

# POLS 3045: Public Opinion and Political Behavior, Fall 2019

CRN 86612: Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:00–3:15 p.m., Walker 308 (Cochran Campus)

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Tuesdays and Thursdays 3:30–5:30 p.m., Wiggs 14 (Cochran).

Also available by appointment.

Welcome to the course! This class is designed to be an in-depth exploration of the related concepts of public opinion and mass political behavior, with a focus on the role of the individual voter in governing in a representative democracy, and whether the average citizen is equipped to decide political issues. The main emphasis in this course is on public opinion and political behavior in the United States, but much of the material applies to democratic publics throughout the world.

► **Catalog Description:** This course provides an overview of the study of public opinion and mass political behavior, with particular attention to the contemporary United States. Includes analysis of data from public opinion surveys.

► **Prerequisite:** POLS 1101/1101H with a C or higher, and POLS 3000 (Research Methods in Political Science).

► **Expected Learning Outcomes:** Students will be expected to achieve the following learning outcomes in order to receive a passing grade (D or above):

1. Identify and explain the contested meanings of the concept of public opinion.
2. Describe the processes by which social scientists study public opinion.
3. Identify how external influences affect individuals' political beliefs, values, and opinions.
4. Describe the role of beliefs and values in forming opinions.
5. Identify and describe how individual characteristics and group identities influence public opinion.
6. Describe the extent to which members of the public meet the criteria of the "ideal" democratic citizen.

These outcomes will be assessed on the midterm and final examinations in the course.

- Identify and use appropriate methodologies for collecting, analyzing, and presenting data and evidence in written, oral, and graphical form, within the context of political science. (Program-level SLO.)

The preceding program-level student learning outcome will be assessed using the final paper in the course.

**Required Materials:** There is one textbook required for the course:

- ▷ Rosalee A. Clawson and Zoe M. Oxley. 2016. *Public Opinion: Democratic Ideals, Democratic Practice*, 3rd ed. Washington: CQ Press. ISBN 978-1-5063-2331-2.

This textbook should be available, new or used, at the bookstore in Georgia Hall; you may also be able to order it on-line at a discount.

Additional readings may be assigned at the discretion of the professor and will be provided for you at the library reserve desk, on the course Brightspace (D2L) site, or as handouts in class.

**Note:** You are required to own, or have access to, a copy of the textbook for the duration of the course (through the final examination).

**Technology Requirements:** You are required to have access to Brightspace for the duration of the course. You will also need access to a computer, tablet, or smartphone that can read Portable Document Format (Adobe PDF) files and supports HTML5 technologies for browsing the Internet.

**Assignments and Grading:** Your grade in this course will be based on the following elements:

Midterm Exam	25%	Article/Chapter Presentations	20%
Final Exam	25%	Research Paper	25%
Participation	5%		

Your final grade in the course will be assigned based on this scale:

Final Average	≥ 90.0	≥ 80.0	≥ 70.0	≥ 60.0	< 60.0
Grade	A	B	C	D	F
Grade Points	4.0	3.0	2.0	1.0	0.0

**Exams:** The exams will be closed-book, in-class examinations, consisting of an appropriate mixture of multiple-choice, short-answer, and essay questions. The midterm exam will cover topics covered up to that point in the course; per university policy, the final exam is *comprehensive*.

**Article/Chapter Presentations:** Each student will be assigned four articles and/or book chapters from various scholarly works related to public opinion and political behavior to give brief, in-class presentations about. The specific articles/chapters and dates will be assigned as the term progresses. Each presentation will be worth 5% of the final course grade.

**Research Paper:** There will be one public opinion research paper, approximately ten pages in length; further details on this paper assignments will be given in class and posted on Brightspace.

Your papers must be individual efforts; you may consult with me, the Writing Center and tutors, other faculty members, or other students, but the writing and research must be substantially your own work.

The body of your paper should be double-spaced and written using a proportional typeface (either 11 point or 12 point), with one-inch margins and including page numbers.<sup>1</sup> The first page of your paper should include your name, the date, and an appropriate title for the assignment; a separate title page is acceptable, but not necessary.

Papers must consistently use a widely-accepted citation style in the social and behavioral sciences; examples of acceptable styles include those included in the style manuals of the American Political Science Association (APSA), the American Sociological Association (ASA), the American Psychological Association (APA), or the Modern Language Association (MLA); “Chicago” or “Turabian” style is also acceptable. All papers that make use of sources must include a list of works cited and include properly cited quotations or paraphrases of the material used. Papers should also be written in standard English with coherent use of prose and grammar.

Copies of all out-of-class written assignments must be submitted to the appropriate “drop box” on the Brightspace website. In the event that the timeliness of an assignment is in question, the time submitted to Brightspace will be used as the definitive record of when the assignment was received.

**Participation:** The remainder of your grade will be based on your participation in, and contributions to, the class meetings. This grade will be determined holistically by the instructor.

**Contacting the Professor:** My regularly-scheduled office hours are listed at the beginning of the syllabus. During those times, I generally do not schedule appointments; rather, meetings are “first come, first serve.” When I am not busy with a student in-person, I will also be available “virtually” at these times by phone or web chat. If you wish to make a confirmed appointment to see me *outside* my scheduled hours, please do so at least two business days in advance.

If you do contact me outside my office hours, please bear in mind that my other work and personal obligations may be on a different schedule than what is convenient for you; for example, I may be in class, in the midst of research, or at a meeting. Except under extraordinary circumstances, if your email includes a question or otherwise requires a response, I will always get back to you within one business day, and frequently sooner; messages that merely inform me of a class absence may not be acknowledged.

If you call my office outside my office hours, please avoid leaving voice mail or messages with university staff; it is an incredibly unproductive and inefficient means of communication. You will usually receive a much quicker response by email.

To protect the privacy of your educational records, all discussion regarding grades or other confidential information must be conducted in person, via Brightspace, or via your official *mga.edu* email address; I will not discuss confidential information over the phone or via any non-school email address. If you have not yet activated your official university email address, please see <https://www.mga.edu/technology/services/email.php>

<sup>1</sup>Proportional typefaces include Times New Roman, Arial, Calibri, etc. “Typewriter-style” (constant-width) typefaces such as Courier New are **not acceptable**.

**When contacting me outside of class, please be sure to specify both the course and section you are in, as it will allow me to respond more quickly to you.**

**Class Policies:** The primary expectations of all Middle Georgia State University students are integrity and civility. Each student should approach his/her academic endeavors, relationships and personal responsibilities with a strong commitment to personal integrity and interpersonal civility.

I believe that for our class to be successful, we must establish a supportive and respectful environment in the classroom and related settings (such as the class website on Brightspace). Accordingly, disruptive behaviors such as repeated tardiness, side conversations, reading materials unrelated to the course (such as the student newspaper), or use of communication technologies (e.g., web browsing/IMing/texting during class) will adversely affect your grade; repeated or egregious disruptive behavior may result in you being asked to leave class for the day, which will reduce your participation grade by one letter grade.

► **Electronic devices:** In the past I have found that while a few students are able to use laptops and tablets effectively as note-taking aids in the classroom, the vast majority find it difficult to avoid distractions from email, Facebook, and other sources online. Ordinarily this wouldn't cause much of a problem, but in the classroom setting this creates what social scientists refer to as "negative externalities"; specifically, when you're watching that funny YouTube video of the monkey washing a cat, everyone around you is also going to see it and be distracted too. Accordingly, you should mute or switch off your cell phones and any alarms during class, and refrain completely from using laptops, tablets, e-readers, "smart" or "dumb" phones, and other portable electronic devices during class.

There may be times in class when I *specifically* ask you to use your cell phone or a laptop or tablet (for example, to participate in a web-based activity); on these occasions, of course, it would be OK to do so.

► **Extra credit:** To be fair to all students, I do not offer individualized extra-credit opportunities. If you believe you might benefit from extra credit, I strongly advise you take advantage of any opportunities offered to the whole class as they are announced during the term.

► **Notes:** I do not provide lecture notes for students under any circumstances. If you miss class, you will have to rely on the generosity of a classmate or make use of any materials provided on the textbook website or its study guide, if applicable. (Students with disabilities who require notes or other learning environment accommodations should consult with me and the MGA Disability Services Office to arrange notetaking assistance.)

You may make audio recordings of in-class lectures; recordings are for your own, personal use, and may not be shared with students who are not enrolled in this course.

► **Revisions to the syllabus:** While I will make every effort to follow the syllabus as-written, if unforeseen circumstances arise during the semester I reserve the right to amend any policy in this syllabus.

► **Attendance and absence policy:** To encourage regular attendance and participation in class, I will take daily attendance. Your attendance an important factor considered when evaluating your participation grades; however, perfect attendance does not guarantee a perfect participation grade, and it is possible, but perhaps unlikely, that you could receive a perfect participation grade if you have missed a class meeting. Unlike in some of your other courses, "attendance" is not directly computed in your grade and there is no grade penalty for an absence.

Arriving late, leaving early, or unexplained/frequent trips outside of the room during class time for non-medical reasons will adversely affect your participation grade.

► **Make-ups:** Make-up examinations must be scheduled in advance in the case of an unavoidable planned or reasonably-foreseeable absence; otherwise, make-ups will be given only in the case of an illness or other emergency that is properly documented, after the fact. To be fair to all students, make-up exams must be completed within two weeks of the originally scheduled exam date; also, make-up exams may be administered in a different format than the original exam offered to the rest of the class, at my sole discretion.

Make-up quizzes will not be arranged under any circumstances. There are also no make-ups for missed classes; however, students with an excused absence will receive credit for attending any classes missed with a valid excuse (such as student illness or participation in class-related or sponsored activities), and any missed in-class quiz will be dropped from the grade.

To be fair to all students in the class, students are responsible for *all assignments*, regardless of their date of initial

enrollment in the course.

► **Late Assignments:** A late penalty of 10 percentage points per day will apply to work turned in after the deadline for the assignment to be completed. Notwithstanding this policy, any work received more than 48 hours after the scheduled final examination may not be graded, resulting in a zero (0) on any assignments outstanding at that point in the semester. (Please refer to the university policy on incomplete grades, discussed below, for exceptions.)

► **Grade Appeals:** Like everyone else, I am fallible and sometimes make mistakes. If I simply misrecorded a grade (for example, if I enter “70” in the gradebook when you earned an “80”) or made an arithmetic error, please bring me the returned assignment, and I will immediately correct the error.

If you believe you received an *unjust* grade, I am happy to discuss the grading of the assignment with you, in-person during regular office hours or at a scheduled appointment; please bring the graded assignment with you so we can have a productive conversation. If you remain unsatisfied with my explanation of the grade, to give us both ample time to consider the dispute, you will need to type a brief (one-page) explanation of your position and turn it in, along with the original graded assignment, *at least one week after* the assignment was originally returned to you. I will then consider your appeal and make a determination. Appeals must be submitted in hard copy format; no appeals submitted via email will be considered. Please refer to the Student Handbook and Catalog for policies regarding appeals of *final letter grades*.

► **Academic Misconduct:** You are responsible for reading, understanding, and abiding by the Student Code of Conduct; this is included in the current edition of the Student Handbook, which is available online at [https://www.mga.edu/student-affairs/docs/MGA\\_Student\\_Handbook.pdf](https://www.mga.edu/student-affairs/docs/MGA_Student_Handbook.pdf).

I take academic misconduct (including, but not limited to, cheating on exams and plagiarism of written work) very seriously. So does Middle Georgia State University. In this course the *minimum* penalty for academic misconduct is a grade of zero (0) on the assignment in question, with no opportunity to repeat the assignment, along with referral to the testing center to complete an examination on plagiarism, cheating, and the Student Code of Conduct. Second or subsequent violations, or egregious misconduct (for example, an organized effort to cheat involving multiple students, or academic misconduct that causes harm to other students), will automatically be referred to the Office of Student Affairs for a university-level resolution which may include a failing grade in the course, disciplinary probation, and/or academic suspension.

I offer some free advice, drawn from past experience as both a student and a professor: do not turn in plagiarized work because you have run out of time and feel as if you need to turn in *something*—taking the late penalty is better than the sanctions for academic misconduct. Similarly, if you forgot to study, it’s better to get a low grade on the exam than the zero you’ll get if you cheat.

One of the early computer programmers, Admiral Grace Hopper, is reported to have said that “[i]t’s easier to ask forgiveness than it is to get permission.” That advice *does not* apply in this situation. If you have the slightest doubt about whether something is academic misconduct, *ask me before handing in the assignment for grading*.

A plagiarism prevention service is used in evaluation of written work submitted for this course. As directed by the professor, students are expected to submit or have their assignments submitted through the service in order to meet requirements for this course. The papers will be retained by the service for the sole purpose of checking for plagiarized content in future student submissions.

**University Policies:** Students are responsible for reading, understanding, and adhering to all Middle Georgia State University student policies, including those linked on the Syllabus Policy page:

<https://www.mga.edu/faculty-affairs/syllabus-policy.php>. Any policy listed therein is incorporated in this syllabus by reference.

► **Disability Accommodations:** While you are welcome to discuss any special needs with me in private, to be fair to all students, accommodations are only provided when supported by appropriate documentation from MGA Disability Services (478-471-2985 or 478-934-3023; Student Life Building, Room 266 (Macon) or Sanford Hall (Cochran); <https://www.mga.edu/accessibility-services/index.php>).

► **Campus Emergencies:** In the event of a closure or delayed opening of the university due to inclement weather or other emergency, you should monitor the Knight Alert system for updates; sign up for these alerts at

<https://www.mga.edu/police/alert/index.php>. You should expect communication via email and/or Brightspace regarding any assignments to be completed or revisions to the schedule while we are unable to meet.

In the event of an emergency situation on campus, call 9-1-1 and/or campus police at 478-471-2414.

► **HB 280 (Campus Carry Legislation):** For information on how this law affects your rights and responsibilities, please see <https://www.mga.edu/police/campus-carry.php>.

► **End of Course Evaluations:** Student evaluations of faculty are administered online at the end of each term for all courses with five or more students. Students will receive an email containing a unique link to a survey for each course in which they are enrolled. All responses are anonymous.

► **Withdrawal Deadlines:** The last day to drop the course without it appearing on your transcript is Monday, August 19th. Students may withdraw from the course and earn a grade of “W” up to and including the midterm date, on Monday, October 14th. After this point, students who withdraw will receive a grade of “WF,” which is calculated in the GPA as an “F.”

The MGA Withdrawal Form is available online or from the Office of the Registrar. Students are encouraged to read the withdrawal policy found at <https://www.mga.edu/registrar/registration/drop-add.php> before dropping/withdrawing from class.

► **“No-Shows” and Informal Withdrawals:** Students who have not attended any classes as of the reporting period (generally, during the second week of classes) may be reported as a “no-show” and may lose financial aid as a result. In addition, if you stop coming to class without withdrawing, you may lose eligibility for financial aid in future terms.

**Course Outline:** Any changes to this schedule will be announced in class and will be posted to the course calendar and in Brightspace. We will not necessarily read books in the order they appear the syllabus; please be sure you read the correct chapters *in advance* of the designated class dates. While I may periodically remind students of upcoming scheduled events, it is **your responsibility** to be familiar with this schedule and any changes to it.

**Aug 15** Introduction to the course.

**Aug 20, 22** What is public opinion? What does public opinion have to do with democracy? How is public opinion related to political behavior?  
Reading: Clawson and Oxley, chapter 1.

**Aug 27** Methods of studying public opinion.  
Reading: Clawson and Oxley, “Appendix: Studying Public Opinion Empirically.”

**Aug 29 No Class: APSA Conference**

**Sep 3, 5** Political socialization: how do people form their beliefs and values?  
Reading: Clawson and Oxley, chapter 2.

**Sep 10, 12** The mass media and its effects on opinion.  
Reading: Clawson and Oxley, chapter 3.

**Sep 17, 19** Are political attitudes stable?  
Reading: Clawson and Oxley, chapter 4.

**Sep 24, 26** Ideology, partisanship, and polarization.  
Reading: Clawson and Oxley, chapter 5.

**Oct 1 Midterm Exam**

**Oct 3, 8** Pluralistic Roots of Public Opinion: Personality, Self-Interest, Values, and History.  
Reading: Clawson and Oxley, chapter 6.

**Oct 10, 15** The role of group identity in public opinion.  
Reading: Clawson and Oxley, chapter 7.

**Oct 17, 22** Political knowledge, interest, and attentiveness.  
Reading: Clawson and Oxley, chapter 8.

**Oct 24, 29** Public support for civil liberties.  
Reading: Clawson and Oxley, chapter 9.

**Oct 31; Nov 5** Public support for civil rights.  
Reading: Clawson and Oxley, chapter 10.

**Nov 7 No Class: GPSA Conference**

**Nov 12, 14** Political trust and system support.  
Reading: Clawson and Oxley, chapter 11.

**Nov 19, 21** How does public opinion influence policy?  
Reading: Clawson and Oxley, chapter 12.

**Nov 26, 28 No Class: Thanksgiving Break**

**Dec 3** Conclusions.  
Reading: Clawson and Oxley, chapter 13.

**Thursday, December 5th, 3:30–5:30 p.m. Final Exam**