

POSC 146
MASS MEDIA AND PUBLIC OPINION
 Spring 2005

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Office Hours: Tuesday and Wednesday, 2:30-4:30 p.m. and by appointment

Class consultant: Mary Currin-Percival
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 hours: Tuesday/Thursday, 10-11 a.m.; Wednesday 3-4 p.m.; and by appointment

On-line web course materials available through Blackboard <http://ilearn.ucr.edu/>

Required Reading

Weisberg, Herbert F., Jon A. Krosnick, and Bruce D. Bowen. 1996. *An Introduction to Survey Research, Polling, and Data Analysis*, 3rd edition. Sage Publications. ISBN 0803974027.

Asher, Herbert. 2004. *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know*, 6th edition. CQ Press. ISBN 1568028334.

Course Requirements

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| Journal article review | 10% |
| Institutional Review Board Tutorial certification | 10% |
| Research proposal | 10% |
| Midterm exam | 15% |
| Survey fieldwork | 20% |
| Survey research analysis report | 15% |
| Final examination | 20% |

Course Description

This course might be better named *Public Opinion and the Mass Media*, but the catalog title isn't too far off base. In this class, we will discuss public opinion and the mass media with attention both to concerns about how news media may affect public opinion as well as how the news outlets and scholars attempt to gauge and characterize public opinion through the conduct of survey research. A major part of this class will involve a collective class project - the design, fielding, and analysis of our own original public opinion survey, conducted in a computer assisted telephone interviewing facility. This will be a random sample survey of a population the class chooses and a research design the class develops. Because we will be conducting a survey, the course has a theoretical side, as well as a practical element.

Much class time will be allocated to lecture material. However, given that we will collaborate on a research project together, it is essential that you are prepared to be a partner in this collaboration. I expect you to pay close attention to the readings and keep up with them.

My office hours are listed at the top of this syllabus. Please do not hesitate to come by during these scheduled times or contact me to schedule an appointment.

Students with permanent and temporary disabilities should contact me to discuss arrangements, as well as contact Services for Students with Disabilities to request services.

Journal Article Review

Early in the quarter, I would like you to read one of several journal articles related to public opinion and the mass media. Ms. Currin-Percival and I will prepare a list of articles for you to choose from among. In your review, which should be 2-4 pages, I will ask you to identify the research question the article poses and the hypothesis or hypotheses investigated. You will also need to pay attention to how the survey items the researcher(s) use(s) are worded, how the population was surveyed, and other details. Attending to these issues will help you begin to think about the theory and practice of public opinion research. The Journal Article Review is due April 12, in class.

Institutional Review Board Tutorial

Also early in the quarter, I would like you to work through the Institutional Review Board Tutorial for investigators conducting research with human subjects. Participation is self-guided – log in using your own e-mail address at: <http://www.ora.ucr.edu/appTutorial/TutorialClient/Introduction.asp>. You will be asked to write your own password. At the end of the tutorial, you will reach a screen indicating you have completed the tutorial. Print this out, sign the form and turn it into me in class April 12.

Research Proposal

The next major assignment is a short memo, 2-4 pages, proposing an idea for our class survey project. The paper will need to identify a question, why you are interested in it, and why you think it is important for researchers to learn. I will also ask you to write survey questions intended to measure the variables of interest. Ms. Currin-Percival and I will review the proposals and offer several of them to the class to discuss for inclusion on the final survey instrument in some form.

Survey Fieldwork

As noted, we will conduct a public opinion survey as a class. Your participation is essential for the collection of data in this project. Everyone in the class will be responsible for two two-hour shifts calling survey respondents, most likely during the second and third weeks of May, depending on the approval of our survey instrument by the campus Institution Review Board. Ms. Currin-Percival will oversee the survey fieldwork and grade your participation not on the basis of your ability to complete interviews, but rather your professionalism, punctuality, and effort. All interviews will be conducted in the Computing Collaboratory Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing Laboratory in Sproul Hall.

Survey Analysis Report

Following the fieldwork, with advice from Ms. Currin-Percival and me, you will conduct a rudimentary analysis of our data and write-up your findings. This will consist of posing a research question, reviewing a few journal articles related to the research question (no more than 3), and using the data we collect intended to inform some kind of answer to that question. For this assignment, you will use a statistical analysis package like SPSS, available in student computing laboratories across campus. Only basic analytical designs will be necessary to complete this assignment. The actual analysis report will likely be short, 3-5 pages, and consist of text, tables presenting results from your research, and the few relevant citations you develop. The paper is due by **5 p.m. Friday, June 3**.

Note that all late papers will be graded, but with a 1/3 letter-grade reduction with each day it is late. Any paper that is turned in will receive partial credit.

Examinations

You will also complete two examinations. The mid-term exam is scheduled for **Thursday, May 5, in class**. If you are unable to take the mid-term exam at the scheduled time, you may schedule an alternate time by contacting me prior to the scheduled exam time and providing appropriate original-copies documentation (medical, military, etc.) for your inability to take the exam at the scheduled time. Scheduling a makeup exam is your responsibility. I will consider extreme medical emergencies, again with complete original documentation. The final exam will have a similar but longer format. It is scheduled for **Thursday, June 9, 8-11 a.m.**

Any student who plagiarizes, cheats, or fabricates data will receive no credit for the spoiled assignment. All cases will be referred to the Student Judicial Affairs office.

Course Schedule

- March 29** **Course introduction and outline**
- March 31** **Thinking about public opinion**
Asher. Chapter 1 (pp. 1-27).
Golin, Albert. 1987. "Polling and the News Media." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 51: S86-S94.
<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0033362X%281987%2951%3CS86%3APATNM%3E2.0.CO%3B2-N>
Heith, Diane J. 2004. "Shaping Public Opinion: News Media." In John G. Geer, ed. *Public Opinion and Polling Around the World: A Historical Encyclopedia, Volume One*. ABC-CLIO. Pp. 38-44.
Moy, Patricia, and Dietram A. Scheufele. 2004. "Measuring Public Opinion, A Mass Media Perspective." In John G. Geer, ed. *Public Opinion and Polling Around the World: A Historical Encyclopedia, Volume One*. ABC-CLIO. Pp. 26-32.
- April 5** **Conducting a Survey Research Project: Preliminaries**
Weisberg, Krosnick, and Bowen. Chapters 1 & 2 (pp. 3-37).
- April 7** **No class meeting, but note assignments due April 12**
I suggest you use what would be our time together to complete the Institutional Review Board Tutorial at <http://www.ora.ucr.edu/appTutorial/TutorialClient/Introduction.asp>.
While you are preparing to complete the IRB tutorial, you should read Weisberg, Krosnick, and Bowen. Chapter 17 (pp. 351-364).
- April 12** **Overview of Media Effects**
Journal Article Review, Institutional Review Board Tutorial certification due in class
- April 14** **Questionnaire Design**
Weisberg, Krosnick, and Bowen. Chapter 4 (pp. 77-102).
- April 19** **Nonattitudes and Testing Effects**
Asher, Chapters 2 & 3 (pp. 28-68)
Research Proposal due in class
- April 21** **Discuss questionnaire**
- April 26** **Populations and Sampling**
Asher, Chapter 4 (pp. 69-88)
Weisberg, Krosnick, and Bowen. Chapter 3 (pp. 38-76)
- April 28** **Data Collection: Fieldwork**
Asher, Chapter 5 (pp. 89-103)
Weisberg, Krosnick, and Bowen. Chapter 5 (pp. 103-130)
- May 3** **Survey Project Overview & Exam Review**
Weisberg, Krosnick, and Bowen. Chapter 7 (pp. 147-170)
- May 5** **MIDTERM EXAM, IN CLASS**

- May 10** **Conducting Interviews in a Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing Facility**
Overview of VOXCO Interviewer Program and Etiquette
- May 10-21** **Fieldwork for survey, to be confirmed pending project approval by the IRB**
Each student is responsible for participating in two two-hour interviewing sessions
- May 12** **Reporting on Polls in the Media**
Asher, Chapter 6 (pp. 104-124)
- May 17** **Polls, Elections, and Democracy**
Asher, Chapters 7 & 9 (pp. 125-158; 189-201)
- May 19** **Data Analysis**
Asher, Chapter 8 (pp. 159-188)
Weisberg, Krosnick, and Bowen. Chapter 8 (pp. 173-189)
- May 24** **Data Analysis Continued: Frequency Distributions**
Weisberg, Krosnick, and Bowen. Chapter 9 (pp. 190-221)
- May 26** **Data Analysis Continued: Crosstabulation and Control Variables**
Weisberg, Krosnick, and Bowen. Chapter 11 & 13 (pp. 247-259, 283-297)
- May 31** **Data Analysis Continued: Using SPSS**
- June 2** **Survey Reports**
Weisberg, Krosnick, and Bowen. Chapter 15 (pp. 327-333)
Exam Review
- June 3** **Survey Analysis Report Due, 5 p.m.**
- June 9** **FINAL EXAM, 8-11 a.m**