

Public Opinion and Voting
POSC 560.01/SOC 460.01

Spring 2008

TF 12:00-1:50 p.m.

AC 209 (T) and AC 233 (F)

Office Hours: TWF 4:00-5:00 p.m.

and by appointment

Joel Fetzer

RAC 157

506-6250

joel.fetzer@pepperdine.edu

seaver.pepperdine.edu/academics/faculty/member.htm?facid=joel_fetzer

Bulletin Description: Examines the causes and effects of individuals= socio-political attitudes and voting in the United States. Laboratory work teaches secondary analysis of quantitative social surveys. A previous course in introductory statistics is strongly recommended. Satisfies POSC Methodology requirement.

Full Description: This course introduces the major theories of mass-level public opinion and voting and examines the political and social consequences of those views. Surveys the effects of childhood socialization, gender, ethnicity, religion, education, economics, and the media on people=s views of ethnic relations, welfare policy, civil liberties, political candidates, liberal democracy, and foreign policy. A parallel, hands-on, track teaches students how to conduct multivariate analysis of survey data.

Prerequisites: None formally, although POSC/SOC 250 or its equivalent is highly recommended.

Objectives: This class aims to increase students= understanding of why individuals differ in their socio-political attitudes and electoral behavior and of how public opinion influences public policy in a democracy. The course likewise teaches the skills needed for graduate study in empirical social research or for employment in political or commercial polling.

Requirements: Successful completion of this course will require attending class regularly and participating actively in the field trip, class discussions, and laboratory demonstrations (10% of grade), reading the assigned texts, completing the weekly lab-based problem sets (20% of grade), performing creditably on the midterm (20% of grade; scheduled for Tues., Feb. 26, in AC 209) and final (25% of grade; scheduled for Thurs., Apr. 24, from 10:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. in AC 209) exams, and writing a 10-15 page research paper (25% of grade; due Tues., Apr. 15) analyzing a particular public-opinion poll. Readings for a given week should normally be completed by the beginning of Tuesday=s meeting. Problem sets are also generally due at the beginning of Tuesday=s class.

Students with documented disabilities (physical, learning, or psychological) requiring accommodations to participate in class activities or meet course requirements should contact the Disabilities Services Office (TCC 264, 506-6500) as soon as possible. All discussions will remain confidential. Please visit www.pepperdine.edu/disabilityservices/ for additional information. Students needing to be absent during a religious holiday should also notify the instructor beforehand.

Academic dishonesty is inexcusable! Examples include writing notes on one's extremities and consulting said notes during a closed-book exam, forging the professor's signature, down-loading term papers from the Internet, copying a paper or problem set from another student (though reasonable cooperative efforts are allowed on problem sets in this class), hiring a graduate student to write your term paper for you, and submitting the same term paper for two classes without having previously obtained the permission of both instructors. If you are caught cheating in this class, I will do my best to see that you at least receive an F for the course. The Seaver College Academic Integrity Committee may impose additional sanctions, including suspension from Pepperdine. In short, don't even think about it!

A student requesting a grade change on substantive grounds (e.g., the number of points earned for a particular answer on an exam; substantive grounds do not include errors in adding up the total number of points for an exam) must submit her or his request to me in writing within one week of the date I returned the graded assignment to her or him. My response will be in writing and is subject to review by and carbon-copying to the chair of the Social Science Division.

Readings: The following works are *required* and may be purchased at the campus bookstore:

- Achen, Christopher H. 1982. *Interpreting and Using Regression*. Newbury Park: Sage.
- Erikson, Robert S., and Kent L. Tedin. 2005. *American Public Opinion*, 7th ed. New York: Pearson Longman.
- Gilens, Martin. 1999. *Why Americans Hate Welfare*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Pollock, Philip H. 2005. *An SPSS Companion to Political Analysis*, 2nd ed. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

In addition, obtaining a scientific calculator capable of computing e^x (where e is the base of a natural logarithm) is highly recommended.

Schedule:

Week 1 (Jan. 8 & 11): Introduction to Public Opinion Research

Reading: Pollock, pp. 1-57.

Lab: Review of basic statistical concepts; Introduction to SPSS

Week 2 (Jan. 15 & 18): Motivations for Empirical Social Research

Reading: Erikson and Tedin, pp. 23-115; Gilens, pp. 1-59.

Lab: Coding Data

- Week 3 (Jan. 22 & 25): Public Opinion and Democratic Theory
 Reading: Erikson and Tedin, pp. 1-22; Pollock, pp. 59-74.
 Lab: Computing Frequencies and Producing Statistical Graphics
- Week 4 (Jan. 29 & Feb. 1): Political Socialization; Attitudinal Effects of Education
 Reading: Erikson and Tedin, pp. 116-147; Gilens, pp. 60-101; Pollock, pp. 75-102.
 Lab: Accessing Archived Data
- Week 5 (Feb. 5): Economic Theories of Political Behavior
 Reading: Erikson and Tedin, pp. 177-186; Pollock, pp. 103-117.
 - **Note:** No lab this week: Joel at off-campus seminar.
- Week 6 (Feb. 12 & 15): Gender, Ethnicity, and Public Opinion
 Reading: Erikson and Tedin, pp. 187-191 & 206-212.
 Lab: Constructing Variables using SPSS
- Week 7 (Feb. 19 & 22): Midterm Review
 Reading: Pollock, pp. 119-170.
 Lab: Proportions and Measures of Central Tendency
 - **Note:** Be sure to bring to class on Tuesday any questions about previous weeks= material.
- Week 8 (Feb. 26): Midterm
Note: Midterm exam given in class on Tuesday. No lab session this week.
- Week 9 (March 11 & 14): Elections
 Reading: Erikson and Tedin, pp. 246-273; Gilens, pp. 102-153.
 Lab: Cleaning Data
 - **Note:** No class March 4 or 7; Spring Break
- Week 10 (March 18 & 21): Religion and Political Behavior
 Erikson and Tedin, pp. 192-205; Pollock, pp. 171-203.
 Lab: Inferring Population Characteristics from a Survey
- Week 11 (March 25 & 28): Political and Social Tolerance
 Reading: Erikson and Tedin, pp. 148-176; Gilens, pp. 154-173.
 Lab: Chi-square Tests of Cross-Tabulations
- Week 12 (Apr. 1 & 4): Public Opinion Research as a Profession
 Reading: Achen, pp. 7-79.
 Lab: Regression Analysis
Note: Field trip to office of local polling firm on Tuesday; please meet in front of Smother=s Theatre at 12:00 noon. We should be back by around 3:00 p.m.

Week 13 (Apr. 8 & 11): Foreign-Policy Attitudes

Reading: Gilens, pp. 174-216.

Lab: Interaction Effects and Dummy Variables

Week 14 (Apr. 15 & 18): Media Effects

Reading: Erikson and Tedin, pp. 213-245 & 274-313.

Lab: Logistic regression

Note: Research paper due in Tuesday class.

Week 15: Final exam is scheduled for Thurs., Apr. 24, from 10:30 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. in AC 209.