

Public Opinion, Political Socialization and Public Relations
PSC220

Dr. Ben Zingman

Spring 2008

Th. – 7:10-9:40 PM

2020 K Street, NW - Rm. 24

bzcom@aol.com

410.531.3458 – h/o; 443.802.8809 - c

As we enter what feels like the second decade of the 2008 presidential campaign, we are bombarded with assessments of public opinion, the public mood, the public mind and other similar concepts. For communicators, this political race, the War in Iraq, Middle East diplomacy, immigration reform, national healthcare, environmental reform, job outsourcing, and dozens of issues before the nation, its institutions and citizens raise several important questions: Who exactly is “the public?” Me, you, everyone? What is public opinion? What I think? What you think? What the power brokers think? And where does it come from? Family, school, religious upbringing, ethnic background, job, the media? How can we tell when we see it? How do we measure it? What can influence it? And at the foundation of these inquiries, what implications does it all have for us as public relations and public affairs communicators and the roles we play for our organizations and clients

Similarly, in recent years we’ve seen a resurrection of the notion of political socialization, the process by which people view their engagement in politics, acquire and maintain their political attitudes, biases, beliefs – in short, their public opinions and the political decisions that they make as a result. Typically, investigators debate the level of information displayed by voters and the different types of voting behavior and other forms of political engagement. And here too, we are faced with a laundry list of important questions about what people learn, how they learn it, how they reinforce or alter these what they’ve learned, and why all this is important to us as citizens and, for purposes of this course, as communicators.

Much of the debate centers on the forces that influence public opinion and political socialization, and most often the focus is the power of the press and its impact on our institutions of business, government and not-for-profit endeavor. But where does that power come from and how is it exercised? Through what mechanisms do the media affect our politics and social decisions? Only through news? What about advertising (or film, TV, radio and music)? And what about the role of new, alternative media, or, alternatives to media? And of course, what are we doing as communicators to facilitate, enhance or utilize the media’s power and the views and behaviors that it informs and encourages?

Through analytical research, first-hand accounts and theoretical constructs, the class will explore these and other key questions.

As the choreographer of this ballet, I should share with you some of my biases:

1. I believe many of the questions we wrestle with today were in fact raised generations ago and continue to define our understanding of democracy and how it works. The Jeffersonian model of citizenship is often a starting point, but we are not the first to question it, and must not yield to a generational conceit that we are the first to walk this intellectual path.
2. In trying to understand public opinion, researchers often focus on what they can measure, and this can leave us with detailed knowledge of the wrong information.
3. And of course, there is an expectation that the media are “the window to the soul” of public opinion. Yet, our own experience as well as a strong tradition of critical literature, suggest the media are an imperfect lens.
4. Moreover, the impact of the media on public opinion and political socialization may in fact be greater through cultural/entertainment programming and content than through news. (Which has more impact -- news reports about genocide, or, the movie *Hotel Rwanda*? Both? Neither? Why?)
5. And finally, the role of public relations regarding public opinion is frequently confusing and often misunderstood. So we should try to clarify it!

There are another two or three hundred presumptions I can share with you, but I think you get the picture – the course, the projects, the materials and the discussions do not exist in a vacuum. Students are expressly and specifically forbidden to be ignorant of the political and professional worlds around them.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

1. Develop awareness and critical thinking regarding the role, formation, measurement and use of public opinion in contemporary U.S. public affairs and public relations.
2. Help students understand socialization processes that shape opinion, political and marketplace behavior, and the role we play as communicators in engaging and influencing these processes.
3. Provide students an opportunity for developing, implementing and presenting a substantial analysis of how communications activities are utilized in the real world to influence opinion, attitudes and behavior.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AT GWU

(Taken from <http://www.gwu.edu/~ntegrity/about.html>)

The Code of Academic Integrity was created and went into effect in the 1996-1997 academic years. It was written and designed by students, faculty, librarians and administration with ultimate approval from the President of the University and the Board of Trustees. An Academic Integrity Office was created to manage the process and an Academic Integrity Council was formed to promote academic integrity and to administer all procedures associated with the Code.

Conflicts or questions about the Code of Academic Integrity (including its interaction with other policies of the University) should be forwarded to the Office of the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs. The Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs or a designee shall be the final interpreter of the Code.

Questions regarding the history of the Code, its interpretation and other related matters should be referred to the Academic Integrity Office located at 801 22nd Street NW (Phillips Hall, Suite 411). Contact us by phone at (202)-994-1977 or by email at ntegrity@gwu.edu.

Academic integrity is a hot topic today on college and university campuses. Much study and research has been devoted to the awareness and promotion of academic integrity. The George Washington University belongs to The Center for Academic Integrity, which is based on the Clemson University campus and is affiliated with the Rutland Ethics Institute. Numerous links and a complete bibliography on academic integrity may be found at the Center's web site: www.academicintegrity.org.

Also, please note the **GWU Statement of Ethical Principles** (<http://my.gwu.edu/files/policies/StatementofEthicalPrinciplesFINAL.pdf>)

COURSE STRUCTURE

Most of the semester will involve seminar-style classes, with assigned readings, open discussion and periodic guest speakers. At the first class, students will be divided into three-person study and research teams. Students also will be assigned a brief essay due at the second class to allow me to judge writing levels and subject familiarity. Note that the quality of writing is important both in this class and in your careers and will be reflected in the grading of papers.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

There will be a short **midterm paper** and a **research project**. In addition, students will be graded on their **in-class performance (including pop quizzes)**, their presentation of “**volunteer**” **readings** and their **reporting and analysis of ongoing polling** (see “Poll Watching” below).

GRADE WEIGHTING

50 pts - research project (40 pts paper/10 pts presentation)
 23 pts - class work (including “poll watching” and at least two 2-pt quizzes)
 25 pts - midterm paper
 2 pts - volunteer readings and “poll watching”
100 Points Maximum

Course grades will be determined as follows:

A/90+ A-/89-88 B+/87-85 B/84-80 B-/79-78 C+/77-75 C/74≥

RESEARCH PAPER AND PRESENTATION – HOW REAL-WORLD ORGANIZATIONS INFLUENCE PUBLIC OPINION

Each three-person team will choose a business organization (either a company or a trade association), a not-for-profit (such as a charity, labor union, university or NGO) and a political entity (such as a party organization, congressional committee, individual legislator, government agency) and compare and contrast of how they view, utilize and try to shape public opinion. Each student will be responsible for one of the three entities the team selects, and for developing a paper on that entity. Working jointly, the team will develop a presentation comparing the three organizations they’ve chosen. (Full details TBA.)

To provide greater focus and analytical strength to the effort, each team will choose a subject area from among the following topics. No duplication of either the topic or the specific research subject will be allowed among teams or individuals. Topics include:

- Diversity and ethnicity (including immigration policy).
- Gender.
- Energy policy.
- Healthcare and/or public health issues.
- The environment, including broad issues such as global climate change and more focused issues such product de-selection.
- The economy and/or economic issues such as globalization or international trade.
- Education, including policy as well as system and school-level issues.

MIDTERM PAPER

The short (maximum 5 pp.) midterm paper is a prelude to the major project. (Details TBA.) Students will analyze the public opinion environment for their chosen organizations, using the readings and class discussions to bolster their arguments.

CLASS PARTICIPATION

In addition, students will be evaluated on their **class participation and contribution**. This is not simply a matter of how often students speak, but rather, how well they are prepared to discuss specific concepts and readings, and whether their input is thoughtful, provocative and lively.

And, from time to time there may also arise opportunities for mini-presentations on subjects of interest. Such efforts will be recognized in final grading.

“POLL WATCHING”

Students will sign up to monitor and be prepared to report on polls each week. Among the poll options drawn from govspot.com (<http://www.govspot.com/categories/pollsandopinion.htm>) are:

[PollingReport.com](#)

Tracks trends in public opinion.

[Gallup Organization](#)

Powerhouse of opinion polls.

[USA Today Snapshots](#)

Quick looks at American opinion.

[LA Times Polls](#)

Polls on political and general issues.

[Nat'l Election Studies](#)

Guide to public opinion & behavior.

[Harris Poll](#)

Recent polls on political issues.

[Mason-Dixon](#)

State and national poll results.

[Pew Research Group](#)

Attitudes toward politics and public policy.

[Zogby](#)

Polls about American society.

[ABC News Poll](#)

Archive of polls from 1999.

[CBS News Polls](#)

Opinions on news and politics.

[Washington Post Poll](#)

Questions of national interest.

Also worthy of consideration are Public Agenda, the Eagleton Institute (Rutgers), Quinnipiac University, the blog by CBS pollster Kathleen Francovic (<http://www.cbsnews.com/sections/opinion/pollpositions/main501863.shtml>) and the websites of Ad Age, PR Week, and PRSA as they affect .

VOLUNTEER READINGS

Students will have the opportunity to “volunteer” to report on a specific “additional” reading assigned for a particular class (beginning on Week Two). A sign-up process will take place during the first class. Students will enliven discussion by presenting – and critiquing – concepts developed in their selections so that the entire class may benefit from these readings. (Note – the five volunteers for January 31 will engage in a panel discussion. See below.)

REQUIRED READINGS

Students will be asked to purchase, borrow or find the following items:

1. Bishop, George F. *The Illusion of Public Opinion* (2005)
2. Gimpel, James, et al. *Cultivating Democracy* (2003)
3. Graber, Doris. *Media Power in Politics 5th Edition* (2007)
4. Sosnick, Douglas, et al, *Applebee’s America* (2006)

Additional Assigned & Volunteer Readings (on Reserve or provided by instructor) include:

Assigned

Austin, E.W. and Pinkleton, B.E., *Strategic Public Relations Management* (2001)

CIRCLE (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement) http://www.civicyouth.org/?page_id=154 (Selected Fact Sheets)

Ferguson, Sherry Devereaux, *Communication Planning* (1999)

Herbst, Susan, *Numbered Voices* (1993)

Key, V.O., *Public Opinion and American Democracy* (1961)

Lippmann, Walter, *Phantom Public* (1927)

Lippmann, Walter, *Public Opinion* (1922)

McCombs, M. and Shaw, D. “The agenda setting function of the mass media, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 1972, 36, 176-87.

Madison, James, “Federalist Paper #10” (1787)

Norrander, B. and Wilcox, C. *Understanding Public Opinion* (2002)

Zaller, John. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* (1992)

Volunteer

Burstein, Paul. “The Impact of Public Opinion on Public Policy: A Review and an Agenda,” *Political Research Quarterly*, 56 (2003)

Bryce, James, *American Commonwealth*, Vol. II (1895)

Frankovic, Kathleen, “Public Opinion and Polling” in Graber (ed.), *Politics of News/News of Politics* pp. 150-70 (1998)

Harris, Thomas. *Value-Added Public Relations* (1998)

Herbst, Susan, *Numbered Voices* (1993)

Key, V.O., *Public Opinion and American Democracy* (1961)

Lippmann, Walter, *Phantom Public* (1927)

Lippmann, Walter, *Public Opinion* (1922)

Norrander, B. and Wilcox, C. *Understanding Public Opinion* (2002)

Sapiro, V., "Not Your Parents Political Socialization," *Annual Review of Political Science*, 7 (2004)

Stimson, James, *Tides of Consent* (2004)

ASSIGNMENTS

Week 1 – January 17

Students sign-up for volunteer readings, poll watching

General Intro – Politics, Public Opinion & Political Socialization

- V.O. Key, *Public Opinion and American Democracy*, pp. 1-25 (Reserve)

Section 1 – Public Opinion: What it is, why do we care about it?

Week 2 – January 24

Public Opinion – A Conundrum of Controversy

- Madison, "Federalist Paper #10" (Reserve)
- Norrander and Wilcox, Introduction, "The Diverse Paths to Understanding Public Opinion" (bz) (pp. 1-16)
- Zaller, Chap. 2-3 (pp. 6-52) (bz)
- Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, Chap. 1 – "The World Outside and the Pictures in Our Heads" (Reserve) (pp. 3-20)

Volunteer Reading #1-3

1. Frankovic, "Public Opinion and Polling" in *Politics of News/News of Politics* pp. 150-70 (Reserve)
2. Herbst, *Numbered Voices*, Chap. 6, "Contemporary Public Opinion Polling" (bz), pp. 113-32
3. Bryce, *American Commonwealth*, Chap. LXXVI "The Nature of Public Opinion" pp. 247-54 and Chap. LXXVII "Government by Public Opinion" pp. 255-62 (bz)

Week 3 – January 31

What Drives Public Opinion?

- Bishop, *Illusion of Public Opinion*, Chaps. 1-3 (pp. ix-68)
- Sosnick, et al, *Applebee's America*, Intro. and Chap. 1 (pp. ix-61)

Volunteer Reading #4-8

Panel Discussion

4. Key, Chap. 5 "Geographical Distribution" (pp. 99-120) (Reserve)
5. Key, Chap. 6 "Occupation and Class" (pp. 121-152) (Reserve)

6. Sapiro in Norrander & Wilcox, Chap. 1 “It’s the Context, Situation, and Question, Stupid; The Gender Basis of Public Opinion” (pp. 21-42) (bz)
7. Calhoun-Brown in Norrander & Wilcox, Chap. 3 “This Side of Jordan: Black Churches and Partisan Political Attitudes” (pp. 61-76) (bz)
8. Uhlener and Garcia in Norrander and Wilcox, Chap. 4 “Latino Public Opinion” (pp. 77-101) (bz)

Week 4 – February 7

Guest Speaker – Michael Maslansky, Luntz & Maslansky

The Dynamic of Public Opinion

- Sosnick, Chaps. 2-3, pp. 62-126
- Jacoby, “Core Values and Political Attitudes” in Norrander & Wilcox, Chap. 8, pp. 177-202 (bz)

Week 5 – February 14

Using Public Opinion

Midterm Paper Assigned

Teams Meetings: Choose Topics/Organizations to Study

- Bishop, Chaps. 4, 5 6 (pp. 69-142)
- Herbst, *Numbered Voices*, Chaps. 2, 3 (pp. 29-68) (bz)

Volunteer Reading #9-10

9. Stimson, *Tides of Consent*, Chap. 1 “Opinion Flow” (pp. 1-22) (bz)
10. Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, Chaps. 16, 17 (The Self-Centered Man and The Self-Contained Community) (pp. 161-74) (Reserve)

Section 2 – Political Socialization and Political Engagement

Week 6 – February 21

- Gimpel, et.al., *Cultivating Democracy*, Intro.-Chap. 2; pp. ix-64 (bz)
- Sosnick, Chaps. 4-6 (pp. 129-197)
- Selected Fact Sheets and info from CIRCLE (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement)
http://www.civicyouth.org/?page_id=154
- Lippmann, *Phantom Public*, Chap. 1, “The Disenchanted Man” (pp. 3-11) (bz)

Volunteer Reading #11-12

11. Sapiro, V. (2004) “Not Your Parents Political Socialization,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, 7 (Reserve)
12. Lippmann, *Phantom Public*, Chap. 2, “The Unattainable Ideal” (pp. 12-29) (bz)

Week 7 – Feb 28

Midterm Paper Due

Team Project Assignment

- Gimpel, Chaps. 3-6, pp. 65-168

Section 3 – Role of Media in Public Opinion and Public Policy**Week 8 – March 6**

- Graber, Media Power in Politics, Part I “Putting Mass Media Effects into Perspective” and Part II – “Shaping the Political Agenda and Public Opinion”
 - All except Aday, Chap. 5 and Kull et al, Chap. 9 (both dealing with warfare)
- McCombs, M. and Shaw, D. “The agenda setting function of the mass media, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 1972, 36, pp. 176-87. (bz)

Volunteer Reading #13-15

- 13.** Harris, Value-Added Public Relations, Chap. 16, “Involving People With Products” (bz)
- 14.** Harris, Chap. 17 “Cultivating a Core Consumer Base” (bz)
- 15.** Burstein, Paul. “The Impact of Public Opinion on Public Policy: A Review and an Agenda,” *Political Research Quarterly*, p. 56 (2003) (bz)

Week 9 – March 13**Students present research topics**

- Graber, Part III “Influencing Election Outcomes” and Part IV “Controlling Media Power- Political Actors vs. the Press”

Volunteer Reading #16

- 16.** Harris, Chap. 23 “Influencing the Influentials” (bz)

Week 10 – March 20/Spring Break**Section 4 –Strategic Role of PR in Influencing Public Opinion****Week 11 – March 27**

Guest Speaker, Thom Metzger – American Chemistry Council’s *essential₂* program

- Graber, Part V “Guiding Public Policies” and Part VI “Regulating and Manipulating Media Effects”
 - All except O’Heffernan, Chap. 25; Entman, Chap. 26; Hatchen, Chap. 27; and Lipman, Chap. 35 (dealing with foreign policy, war and international affairs)
- Bishop, Chap. 7, pp. 143-168

Week 12 – April 3

Guest Speaker – Greening Wal-Mart

- Austin & Pinkelton, *Strategic Public Relations Management*, Chaps. 1-4, pp. 1-67 (reserve)
- Ferguson, Sherry Devereaux, *Communication Planning*, Chaps. 11 “Choosing the Channel” and Chap. 12 “Strategic Approaches to Planning for Issues Management” (pp. 175-212) (reserve)

Week 13 – April 10

Team Meetings

- Ferguson, *Communication Planning*, Chap. 7 “Understanding the Psychology of Audiences” Chap. 9 “Message Design, Perception, Cognition and Information Acquisition” and Chap. 10 “Message Design Theories of Persuasion” (pp. 115-130, 145-60, 161-74) (reserve)
- Austin & Pinkelton, *Strategic Public Relations Management*, Chap. 14 “Theories for Creating Effective Message Strategies” and Chap. 15 “Practical Applications...”, (pp. 290- 335) (reserve)

Week 14 – April 17

Research Presentations and Papers Due

Week 15 – April 24 (Last Class)

Research Presentations Part II (if necessary)

Course Summation – Where Do We Go From Here?

- Applebee, Chaps. 7 and 8, pp. 198-228
- Bishop, Chap. 8-9, pp. 169-202

###