

Political Science 359W: Public Opinion and Political Learning

Professor Jeffrey L. Bernstein

Class meets Tuesday and Thursday, 9:30 A.M. – 10:45 A.M., 220 Pray-Harrold

Welcome to Political Science 359W, Public Opinion and Political Learning. I'm very excited to be teaching this class again, and I look forward to getting to know all of you and working with you this semester. Thanks in advance for sharing this journey with me.

How to Contact Me:

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Office Hours: Mondays, 10 A.M. – 12 P.M.; Tuesdays, 11:00 A.M. – 12:30 P.M.;
Thursdays, 12:00 P.M. – 1:30 P.M.; **and by appointment**
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I'm usually not hard to find. I'm on e-mail all the time, and will try to check my voice mail at least once a day. I welcome visitors during office hours – this is your time, and I enjoy the company and the chance to get to know you. If you'd like to talk in person but my office hours don't work for you, let me know and we can find a different time that works for both of us. Please do not hesitate to be in touch if you have any concerns about the class, or if you want to talk about other stuff.

Take-Home Final Exam

When I teach, I use the principle of “backwards design.” What this means is that I articulate for myself what I want you to learn, and then design the course to maximize your chances of achieving my desired learning objectives. So, here is your take-home final exam:

The Responsible Electorate?

We know by now that citizens don't devote oodles of time to following politics; Philip Converse would argue that if political information promises few benefits, “voters are no fools to remain ignorant.” And yet, V.O. Key argued in his book *The Responsible Electorate* that “voters are not fools.” Key argued that citizens actually do quite fine in terms of gaining, processing, and using information.

How can this be? Do citizens know enough to process the political world and reach reasonably informed conclusions? What devices do citizens use to ease the task of gathering political information, understanding it, and making decisions based upon it? Can citizens do this adequately, or must we disagree with Key and argue that the voters are, in fact, fools? Based on all of this, how would you assess the empirical and normative place of public opinion in democracy?

So, if you read the above paragraph closely, you will see me telegraphing for you one of the biggest themes of the course. Basically, I wonder about the extent to which this American experiment with democracy is working. Can citizens really understand what they need to in order to participate in this democracy? Do they need to understand this much? How does our system of government work if the people are unable to fulfill the tasks we outline for them? You get the idea.

So, that's my goal – your being able to answer questions like this at the end of the course is vitally important to me. How will we get there? We'll start off with a provocative case study of public opinion regarding the tax cuts of 2001 and 2003; this case study will raise some important questions about the competence of the American citizenry. We then consider some problems in American government today – people don't vote, they don't trust the political system, they lack political knowledge, they lack connections to their fellow citizens, etc. We'll ask why these patterns have emerged and study their consequences. We will be reading the professional literature on these problems; the work will not be easy, but the rewards will be great.

As I hope you can tell from the exam question, a big goal of mine in this class is to pay lots of attention to the **big questions**. These questions can be difficult, and perhaps intractable. We will feel as if we have reached an epiphany in our understanding – and then the next article we read will shatter that. That's good, that's normal, and, if I may say so, that's fun! Years ago, political scientist V.O. Key wrote that “to speak with precision about public opinion is a task not unlike coming to grips with the Holy Ghost.” I think Key might have been right, given the ephemeral nature of knowledge regarding public opinion.

So, as we struggle together with some of this material, I will push you to be informed *consumers* and *producers* of public opinion knowledge. To that end, we will spend a lot of time reading the literature and critiquing it; I very strongly want to encourage you to engage with what you read, and to argue with it. Do not take what I give you to read as the absolute Truth – there are multiple perspectives on all these issues, and I encourage you to be informed skeptics this term. And, as you work at being *consumers* of knowledge, you will spend a fair bit of time in here *producing* your own knowledge, in the form of your own, original written work. More on that below.

A Little Bit About Me

I've been on the faculty in political science at EMU since 1997. Political learning is my central research area; I am currently engaged in a large-scale study of what political thinking looks like when done by experts and novices. You'll hear about this work this semester when we think about how we can help people to be more capable and effective citizens, and when we think of the role civic education plays in this process.

I'm a husband, father of two wonderful boys (Zachary is sixteen and Solly is eleven) and a crazed, suffering fan of the New York Mets. I like music with tight vocal harmonies and think nobody can sing as well as the Oak Ridge Boys. My two favorite movies are

12 Angry Men (the original) and *Apollo 13*, although I saw *Spotlight* over the break and was floored by how good it was. I juggle – balls, clubs, rings, and flaming torches. My job is important to me, because I relish the opportunity to be the kind of teacher to all of you that people like Charles Franklin, Jim Davis, John Jackson and John Kingdon were to me in college and graduate school. I can never pay them back for what they did for me; instead, I try to use them as exemplars for what I want to be as a teacher, scholar and mentor.

I've spent a lot of my time thinking about teaching, and I think I have a mission statement for my teaching: **my job is to provide the scaffolding to help you achieve great heights**. If we unpack that statement, we'll see two implications. First, **I intend to have you reach great heights**. I will push you to read difficult material, answer challenging questions in class, and write incredibly good papers. That's your job. **My job is to help you get there** – to run interesting class sessions, give you engaging assignments, and help you as you go about doing the work for this class. I very much want you to do well; help me help you!

My Expectations for You

Now that I've told you who I am and what you can expect from me as a teacher this term, let me share with you some of the things I will expect from you. I'll start by saying that I view PLSC 359 as a serious class for serious students (even for graduating seniors). **If you are not prepared to work hard and take learning seriously, drop the class**. You owe it to yourselves, and to your classmates, to give it your all!

So as not to belabor what should be obvious, a few quick bullet points of expectations:

- Please attend class. A great deal of material will only be addressed in class.
- Please come on time. If you must be late, please enter non-disruptively.
- Please get dressed before coming to class. No pajamas. (A pet peeve of mine!) If you makes you feel better, I will pledge not to wear my pajamas during class.
- I permit the use of laptops in class for note-taking. Please do not abuse the privilege by using your computer to goof off, or to visit inappropriate sites, during class. If you abuse the permission to use laptops in class by visiting inappropriate sites (such as www.yankees.com), you will lose computer privileges in my class.
- Pls do not txt your bff during my class. IMHO, what u have 2 say is just not that important. It can wait. Really. It can.
- Please do not sleep in class. I don't teach in your bedroom, so don't sleep in my classroom.
- Please do the readings ahead of time. Think about them and come to class prepared to discuss them and hear what others have to say.
- Please take deadlines and due dates seriously.
- Please work steadily throughout the term. You will do much better on exams and on the final paper assignment if you don't wait until the last minute to try to pull stuff together. Slow and steady wins the race.

By the way, I know class meets early. Sadly, I don't care. ☹ The early hour of the class does not give you permission to come late, or to skip class. Life is tough – be tougher! Finally, and most importantly, please remember that I am here to help you and to try to maximize your success in this class and at EMU in general. Keep me posted on how things are going for you. If you are struggling, or run into personal problems, don't let things snowball until they are out of control. Please give me every opportunity to help you succeed; I would like nothing better than to have everyone in here do well.

What We Will Read

I will not assign a voluminous set of readings for you to do this term. Instead, I will assign a smaller amount of material and lead us in exploring what we do read more deeply. I expect you to do the assigned reading carefully, *using your brain as well as your eyeballs* in doing so. Please come to class ready to explore the readings and their implications.

I've ordered two books for the class, available at the bookstores and online. The books are:

Dalton, Russell J. 2016. *The Good Citizen: How a Younger Generation Is Reshaping American Politics*, 2nd Edition. Thousands Oaks, CA: CQ Press. **Hereafter referred to as Dalton.**

Wattenberg, Martin P. 2012. *Is Voting for Young People?* 3rd edition. New York: Pearson Longman. **Hereafter referred to as Wattenberg.**

Something that's a little interesting is that Dalton and Wattenberg are colleagues and friends at UC-Riverside – they have offices down the hall from each other – and have some strong areas of disagreement. We'll learn from unpacking these disagreements.

In addition to the books, we will have a variety of other readings – journal articles, book chapters, etc. These will be made available to you on Canvas. All course readings outside of the textbooks will be available to you starting on the first day of the semester.

Exams and Other Assignments

So, what will we do this term as assignments? First of all, we'll have an in-class midterm, made up of paragraph-length items and one longer essay, which will be held in class on Thursday, February 18. The midterm will not ask you to regurgitate the material we cover in class – that's boring, and I know how much students hate boring exams. Instead, the exams will concentrate on *application*; asking you to *use* and *synthesize* what you know to demonstrate an understanding of public opinion and political learning.

The final exam will be due on Tuesday, April 26, at 9 A.M. The take-home exam question should have the title “The Responsible Electorate” and should respond to the prompt given on page 1 of this syllabus.

As you know, this is a Writing Intensive class. As such, in addition to the exams, I will be providing *lots* of opportunities for you to write, in a variety of ways. YEAH! First, I will ask you to write a *grant application* of approximately 5000 words (including tables, references and appendices). The grant application should summarize the state of our knowledge in a particular area of public opinion, and should propose an inquiry that will fill in a significant hole in our knowledge. We will do this in stages, starting with an “Idea Memo” (due on February 11), a “Progress Memo” (due on March 10), then a complete rough draft (due on March 31). The final paper will be due on Tuesday, April 19, by 11 P.M. I will say a lot more about each of these stages of the project. For now, suffice it to say that I expect a high-quality, thoughtful, and sophisticated piece of original research, and will do everything in my power to help you to produce such work.

On four occasions during the term, I will ask you to write an 800-word article review for that day. The review should go beyond merely summarizing the pieces assigned; instead, you should respond to the arguments made by the authors, highlighting agreements and disagreements with other readings, discussing methodological issues as appropriate, and setting the piece in a broader context relative to our course and to American politics. We’ll handle assignments for these reviews on the second day of class; I will also discuss the process we will use for these reviews (using Canvas) on the second day as well.

Writing in collaboration with peers will be a critical component of this class. During the semester, you will be part of a peer review group with three other students. You will read and respond to your classmates’ memos on the readings. Your work doing this peer review will be reflected in your class participation grade. Details will follow.

Class participation is very, very important to me. Your learning in this class will be enhanced by listening to what your fellow students have to say, and by sharing your own thoughts – both in written work and in our discussions. There will be many opportunities for you to take an active role in this class, and I hope you will take full advantage of them.

Grading

You probably are wondering how grades are determined. The chart below gives the assignments, due dates, and the percentage each will count toward your course grade.

Date	Assignment	Percent of Grade
February 18	Midterm Examination	20
April 26	Take-Home Examination Due (by 9 A.M.)	20
February 11	Grant Application “Idea Memo” Due	Not graded
March 10	Grant Application “Progress Memo” Due	Not graded
March 31	Grant Application Complete Draft Due	5

April 19	Final Grant Application Due (by 11 P.M.)	30
Dates vary	Article Reviews	5 each, 20 total
All term	Class participation – including peer reviews	5

I will guarantee you the grade promised to you by the chart. I reserve the right to bump up grades on the basis of things such as improvement over the term, exemplary class participation, etc. Give me a good reason to raise your grade; I'll be happy to do so. ☺

A Few Other Notes

Let me make a couple of other comments here. First of all, **academic integrity**. Here at the university, there are few issues that are more important. Academic dishonesty, including all forms of **cheating and/or plagiarism**, will not be tolerated in this class. Anyone caught engaging in academic dishonesty will receive a grade of zero for the assignment in question and may, at my discretion, receive a failing grade for the entire course. In addition, you may be referred to the *Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards* for discipline that could result in suspension or permanent dismissal from the university. If you are not sure whether something constitutes academic dishonesty, ask me.

For **students with disabilities**, if you wish to be accommodated for your disability, EMU policy requires that you first register with the *Disability Resource Center* in room 240K of the Student Center. You may contact the DRC by phone at (734) 487-2470; their website is <http://www.emich.edu/drc/>. Students with disabilities are encouraged to register with the DRC soon as you will only be accommodated from the date you register with them forward. **No retroactive accommodations are possible**. I am more than willing to offer you all accommodations to which you are entitled, but emphasize this is not something I can do on my own. If you have any questions, talk to me or the Disability Resource Center.

I am willing to make all reasonable accommodations for **absences caused by religious observation**. I do ask that you keep me posted when situations like this occur. Like most people, I am familiar with religious observances in my own faith, but know less about other religions. Perhaps your informing me of your absences, should they be necessary, will give me an opportunity to learn something new!

One other thing – for purposes of this course, when I need to reach all of the students, I will use e-mail, specifically e-mail sent to your emich.edu address. Please make sure that all messages sent to this account are accessible by you and, if you use a different account, that you are able to forward EMU e-mails to your other account. I will consider you to have been informed about something connected with the course if I e-mail it to you at your emich.edu address.

Finally, in addition to my policies and expectations, you are responsible for understanding all applicable University guidelines, policies, and

procedures. The EMU Student Handbook is the primary resource provided to students to ensure that they have access to all University policies, support resources, and students' rights and responsibilities. The policies can be found in all their glory at the following URL: <http://www.emich.edu/studenthandbook/policies/academic.php#univ>

Schedule of Classes

Below, I have listed a schedule of classes and what we will attempt to do in each one. Let me emphasize that this is somewhat tentative – I want us all to feel free to follow what interests us rather than being bound by my artificial schedule. Still, I trust this is a fairly reasonable outline and urge you to remain diligent about keeping track of where we are.

Part I: Introduction

Thursday, January 7 – Course Introduction; Diving In....

Tankersley, Jim and Scott Clement. 2015. “What Gun Control Advocates Don’t Understand about Gun Owners.” *Washington Post*, December 3.

Tuesday, January 12 – The Concept of a “Correct” Vote

Lau, Richard R. and David P. Redlawsk. 1997. “Voting Correctly.” *American Political Science Review* 91: 585-598.

Part II: A Case Study of Tax Reform

Thursday, January 14 – D’oh! Homer Gets a Tax Cut

Bartels, Larry M. 2005. “Homer Gets a Tax Cut: Inequality and Public Policy in the American Mind.” *Perspectives on Politics* 3:15-31.

Tuesday, January 19 – A Response to Homer Gets a Tax Cut

Hacker, Jacob S. and Paul Pierson. 2005. “Abandoning the Middle: The Bush Tax Cuts and the Limits of Democratic Control.” *Perspectives on Politics* 3: 33-53.

Thursday, January 21 – Another Response, and Bartels’ Rejoinder

Lupia, Arthur, Adam Seth Levine, Jesse O. Manning and Gisela Sin. 2007. “Were Bush Tax Cut Supporters ‘Simply Ignorant’? A Second Look at Conservatives and Liberals in ‘Homer Gets a Tax Cut.’” *Perspectives on Politics* 5: 773-784.

Bartels, Larry M. 2007. “Homer Gets a Warm Hug: A Note on Ignorance and Extenuation.” *Perspectives on Politics* 5:785-790.

Part III: Methodological Considerations

Tuesday, January 26 – The “Dark Arts” of Surveys

Seife, Charles. 2010. *Proofiness: The Dark Arts of Mathematical Deception*. New York: Viking. Chapter 4.

Thursday, January 28 – Surveys and the Abortion Issue

Abramowitz, Alan I. 1995. “It’s Abortion, Stupid: Policy Voting in the 1992 Presidential Election.” *Journal of Politics* 57:176-186.

Tuesday, February 2 – Interviews and the Abortion Issue

Luker, Kristin. 1984. *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood*. Berkeley: University of California Press. Chapter 7.

Thursday, February 4 – A Bit More Methodology; What People Know

Grimmer, Justin, Solomon Messing and Sean J. Westwood. 2012. “How Words and Money Cultivate a Personal Vote: The Effect of Legislator Credit Claiming on Constituent Credit Application.” *American Political Science Review* 106: 703-719.

Tuesday, February 9 – GRANT APPLICATION WORKSHOP DAY #1

Part IV: Challenges to Democracy

A. Young People May Be Disengaging from Politics

Thursday, February 11 – Young People Are Disengaged from Politics

Wattenberg, chapters 1-2.

NOTE: YOUR GRANT APPLICATION “IDEA MEMO” IS DUE TODAY

Tuesday, February 16 – Young People Aren’t Disengaged from Politics

Dalton, chapters 1-3.

Harward, Brian M. and Daniel M. Shea. 2012. “Disrupting Filters to Deepen Students’ Political Commitment.” *Transformative Dialogues*, Volume 6, Issue 1.

Thursday, February 18 – Midterm Examination

Tuesday, February 23 and Thursday, February 25 – Winter Break

B. People May Be Political Ignoramuses

Tuesday, March 1 – Methodology and Political ‘Ignorance’

Wattenberg, Chapter 3.

Bennett, Stephen Earl. 1988. “‘Know-Nothings’ Revisited: The Meaning of Political Ignorance Today.” *Social Science Quarterly* 69:476-490.

Thursday, March 3 – More Methodology and Political ‘Ignorance’

Stolle, Dietlind and Elisabeth Gidengill. 2010. “What do Women Really Know? A Gendered Analysis of Varieties of Political Knowledge.” *Perspectives on Politics* 8:93-109.

Lupia, Arthur. 2006. “How Elitism Undermines the Study of Democratic Competence.” *Critical Review* 18: 217-232.

C. Social Capital May Be on the Decline**Tuesday, March 8 – The Disappearance of Social Capital**

Dalton, Chapter 4.

Putnam, Robert D. 2000. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon and Schuster. Chapters 1-3.**Thursday, March 10 – The Reemergence of Social Capital**

Dalton, Chapter 5.

Walsh, Katherine Cramer. 2004. *Talking About Politics: Informal Groups and Social Identity in American Life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Chapter 3.**NOTE: YOUR GRANT APPLICATION “PROGRESS MEMO” IS DUE TODAY****D. Political Polarization May Be Increasing****Tuesday, March 15 – The (Fake?) Polarization of American Politics**Dionne, E.J. 1991. *Why Americans Hate Politics*. New York: Simon and Schuster. Chapter 1.Fiorina, Morris P. 2005. *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarized America*. New York: Pearson Longman. Chapters 1 and 3.**Thursday, March 17 – Can Political Polarization Be Overcome?****GRANT APPLICATION WORKSHOP DAY #2**Gutmann, Amy and Dennis Thompson. 2010. “The Mindsets of Political Compromise.” *Perspectives on Politics* 8: 1125-1143.**E. People May Be Politically Disaffected****Tuesday, March 22 – Disaffection with Government Processes**

Dalton, Chapter 6.

Hibbing, John R. and Elizabeth Theiss-Morse. 1995. *Congress as Public Enemy: Public Attitudes Toward American Political Institutions*. New York: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 4 and 5.**Thursday, March 24 – The Meaning of Declining Participation**

Wattenberg, Chapters 4, 5 and 9.

Part V: Political Socialization and Political Thinking**Tuesday, March 29 – Agents of Political Socialization– Family, Schools**Jennings, M. Kent. 1993. “Education and Political Development among Young Adults.” *Politics and the Individual* 3:1-24.

Huckestein, Hailey L., Steven M, Mikulic and Jeffrey L. Bernstein. 2015. “Major Factors in the Development of Political Attitudes.” Working paper.

Thursday, March 31 – The Organization of the Political Mind

Lodge, Milton and Ruth Hamill. 1986. “A Partisan Schema for Information Processing.” *American Political Science Review* 80: 505-519.

Taber, Charles and Milton Lodge. 2006. “Motivated Skepticism in the Evaluation of Political Beliefs.” *American Journal of Political Science* 50: 755-769.

NOTE: YOUR GRANT APPLICATION DRAFT IS DUE TO ME BY 8 P.M. TODAY

Tuesday, April 5 – Genetics and Politics – Really? Yes, Really.**GRANT APPLICATION WORKSHOP DAY #3**

Alford, John, Carolyn Funk and John Hibbing. 2005. “Are Political Orientations Genetically Transmitted?” *American Political Science Review* 99: 153-167.

Thursday, April 7 – Perspectives on Race, Class, Gender

Wolak, Jennifer and Michael McDevitt. 2011. “The Roots of the Gender Gap in Political Knowledge in Adolescence.” *Political Behavior* 33: 505-533.

Hutchings, Vincent L., Hanes Walton, Jr. and Andrea Benjamin. 2010. “The Impact of Explicit Racial Cues on Gender Differences in Support for Confederate Symbols and Partisanship.” *Journal of Politics* 72: 1175-1188.

Tuesday, April 12 – Political Socialization – The Mass Media

Graber, Doris A. 1994. “Why Voters Fail Information Tests: Can the Hurdles Be Overcome?” *Political Communication* 11:331-346.

Iyengar, Shanto, Mark D. Peters, and Donald R. Kinder. 1982. “Experimental Demonstrations of the ‘Not-so-Minimal’ Consequences of Television News Programs.” *American Political Science Review* 76:848-858.

Thursday, April 14 – Political Networks and Why They Matter

Huckfelt, Robert, Eric Plutzer and John Sprague. 1993. “Alternative Contexts of Political Behavior; Churches, Neighborhoods and Individuals.” *Journal of Politics* 55: 365-381.

Mutz, Diana C. 2002. “The Consequences of Cross-Cutting Networks for Political Participation.” *American Journal of Political Science* 46: 838-855.

Part VI: The American Experiment with Democracy**Tuesday, April 19 – Civic Engagement and Deliberative Democracy**

Bernstein, Jeffrey L. 2008. “Cultivating Civic Competence: Simulations and Skill-Building in an Introductory Government Class.” *Journal of Political Science Education* 4: 1-20.

Sanders, Lynn. 1997. “Against Deliberation.” *Political Theory* 25: 347-376.

NOTE: YOUR GRANT APPLICATION IS DUE TONIGHT AT 11:00 P.M. THIS IS A FIRM DEADLINE.

Tuesday, April 26 – Take-Home Final Examination Due by 9:00 A.M.