

Political Science 201
Introduction to Political Behavior and Activism
Winter 2005
Tuesday and Thursday 4:30-6:18 pm
MacQuigg Lab 161

Instructor: Johnny Peel

Office: Derby 2012

Hours: Tuesday and Thursday 1 – 2 p.m. or by appointment

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Required Readings:

- **American Public Opinion**, by Robert Erikson and Kent Tandin, 7th Edition, Longman Publishing.
- **Political Participation in the United States**, by M. Margaret Conway, 3rd Edition, CQ Press

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 contacting public officials 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.

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 regular class or 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 be in class and can provide some proof of your circumstances, meet with me and we may be able to make alternative arrangements.

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.

Statement on Academic Misconduct:

Ohio State defines academic misconduct as any of the following behaviors:

- Violation of course rules as contained in the course syllabus
- Providing or receiving information during quizzes and examinations
- Taking the place of another student during an examination
- Plagiarism

Consequences of Misconduct:

An instructor who believes that academic misconduct has occurred in his or her class will refer the student or students involved to the university committee on academic misconduct. A hearing will take place, and if the student or students are found guilty, any of the following sanctions will be applied:

- Warning
- Failing the course
- Failing the assignment
- Placement on disciplinary probation
- Suspension from the university
- Dismissal from the university

A Word About E-mail:

Many 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. 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)

January 4

- Introduction

January 6

- Introduction to public opinion
Erickson ch. 1-2

January 11

- Psychology of public opinion/Trends in Political Sentiment
Erikson ch. 3-4

January 13

- Political Socialization and Learning
Erikson ch. 5

January 18

- Political Socialization and Learning
Erikson ch. 6-7

January 20

- The News Media and Public Opinion
Erikson ch. 8

January 25

- Review Day

January 27

- First Exam

February 1

- Elections as Instruments of Popular Control/The Public and its Elected Leaders
Erikson ch. 9-10

February 3

- Public Opinion and the Performance of Democracy
Erikson ch. 11

February 8

- Introduction to Political Participation
Conway ch. 1-2

February 10

- Psychology of Participation
Conway ch. 3

February 15

- The Political Environment and Participation/ The Legal Structure and Participation
Conway ch. 4-5

February 17

- The Rationality of Participation
Conway ch. 6

February 22

- Review Day

February 24

- Second Exam

March 1

- Explanations of Patterns of Political Participation
Conway ch. 7

March 3

- Does Political Participation Make a Difference?
Conway ch. 8

March 8

- Review Day

March 10

- Final Exam