

# POS 3233 | Politics & Public Opinion

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA  
FALL 2023

**Instructor:** David Macdonald, Ph.D.

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**Time & Location:**

- Tuesday 1:55 PM - 2:45 PM (AND 0034)
- Thursday 1:55 PM - 3:50 PM (AND 0034)

**Office Hours:**

- Anderson Hall 207
- Wednesdays 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM & 2:00 PM - 4:00 PM
- Also by email appointment if necessary

## Course Description

Politics & Public Opinion (POS 3233) is an upper-level undergraduate course that explores the causes and consequences of public opinion, a key concept in the broader study of democracy. This course specifically focuses on the United States, but many of the insights we have gleaned from the study of American public opinion can be applied to other countries and contexts. In this course, we will study the fundamentals and logic of survey design, explore the various sources of political attitudes, and examine the policy consequences of mass opinion. You will also ideally become more statistically literate and “less afraid” of numbers than you were coming into this course. To do this, we will read a variety of academic articles and get hands-on experience in analyzing and manipulating high-quality public opinion data.

## Course Objectives

Students should exit this course being familiar with:

- The fundamentals of survey design, e.g., sampling, weighting, and question-wording effects
- How ordinary people come to form political opinions
- The relationship between mass opinion and public policy
- How to interpret the results of public opinion surveys
- How to properly analyze survey data and present relevant insights

## Required Texts & Readings

There is no assigned textbook. I will make each of the readings, which are drawn from a variety of academic journals, electronically available as a PDF on the Canvas course website. These readings are listed in the “Course Schedule” section of this syllabus.

## Course Policies

### Canvas

The course website will be on Canvas (<https://elearning.ufl.edu/>). It is here that you will be able to access all of the assignments, readings, and study guides. All readings, study guides, and assignment instructions are available under the “Files” tab on Canvas. The reading response submission site is available under the “Assignments” tab on Canvas.

### Grades

Your overall course grade will be comprised of the following weighted components. Further detailed instructions about these assignments will be given in class and posted on the course website.

- **Reading Responses** (25%)
  - Readings listed in the “Course Schedule” section of this syllabus
  - Write an approximately 1 paragraph summary of your thoughts
  - Post response on Canvas by 11:59 PM the NIGHT BEFORE our first weekly meeting
  - There are 11 opportunities for responses; you need to submit 10 for full credit
- **Exam I** (25%)
  - Closed-book multiple choice exam on Tuesday 10/03
- **Exam II** (25%)
  - Closed-book multiple choice exam on Tuesday 11/28
- **Survey Data Project** (25%)
  - Instructions posted on Canvas
  - Email to the instructor (as a PDF) by 11:59 PM on Tuesday 11/21

Letter grades will be assigned as follows.

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

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### Extra Credit

I DO NOT give out extra credit, but I am willing to round up borderline grades in certain cases. Student participation, preparation, and effort may be taken into consideration in deciding whether to round up borderline grades.

## **Lecture Notes & Study Guides**

I DO NOT make my lecture slides available on Canvas. You need to come to class in order to truly learn and absorb the material. I will, however, give out a study guide before each exam.

## **Late Work**

Late work will not be accepted except as a result of unusual/extenuating circumstances that have been discussed with the instructor.

## **Email**

All email correspondence in this course must be through your UF student email. Please keep it professional when writing and responding to emails.

## **Electronics**

I expect you to keep your phones away and to only use laptops for the purpose of note-taking. If I notice that you are frequently using such devices for other purposes and thus not paying attention nor participating in class, then I will NOT round up your borderline grades.

## **Decorum**

Students in this course are expected to follow the “Golden Rule” of treating others as you wish to be treated. Everyone in this class has the right to speak and to be heard, but this right is not unlimited. Ultimately, we are all responsible for the things we say and do. There will also be ZERO tolerance regarding any threats of violence toward the instructor(s) and/or students, be they verbal or written. Such threats will be reported to University Police.

## **Reasonable Accommodations**

As evidenced by the Covid-19 pandemic, sometimes difficult and unfortunate things happen in our lives that can make attending class and thus being academically successful very difficult. As such, I am willing, if possible, to help you overcome such difficulties. If you are experiencing challenging life circumstances and need help to succeed in the course, please speak to me ASAP. Do not wait until the end of the semester to as it will often be too late for me to do anything. Please see the following link (<https://umatter.ufl.edu/helping-students/your-well-being/>) and/or reach out to a medical professional for any physical or mental health problems.

## **Changes to the Syllabus**

I reserve the right to make minor changes to the syllabus and course schedule during the semester as necessary. That being said, if there are any changes, every effort will be made to alert you in writing as far in advance as possible.

# University Policies

## Academic Honor Code

UF students are bound by the University's Honor Pledge which states: "We the members of the University Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code." On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." The Honor Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor and see the following link: <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/>. In short, don't cheat! The costs FAR outweigh the benefits!

## Disability Services

Students with disabilities who are requesting special accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center ([www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/](http://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/) or **352-392-8565**) by providing appropriate documentation. Once registered, students will receive an accommodation letter which must be presented to the instructor when requesting accommodation. Students with disabilities should follow this procedure as early as possible in the semester.

## Recordings

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor. A "class lecture" is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or lecturer during a class session. Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To "publish" means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code. Additional information is available at the following link: <https://aa.ufl.edu/policies/in-class-recording/>.

## Online Course Evaluations

Students are expected to provide feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing online evaluations (<https://evaluations.ufl.edu>). Evaluations are typically open during the last two or three weeks of the semester, but students will be given specific times when they are open. Summary results are available to students (<https://evaluations.ufl.edu/results/>).

## Course Schedule

The instructions (and submission space) for the Reading Responses are on Canvas. The short version is that in order to receive full credit, you need to write two paragraphs; one that summarizes the article and a second that articulates your personal opinion of the article. There are 11 total opportunities (Weeks 2-15, excepting Exam Weeks and Thanksgiving Break) to complete a reading response. You will need to complete 10 of them for full credit. All assigned readings are available as PDFs on Canvas.

### Week 1 - Course Introduction

- Class Meetings
  - Thursday 08/24 only
- No readings this week

### Week 2 - Polling & Survey Design I

- Class Meetings
  - Tuesday 08/29 & Thursday 08/31
- Reading Response
  - Berinsky (2017) *Annual Review of Political Science*

### Week 3 - Polling & Survey Design II

- Class Meetings
  - Tuesday 09/05 & Thursday 09/07
- Reading Response
  - Jennings and Wlezien (2018) *Nature Human Behavior*

### Week 4 - Political Information

- Class Meetings
  - Tuesday 09/12 & Thursday 09/14
- Reading Response
  - Enders et al. (2021) *Political Behavior*

## **Week 5 - Ideology**

- Class Meetings
  - Tuesday 09/19 & Thursday 09/21
- Reading Response
  - Malka, Lelkes, and Soto (2019) *British Journal of Political Science*

## **Week 6 - Political Socialization**

- Class Meetings
  - Tuesday 09/26 & Thursday 09/28
- Reading Response
  - Jennings, Stoker, and Bowers (2009) *Journal of Politics*

## **Week 7 - EXAM I**

- Exam Tuesday 10/03
  - In class @ regular time (1:55 PM - 2:45 PM)
  - Study Guide available on Canvas
- No class Thursday 10/05
  - Use this time to recharge and/or work on other projects

## **Week 8 - Sources of Mass Opinion: Political Elites & The Mass Media**

- Class Meetings
  - Tuesday 10/10 & Thursday 10/12
- Reading Response
  - Kim (2023) *American Journal of Political Science*

## **Week 9 - Sources of Mass Opinion: Social Groups**

- Class Meetings
  - Tuesday 10/17 & Thursday 10/19
- Reading Response
  - Jones (2023) *Journal of Politics*

## **Week 10 - Sources of Mass Opinion: Core Values**

- Class Meetings
  - Tuesday 10/24 & Thursday 10/26
- Reading Response
  - Macdonald (2023) *Political Psychology*

## **Week 11 - Aggregate Public Opinion**

- Class Meetings
  - Tuesday 10/31 & Thursday 11/02
- Reading Response
  - Wolak and Peterson (2020) *American Journal of Political Science*

## **Week 12 - The Opinion-Policy Connection**

- Class Meetings
  - Tuesday 11/07 & Thursday 11/09
- Reading Response
  - Caughey and Warshaw (2018) *American Political Science Review*

## **Week 13 - Political Polarization**

- Class Meetings
  - Tuesday 11/14 & Thursday 11/16
- Reading Response
  - Fiorina (2016) *Hoover Institution Series*

## **Week 14 - THANKSGIVING BREAK**

- Class Meetings
  - None
- Survey Data Project Due
  - Email a PDF copy to instructor
  - Due by 11:59 PM on Tuesday 11/21

## **Week 15 - EXAM II**

- Exam Tuesday 11/28
  - In class @ regular time (1:55 PM - 2:45 PM)
  - Study Guide available on Canvas
- No class Thursday 11/30
  - Use this time to recharge and/or work on other projects