space between your paragraphs. Word seems to do this by default. Don't let it. Speaking of contractions, do not use them. Do not use an enormous header and do not allow it to repeat on each page; just write your name. Number your pages. You do not need a cover page or any kind of fancy folder, just **staple your paper**. Just for emphasis: **do not use any direct quotes**. This is a short essay. I want to see your arguments, not what someone else has to say. Include a title.

**Citations:** You will need a works cited page. Cite any work you reference using in text citations like this (Smith, 2011).

**Sources:** You need to draw on academic publications. That means peer reviewed books or journal articles that have been **published**. For books, that means you need to focus on academic presses (i.e. the University of Chicago Press), but academic-oriented commercial presses like Sage and Routledge are acceptable too. Here are a number of examples of acceptable political science journals: *American Political Science Review*, *American Journal of Political Science*, *Journal of Politics*, *British Journal of Political Science*, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *Political Behavior*, *Political Research Quarterly*, *Electoral Studies*, *State Politics and Policy Quarterly*, *Public Choice*, *Political Communication*, and *American Politics Research*. There are many other peer reviewed journals out there. **If you are unsure if the article you want to review is from an acceptable journal, you should ask me.** This seems to be a major problem for a small number of students, so do yourself a favor and double check with me. Avoid working papers and other unpublished works. Again, if you're not sure, **ask**.

**Caution:** Do not under any circumstances cite Wikipedia, Yahoo! Answers, or anything else like that. If you choose to use something that was published by an ideologically driven think tank (CATO, Brookings, Heritage, etc.), be careful. Remember that these organizations have an incentive to shape our perceptions of reality to best suit themselves. It is unlikely that I will accept one of these pieces as one of your required sources, though you are certainly free to use them as additional sources. Again, if you're not sure, **ask**.

## Research Presentation

All students will present their papers to the class during the week of 4/26. Students should use visual aids (i.e. Powerpoint or something). The maximum length of the presentations should be no longer than 5 minutes, but this will depend on the number of people who enroll in the class. Presenters should be prepared to answer questions from their fellow students and myself. **If you don't turn in a paper, you can't do a research presentation.**

## Extra Credit

I *may* include one or two extra credit questions on the exams. Other than these questions, there are no other sources of extra credit in this course.

## Technology

Silence your phone's ringer or turn it off entirely. You will be able to access my slides (if I use any) on WebCampus. You are free to bring your laptops, but be aware that I will not allow them if they become a distraction to either me or to your classmates. If you choose to use a laptop, please sit towards the back of the class so that your screen distracts as few students as possible. That said, do yourself a favor a **don't** use a laptop if you can avoid it. There's all kinds of research on this kind of thing and pretty much all of it says that students learn better and perform better on exams when they don't use computers in lecture and discussion style classes.

## Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Any student with a disability needing academic adjustments or accommodations is requested to speak with me and the Disability Resource Center (Thompson Building Suite 100) as soon as possible to arrange for appropriate accommodations.

## Academic Dishonesty

The following is the university's statement on academic dishonesty:

Academic dishonesty is against university as well as the system community standards. Academic dishonesty is defined as: cheating, plagiarism or otherwise obtaining grades under false pretenses. Plagiarism is defined as submitting the language, ideas, thoughts or work of another as one's own; or assisting in the act of plagiarism by allowing one's work to be used in this fashion. Cheating is defined as (1) obtaining or providing unauthorized information during an examination through verbal, visual or unauthorized use of books, notes, text and other materials; (2) obtaining or providing information concerning all or part of an examination prior to that examination; (3) taking an examination for another student, or arranging for another person to take an exam in one's place; (4) altering or changing test answers after submittal for grading, grades after grades have been awarded, or other academic records once these are official.

Disciplinary procedures for incidents of academic dishonesty may involve both academic action and administrative action for behavior against the campus regulations for student conduct. The procedures involve the determination by the faculty member pursuing concerns over alleged cheating or plagiarism as to whether administrative action is warranted, in addition to making a determination as to any academic consequence. Academic action may include: (1) cancelling the student's enrollment in the class without a grade; (2) filing a final grade of "F"; (3) awarding a failing mark on the test or paper in question; (4) requiring the student to retake the test or resubmit the paper.

## Communication

I make every effort to communicate to you my expectations, your responsibilities, and the substantive information covered in this course. I will send e-mails to the entire class. I

maintain a WebCampus site for the class, and I will make announcements and issue some reminders in class. Note that I will only send e-mail out to your e-mail accounts as listed on the course roster in WebCampus. I will not keep track of any other e-mail addresses that you might use. I am also very easy to reach if you need to communicate with me. Come to my office hours or even better, send me an email. It is important for you to stay in touch, particularly if any problems arise.

Please keep in mind that there are many students enrolled in this class. Because of this, students who have questions should first check to see if the syllabus answers that question. If their question still has not been resolved, they should then contact me.

## Tentative Course Outline

The course outline described below is tentative and subject to change at my discretion. Note that each date should be interpreted as “the week of.” \* = item is on ARES, \*\* = item is in Course Documents in on WebCampus.

- **8/29:** Course introduction. **No class on 9/1.**
- **9/5:** What is public opinion? Readings: Clawson chapter 1 (including appendix), Lippmann, “The World Outside and the Pictures in Our Heads,” chapter 1 from *Public Opinion* (available at <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/6456/pg6456.txt>).
- **9/12:** How do we measure public opinion? Readings: \*Asher chapter 2
- **9/19:** Political socialization. Readings: Clawson chapter 2, \*\*Niemi and Hepburn “The Rebirth of Political Socialization,” \*\*Litt “Civic Education, Community Norms, and Political Indoctrination.”
- **9/26:** Attitudes and voting. Readings: Clawson chapter 4, Lewis-Beck chapters 1 - 5.
- **10/3:** Party identification. Readings: Lewis-Beck chapters 6 - 8.
- **10/10:** Ideology. Readings: Lewis-Beck chapters 9 and 10, Clawson chapter 5.
- **10/17: Catch up and review. Midterm on 10/20.**
- **10/24:** Social and economic contexts. Readings: Lewis-Beck chapters 11 - 13, Clawson chapter 7.
- **10/31:** Race and gender. Readings: \*\*Feldman and Huddy “Racial resentment and white opposition to race-conscious programs: Principle or prejudice?,” \*\*Bobo and Gilliam “Race, sociopolitical participation, and black empowerment,” \*\*Kaufmann “The Gender Gap,” \*\*Dolan “Voting for Women in the ‘Year of the Woman’,” \*\*Burns and Gallagher “Public Opinion on Gender Issues: The Politics of Equity and Roles.”
- **11/7:** Political knowledge, tolerance, and trust. Readings: Clawson chapters 6 and 9-11 \*\*Kuklinski et al. “Misinformation and the Currency of Democratic Citizenship.” “How I Used Lies About a Cartoon to Prove History is Meaningless on the Internet” (available at <http://goo.gl/f3oCvI>).

- **11/14:** Public opinion and the media. Readings: Clawson chapter 3, \*\*Berinsky and Kinder “Making Sense of Issues Through Media Frames: Understanding the Kosovo Crisis,” \*\*Krosnik and Kinder “Altering the Foundations of Support for the President Through Priming,” \*\*Levendusky “Why Do Partisan Media Polarize Viewers?” **Research questions need to be approved by 11/17.**
- **11/21: No class on 11/24.** Public opinion and political outcomes. Readings: Lewis-Beck chapters 14 - 15, Clawson chapter 12, \*\*Page and Shapiro “Effects of Public Opinion on Policy,” Weissberg, “Why Policymakers Should Ignore Public Opinion Polls” available at <http://www.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/pubs/pdf/pa402.pdf>.
- **11/28:** Campaigns. Readings: \*\*Gelman and King “Why are American Presidential Election Campaign Polls so Variable When Votes are so Predictable?,” \*Hillygus and Shields *The Persuadable Voter* chapter 2, \*Geer *In Defense of Negativity: Attack Ads in Presidential Campaigns* chapters 1, \*Stimson *Tides of Consent* chapter 4.
- **12/5: Research papers due in class on 12/6. Student research presentations.**
- **12/12: No class on 12/15.** Emotions and political psychology. Readings: Clawson chapter 13. \*\*Brader “Striking a Responsive Chord: How Political Ads Motivate and Persuade Voters by Appealing to Emotions,” \*\*Huddy et al. “Threat, Anxiety, and Support for Antiterrorism Policies,” \*\*Miller “The Emotional Citizen: Emotion as a function of political sophistication,” \*\*Rahn “The Role of Partisan Stereotypes in Information Processing about Political Candidates.”
- **12/20: Final exam from 5:00 - 7:00 PM (gross) in our normal classroom.**