

## PUBLIC OPINION - POLS 4/5103

Spring 2004

Dr. Caress

**COURSE OUTLINE:** Public opinion is a fundamental element of a democratic society. This course examines in depth the nature and dynamics of public opinion in the American political system. The course will be divided into three separate but related sections.

After a brief introduction about the significance of public opinion in a free society, the first section of the course focuses on how individual opinions are developed and formed. It looks at the process of socialization and opinion formation. The development of individual ideology also will be scrutinized as well as the basic attitudes that are part of American society. This section will conclude by discussing the concept of "civic culture." The second section of the course focuses on the linkage between the opinions of the American people and the actions of their government. It illustrates the process of opinion aggregation and mobilization. This section also includes an examination of how individual opinions are expressed in the American political process. The roles of the media, interest groups, and political parties also will be analyzed in this section. The third section examines the methods used to measure public opinion. The techniques of public opinion surveying will be studied in detail. This will be followed by a final summary that provides an overview of the theories of public opinion's importance in government.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES:** Students who take this class will develop an appreciation of the role of public opinion in American democracy and also an understanding of modern opinion sampling techniques. Students will also have an opportunity to demonstrate this knowledge in writing. Graduate students will engage in a more in depth research exercise.

**TEXTBOOKS:** *American Public Opinion* - Erikson & Tedin

**ASSIGNMENTS:** There will be three exams: two midterms and a final. They are all short answer and essay. The midterms will each be worth 25% of the total grade, and the final exam will be worth 30%. In addition there will be a class project that will be worth 15% of the grade. This project will consist of participating in polling operation and preparing a 5-8 page summary.. The details will be explained in class. The remaining 5% will be based on class participation.

### READING & ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

Week 1. <u>Introduction</u>	Chap. 1 - Erikson	
Week 2. <u>Opinion Formation</u>	Chap. 5 - Erikson	
Week 3. <u>Ideology</u>	Chap. 3 - Erikson	
Week 4. <u>Civic Culture</u>	Chap. 4 & 6 - Erikson	<b><u>1<sup>st</sup> Exam - February 5</u></b>
Week 6. <u>Opinion Aggregation</u>	Chap. 7 - Erikson	
Week 7. <u>Impact on Policy</u>	Chap. 9 - Erikson	
Week 8. <u>Representation</u>	Chap. 10 - Erikson	
Week 9. <u>Party</u>		
Week 10 <u>Interest Groups</u>	Chap. 11 - Erikson	<b><u>2<sup>nd</sup> Exam - March 11</u></b>
Week 11. <u>Media</u>	Chap. 8 - Erikson	
Week 12 <u>Class Project</u>		<b><u>Project Day April 8th</u></b>
Week 13 <u>Opinion Gauging</u>	Chap. 2 - Erikson	
Week 14. <u>Surveying</u>	Chap. 12 - Erikson	
Week 15. <u>Summary</u>	No Readings -	<b><u>Project writeup due April 22 FINAL -Ap 29th</u></b>