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Public Opinion and American Democracy: Politics for a Connected Public  
L32 PolSci 3211.01  
Fall 2013

Course meets Monday and Wednesday 1:00-2:30 PM  
**Please check course website periodically for syllabus updates**

### **Overview**

How has new media changed the relationship between voters and their elected representatives? Online access to politics promised to revolutionize the way citizens consume political information, with implications ranging from increasing the transparency of government to making ordinary citizens more politically aware. This course discusses the transformation in American politics caused by new media. We focus on the ways the mass public leverages online resources: *seeking* political information for themselves, *receiving* direct campaign communications, and *relying* on a sophisticated, emergent class of public opinion leaders.

This course is intended to provide students with an understanding of the role of new media in American politics. We focus on the role that technology plays in elections, public opinion, and the formation of ideas that flow into the electoral and policy worlds. The course addresses several polemical questions, such as the problems associated with the digital divide, the use of the internet in politics and how it differs from some popular myths of its role, and the way in which new media promote social connections and social bifurcation.

The course will consist of three components. First, we will work through both canonical theoretical frameworks as well as the frontier of empirical research necessary to understand political behavior within the context of new media. Second, we will interpret (and periodically analyze) data on this topic. Finally, you will have an opportunity to engage through new media with an elected representative of your choice.

This is an ambitious and demanding course, covering a lot of material. It is important that you stay on top of the readings and the assignments. This will also be a course that will cover a large amount of quantitative material. While no explicit courses are required as pre-requisites, successful completion of the homework assignments will be easier with a familiarity with social science statistics.

### **Structure of the course**

The course will meet twice per week for lecture and discussion. Each class meeting will begin promptly with an anecdote that will last about ten minutes to accommodate those of

you who need to travel across campus in between class periods. Some weeks we will have overhead slide presentations and other weeks we will discuss the reading. I will frequently present current empirical evidence relating to that week's topic. Very frequently we'll work in small groups.

You are welcome (and sometimes encouraged) to bring your laptops, tablets, and smart phones to class. Not only will we periodically analyze data in class but also I am happy for you to use these devices to access course information (or related information) online. Please, however, use technology responsibly.

The syllabus is very flexible. If there are materials you wish to read in this course, please suggest them.

Your teaching assistant is Constanza Figueroa Schibber. Her email is [c.figueroaschibber@go.wustl.edu](mailto:c.figueroaschibber@go.wustl.edu). Her office hours are Wednesday, 11 AM-1 PM, in Seigle 256. Please make her your first point of contact when you have questions.

### **On Academic Integrity**

Academic honesty is at the very core of a university's mission of research, teaching, and learning. We cannot grow and develop as scholars and citizens of this community without honoring a commitment to generate original work and to appropriately cite the work of others. Any case of academic dishonesty in this course will be referred to the University Judicial Board. All violations of academic integrity will be treated extremely seriously.

### **Assignments and Exams**

There will be five take-home assignments. These are designed to give you practice with the ideas, data analyses, and types of new media that we discuss in this course. You are encouraged to collaborate with your classmates but you must write up your homework on your own, using your own words.

Assignments are due on the dates indicated in the timetable below, before the **beginning** of class. Late assignments will be penalized grade-wise as described in the next section. You must turn in your assignments through the course Blackboard website.

There will be two mid-term exams and a final exam. Each of these exams will be cumulative, incorporating all of the material that we have covered up to that point. You will also have the opportunity to take a pre-test and a post-test. Your scores on these later two will count only towards extra credit in the course.

### **Grading**

Your grade will be structured as follows:

Assignments 1-5:	10% each
Midterm 1-2:	15% each

Final exam: 20%  
Pre-test and post-test: 2.5% each (extra credit)

Late assignments will be penalized a half-grade for every day of lateness with no exceptions. In the case of a last-minute emergency, grades may be calculated at the discretion of the professor.

The procedure to have any grade revised is as follows. Please write up a one-page description of your argument as to why your grade should be changed and hand it in, along with your initial assignment, within one week of receiving your grade. The professor will respond in writing. The professor's decisions regarding grades are final.

### **Readings and Resources**

All the books listed below are available from Amazon.com. Required readings from other sources as well as survey data will be posted on the course website as the course progresses, usually a week before the date on which the reading or data will be discussed.

#### Required books:

1. Sunstein, Cass R. 2009. Republic.com 2.0. Princeton University Press.
2. Bimber, Bruce. 2003. Information and American Democracy. Cambridge.
3. Sinclair, Betsy. 2012. The Social Citizen. University of Chicago Press.

### **In the spirit of new media:**

Our Twitter hashtag: #PoliticsforaConnectedPublic  
Our Facebook group: Politics for a Connected Public  
Our Google Plus group: Politics for a Connected Public

You will have been invited to join the Facebook and Google Plus groups. You are under no obligation to join these groups; they are intended only to give you experience using new media for the purposes of this class but are not required. If you wish to Tweet something from class or post something from class, feel free, but remember that you need to use these online resources responsibly.

### **Course Website**

The syllabus, readings, and requirements will be adjusted as the course progresses. Throughout the course I will periodically add journal articles to each week's reading. Each of these articles I will post on our course website.

**\*\*\* Every student is required to check the course website for updates to this syllabus before doing any reading or assignment \*\*\***

**Course Timetable**

All the readings listed below are required unless otherwise noted.

Date	Topic	Readings	Assignments & Notes
Week One (August 28)	Course organization (Pre-test and syllabus)	None	Pre-test
Week Two (Sept 4)	Social Science Statistics Overview (statistical significance, linear regression coefficients)	Watch the two TED talks posted on Blackboard: Ben Goldacre, “Battling bad science” and Peter Donnelly, “How Juries Are Fooled By Statistics”	
Week Three (Sept 9, 11)	The Promise of the Internet and its Problems	For Sept 9: Sunstein pg 1-137 and “Why the Social Researcher Uses Statistics.” For Sept 11: Sunstein pg 138-223.	Last day to drop this course is September 11 <sup>th</sup> . First assignment due September 11 <sup>th</sup> .
Week Four (Sept 16, 18)	Who is using new media to talk about politics?	For September 16th: “Digital Differences”, PEW Research Center. For September 18th: “Social Media and Mobile Internet Use Among Teens and Young Adults”, PEW Research Center and “New Media and Youth Political Action”, YPP report.	Last day to change a grade to P/F is September 16 <sup>th</sup> .
Week Five (Sept 23, 25)	Who is using new media to talk about politics?	For September 23rd: Bimber 1-33. For September 25th: Bimber 89-249.	
Week Six (Sept 30, Oct 2)	Who is using new media to talk about politics?	None	Second assignment is due September 30th. First mid- term is October 2 <sup>nd</sup> .
Week Seven (Oct 7, 9)	Seeking Politics: Information and Opinions	For October 7 <sup>th</sup> : Gentzkow and Shapiro, “Ideological Segregation	Mid-term course evaluations (optional).

		Online and Offline.” For October 9 <sup>th</sup> : “Online echo chambers” and “Rethinking Information Diversity”	
Week Eight (Oct 14, 16)	Seeking Politics: The News Media and Voter Informedness	For Oct 14th: Zaller “Monica Lewinsky’s Contribution to Political Science” For Oct 16 <sup>th</sup> : Lau and Redlawsk “Voting Correctly”	
Week Nine (Oct 21, 23)	Seeking Politics: Primary Elections	For Oct 21: Hall and Sinclair (too be posted) For Oct 23: TBA. Connie will lecture October 23 <sup>rd</sup> .	Third assignment is due October 23 <sup>rd</sup> .
Week Ten (Oct 28, 30)	Receiving Politics: How do voters process information?	For October 28 <sup>th</sup> : None. For October 30 <sup>th</sup> : Hetherington “The Media’s Role in Forming Voters’ National Economic Evaluations in 1992” and Kull et al “Misperceptions, the Media and the Iraq War”	Second midterm is October 28 <sup>th</sup> .
Week Eleven (Nov 4, 6)	Receiving Politics: Two Step Flow (Information vs Behavior)	For Nov 4: Page and Shapiro “The Myth of Capricious Change” For Nov 6: Katz “The Two-Step Flow of Communication”	
Week Twelve (Nov 11, 13)	Relying: Voting and Norms	For Nov 11: Bond et al “A 61-million-person experiment in social influence and political mobilization” For Nov 13: Wolf “How the Internet Invented Howard Dean”	Last day to change back to a letter grade from P/F is November 15 <sup>th</sup> . Fourth assignment is due November 13 <sup>th</sup> .
Week Thirteen (Nov 18, 20)	Relying: Social Connections	For November 18 <sup>th</sup> : Sinclair pg 1-76. For November 20 <sup>th</sup> : Sinclair 77-156.	

Week Fourteen (Nov 25)	Relying: We are all connected	Dow, Adamic and Friggeri, “The Anatomy of Large Facebook Cascades” and watch the YouTube link on Blackboard	
Week Fifteen (Dec 2, 4)	Course overview (Summary and post-test)	None	Fifth assignment is due December 2 <sup>nd</sup> . Post-test on December 4 <sup>th</sup> .
Final Exam (December 18)	Final Exam, Wednesday December 18, 1:00-3:00 PM		