

Dr. Paul Lenchner
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Fall 2009
Hours: M-R, 8:25-9:25 a.m. & by appointment
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PSCI 345: PUBLIC OPINION

TEXTS

W. Lance Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion*, 8th ed.
Robert S. Erikson and Kent L. Tedin, *American Public Opinion*, updated 7th ed. (E&T)
Charles Prysby and Carmine Scavo, *Voting Behavior: The 2004 Election*; available at
<http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/SETUPS/index.html>

SCHEDULE

DATE	TOPIC	READINGS
Aug. 31—Sept. 14	Introduction to Public Opinion and Polling	E&T, chs. 1-2
Sept. 16--28	Microlevel and Macrolevel Opinion	E&T, chs. 3-4
Sept. 30	Quiz	
Sept. 30—Oct. 5	Public Opinion and Political Socialization	E&T, ch. 5
Oct. 7	Public Opinion and Democratic Stability	E&T, ch. 6
Oct. 12	EXAMINATION	
Oct. 14--19	Group Differences in Opinions	E&T, ch. 7
Oct. 21	The Media and Opinions	E&T, ch. 8
Oct. 26	Quiz	
Oct. 26—Nov. 23	A Critical Look at the News Media	Bennett, chs. 1-8
Nov. 25	EXAMINATION	
Nov. 30—Dec. 2	Elections, Public Officials, and Popular Control	E&T, chs. 9
Dec. 7	Leaders, the Public, and Democracy	E&T, ch. 10
Dec. 9	Public Opinion and American Democracy	E&T, ch. 11
Exam Week	FINAL EXAMINATION	

Please Note

1. Modifications in this syllabus are possible. If any changes become necessary, they will be announced in class.

2. This syllabus and selected other course materials may be accessed on-line through the Texas A&M—Commerce website (www.tamu-commerce.edu). Click Academics. Then click on Political Science, then Faculty, then Paul Lenchner, and finally Political Science 345.

OBJECTIVES AND REQUIREMENTS

Objectives

Like all classes, this class has both general and specific objectives. The general objectives are to develop and enhance the student's intellectual abilities, especially the ability to analyze political life and communicate in an effective manner about it. The specific objectives follow from the general ones and focus on public opinion in the United States. These goals include promoting understanding of:

1. The meaning and importance of public opinion.
2. The sources of public opinion.
3. The methods used to study public opinion, including their applications and limitations.
4. The characteristics of American public opinion.
5. The impact of public opinion, including its effects on elections and public policy.
6. The special role of the news media in influencing public opinion, including concerns about their role and impact.

Requirements

All members of the class are expected to:

1. Complete the assigned readings on time.
2. Participate in discussions of the readings and related topics.
3. Take two examinations during the semester and a comprehensive final examination.
4. Take two or more announced quizzes.
5. Complete a number of assignments analyzing public opinion data.
6. Write a critical analysis of a scholarly article.

Evaluation

Grades will be calculated as follows:

First examination	12.5%
Second examination	12.5%
Final examination	20.0%
Quizzes	12.5%
Polling assignments	20.0%
Critical analysis	12.5%
Class participation	<u>10.0%</u>
	100.0%

From time to time, extra credit assignments will be given. It is advisable to take advantage of these opportunities. Attendance records will kept, and students with very few or no unexcused absences will have a small bonus added to their course average. I reserve the option of dropping students with more than six unexcused absences.

ADDITIONAL POLICIES

1. **Lateness for class. It is rude and disruptive to arrive late for class.** While anyone can be a minute or two late on rare occasions (say, once during the term), **chronic lateness is**

unacceptable. Everyone is expected to be in class on time. **The door will close very soon after the start of class, and late arrivals may be locked out.** To avoid problems and the embarrassment of being locked out, **arrive on time.**

2. **Proper behavior in class.** All students at the University shall follow the tenets of common decency and acceptable behavior conducive to a positive learning environment. (See the *Student's Guide Handbook*, Policies and Procedures, Conduct.) Besides arriving on time, these tenets include the following:
- **not leaving the room during class except for major emergencies; use the restroom before, not during, class.**
 - **being attentive during class;** having personal conversations, doing work for another class, sending text messages, surfing the Internet, listening to music, or reading personal materials is unacceptable.
 - **not eating, wearing hooded garments, or engaging in personal grooming during class.**
 - **using laptops only to take notes.**
 - **turning off cell phones and all other electronic devices and putting them away (except for laptops being used to take notes); if your cell phone goes off during class, it may be taken from you.**
 - **showing respectful tolerance for views other than your own;** a university is a place for thoughtful exchange of ideas; there is no justification for disrespectful behavior when someone else is speaking.
4. **Students with disabilities.** The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination law that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe that you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact the Office of Disability Resources and Services, Gee Library, Room 132, 903-886-5835/5150, StudentDisabilityServices@tamuc.edu.

ADVICE FOR STUDENTS

1. Be sure you have and keep the syllabus, assignment instructions, handouts, and other materials.
2. Follow instructions carefully for each assignment.
3. Submit your work on time. It is painful for me to see a student's grade suffer because he or she submitted an assignment late or not at all. **Late penalties are damaging. Zeroes are often devastating. Do not punish yourself by failing to submit a required paper.**
4. Neatly type papers in clear, correct English.
5. When extra credit opportunities are offered, take advantage of them.
6. Come to class. If possible, sit near the front of the room. Do not hesitate to seek recognition to make a comment or ask a question.
7. Be attentive and take notes during class. Research shows that students who take careful notes do better than those who do not.
8. Follow the news. Topics from the news will often come up in class, and your learning will be enhanced if you're aware of the context of news references. With the vast number of news sources, including high-quality websites, current events can be followed at your convenience.
9. Feel free to visit with me. **If you are having problems or concerns in class, see me at once.** The longer you delay, the harder it will be to address your needs. I want you to succeed, and I will work with you in developing strategies appropriate for your situation. But I cannot help if I'm not informed of your concerns. So please come in.
10. Don't feel that you must have a problem to drop by my office. If you want to pursue topics raised in class in additional depth, if there are subjects we didn't get to that you find interesting, if you want to talk about opportunities for political science graduates, or if you just want to chat, please stop by. I'm not hard to find, and I'd be glad to visit with you.

11. A good way to reach me is via e-mail (Paul_Lenchner@tamu-commerce.edu). I will make every effort to respond promptly to messages.