**Political Science (PSC) 203: Survey Research**

Fall 2014: Tuesday and Thursday, 9:40 A.M.—10:55 A.M., Bausch & Lomb 270

Instructor: Mitch Sanders, mitch.sanders@yahoo.com

Harkness 308, office hours Tuesday 11:00-12:00 and/or by appointment

Public opinion surveys are a vital component of contemporary politics. In this course we will explore the fundamental elements of survey research: designing and implementing a questionnaire, selecting a sample, interpreting the results, and presenting the findings. This semester, we will pay special attention to surveys about current public policy issues like the environment, immigration, and health care. We will also examine surveys done for the 2012 presidential election and the 2014 congressional elections. PSC 203 satisfies the Techniques of Analysis requirement for undergraduate majors and minors in Political Science.

**Course components and their contributions to student grades**

Activities (12, total 30%). These will generally be brief, written assignments (500-750 words). Some will involve communication with the instructor, others will engage the entire class. Students are encouraged to do all 12 activities but when computing grades I will only count the highest 10.

Class participation (30%). Active involvement in a shared learning involvement is among the most vital elements of education. Participation will take the form of contributions to discussions both in class and out of class (most likely via UR’s Blackboard).

Project participation (20%). Toward the end of the semester we will design, implement, and analyze a survey. Each student will be involved in all elements of the project, and heavily involved in some elements of the project.

Project presentation (20%). These will be group presentations (2-4 students in a group), consisting of 8-10 PowerPoint slides per person plus 8-10 group slides.

**Course readings and other materials**

We will use four texts, available in the campus bookstore or anywhere else fine academic books are sold.

*- New Directions in Public Opinion*, edited by Adam Berinsky

*- Political Polling in the Digital Age*, edited by Kirby Goidel

*- The Gamble: Choice and Chance in the 2012 Presidential Election*, by [John Sides](http://www.amazon.com/John-Sides/e/B00F1HYW0Q/ref=dp_byline_cont_book_1" \t "_blank) and Lynn Vavreck

*- The Total Survey Error Approach: A Guide to the New Science of Survey Research*, by Herbert Weisberg

There will occasionally be other reading assignments either as directed or self-discovered. Students will also need access to MS-Office (Word, PowerPoint, and occasionally Excel), available in campus computer labs or for purchase from the campus computer store, and SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Details about SPSS availability and use will be provided later in the semester.

**PSC 203 Course Schedule and Readings (Version 1.0)**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Class** | **Date** | **Subject** | **Readings** | **Activity** |
| 1 | T 9/2 | Introduction, Organization |  |  |
| 2 | Th 9/4 | Survey research examples | Berinsky ch 1, 3 | 1. Survey Research Examples |
| 3 | T 9/9 | Survey research examples | Berinsky ch 12, 13, + one other chapter of your choice |  |
| 4 | Th 9/11 | Survey research examples |  | 2. Class survey topics |
| 5 | T 9/16 | Survey research examples | Sides & Vavreck ch 1, 2, + one other chapter of your choice |  |
| 6 | Th 9/18 | Survey research examples |  | 3. Election 2012 discussion |
| 7 | T 9/23 | Survey questions |  |  |
| 8 | Th 9/25 | Survey questions | Weisberg ch 5, 6 |  |
| 9 | T 9/30 | Survey questions |  | 4. Examples, good and bad |
| 10 | Th 10/2 | Survey questions |  | 5. Class survey questions: individual |
| 11 | T 10/7 | Survey questions |  | 6. Class survey questions: group |
| 12 | Th 10/9 | Sampling |  |  |
| 13 | T 10/14 | No class: Fall Break |  |  |
| 14 | Th 10/16 | Sampling | Goidel ch 2, 3  Weisberg ch 3, 12 |  |
| 15 | T 10/21 | Sampling | Weisberg ch 8, 9, 10 | 7. Sampling and margin of error statement |
| 16 | Th 10/23 | Sampling |  | 8. Sample plan for class survey |
| 17 | T 10/28 | Class survey planning | Goidel intro  Berinsky ch 2 | 9. Plans for survey implementation |
| 18 | Th 10/30 | Election polling | Goidel ch 4 |  |
| 19 | T 11/4 | Election polling |  | 10. Predictions: pre |
| 20 | Th 11/6 | Election polling |  | 11. Predictions: post |
| 21 | T 11/11 | Data analysis and presentation |  |  |
| 22 | Th 11/13 | Data analysis and presentation |  | 12. Analysis examples |
| 23 | T 11/18 | Data analysis and presentation |  |  |
| 24 | Th 11/20 | Survey analysis |  |  |
| 25 | T 11/25 | No Class: Pre-Thanksgiving |  |  |
| 26 | Th 11/27 | No Class: Thanksgiving |  |  |
| 27 | T 12/2 | Planning for presentations |  |  |
| 28 | Th 12/4 | Planning for presentations |  |  |
| 29 | T 12/9 | Class presentations |  |  |
| 30 | Th 12/11 | Class presentations |  |  |

**PSC 203 Introductory Questionnaire**

1. Are you here for PSC 203?
   * Yes
   * No

IF YES, PROCEED TO QUESTION 2. IF NO, PLEASE PROCEED TO THE CORRECT CLASSROOM FOR WHATEVER COURSE YOU ARE ENROLLED IN.

1. What is your name?
2. What is your email address?
3. What do you consider your home town?
4. How many surveys have you taken in the past 12 months?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| In-person |  |
| By Telephone |  |
| Online |  |
| Other |  |

1. What was the most interesting survey you took in the past 12 months, and why was it interesting?
2. Which of the following best describes you?
   * Freshman
   * Sophomore
   * Junior
   * Senior
   * Other: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
3. What is your major?
4. Why are you taking this course? Please select all that apply.
   * I find the subject interesting
   * I can’t stop thinking about the survey infographics I see on TV
   * Survey research may be relevant for my career
   * The course satisfies a requirement for my major
   * The course satisfies another university requirement
   * Other \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
   * Other \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
   * Other \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1. Strongly Disagree | 2. | 3. | 4. Neither Agree nor Disagree | 5. | 6. | 7. Strongly Agree | 9. Not Sure |
| Public opinion is important in a democracy | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ |
| Most Americans understand how survey research is conducted | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ |
| Most people I know understand how survey research is conducted | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ |
| Politicians rely heavily on polls when making choices about governing | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ |

1. Here are some tasks associated with implementing a survey. Based on what you know now, please indicate how interested you are in each of these tasks.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | 1. Not interested at all | 2. | 3. | 4.Somewhat interested | 5. | 6. | 7. Extremely interested | 9. Not Sure |
| Compiling and ordering survey questions (comparing questions to academic/industry standards, ensuring participant engagement) | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ |
| Developing a sample plan  (deciding how many people to survey, and how) | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ |
| Programming the survey  (using an online platform like surveymonkey), and deciding which platform is preferred. | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ |
| Analyzing the data (checking validity of responses and results, overall understanding of the data) | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ | □ |

1. What is something about you that the rest of the class might find interesting?