Welcome to Public Opinion and American Democracy. This course will examine public opinion and assess its place in the American political system. The course will emphasize both how citizens’ thinking about politics is shaped and the role of public opinion in political campaigns, elections, and government. While the course will focus on research on the current state of public opinion, throughout the course we will also discuss historical developments in opinion and its place in politics, including changes that arose with the development of polling and with the advent of television and other electronic media. We will also consider normative questions, including the role opinion should play in American democracy.

**Requirements and Expectations**

You are expected to attend every class session. You are further expected to come prepared to discuss the issues raised in the readings. Please read the assigned materials before class on the date they are listed.

To meet the purpose of the course, you will be expected to both consume and digest readings from scholarly and journalistic sources. You are also expected to be aware of current events, especially relating to American politics. I highly recommend that you subscribe to and read a national newspaper, such as the *Wall Street Journal* or the *New York Times*.

Each week, one-half of the class will be required to write a short essay responding to the week’s readings, no longer than two single-spaced page. These essays should try to engage a number of the week’s readings, by, for example, doing one or more of the following: juxtaposing and commenting on alternative explanations or approaches to a substantive topic; criticizing the methodologies used and proposing other strategies of research; criticizing the conceptualization and/or measurement of a particular construct; analyzing the implications of a set of findings; suggesting new questions or hypotheses for research; developing similarities and contrasts with arguments or research found in the readings from previous weeks. More generally, these papers should contain an argument, not a summary or description of the readings. These papers should be distributed to instructors and class participants by 4:00 on the Monday before the scheduled Wednesday meeting. I will comment on them and turn
them back at the end of Wednesday’s session. These essays will serve as the starting point for our discussion.

Students will also be required to write two papers for the class. A short critique of media polls will be due on March 7, 2007. A longer paper is due on the last scheduled day of class, May 16, 2007. This paper should review and interpret relevant literature and/or propose a research project. More details about these papers will follow later in the semester.

**Grading**

Your grade will be determined as follows:

1. **Participation**: 35 percent: Regular attendance and participation in class discussion is required.
2. **Weekly Papers**: 25 percent
3. **Short Paper**: 10 percent.
4. **Long Paper**: 30 percent.

I expect that all papers will be turned in *on time*: no exceptions; no excuses. In addition, plagiarism is entirely unacceptable. Should you turn in a plagiarized paper, appropriate University sanctions will be pursued. If you are unclear what constitutes plagiarism, please talk to me. Finally, grades for your paper will be based on both substance and style. The papers will be graded on the quality of thought and analysis, the research you do, and the quality of writing. Use proper grammar, appropriate language and (please, please, please) proofread and spell-check the final copy of your paper before turning it in.

**Required Reading**

There are 5 required books for this course, which are available at the Coop

COURSE SCHEDULE AND OUTLINE

February 7: Preliminaries

THE MEANING AND MEASUREMENT OF PUBLIC OPINION

February 14: The Meaning of Public Opinion


February 21: Measuring Public Opinion: Sampling and Collecting Data


February 28: The Survey Interview and the Nature of the Survey Response


DEMOCRATIC COMPETENCE

March 7: Political knowledge, Sophistication, and Democratic Competence.


**March 14: Ideology and the Organization of Opinion.**


**BUILDING FROM THE GROUND UP:**

**OPINION INGREDIENTS AND THE FOUNDATIONS OF PUBLIC PREFERENCES**

**March 21: Self Interest (or symbolic politics?)**


**April 4: Groups in American Politics: Us and Them.**


April 11: Core Values


**SOCIETY AND POLITICS**

April 18: Framing, Priming and Media Effects


April 25: Collective Opinion and Representation


**PUBLIC OPINION AND POLICY**

May 2: Public Opinion and Public Policy


May 9 Public Opinion and Foreign Policy


**FINAL REFLECTIONS**

May 16: Conclusion. Public Opinion and American Democracy


