

**Political Science 201**  
**Introduction to Political Behavior and Activism**  
 Winter 2006  
 Monday and Wednesday 12:30 –2:18 p.m.  
 MacQuigg 161

**Instructor:** Johnny Peel

**Office:** Derby 2012

**Hours:** Monday/Wednesday 10 – 11 a.m. or by appointment

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**Required Readings:**

- **American Public Opinion**, by Robert Erikson and Kent Tandin, 7<sup>th</sup> Edition, Longman Publishing.
- **The New Citizenship**, by Craig Rimmerman, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition, Westview Publishing.
- Expectation of knowledge of major political current events.

**Introduction:**

In this course, these are a few of the major questions I hope we find answers to:

- How do individuals form their political opinions?
- How knowledgeable are Americans about politics?
- What do Americans think about major political issues?
- How reliable is public opinion polling?
- What is the role of the government in shaping public opinion? The media?
- How much weight should politicians place on public opinion in making decisions?
- What factors determine if (and how) individuals participate in politics?
- Why is US voter turnout lower than other democracies?
- Why has US voter turnout declined over time?
- Does voter turnout have an effect on electoral outcomes? On public policy?
- What structural aspects of the US system affect turnout?
- Which social groups are most/least likely to vote? Why?
- How do campaign contributions affect elections and public policy?
- How do interest groups affect elections and public policy?
- Does a contacting public official ever make a difference? Why?
- What impact do non-traditional forms of participation (such as protests) have on the political system? When are they most likely to be effective?
- What is involved in the process of running for local office?
- How can you get active in politics? What is the best strategy if you want to make a difference about an issue you care about?

David Brinkley once said that since it is impossible to be objective, it is all the more important to be fair. I am not going to pretend that I hold no political beliefs of my own, but I also will not prevent an open discussion of anyone else's political views. One of the core beliefs I will not be bashful in expressing is that blind acceptance of the status quo and the tendency of citizens to unquestioningly believe what they are told by the media, by elected officials and by business leaders is a corrosive force eating away at American democracy. If you are not prepared to critically examine the political world we live in, this may not be the class for you. Another thread that will be evident in the course is the active encouragement of political participation. By the end of this quarter, I hope to have shown all of you not only the massive influence of government upon your lives, but also the largely untapped ability of regular citizens to influence government policies.

In this course, my main goals are two-fold:

- A) To give you a solid understanding of what political science has learned about what shapes public opinion and determines political behavior.
- B) To give you the practical knowledge you need to get involved in politics if you desire.

I have learned that the combination of traditional lectures and in-class discussion is effective in honing the critical thinking skills of students. Because in-class discussion is an important part of this course, it is extremely important to make sure you attend each lecture and keep up with the readings. Exam questions will be drawn from the book, lectures, and class discussions, so if you do not keep up it will be reflected in your exam grades.

### **Goals/Rationale:**

Courses in social science help students understand human behavior and cognition, and the structures of human societies, cultures and institutions.

### **Learning Objectives:**

1. Students understand the theories and methods of scientific inquiry as they are applied to the studies of individuals, groups, organizations, and societies.
2. Students comprehend human differences and similarities in various psychological, social, cultural, economic, geographic, and political contexts.
3. Students develop abilities to comprehend and assess individual and social values, and recognize their importance in social problem solving and policy making.

### **Responsibilities:**

Your responsibilities are to be in class on time each day, be attentive and respectful of your instructor and your fellow students, and to come prepared to discuss the readings and issues arising from previous lectures, etc. Out of respect for me and your fellow students please turn off all cell phones when you enter the class and give your undivided attention to the material being presented.

**Policy on Absences:**

In terms of absences for exams; I will only accept excuses that deal with medical or family emergencies, and they should be accompanied by documentation. If you know in advance you absolutely cannot make an exam and can provide some proof of your circumstances, meet with me and we may be able to make alternative arrangements.

**Grading:**

First exam	250 points
Second exam	250 points
Third exam	250 points
Fourth Exam	250 points

(Lowest exam grade is dropped)

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Total	750 points
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Extra Credit opportunity	up to	15 points
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**Exams:**

There will be four exams. All will be closed book in-class exams. The format will be a mixture of multiple choice, matching and true/false questions. The final will NOT be comprehensive. In addition to the assigned readings and lecture material, you will be expected to keep up with major political events (which we will also discuss in class), and some exam questions will test your basic factual knowledge of these events. Study guides will be distributed for each exam, and ONLY materials on the study guide will be on the exam.

**You will be allowed to drop the lowest of your four exam grades from your final grade.**

HINT: I get a large portion of my political news from Countdown with Keith Olbermann on MSNBC (weeknights @ 8), so usually if you watch that program you'll get a head start on what kind of events we'll discuss in class. I don't care WHERE you get your news from, but I do expect you to pay attention to news sources of your choosing while you are in this class.

**Attendance:**

You will not be graded on attendance, but given that a significant portion of the exams will be drawn from information disseminated in the classroom, it is still very important for you to attend each class meeting.

**Disability Statement:**

Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss your specific needs. Please contact the Office for Disability Services at 614-292-3307 in room 150 Pomerene Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities.

**A Word About E-mail:**

Some important class assignments and announcements may be distributed via e-mail, so it is essential that you provide me with the e-mail address you use most frequently. **IMPORTANT: You** are responsible for making sure you receive class e-mails. If you have technical difficulties, it is your responsibility to inform me of your problem. Please make sure that my address is removed from any spam filter you use. This has been a common problem in past classes.

**Schedule:**

**(This schedule is not set in stone. The pace of the class or current political events may make changes necessary)**

**Wednesday January 4**

- Introduction

**Monday January 9**

- Introduction to public opinion  
*Erickson ch. 1-2*

**Wednesday January 11**

- Psychology of public opinion  
*Erikson ch. 3*

**Monday January 16**

- **MLK day: NO CLASS!**

**Wednesday January 18**

- Trends in Political Sentiment/Political Socialization and Learning  
*Erikson ch. 4*

**Monday January 23**

- **FIRST EXAM**

**Wednesday January 25**

- Political Socialization and Learning  
*Erikson ch. 5*

**Monday January 30**

- Support for Democratic Values/Group Difference  
*Erikson ch. 6-7*

**Wednesday February 1**

- The Media  
*Erikson ch. 8*

**Monday February 6**

- **SECOND EXAM**

**Wednesday February 8**

- Public Opinion's Impact on Elections  
*Erikson ch. 9*

**Monday February 13**

- Public Opinion's Impact on Public Policy  
*Erikson ch. 10-11*

**Wednesday February 15**

- Introduction to Non-Voting Behavior (Rimmerman ch. 1)

**Monday February 20**

- The Elite Theory of Democracy/Participatory Democracy (Rimmerman ch. 2)

**Wednesday February 22**

- **THIRD EXAM**

**Monday February 27**

- Civic Indifference and Voter Turnout (Rimmerman ch. 3)

**Wednesday March 1**

- Civility and Stability (Rimmerman ch. 4)

**Monday March 3**

- "The Me Generation" (Rimmerman ch. 5)

**Wednesday March 8**

- Service Learning and the New Citizenship (Rimmerman ch. 6)

**FINAL EXAM AS SCHEDULED BY THE UNIVERSITY**