

**Public Opinion - Spring 2015**  
**PS 4175 Sec. 101 TR 11:00 - 12:15 PM, Room: BH 223**

---

Dr. William Hicks  
**Office:** Anne Belk Hall 351E  
**Email:** [hickswd@appstate.edu](mailto:hickswd@appstate.edu)  
**Office Hours:** *TR*: 12:30-2:00 PM. *W*: 10:00-12:00 PM.

**Course Description:** This course investigates the nature and consequences of public opinion in American politics. Political scientists often evaluate the quality of representative government by examining the relationship between public opinion and public policy. Towards this end, these political scientists are concerned with three central questions. First, is public policy congruent with public opinion? Second, does public policy respond to changes in public opinion? Third, do certain political institutions – e.g., electoral institutions – facilitate the influence of public opinion on public policy? Understanding these questions requires, above all else, an intimate understanding of public opinion itself. This course aims to provide this understanding through several core questions.

- What is public opinion and how is it measured?
- What are the sources of political attitudes for individuals, groups, and the public generally?
- How are particular beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors distributed among the public?
- How, why, and to what extent does public opinion influence public policy?

**Textbooks:**

- Clawson, Rosalee A., and Zoe M. Oxley. 2013. *Public Opinion: Democratic Ideals, Democratic Practice. Second Edition.* Washington, D.C.: CQ Press.
- Hillygus, D. Sunshine, and Todd G. Shields. 2008. *The Persuadable Voter: Wedge Issues in Presidential Campaigns.* Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

**Course Grades & Assignments**

<i>Grading Scale</i>		<i>Grade Requirements</i>			
A .....	94-100	C .....	74-76	Research Project .....	30%
A- .....	90-93	C- .....	70-73	Exam 1 .....	20%
B+ .....	87-89	D+ .....	67-69	Exam 2 .....	20%
B .....	84-86	D .....	64-66	Survey Data Assignment .	20%
B- .....	80-83	D- .....	60-63	Quizzes .....	10 %
C+ .....	77-79	F .....	0-59		

**Exams:** This course has two exams. These exams consist of a mixture of short & long essay assessments.

**Research Project:** I assign a research project in this class that contains three parts. First, you will develop a research question of your own interest relevant to the scholarship on public opinion in American politics. Second, you will write a brief literature review detailing what others have

discovered about this research question. For this second element, you are required to write a 3 to 5 page essay that details your research question, and the procedures and findings of at least 5 projects in the *scholarly* literature. Finally, you will develop a series of survey questions, and a sampling procedure, that you think will provide an answer to your research question. The details of this assignment will be provided in class.

**Survey Data Assignment:** Using data I provide students from the [General Social Survey](#), I require students write a short analysis of public opinion. For this assignment, students will create a number of tables describing public opinion on a particular issue, and how opinions on that issue vary according to political, social, and economic groups. I will provide students with the specifics of this assignment in class.

**Quizzes:** I will give periodic quizzes throughout the course. The content of these quizzes is usually derived from the assigned readings. I use quizzes to encourage students to stay up-to-date on the reading assignments.

**General Course Outline:\***

I .....	Introduction
II .....	Understanding Public Opinion
III .....	The Sources of Public Opinion
IV .....	The Sources of Public Opinion
V .....	The Sources of Public Opinion
VI .....	The Content of Public Opinion
<b>Survey Data Assignent due 02/20</b>	
VII .....	The Content of Public Opinion
<b>Exam I, 03/05</b>	
IX .....	Spring Break
X .....	The Consequences of Public Opinion
XI .....	The Consequences of Public Opinion
XII .....	The Politics of Public Opinion
XIII .....	The Politics of Public Opinion
<b>Exam I, 04/16</b>	
XV .....	Public Opinion Research
XVI .....	Public Opinion Research

**Research Projects due 04/30**

**Specific Course Outline:**

---

**Week 1. INTRODUCTIONS**

January 13 ..... Introductions  
 January 15 ..... NO CLASS

---

**Week 2. UNDERSTANDING PUBLIC OPIION**

---

\*Dates and topics are subject to change at instructor's discretion.

January 20 ..... Clawson & Oxley: Ch. 1  
January 22 ..... Clawson & Oxley: Appendix to Ch. 1

---

**Week 3. THE SOURCES OF PUBLIC OPINION**

January 27 ..... Clawson & Oxley: Ch. 2  
January 29 ..... Clawson & Oxley: Ch. 3

---

**Week 4. THE SOURCES OF PUBLIC OPINION**

February 3 ..... Clawson & Oxley: Ch. 4  
February 5 ..... Clawson & Oxley: Ch. 5

---

**Week 5. THE SOURCES OF PUBLIC OPINION**

February 10 ..... Clawson & Oxley: Ch. 6  
February 12 ..... Clawson & Oxley: Ch. 7

---

**Week 6. THE CONTENT OF PUBLIC OPINION**

February 17 ..... Survey data analysis  
February 19 ..... Survey data analysis

---

**Week 7. THE CONTENT OF PUBLIC OPINION**

February 24 ..... Clawson & Oxley: Ch. 8  
February 26 ..... Clawson & Oxley: Ch. 9 & 10

---

**Week 8. REVIEW & EXAM**

March 3 ..... REVIEW  
March 5 ..... EXAM 1

---

**Week 9. SPRING BREAK**

March 10 ..... NO CLASS  
March 12 ..... NO CLASS

---

**Week 10. THE CONSEQUENCES OF PUBLIC OPINION**

March 17 ..... Clawson & Oxley: Ch. 11 & 12  
March 19 ..... Clawson & Oxley: Ch. 13

---

**Week 11. THE CONSEQUENCES OF PUBLIC OPINION**

March 24..... I will provide readings for Tuesday  
March 26 ..... I will provide readings for Thursday

---

**Week 12. THE POLITICS OF PUBLIC OPINION**

March 31 ..... Hillygus & Shields: Ch. 1 & 2  
April 2 ..... Hillygus & Shields: Ch. 3 & 4

---

**Week 13. THE POLITICS OF PUBLIC OPINION**

April 7 ..... NO CLASS  
April 9 ..... Hillygus & Shields: Ch. 5 & 6

---

**Week 14. REVIEW & EXAM**

April 14 ..... REVIEW  
April 16 ..... EXAM II

---

**Week 15. CONDUCTING PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH**

April 21 ..... I will provide readings for Tuesday  
April 23 ..... I will provide readings for Thursday

---

**Week 16. CONDUCTING PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH**

April 28 ..... I will provide readings for Tuesday  
April 30 ..... I will provide readings for Thursday

---

**Academic Integrity:** As a community of learners at Appalachian State University, we must create an atmosphere of honesty, fairness, and responsibility, without which we cannot earn the trust and respect of each other. Furthermore, we recognize that academic dishonesty detracts from the value of an Appalachian degree. Therefore, we shall not tolerate lying, cheating, or stealing in any form and will oppose any instance of academic dishonesty. This course will follow the provisions of the Academic Integrity Code, which can be found on the Office of Student Conduct Web Site:

[www.studentconduct.appstate.edu](http://www.studentconduct.appstate.edu)

**Statement on Student Engagement with Courses:** In its mission statement, Appalachian State University aims at “providing undergraduate students a rigorous liberal education that emphasizes transferable skills and preparation for professional careers” as well as “maintaining a faculty whose members serve as excellent teachers and scholarly mentors for their students.” Such rigor means that the foremost activity of Appalachian students is an intense engagement with their courses. In practical terms, students should expect to spend two to three hours of studying for every hour of class time. Hence, a fifteen-hour academic load might reasonably require between 30 and 45 hours per week of out-of-class work.

**Disability Services:** Appalachian State University is committed to making reasonable accommodations for individuals with documented qualifying disabilities in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Those seeking accommodations based on a substantially limiting disability must contact and register with The Office of Disability Services (ODS) at <http://www.ods.appstate.edu/> or 828-262-3056. Once registration is complete, individuals will meet with ODS staff to discuss eligibility and appropriate accommodations.

**Religious Observances Policy:** Faculty members are required to make reasonable accommodations for students requesting to miss class due to the observance of religious holidays. All ASU students are allowed a minimum of two absences per year for religious observances. Up to two absences for such observances will be excused, without penalty to the student, provided that the student has informed the instructor in the manner specified in the syllabus. Notice must be given by the student to the instructor before the absence occurs and no later than three weeks after the start of the semester in which the absence(s) will occur. Arrangements will be made to make up work missed by these religious observances, without penalty to the student. For the purposes of this policy, ASU defines the term “religious observance” to include religious holidays, holy days, or similar observances associated with a student’s faith that require absence from class. Faculty, at their discretion, may include class attendance as a criterion in determining a student’s final grade in the course. On the first day of class, faculty must inform students of their class attendance policy and the effect of that policy on their final grade; both policies must be clearly stated in the class syllabus.