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Carleton University
Department of Political Science

Fall 2008

Public Opinion and Public Policy

PSCI 3407A

Fridays 8:35-11:25

Please confirm location on Carleton Central

Instructor:

Scott Bennett

A627 Loeb Building

sebalpha@connect.carleton.ca

Note that actual lectures and discussion may usually only occupy the first part of the period, and the last part will often be used for computer lab work, answering student questions or other activities.

Office Hours:

Wednesdays 8:00 to 10:30 and 15:00 to 16:00

Thursdays 8:00 to 8:30 and 11:45 to 12:15

Fridays 8:00 to 8:30

Note that the above office hours may not be held during the first week of classes and are sometimes cancelled due to conflict with various university meetings.

Read this syllabus carefully. This syllabus stipulates class and university policies. Exemptions from these policies will almost never be granted.

NOTE: IN SO FAR AS POSSIBLE, YOU SHOULD TRY TO COMMUNICATE WITH THE INSTRUCTOR IN CLASS OR THROUGH ELECTRONIC MAIL. IN PERSON MEETINGS DURING OFFICE HOURS SHOULD BE RESERVED FOR PROBLEMS THAT CANNOT BE DEALT WITH IN ANY OTHER WAY.

NOTE: EMAIL COMMUNICATIONS MUST BE VIA YOUR CARLETON CONNECT ACCOUNT.

Nature of Course

This course is primarily about learning how to analyse data on public opinion, particularly public opinion pertaining to policy issues. This year particular emphasis will be given to the basic value systems that drive more specific opinions about public policy as well as to the influence of socio-economic/demographic variables on values and opinions. Sometimes, these value systems can be thought of as the major dimensions of political culture. One of the things that will be clear from the course is that different public value systems exist in the same country. Thus, there may be convergences/divergences within the same country's public value systems as well between/among the public value structures of different countries. If a student already has a slightly different and highly developed focus in mind for research, that may be permitted. We may also want to consider issues surrounding the engineered change in public opinion and how one analytically deals with that.

It is important to note that you are expected to come to the course with a basic knowledge of data analysis techniques. Your work in the course will require you to use such skills, and basic skills will be reviewed to some degree. You will also be taught some aspects of analysis that go a bit beyond an introductory understanding of such methods. **Instruction in quantitative data analysis methods as it relates to public opinion and public policy is a major part of this course.**

Since there is a heavy methodological component to this course, it is somewhat different from many third year courses. In addition, depending on course enrolment, there may be a greater degree of non-lecture presentation of material. For example, there may be computer lab sessions, practical demonstrations and, possibly, participation features that are more like seminar procedures.

Another point related to the heavy methodological and hands-on emphasis of the course is that you must have successfully completed both PSCI 2701 and PSCI 2702 (or equivalent) before you take this course. You will not be graded in this course if you have not successfully completed those courses or equivalents. Also, the course has been designed with the view that people who are taking the course are deeply interested and relatively well prepared in quantitative analysis of political phenomena.

Main Texts

There are no required texts for this course. Various books have been placed on reserve for the course. They are intended to supplement and illuminate some of the lecture topics, and they do provide pertinent background and perspective. They may also stimulate you in forming ideas about your research paper. They will not be used as a near perfect reiteration of all of the lecture topics, as would be the case in some third year courses.

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You may wish to review an introductory research methods text as well. Certainly, there will be significant elements of the course that require some instruction in these matters. Although in no way required, some copies of:

Bennett, Public Affairs Research Methods: A Quantitative Introduction

have been ordered. It is also available on reserve. Remember, the quantitative methodological dimension of this course is of major importance.

Grading and Preliminary Comments on Course Work

Major Seminar Paper 80% of Course Grade

Participation 20% of Course Grade

More details on the paper will be provided in class. It is due in the last class (November 28). Also, during that last class, you may make an oral presentation of your final work, if time permits.

As indicated, the main grading instrument is a research paper. The general attributes of the paper are provided in the following comments. More details will be made available in class.

Normally, this sort of paper would be 6250 words long at a bare minimum. Typically they are longer than the minimum. The paper can be based on data from one country, or it can involve comparison between/among countries: Various substantive topics can be covered here, but the paper must usually address some aspect of the questions described below:

To what extent are:

(a) there relations between/among people's value systems and people's opinions about public policy?

(b) the variables and relations noted in (a) dependent upon their socio-economic and demographic characteristics, particularly those that reflect a person's place in the economy?

In addition, this year, we may allow the development of papers based on the idea of experimental change in public opinion.

The instructor will make some strong recommendations about the content of paper topics in order to save students time in getting started. However, there will be some freedom of choice in choosing topics.

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Your participation mark will depend upon factors to be determined when we know how many people are in the course. However, it is likely that it will depend upon doing at least one or two presentations. Depending on enrolment, students may make brief presentations on their research paper outline and their final paper. This is accounted for in the listing of course topics below. Once the details of presentations have been determined, the exact participation expectations will be described in an addendum to this course outline.

Main Topics

In each of the following topics, there will be some lecture and practical guidance provided by the instructor.

Note that the instructor considers it to be bad pedagogy and probably bad administration to assign in advance specific dates to the coverage of specific topics. In general, we hope to reach topic 5 (preliminary outlines) no later than week 7 of the course. However, this is an expectation that can be altered in light of student background, interests and progress. We will cover as many of the topics as is appropriate and possible in the order listed below.

Also note that, at some point, we may have a presentation by the Data Centre on available data sources. However, it is assumed that most students will be working on predesignated data sets.

1. Introduction to Public Opinion and Its Relation to Public Policy

2. A More Detailed Consideration of Value Systems Underlying Public Opinion: Materialism/Post-Materialism, Left-Right Political Orientation, Types of Transcendent or Religious Values, Beliefs about Human Nature, Human Rights Belief Systems

3. A (Rapid) Review of Basic Methodologies for Analysing Data on Values, Opinion and Background Variables

Review Main Features of Bennett Text or a Similar Text

4. Some More Advanced Data Analysis Techniques

Depending on progress, some of this topic may be continued after topic 5.

5. Probable Time for Preliminary Outlines of Proposed Paper Topics (Depending on course enrolment, this may be associated with student presentations.)

From this point on, an increasing portion of class time will be devoted to solving specific analytic problems encountered in developing student papers. However, some new material will also be presented to provide more examples of analysis already done.

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6. Some Examples of Canadian Analysis

The instructor will provide and explore some examples in class.

7. Some Examples of Comparative Analysis

The instructor will provide and explore some examples in class.

8. An Example of Experimental Change in Public Opinion

If time permits and students are interested the instructor may provide and explore an example of this in class. A decision on this may depend on how much time we need to spend putting the final technical touches on student papers.

9. At Least One Class Devoted Entirely to Dealing with Analytic Issues in Student Papers if Time Permits

10. Final Papers Due

There may be concluding presentations on papers if time and enrolment permit.

Other Rules

Without going into great detail, various other course, departmental and university rules apply to the conduct of any course. You are expected to know them. From, my point of view, the important rules are:

1. Do your work on time as described in this outline and in class.
2. Do not engage in plagiarism.
3. Do not disrupt the class.
4. Keep an open mind with respect to value systems and approaches to inquiry.

With respect to point one above, the final copy of the course paper should be handed in at the last class on November 28, 2008. It should be in a large envelope and it must be in both typed form and on disk/cd/dvd that is both readable and writeable. Be sure you keep copies of the paper. No excuses for lateness will be accepted except for some extreme emergency (such as the student's hospitalisation) that makes it physically impossible for the student to turn in a paper. Failure to observe this rule will lead to a loss of all marks associated with the paper.

Presentations must be done on time as assigned. The only excuses accepted are the same as those noted in the previous paragraph. Failure to observe this will lead to a loss of all marks associated with a presentation.

Other rules of general interest from a departmental or university perspective are contained in an attachment that follows.

Academic Accommodations

For students with Disabilities: Students with disabilities requiring academic accommodations in this course must register with the Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (9500 University Drive) for a formal evaluation of disability-related needs. Registered PMC students are required to contact the centre, 613-520-6608, every term to ensure that I receive your letter of accommodation, **no later than two weeks before the first assignment is due or the first in-class test/midterm requiring accommodations**. If you require accommodation for your formally scheduled exam(s) in this course, please submit your request for accommodation to PMC by **November 7, 2008**, for December examinations, and **March 6, 2009**, for April examinations."

For Religious Observance: Students requesting accommodation for religious observances should apply in writing to their instructor for alternate dates and/or means of satisfying academic requirements. Such requests should be made during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist, but no later than two weeks before the compulsory academic event. Accommodation is to be worked out directly and on an individual basis between the student and the instructor(s) involved. Instructors will make accommodations in a way that avoids academic disadvantage to the student. Instructors and students may contact an Equity Services Advisor for assistance (www.carleton.ca/equity).

For Pregnancy: Pregnant students requiring academic accommodations are encouraged to contact an Equity Advisor in Equity Services to complete a *letter of accommodation*. Then, make an appointment to discuss your needs with the instructor at least two weeks prior to the first academic event in which it is anticipated the accommodation will be required.

Plagiarism: The Undergraduate Calendar defines plagiarism as: "to use and pass off as one's own idea or product, work of another without expressly giving credit to another." The Graduate Calendar states that plagiarism has occurred when a student either: (a) directly copies another's work without acknowledgment; or (b) closely paraphrases the equivalent of a short paragraph or more without acknowledgment; or (c) borrows, without acknowledgment, any ideas in a clear and recognizable form in such a way as to present them as the student's own thought, where such ideas, if they were the student's own would contribute to the merit of his or her own work. Instructors who suspect plagiarism are required to submit the paper and supporting documentation to the Departmental Chair who will refer the case to the Dean. It is not permitted to hand in the same assignment to two or more courses. The Department's Style Guide is available at: <http://www.carleton.ca/polisci/undergrad/Essay%20Style%20Guide.html>

Oral Examination: At the discretion of the instructor, students may be required to pass a brief oral examination on research papers and essays.

Submission and Return of Term Work: Papers must be handed directly to the instructor and will not be date-stamped in the departmental office. Late assignments may be submitted to the drop box in the corridor outside B640 Loeb. Assignments will be retrieved every business day at **4 p.m.**, stamped with that day's date, and then distributed to the instructor. For essays not returned in class please attach a **stamped, self-addressed envelope** if you wish to have your assignment

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returned by mail. Please note that assignments sent via fax or email will not be accepted. Final exams are intended solely for the purpose of evaluation and will not be returned.

Approval of final grades: Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by an instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

Course Requirements: Students must fulfill all course requirements in order to achieve a passing grade. Failure to hand in any assignment will result in a grade of F. Failure to write the final exam will result in a grade of ABS. FND (Failure No Deferred) is assigned when a student's performance is so poor during the term that they cannot pass the course even with 100% on the final examination. In such cases, instructors may use this notation on the Final Grade Report to indicate that a student has already failed the course due to inadequate term work and should not be permitted access to a deferral of the examination. Deferred final exams are available **ONLY** if the student is in good standing in the course.

Connect Email Accounts: The Department of Political Science strongly encourages students to sign up for a campus email account. Important course and University information will be distributed via the Connect email system. See <http://connect.carleton.ca> for instructions on how to set up your account.

Carleton Political Science Society: The Carleton Political Science Society (CPSS) has made its mission to provide a social environment for politically inclined students and faculty. Holding social events, debates, and panel discussions, CPSS aims to involve all political science students in the after-hours academic life at Carleton University. Our mandate is to arrange social and academic activities in order to instill a sense of belonging within the Department and the larger University community. Members can benefit through numerous opportunities which will complement both academic and social life at Carleton University. To find out more, please email carletonpss@gmail.com, visit our website at poliscisociety.com, or come to our office in Loeb D688.

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