

Political Science 201
Introduction to Political Behavior and Activism
 Autumn 2005
 Monday and Wednesday 11:30 –1:18 a.m.
 Townsend Hall 248

Instructor: Johnny Peel

Office: Derby 2012

Hours : Monday -Thursday 10 – 11 a.m. or by appointment

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Required Readings:

- **American Public Opinion**, by Robert Erikson and Kent Tandin, 7th Edition, Longman Publishing.
- **The New Citizenship**, by Craig Rimmerman, 3rd Edition, Westview Publishing.
- Additional readings distributed by instructor

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 also 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.

Experimental Research

I intend to collect some data from activities and class assignments to use in my own dissertation research. You will be asked to give some personal information later in the quarter, and I want you to know that your divulging of this information is **completely voluntary**. This information will be completely confidential, and steps will be taken to make sure that no one can be linked to their responses on the in-class surveys. Finally, those who agree to share this information will be given 30 extra credit points (3% of final grade). If you choose not to participate, you will be given an alternative assignment of equal value.

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:

Many important class assignments and announcements will 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. Beyond that, a technical problem will not allow you to miss a deadline or claim that you did not get a reading. I expect you to exhaust other options, such as contacting me, trying to connect from a campus computer, or getting the assignment from another student in the class. 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 September 21

- Introduction

Monday September 26

- Introduction to public opinion
Erickson ch. 1-2

Wednesday September 28

- Psychology of public opinion
Erikson ch. 3

Monday October 3

- Trends in Political Sentiment
Erikson ch. 4

Wednesday October 5

- Political Socialization and Learning
Erikson ch. 5

Monday October 10

- Support for Democratic Values & Group differences
Erikson ch. 6-7

Wednesday October 12

- The impact of the media
Erikson ch. 8

Monday October 17

- Public opinion's impact on elections and policy
Erikson ch. 9, 10, 11

Wednesday October 19

- Review Day

Monday October 24

- **First exam**

Wednesday October 26

- Introduction to Political Participation
Conway ch. 1-2

Monday October 31

- Introduction to Non-Voting Behavior (Rimmerman ch. 1); The Elite Theory of Democracy/Participatory Democracy (Rimmerman ch. 2)

Wednesday November 2

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

Monday November 7

- Civility and Stability (Rimmerman ch. 4); "The Me Generation" (Rimmerman ch. 5)

Wednesday November 9

- Campaign Financing
Readings TBA

Monday November 14, Wednesday November 16 and Monday November 21

- *Group Campaign Finance Project (details TBA)*

Wednesday November 23

- **NO CLASS**

Monday November 28

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

Wednesday November 30

- Review/spillover Day

FINAL EXAM AS SCHEDULED BY THE UNIVERSITY