Political Science 304-YE1 (Online):  
Public Opinion and American Politics

Spring Semester 2018  
Professor April K. Clark  
Office: Zulauf 402  
Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:30 a.m.-Noon or by appt.  
Office phone: (815) 753-7055  
E-Mail: aclark9@niu.edu

Course Description: This course explores the structure and dynamics of American public opinion, providing a broad-based introduction to the forces that shape citizens’ social and political attitudes in the contemporary United States. We will focus our analysis in three major areas: definitions of public opinion and theories of opinion formation, how public opinion is influenced and how it in turn influences governmental policy, and public opinion in specific issue areas of the contemporary American political scene. Our analysis will draw heavily both on classic readings in public opinion and on insights from modern political science, allowing us to examine important political phenomena from a variety of perspectives. Ultimately, the goal of this course is to help each member of the class arrive at a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of the forces that shape American beliefs, attitudes, and opinions, the ways that those views are expressed in the public sphere, and the process by which the public will is discerned and translated into legislative outcomes.

Online Class Format: This class is offered in an online format, so there is not the typical opportunity for us to work out ideas collectively in the classroom each week. That does not mean we won’t collectively work out ideas, however. We will be using a number of mediums to engage with the course material as well as with each other. Because you are not held accountable for doing the work via having to see me face-to-face several times a week, it is up to you to keep up with the work and make sure you are participating and doing the assignments. If staying on-task and being organized is not your forte, perhaps you should consider taking a traditional classroom version of this course. In short, it is your responsibility to do the work and keep up. Write reminders to yourself. Schedule alerts in your phone. Have your buddies in the class hold you accountable. I want you to be successful but much of that falls on you!

Readings: In this course, we will use three assigned books, supplemented frequently with additional reading materials. The books, Clawson and Oxley’s Public Opinion: Democratic Ideals, Democratic Practice, Asher’s Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know, and Fiorina’s Culture war? The myth of a polarized America are all available at the NIU bookstore. Links to the on-line reading materials will be available through the course Blackboard website (denoted as an electronic reserve or ER). Students should visit the site during the first week of class to be sure that they have no problems obtaining the on-line reading materials.

Timely reading is critical both for achievement as an individual student in this class, and for the success of the course as a whole. The reading load in this course is reasonable for an upper division Political Science course. As a result, students are strongly expected to have read the material carefully, thought about it, and able to discuss the implications critically. Failure to do so will result in lessened
comprehension of class lectures, poorer exam performance, and a lower course grade. Conversely, dutiful attention to the reading will greatly enhance the intellectual experience of the course for the individual student, and enable him or her to contribute meaningfully to the class as a whole.

Course Requirements and Grading: Students will be evaluated based on the following components:

- **You must be signed up on Blackboard Learn and checking the course Blackboard site regularly.** Students are required to maintain consistent contact – I recommend checking into the course Blackboard site daily since this is how I will contact you with Announcements, lecture materials and Assignments. Each Monday morning, I will post learning modules under the “Course Home Page” and “Course Materials” tab that include learning objectives, PowerPoint slides, additional assigned readings, and other course related materials.

  Blackboard is also your way to view the syllabus online, and get access to other required readings. You need Microsoft Office installed on your computer to get access to PowerPoint lectures.

- **Syllabus Quiz.** After you sign into Blackboard, please complete the Syllabus Quiz within two weeks of the semester commencement - available under the Intro Learning Module tab in the Course Materials Folder – worth **10 points** toward your overall course grade.

- **Introductions.** You are also required to introduce yourself to me and your classmates within the first week of the semester and respond to at least of TWO of your classmates introduction posts. You post your responses to a few questions on Blackboard (see “Introductions” tab under “Discussions” link).

- **Reaction Papers** refers to the quality of your written “reaction” to a group of readings. You need to post your answers to the designated link appearing in the week that the reaction paper is due. The reaction papers are designed to introduce you to important scholarly literature and to provide students the opportunity to explore and understand each text individually and evaluate how well each accomplishes its own objectives. These reaction papers should provide a focused discussion of the assigned readings rather than a summary of them. Since you will be evaluating several weeks readings, you must also discover how the texts relate to one another. A reaction paper may include a discussion of interesting questions that the readings raise for the class, but such a discussion is not sufficient by itself. Writing a good response is not simply a matter of reading the text, understanding it, and expressing an opinion about it. You must allow yourself enough time to be clear about what each text says and how the texts all relate to one another. In other words, response papers require you to synthesize the intellectual work of others—that is, bring it together into an integrated whole. In preparing to write your response papers, therefore, it is crucial that you allow yourself not just enough time to do the readings but enough to digest what you have read and to put the results together into a unified account.

  Reaction papers are due at NOON on Monday in weeks 6 and 10 and are worth **100 points** each (or 200 points of your total course grade). If you fail to submit your reaction paper assignment on the day it is due (except in cases of documented emergencies), you will receive a **ZERO. NO EXCEPTIONS.** Please make note of due dates.
A rubric is provided to show you what a thorough, insightful 100-point reaction paper looks like. Papers need not be long—no more than four (4) double-spaced typed pages. Strong papers consist of the following considerations: How do they relate to one another? Do the authors agree? Disagree? Address different aspects of an issue? Formulate a problem in different ways? In what way (if any) does the information or argument of one text strengthen or weaken the argument of others? Does integrating the claims in two or more of the texts advance your understanding of a larger issue? In addition to synthesizing the readings, reaction papers are expected to be written clearly with excellent grammar and spelling. For more details on course procedure, see the “Paper Rubric” link under the “Start Here” tab on the course website.

Please feel free to email me during the week and I will do my best to respond to your email within 24 hours; however, I do NOT check email regularly Friday Noon—Sunday 8pm.

- **Exams:** This course will have three exams (worth 100 points each) - midterm exams during **Week 6 and 10 a final during Week 16**. Each exam consists of approximately 35 multiple choice questions worth 2 points each and 3 short answer type questions worth 10 points each. The final exam will be of similar format and will focus on material discussed throughout the entirety of the course but will concentrate more heavily on material covered since the midterm. **NO** make-up exams will be given without prior written permission. All cases of academic dishonesty will result in an F for the course and referral to the Dean of Students.

**Course Grading:**

The breakdown of grading for each piece of work will be as follows (510 points total):

- Syllabus Quiz – 10 points.
- Two (2) Reaction Papers – 100 points each (total 200).
- Midterm Exam 1 – 100 points.
- Midterm Exam 2 – 100 points.
- Final Exam – 100 points.

Course Grades will be distributed as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Final Overall Percentage</th>
<th>Final Letter Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>90-100 %</td>
<td>A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-89 %</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-79%</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69%</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below 60%</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Final course grades will be submitted in compliance with PUC's plus/minus (+/-) grading system.*
Basic Policies:

- **Netiquette.**
  For emails, Discussion Board Posts, and all correspondence, please use correct spelling, grammar and punctuation. For example, when you email me, I expect to see a message such as this:

  Dear Professor Clark,
  Body of your email.
  Your Name

  Do not use ALL CAPS when posting to Discussion Boards, because it looks like yelling. Be aware that Discussion Posts or email can come across more coldly than you intend. The Golden Rule (treat others the way you would like to be treated) is vital for class discussion and Posting.

  I do my best to reply to your emails within 24 hours during the work week. **Be aware that I do not regularly check email between Friday 10 am and Sunday 8 pm.**

- **Behavior:** Students and faculty each have responsibility for maintaining an appropriate learning environment. Students who fail to adhere to such behavioral standards may be subject to discipline. Faculty have the professional responsibility to treat all students with understanding, dignity and respect, to guide discussion and to set reasonable limits on the manner in which they and their students express opinions. Professional courtesy and sensitivity are especially important with respect to individuals and topics dealing with differences of race, culture, religion, politics, sexual orientation, gender, gender variance, and nationalities.

Missed exams. Makeup exams will only be given in extraordinary circumstances. If such circumstances arise, please contact the instructor as soon as possible and before the scheduled exam. To keep the process fair for everyone in the course, students will be required to support requests for makeup exams with documentation. A signed note from your mother does not suffice. A missed examination without prior notification and a documented excuse will result in a zero. NO EXCEPTIONS.

Incomplete Requests: Such petitions will be granted only in extraordinary circumstances. The instructor reserves the right to ask for documentation to verify the problem preventing completion of the course by the normal deadlines. If the student does not present documentation from a university office or official, the matter will be left to the instructor’s discretion.

Academic Dishonesty: Any written work for this class will be checked electronically through on-line databases to assess the originality of the work. Regarding plagiarism, the NIU Undergraduate Catalog states: "Students are guilty of plagiarism, intentional or not, if they copy material from books, magazines, or other sources without identifying and acknowledging them. Students guilty of, or assisting others in, either cheating or plagiarism on an assignment, quiz, or examination may receive a grade of F for the course involved and may be suspended or dismissed from the university." The above statement encompasses a paper written in whole or in part by another; a paper copied word-for-word or with only minor changes from another source; a paper copied in part from one or more sources without proper identification and acknowledgment of the sources; a paper that is merely a paraphrase of one or more sources, using ideas and/or logic without credit even though the actual words may be changed; and a paper that quotes,
summarizes or paraphrases, or cuts and pastes words, phrases, or images from an Internet source without identification and the address of the web site. In addition, while students may work collaboratively to complete lab and homework assignments, any completed work that is turned into the instructor must be the student’s own work i.e. written in their own words and outlining their logic or calculations where appropriate or requested.

Students with Disabilities: A student who believes that reasonable accommodations with respect to course work or other academic requirements may be appropriate in consideration of a disability must (1) provide the required verification of the disability to the Disabilities Resource Center, (2) meet with the Disabilities Resource Center to determine appropriate accommodations, and (3) inform the faculty in charge of the academic activity of the need for accommodation. Students are encouraged to inform the faculty of their requests for accommodations as early as possible in the semester, but must make the requests in a timely enough manner for accommodations to be appropriately considered and reviewed by the university. If contacted by the faculty member, the staff of the Disabilities Resource Center will provide advice about accommodations that may be indicated in the particular case. Students who make requests for reasonable accommodations are expected to follow the policies and procedures of the Disabilities Resource Center in this process, including but not limited to the Student Handbook. A wide range of services can be obtained by students with disabilities, including housing, transportation, adaptation of printed materials, and advocacy with faculty and staff. Students with disabilities who need such services or want more information should contact the Disabilities Resource Center at 815-753-1303. A student who believes that reasonable accommodations with respect to course work or other academic requirements may be appropriate in consideration of a disability must (1) provide the required verification of the disability to the Disabilities Resource Center, (2) meet with the Disabilities Resource Center to determine appropriate accommodations, and (3) inform the faculty in charge of the academic activity of the need for accommodation. Students are encouraged to inform the faculty of their requests for accommodations as early as possible in the semester, but must make the requests in a timely enough manner for accommodations to be appropriately considered and reviewed by the university. If contacted by the faculty member, the staff of the Disabilities Resource Center will provide advice about accommodations that may be indicated in the particular case. Students who make requests for reasonable accommodations are expected to follow the policies and procedures of the Disabilities Resource Center in this process, including but not limited to the Student Handbook. A wide range of services can be obtained by students with disabilities, including housing, transportation, adaptation of printed materials, and advocacy with faculty and staff. Students with disabilities who need such services or want more information should contact the Disabilities Resource Center at 815-753-1303.

Writing Assistance: NIU provides a writing center that can assist students in formulating, developing, and revising course assignments. Do not be scared or embarrassed to ask for assistance if you feel you would benefit from it. The university provides these resources in order to help students better reach their academic goals. Information regarding the writing center can be found at:
http://www.niu.edu/uwc/

Department of Political Science website: Undergraduates are strongly encouraged to consult the Department of Political Science web site on a regular basis. This up-to-date, central source of information will assist students in contacting faculty and staff, reviewing course requirements and syllabi, exploring graduate study, research career options, tracking department events, and accessing important details related to undergraduate programs and activities. To reach the site, go to
http://polisci.niu.edu
Undergraduate Writing Awards: The Department of Political Science recognizes, on an annual basis, outstanding undergraduate papers written in conjunction with 300-400 level political science courses or directed studies, such as independent studies or honors theses. Winners are expected to attend the Department’s spring graduation ceremony where they will receive a certificate and a check for $100. No more than two papers may be submitted by a student. There is no requirement as to the length of papers submitted for the award. Often the Department awards prizes for both an outstanding short paper and an outstanding long paper. The number and types of award is dependent upon the papers submitted for consideration in any given year. Authors do not have to be political science majors or have a particular class standing. Only papers written in the previous calendar year are considered for the award. However, papers completed in the current spring semester are eligible for the following year’s competition even if the student has graduated. Papers can be submitted by students or faculty and must be supplied in triplicate to the undergraduate secretary. All copies – one with the student’s name and one without the student’s name. Papers are not to be stapled or bound. Instead, please use paper clips. Papers are generally due in March and notice of call for papers and submission deadlines will be published in the department announcements. You may also contact the department for information at 815-753-1015.

Exams and grading: Regrades are possible if you believe there was an error in grading. In order to have a reconsideration of your grade, you must provide a 1-page typewritten memo explaining where you feel the mistake in grading occurred, and I will take a look at it.

Course Calendar:

The following calendar lists the order of the topics and the date that we will cover them. Please note, we do not read the chapters in chronological order.

**MODULE 1: Weeks 1-6 – 01/15-02/19**

**Section I: Defining and Measuring Public Opinion**

**WEEK 1: (01/15)**

*Context and Overview: Concepts of Public Opinion*

Clawson and Oxley, Chapter 1

**WEEK 2: (01/22)**

*Models of Opinion Formation*

Clawson and Oxley, Chapter 4


Lodge *et al.*’s “The Responsive Voter” (ER)
WEEKS 3 & 4: (01/29 & 02/05)

Thinking Politically:
Ideology and Information in America
Clawson and Oxley, Chapter 5

Pluralistic Roots of Public Opinion: Personality, Self-Interest, Values, and History
Clawson and Oxley, Chapter 6

Pluralistic Roots of Public Opinion: The Central Role of Groups
Clawson and Oxley, Chapter 7

Knowledge, Interest, and Attention to Politics
Clawson and Oxley, Chapter 8
Excerpt: Delli Carpini and Keeter’s Stability and Change in the US Public’s Knowledge of Politics (ER)

WEEKS 5 & 6: (02/12 & 02/19)

Measuring Public Opinion: The Polling Industry
Asher, Chapters 1-5, 8
See also Clawson and Oxley, Appendix Chapter 2 (pgs. 29-42)

First Reaction Paper – due by NOON on Friday, February 23rd

*****Midterm #1 (all material so far) available from*****
NOON on Friday, February 23rd until 3:00 PM on Sunday, February 25th

MODULE 2: Weeks 7-10 - 02/26 through 03/26

Section II: Influences on and of Public Opinion

WEEK 7: (02/26)

Political Socialization
Clawson and Oxley, Chapter 2

WEEK 8: (03/05)

The Media
Clawson and Oxley, Chapter 3
Excerpts: Goldberg’s Media Bias and Chait’s “Victim Politics” (ER)
****March 11 - March 18 – SPRING BREAK****

WEEK 9: (03/19)

Economic Self-Interest
Kinder and Kiewiet’s “Economic Discontent and Political Behavior” (ER)
Gomez and Wilson’s “Political Sophistication and Economic Voting” (ER)
Inglehart’s “The Silent Revolution in Europe” (ER)

WEEK 10: (03/26)

Effects of Public Opinion on Government
Clawson and Oxley, Chapter 12 (pgs. 347-367)
Page and Shapiro’s “Effects of Public Opinion on Policy” (ER)

Second Reaction Paper – due by NOON on Friday, March 30th

*****Midterm #2 (all material so far) available from*****
NOON on Friday, March 30th until 3:00 PM on Sunday, April 1st

MODULE 3: Weeks 11-15 - 04/02 through 04/30

Section III: Expressions of Public Opinion

WEEK 11: (04/02)

Public Opinion and Foreign Affairs
Clawson and Oxley, Chapter 12 (pgs. 367-375)
Mueller’s “Trends in Popular Support for the Wars in Korea and Vietnam” (ER)
Zaller’s “Strategic Politicians, Public Opinion, and the Gulf Crisis” (ER)

WEEK 12: (04/09)

Public Opinion and Democratic Values
Clawson and Oxley, Chapter 9 and 10
Prothro and Grigg’s “Fundamental Principles of Democracy” (ER)
McClosky’s “Consensus and Ideology in American Politics” (ER)
WEEK 13: (04/16)

Public Opinion and Poverty Attitudes
Excerpt: Hochschild’s *What’s Fair?* (ER)
U.S. Census Bureau Income Statistics (ER)
Feldman and Zaller’s “The Political Culture of Ambivalence” (ER)
Feldman and Steenbergen’s “The Humanitarian Foundation” (ER)

WEEK 14: (04/23)

Public Opinion and Social/Cultural Issues (Abortion, Gun Control, Death Penalty, etc.)
Culture war? Fiorina: Chapters 1-5
*Pew Research Center’s* Fact Sheet on Abortion – available:
http://www.pewforum.org/fact-sheet/public-opinion-on-abortion/

*Pew Research Center’s* Abortion Poll Results

WEEK 15: (04/30)

Public Opinion and Social/Cultural Issues (Abortion, Gun Control, Death Penalty, etc.)
Culture war? Fiorina: Chapters 6-10

*Pew Research Center’s* Gay Rights Poll Results – available: http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/06/13/5-key-findings-about-lgbt-americans/

See also: http://www.people-press.org/2017/06/26/support-for-same-sex-marriage-grows-even-among-groups-that-had-been-skeptical/

See also: http://www.people-press.org/2017/06/22/public-views-about-guns/#total

See also: http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/24/5-facts-about-the-death-penalty/

******Final Exam (comprehensive - all material covered) available from******
8:00 AM on Thurs., May 3rd until 3:00 PM on Tues., May 8th
Summary of Important Dates
Two Reaction Papers due by noon – Friday, February 23rd and March 30th
Midterm 1 – Week 6 – Available NOON on Fri., Feb. 23rd until 3:00 PM on Sunday, Feb. 25th
Midterm 2 – Week 10 – Available NOON on Fri., March 30th until 3:00 PM on Sunday, April 1st
Final Examination – Available 8:00 AM on Thurs., May 3rd until 3:00 PM on Tues., May 8th

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Words of Advice for How to Do Well in this Course</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Print yourself out a copy of the Syllabus and other course documents like PowerPoints in Handout Version.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Do the reading.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Take notes on copies of the readings and lecture materials.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ask questions!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Do the assignments and turn them in on time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Study before exams.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Make sure the professor knows your name AND associates it with good things.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Reaction Paper Assignment**

A reaction paper is a four (4) page (typed, double-spaced, 12 pt. font) “reaction” to a group of readings. I want you to react to the readings and not summarize the readings. I read them. I know what they are about. I do not want a book report. I want your reaction paper to illustrate that you had some sort of an “intellectual struggle” with the material. I want you to take up one or more of the issues raised and talk about the problems, implications, your proposed solution, a different ("better") way of looking at the issue, etc. Think big. This is hard, but another challenge is that it must **ONLY BE FOUR PAGES LONG**. You will be down-graded if you go beyond the page limit. I recommend you get your thoughts down on paper then walk away from it for a day or so. When you come back to it with fresh eyes you will be able to decipher what is important to say and what is not. [Note: papers done 20 minutes before they are due are generally really bad.]

**Here are some Dos and Don’ts that may help you:**

**DO**

- Be analytical – think BIG! What are the implications of the key points of a reading or readings in the short-term, long-term, etc.? So, for example, the first set of readings discuss the connection between public opinion and democratic governance and a reasonable approach to Reaction Paper #1 may be to examine the extent to which the public is equipped to participate in the democratic process as supported by the assigned readings. Alternatively, you might focus on the role polls play in responsive governance, the implications, and whether you find polling results an appropriate/convincing representation of the people’s voice.
- Challenge the argument or assumptions being made by an author or authors and suggest an alternative
- Consider problems with the approach or methodology being used and suggest an alternative
- Integrate common themes among the readings wherever you can

**DON’T**

- Summarize
- Tell me you think the reading was long, boring, interesting, funny, etc. You are not a literary critic.
- State the obvious
- Ignore the important themes among the readings
- Make claims that can’t be supported by the readings