

# **POL 350-01: POLITICAL BEHAVIOR**

Washington & Jefferson College  
Spring 2023  
Tuesdays & Thursdays 12:50 – 2:35 PM  
Old Main 207

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## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

While much popular attention in politics focuses on the behavior of elected officials and politicians, in a democracy, ordinary citizens deserve their fair share of attention too. This course provides an overview of how those ordinary citizens engage with politics in the American context. The focus will be on public opinion and political participation.

Questions examined in this course include: Where do political attitudes come from? What effect does the media have on citizens' beliefs? Are Americans ideological? Why does one citizen vote and another does not? In the attempt to answer these questions, another more central question emerges which will be a running theme in this course: Is the political behavior of ordinary Americans conducive to democracy?

Beyond the substantive knowledge of political behavior provided in this course, you will be provided with ample opportunity to engage with scholarly research, both by reading, discussing, and conducting your own research on public opinion and political participation.

## **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

After taking this course, students will be able to:

1. Explain how outside forces affect individual attitudes.
2. Describe the components of public opinion.
3. Explain variations in the level of participation in the American electorate.
4. Describe how capable ordinary Americans are at participating in a democracy.
5. Understand how political behavior is measured through opinion surveys by creating and administering their own survey.
6. Read and analyze political science research and apply theories from that research in written assignments.
7. Participate in rigorous academic discussions.



## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

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**Exams:** There are two *non-cumulative* exams in this course. These exams will consist of a combination of short answers and essay questions. A review sheet for each exam will be made available at least one week before the date of the exam. If you happen to be absent from class on one of the exam days and provided it is an excusable absence (See Attendance policy below), we can schedule a makeup exam. If you anticipate being absent for one of the exams, please let me know as soon as possible. (30%; 15% each)

**Survey Design Project:** To understand how political behavior is measured by political scientists, you will contribute to a course survey on the political behavior of the W&J student body. You will be required to contribute questions to this survey; and recruit students to participate in the survey. This survey data will be used in your final research paper. More information about this project will be distributed in the beginning of the semester. (5%)

**Research Paper Project:** The majority of your grade in this course will be based on a semester-long research project which culminates in a 15-20 page paper and an in-class presentation. The research paper may be on any subject related to political behavior of your choice, though your research question is subject to instructor approval. There will be three smaller assignments throughout the semester designed to demonstrate your progress on this project. More information about these assignments and the broader research project will be distributed at the beginning of the semester. The due dates for each component of this project are as follows:

1. Research Proposal: February 28 (2.5%)
2. Annotated Bibliography: March 28 (2.5%)
3. Outline: April 11 (5%)
4. Final Draft: May 9 (30%)
5. Presentations: May 12 [and May 9 if needed] (10%)

**Attendance:** You are expected to be present for every class meeting. My expectations for your intellectual growth in this course are high. When you are not present, you are unable to partake in that growth. **Everyone receives two free excused absences.** You do not need to notify me of these absences in advance. Do not abuse these excused absences. Students unable to attend class because of illness should contact Student Health Services. Students unable to attend class because of a family or other emergency should contact the Office of Student Life. If there is a reason for an ongoing absence in this class, please discuss this with me as soon as possible. (5%)

**Participation:** You will be expected to fully participate in class discussion. Actively engaging with the course material through discussion with fellow students is crucial to your understanding of the material. As a rule of thumb, you should be speaking, on average, at least once per class to receive a B for participation. Speaking more than this will ensure a higher grade. Conversely, if you habitually fail to contribute to class discussion, you can expect your participation grade to decrease. While participation grades will be primarily based on contributing to in-person class discussions, there will also be the opportunity to gain participation credit through occasional small non-verbal assignments. (10%)



## Grade Determination:

Component	Worth
Exam 1	15%
Exam 2	15%
Survey Design Project	5%
Research Proposal	2.5%
Annotated Bibliography	2.5%
Research Paper Outline	5%
Research Paper Final Draft	30%
Research Paper Presentation	10%
Attendance	5%
Participation	10%

At the end of the course, your grade will be assigned based on the following scale: A (93-100); A- (90-92); B+ (87-89); B (83-86); B- (80-82); C+ (77-79); C (73-76); C- (70-72); D (60-69); and F (0-59).

## COURSE POLICIES

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**Late Assignment Policy:** You are expected to submit all assignments by the due dates listed on the syllabus. Late assignments can be submitted after the due date with a grade penalty. The final grade for the assignment will be lowered by a third of a letter grade for every 24 hours the assignment is late. **Assignments submitted more than a week after the due date will not be accepted for credit.**

Extensions on assignments can be granted providing two criteria are met: (1) there is a legitimate excuse for the assignment not being submitted on time (e.g. documented illness or personal emergency); and (2) you request the extension before the assignment is due.

**Classroom Culture:** For this course to be fully successful, I expect two things from each student. First, I expect active engagement in classroom discussion. While much time will be devoted to class lectures on the material, there will always be time devoted each class for group discussion on the topics we have discussed that day. Relatedly, I expect you to have completed the readings and to be prepared to discuss the relative strengths and weaknesses of the arguments presented in the texts. Our discussions will draw from those theoretical debates. Participation accounts for 10% of your total grade, so it is in your best interest to come prepared for class. A firm grasp of the literature will serve you well in preparation for exams in this class and in crafting a firm foundation for further classes in political science.

While preparing to discuss the course material, I suggest you read (or at least scan) a newspaper once a day. Since this is a class on politics, it is especially important to keep up on current events since they are often direct results of the political system we will be examining. W&J has an online subscription to the New York Times, the Washington Post, and the Wall Street Journal. Information for accessing these newspapers can be found in the following links: [NYT](#), [WaPo](#), and [WSJ](#).

We will occasionally discuss issues that are controversial or polarizing. This is an intrinsic part of the political process, and, as such, it will certainly be a part of our discussions. While it is by no means wrong to hold an



opinion on controversial issues, I expect and require civility in discussions. Hateful comments will not be tolerated and will be grounds for dismissal from the class session.

A key part of academic discussion is treating your classmates and the instructor with respect. Respect not only pertains to what you are contributing to class discussion, but also how you listen to what your classmates and the instructor are saying. I expect you to be an active listener during class discussions.

**Technology:** In my experience as an instructor, I have found that while some students may benefit from using technology in the classroom, there are also many students who abuse the privilege of technology use. **Laptop and tablet use for class purposes is permitted in this course, but this is a privilege. If I habitually observe students abusing this privilege, I reserve the right to prohibit all technology use.** Relatedly, cell phone use is prohibited in this course. If I observe you using your phone during a class, you will receive no participation credit for that day.

**Contacting the Instructor:** The best way to get in contact with me is through email (jkersting@washjeff.edu). I do my best to reply to all student emails within 24 hours and typically my replies will be much sooner than that. That being said: do not email me at midnight and expect a timely answer.

If your questions or concerns are substantial in nature, it is best to meet with me in person rather than engage in a lengthy email exchange. I have regular office hours listed above, but if those times do not work for you, please feel free to schedule an appointment with me.

**Disability Support Services:** Washington & Jefferson College is committed to providing academic accommodations for students with disabilities. This includes individuals with physical disabilities, learning disabilities, and mental health disorders that meet the definition of a disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Students who plan to request accommodations should contact the Director for Academic Success as early as possible, although requests may be made at any time. To determine whether you qualify for accommodations, or if you have questions about services and procedures, please call 724-223-6008 or send an email to [dss@washjeff.edu](mailto:dss@washjeff.edu).

**Academic Honesty:** Washington & Jefferson College is a community dedicated to the intellectual and personal development of its students. Such development may be achieved in many ways, including creating original works of writing, art, and music; conducting research; engaging in discussions; taking examinations; and participation in co-curricular activities. Central to such developmental activities is that whatever a student represents as being the fruit of his or her own intellectual labor is indeed his or her own. Otherwise, the student will not only have acted dishonestly, but will also have wasted the developmental opportunities afforded by the College. W&J upholds academic honesty in the College community by pursuing cases of academic misconduct. When such academic misconduct is discovered, the College will ensure through the imposition of appropriate penalties that the student does not gain unfair advantage through his or her dishonesty and will help the student address the concerns that led to the offense. If the nature of the intellectual dishonesty is determined to be conscious, calculated and/or intentional, or if academic misconduct recurs, the student may be judged to be incapable of benefiting to a satisfactory degree from the developmental opportunities afforded by the College, and may then be permanently dismissed so that the College's resources may be directed to deserving students.



## TEXTBOOK AND READINGS

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The required text for this course is **Public Opinion: Democratic Ideals, Democratic Practice, Fourth Edition** (ISBN: 978-1544390208) by Rosalee A. Clawson and Zoe M. Oxley. It is available through the W&J bookstore and online. All other course readings will be posted online for your use. Readings are to be completed BEFORE the class meeting for which they are listed.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

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(Subject to change)

Meeting	Topic	Readings and Assignments
Thurs. Jan. 26	Course Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Syllabus</li></ul>
Tues. Jan. 31	Defining Political Behavior and Public Opinion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Clawson and Oxley: <i>Public Opinion</i> Chapter 1</li></ul>
Thurs. Feb. 2	Measuring Public Opinion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Clawson and Oxley: <i>Public Opinion</i> Chapter 1 Appendix</li></ul>
Tues. Feb. 7	Political Socialization: Childhood & Adolescence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Clawson and Oxley: <i>Public Opinion</i> Chapter 2 pp. 49-66</li></ul>
Thurs. Feb. 9	Political Socialization: Generational Effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Clawson and Oxley: <i>Public Opinion</i> Chapter 2 pp. 67-76</li><li>Burn-Murdoch: "Millennials are Shattering the Oldest Rule in Politics" (2022)</li></ul> <p><b>Bring in survey questions to workshop</b></p>
Tues. Feb. 14	Media Effects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Clawson and Oxley: <i>Public Opinion</i> Chapter 3 pp. 98-114</li></ul> <p><b>Survey Questions due</b></p>
Thurs. Feb. 16	Media Sources and Fake News	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Allcott and Gentzkow: Excerpt from "Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election" (2017)</li></ul>
Tues. Feb. 21	Attitude Stability & Change: Individuals vs. the Aggregate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Clawson and Oxley: <i>Public Opinion</i> Chapter 4 pp. 117-128</li></ul>
Thurs. Feb. 23	Attitude Stability & Change: Psychological Approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Clawson and Oxley: <i>Public Opinion</i> Chapter 4 pp. 129-145</li></ul>



Tues. Feb. 28	Exam Review & Skills Day	<b>Deadline to meet with Dr. Kersting about research proposal &amp; to submit proposal</b>
Thurs. Mar. 2	Exam 1	
Tues. Mar. 7	Ideology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clawson and Oxley: <i>Public Opinion</i> Chapter 5 pp. 151-168</li> </ul>
Thurs. Mar. 9	Partisanship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clawson and Oxley: <i>Public Opinion</i> Chapter 5 pp. 168-183</li> </ul>
Tues. Mar. 14	Roots of Opinion: Personality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clawson and Oxley: <i>Public Opinion</i> Chapter 6 pp. 187-197</li> </ul>
Thurs. Mar. 16	Roots of Opinion: Self-Interest, Values, and History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clawson and Oxley: <i>Public Opinion</i> Chapter 6 pp. 197-208</li> <li>Eady, Hjorth, and Thisted Dinesen: "The Jan. 6 riot at the Capitol hurt the Republican Party" (2021)</li> </ul>
Tues. Mar. 21	<b>NO CLASS – Spring Break</b>	
Thurs. Mar. 23	<b>NO CLASS – Spring Break</b>	
Tues. Mar. 28	The Central Role of Groups: Race	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clawson and Oxley: <i>Public Opinion</i> Chapter 7 pp. 212-228</li> </ul> <p><b>Annotated Bibliography due</b></p>
Thurs. Mar. 30	The Central Role of Groups: Gender and Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clawson and Oxley: <i>Public Opinion</i> Chapter 6 pp. 230-236</li> <li>Enos: Excerpt from <i>The Space Between Us</i> (2017)</li> </ul>
Tues. Apr. 4	Political Knowledge: Are Citizens Informed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clawson and Oxley: <i>Public Opinion</i> Chapter 7 pp. 241-260</li> </ul>
Thurs. Apr. 6	Political Knowledge: Which Citizens are Informed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clawson and Oxley: <i>Public Opinion</i> Chapter 7 pp. 260-270</li> <li>Krupnikov and Ryan: <i>The Other Divide</i> (2022) Chapter 1</li> </ul>
Tues. Apr. 11	Exam Review and Skills Day	<b>Research Paper Outline due</b>



Thurs. Apr. 13	Exam 2	
Tues. Apr. 18	Rational Participation and the Paradox of Voting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gerber, Green, and Larimer: “Social Pressure and Voter Turnout” (2008)</li> </ul>
Thurs. Apr. 20	The Resource Model of Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Brady, Verba, and Schlozman: “Beyond SES: A Resource Model of Participation” (1995)</li> </ul>
Tues. Apr. 25	Social Networks and Social Capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clawson and Oxley: <i>Public Opinion</i> Chapter 11 pp. 366-374</li> </ul>
Thurs. Apr. 27	Who Participates?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Anoll: “What Makes a Good Neighbor?” (2019)</li> <li>Holbein and Hillygus: Excerpt from “Making Young Voters” (2020)</li> </ul>
Tues. May 2	Unconventional Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Green and Cowden: “Who Protests?” (1992)</li> </ul>
Thurs. May 4	Political Behavior and American Democracy?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Achen and Bartels: Excerpt from <i>Democracy for Realists</i> (2016)</li> </ul>
Tues. May 9	TBA	<b>Final Paper due</b>
Fri. May 12	Presentations	<b>Exam Time: 2:00 – 5:00 PM</b>