

**POLM 5010F**  
**Polling and Opinion Research**  
**Fall 2025**

**Course Description**

This course provides an in-depth exploration of public opinion research through the lens of political marketing, with a particular emphasis on its application in media, commercial, and political contexts. The course critically examines how polls are conceived, conducted, interpreted, and deployed in democratic societies. Students will trace the historical evolution of opinion measurement, from early straw polls and scientific sampling to the emergence of sophisticated market intelligence techniques, data management platforms, and branded online communities.

Special attention is given to the ways in which polling shapes and is shaped by political campaigns, media narratives, and commercial interests. The course investigates the often-overlooked methodological and ethical dimensions of polling—questionnaire design, sampling techniques, response bias, and the problem of “non-attitudes”—while also addressing the political consequences of treating public opinion as both product and instrument. Through case studies, practitioners, and hands-on assignments, students will learn to engage with polling not just as consumers, but as informed analysts and potential practitioners. By the end of the course, students will possess both a theoretical foundation and applied skill set to navigate and critically assess the role of polling in modern political life.

**Course Objectives:**

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

1. Understand the intellectual and historical foundations of public opinion research, including the transition from traditional polling to contemporary market intelligence.
2. Differentiate between media polls, commercial opinion research, and political polling, recognizing their unique purposes, constraints, and ethical challenges.
3. Analyze the methodological underpinnings of survey research, including sampling strategies, questionnaire construction, data collection modes (e.g., IVR, CATI, online), and the interpretation of statistical results.
4. Critically evaluate the influence of political marketing on voter behavior, public discourse, and campaign strategy, with particular attention to segmentation, message targeting, and data-driven persuasion.
5. Assess the ethical implications of polling and data analytics, including issues of consent, representation, manipulation, and the potential erosion of democratic norms through market surveillance practices.
6. Interpret and critique the media’s use of polling data, distinguishing between sound methodology and misleading or exaggerated reporting.

7. Develop applied research skills by designing and presenting a public opinion survey, writing a polling brief, and conducting analysis of polling data for political, commercial, or media use.
8. Synthesize academic theory with practical experience, equipping students for careers in political consulting, campaign management, media analysis, and applied public opinion research.

While there is no assigned textbook, the following are important references for an in-depth analysis of the topic:

André Turcotte, *Political Marketing Alchemy*.

Jennifer Lees-Marshment, *Political Marketing: Principles and Applications*.

Susan Herbst, *Numbered Voices*.

Herbert Asher, *Polling and the Public*.

James Stimson, *Tides of Consent*.

### **Grade Breakdown**

#### **Seminar Discussion – What Did We Learn? (20%)**

Each student will be asked to participate in this seminar discussion and isolate what each have learned through the first two lectures.

Which elements were confirmatory?

Which elements were surprising?

Applications and reflections.

#### **Section 2 – Media and Political Polling Practicum (35%)**

This *Practicum* will focus on lectures and guests' contributions during Section 2 and how the content can be applied to specific situations.

Two powerpoint decks without findings will be provided – one from a Media perspective and one from a political perspective.

The format will be to choose to one set of findings and:

- Provide a summary of key findings
- Discuss key insights

- Make recommendations to the “client”

Format: Submit what would be the equivalent of a 15-minute Powerpoint presentation.

**The evaluation criteria are:**

- Quality and depth of the information provided
- Accuracy of the information provided
- Quality of the visuals
- Clarity of the visuals and of the overall deck
- Strength of the argument

**THE TAKE-HOME PROJECT WILL BE POSTED ON BRIGHTSPACE**

**IT WILL BE DUE – VIA EMAIL**

### **Section 3 – Commercial Opinion Research (35%)**

This *Practicum* will focus on lectures and guests’ contributions during Section 3 and how the content can be applied to specific situations.

Two powerpoint decks without findings will be provided.

The format will be to choose to one set of findings and:

Provide a summary of key findings

Discuss key insights

Make recommendations to the “client”

Two potential formats (To be determined)

In Class:

The powerpoint decks will be posted at the beginning of the class and a strategic memo will be due at the end of the lecture.

OR

**THE TAKE-HOME PROJECT WILL BE POSTED ON BRIGHTSPACE**

**IT WILL BE DUE – VIA EMAIL**

Format: Submit what would be the equivalent of a 15-minute Powerpoint presentation.

The evaluation criteria are:

- Quality and depth of the information provided

- Accuracy of the information provided
- Quality of the visuals / quality of the writing
- Clarity of the visuals / clarity of the writing
- Strength of the argument

### **Market Intelligence and the Future of Polling - Seminar Discussion (10%)**

This is a participation grade as part of the closing seminar.

Each student will be expected to be engaged in the discussion and make contributions to the seminar.

### **Lectures Outline**

#### **Week 1 - Review of the Course Content and Objectives**

##### **Section 1 – Introduction and Key Elements**

#### **Week 2 – Lecture: What Are We Measuring? Understanding Public Opinion**

#### **Week 3 – Lecture: Who Are We Measuring? Understanding the Voter**

#### **Week 4 - Seminar Discussion – What Did We Learn? (20%)**

#### **Week 5 – Lecture: Key Elements**

Week 6 – Thanksgiving

Week 7 – Reading Week

Week 8 - Guest: Allan Gregg

Week 9 – Practicum (35%)

##### **Section 3 – Commercial Opinion Research**

Week 10 – Lecture: Key Elements

Week 11 - Guests: Gozde Kazazoglu – Coca-Cola

Philippe Ozga – Food Banks Canada

Week 12 – Practicum (35%)

##### **Section 4 – Market Intelligence and the Future of Polling**

Week 13 – Seminar Discussion w/ Hilary Martin (Politics), Joanne McPherson (Media), Dennis Matthews (Commercial), Tasha Kheiriddin (Advocacy/Civil Society) – (10%)