

**Journalism & Mass Communication 566**  
**COMMUNICATION AND PUBLIC OPINION**

(4 semester hours credit) - Spring 2021

Tuesday and Thursday at 2:30 PM - 3:45 PM – 2195 Vilas Hall

Discussion Sections:

Mo 11:00 AM - 11:50 AM - VILAS 4008 – Lab 302

We 9:55 AM - 10:45 AM - COMP SCI 1257 – Lab 303

We 11:00 AM - 11:50 AM - COMP SCI 1257 – Lab 304

Zoom link for virtual lecture sessions:

<https://uwmadison.zoom.us/j/93645869259?pwd=NnFhYVpRS24raUVRYZlLU25xeHdBUT09>

**One tap mobile: +13126266799,,93645869259#,,,,\*112901#**

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**Course website:**

<https://dshah.journalism.wisc.edu/teaching/#j614>

<https://canvas.wisc.edu/courses/286805>

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**Purpose statement and learning outcomes:**

This course is an examination of the concept of public opinion and provides an integrated approach to learning about (a) the philosophical and normative assumptions surrounding public opinion, (b) the theoretical approaches to studying public opinion formation and change, (c) the research processes involved in measuring public opinion and understanding its change over time, and (d) the reactions of the public to polling, news information and marketing communications. We will focus on how opinion intersects with the mass media, policymakers, and mass marketers.

The learning goals of this course center on:

- Understanding the political and social history of the concept of public opinion
- Learning the major media effects theories that explain public opinion change
- Acquiring knowledge about different methods for studying public opinion
- Applying this knowledge to conducting communication and public opinion research

To understand the connection between communication and public opinion, students will participate in a group project that requires them to (a) highlight a trend in public opinion of social import, (b) generate an explanation of the trend based on media influence, (c) attempt to link it to shifts in media content, (d) conduct a survey experiment testing their prediction, and (e) share their finding with the class.

## Readings:

The **required readings** for this class are available as a single bulk download. Reading assignments are listed by class session after the lecture outline and again at the end of the syllabus in a bibliography. Assigned readings for Monday lecture are to be completed prior to coming to discussion section.

## Group Project:

In lab, students will be put into groups of 3-4 to work on a class project regarding a selected trend in public opinion. Each group will (1) examine public opinion archives and select a trend in public opinion to study, (2) plot that trend, noting the change over time, and explain its societal relevance, (3) develop a theoretical rationale regarding how media might explain this trend, (4) test some part of this theory with a survey-question wording experiment, (5) conduct a content analysis of mass media to relate to this trend, and (6) prepare a presentation that summarizes their findings.

Opinion Trend Paper: This 3-page paper is produced by the group and consists of an introduction to the opinion trend of interest, a plot of the changes in measurements of this opinion trend, and a discussion about its import. Explaining this trend will be the focus of your group's efforts over the term. It is worth 15 points toward your grade.

Media Predictions Paper: This 3-page paper is produced by the group and consists of an introduction, purpose statement, literature review, and a model predicting the relationship between media content and changes in opinion. This work will form the basis of your account of how changes in media content are linked to changes in mass opinion and the implications of this. It is worth 15 points toward your grade.

Survey Experiment Paper: This 3-page paper is produced by the group and features the rationale, design, measurement for an experimental study of survey question wording. It will include the actual question wording of the survey items and response categories. These will be programmed into a national survey we will collect so that you can report the results in your final presentations. This paper is worth 15 points toward your grade.

Content Analysis Work: Each group must work together to conduct a content analysis of media content focusing on the period spanning the trend in mass opinion. Media should be coded for content thought to explain the changes in mass opinion (e.g., popular music lyrics and attitudes towards drug legalization; presence of gay characters in popular programs and support for gay marriage, coverage of female politicians and willingness to vote for a woman for President). This work is worth 30 points toward your final grade.

Final Class Presentation: During the last two class sessions, each group will then make a presentation (a) highlighting the opinion trend, (b) explaining their theory of media influence, (c) summarizing their findings for both the survey experiment and content analysis relating media content with mass opinion. One presentation will be selected from each day as a "finalist." **"Finalist" groups will not have to take the final exam.** This presentation will be worth 50 points toward your final grade.

Peer Evaluation: During the final exam period, there will be a confidential written evaluation of each student's performance by other group members. Each member of the group will evaluate all other group members on a 100-point scale based on effort, contributions, and congeniality. The average of these evaluations will be converted to a 25-point equivalent and figured into the final grade to reflect your contribution to the final project.

### Exams:

There will be two examinations for this class: a midterm (50 points) and a final exam (50 points). The exams will cover material presented in class, lab and readings. The exams will include both multiple choice and short answer questions that will be based on the readings and/or material presented in class. The final exam is **not** explicitly cumulative, but material covered throughout the class may be covered.

### Lab assignments:

There will be two reaction papers each worth 10 points toward the final grade. There will also be a series of smaller lab exercises totaling an additional 10 points. You will receive further instructions on these assignments in lab. Finally, participation in lab will be worth an additional 20 points. Most of the class project work will take place in lab, so attendance and involvement in those activities will count toward your participation score, along with engagement in class discussions and exercises.

### Notice Regarding Academic Misconduct:

It is your responsibility to complete your own work as best you can in the time provided. Cheating, plagiarism and falsification of data are serious offenses, and it is our responsibility to make sure they do not occur. Anyone found guilty of academic misconduct should expect to fail the entire course and have a record of the matter forwarded to the Dean of Students.

### Graduate Students:

The work completed by graduate students will parallel the learning outcomes described above. However, additional learning outcomes for graduate students will include:

- Demonstration of higher-order synthesis of research on communication and public opinion
- Development of formal hypotheses for empirical testing, extending their group project work

To accomplish this, graduate students will receive an extended reading list and be expected to complete an additional assignment, a final research paper, synthesizing concepts learned in the class and engaging in formal significance testing of the proposed hypotheses. This is an additional assignment.

### Grading for Undergraduates:

<u>Activities</u>	<u>Points</u>	<u>Due date</u>
<i>Group Project Responsibilities</i>		
Opinion Trend Paper	15	In lab on Week 4
Media Predictions Paper	15	In lab on Week 8
Question Wording Paper	15	In lab on Week 10
Content Analysis Work	30	In lab on Week 12
Final Presentation	50	Slides due <b>May 1 (Sunday)</b>
Peer evaluation	<u>25</u>	In lab on Week 14
	150	
<i>Exams</i>		
Midterm exam	50	In class on Week 6
Final exam	<u>50</u>	During Scheduled Time
	100	

*Lab Assignments*

Response Paper 1	10	In lab on Week 3
Response Paper 2	10	In lab on Week 9
Mini-assignments	10	In lab throughout the semester
Participation	<u>20</u>	In lab throughout the semester
	50	

Undergrads will be graded on a basis of.... 300 points

**Grading for Graduate Students:**

<u>Activities</u>	<u>Points</u>	<u>Due date</u>
<i>Group Project Responsibilities</i>		
Opinion Trend Paper	15	In lab on Week 4
Media Predictions Paper	15	In lab on Week 8
Question Wording Paper	15	In lab on Week 10
Content Analysis Work	30	In lab on Week 12
Final Presentation	50	Slides due <b>April 24 (Sunday)</b>
Peer evaluation	25	In lab on Week 16
<b>Final Research Paper</b>	<b><u>50</u></b>	<b>In lab on Week 16</b>
	200	
<i>Exams</i>		
Midterm exam	50	In class on Week 6
Final exam	<u>50</u>	During Scheduled Time
	100	
<i>Lab Assignments</i>		
Response Paper 1	10	In lab on Week 3
Response Paper 2	10	In lab on Week 9
Mini-assignments	10	In lab throughout the semester
Participation	<u>20</u>	In lab throughout the semester
	50	

Grad student will be graded on a basis of.... 350 points

The following breakdowns provide a guideline for the assignment of final grades. These are standards that are guaranteed. When we establish the breakpoints for determining final grades, we use a form of “**collective grading.**” By this, we mean that we assess the performance of the class as a whole. If we have the impression that students in general have been working hard on assignments, doing the readings, and participating in class, we will relax these cut points when setting the final grades. That is, the scale below may be lowered to make the grades more generous, but they will NOT be raised.

<u>Percentage</u>	<u>Grade</u>
93-100%	A
88-93%	AB
83-88%	B
78-83%	BC
73-78%	C
68-73%	D
below 68%	F

## COURSE SCHEDULE

<b>WEEK*</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>
One 1/25-27	Introduction and Course Overview #	Nature of opinion #
Two 2/1-3	Normative concepts I: History of public opinion #	Normative concepts II: Public opinion and policy #
Three* 2/8-10	Psychology I: Attitudinal/cognitive models	Psychology II: Nature of survey response
Four* 2/15-17	Sociology I: Norms and social influence	Sociology II: Social conflict and structure
Five 2/22-24	Media effects I: News, agenda setting, and framing	Media effects II: Entertainment and cultivation
Six 3/1-3	Media effects III: Ads, campaigns, and opinion	<b>MIDTERM EXAM</b> (Feb 23)
Seven 3/8-10	Media, perception, & opinion I: Third-person effects ^	Media, perception, & opinion II: Spiral of silence #
	<b>Spring Break</b>	<b>Spring Break</b>
Eight* 3/22-24	<b>PROJECT WORKDAY - NO LECTURE</b>	Studying opinion I: Overview #
Nine* 3/29-31	Studying opinion II: Content analysis / Social Media	Studying opinion III: Survey research
Ten* 4/5-7	Studying opinion IV: Experimental research	Research procedures I: Sampling
Eleven 4/12-14	Research procedures II: Concepts and operationalization	Research procedures III: Reliability & validity
Twelve* 4/19-21	Problems and challenges I: Nonresponse & Cell Phones	Presentation Workshop: Parameters and Examples
Thirteen 4/26-28	Marketing and opinion I: Materialism & luxury goods	Marketing and opinion II: Political consumerism
Fourteen* May 3-5	Student presentations	Student presentations
Fifteen 5/13	<b>FINAL EXAM</b> (12:25 - 2:25 PM, Friday 5/13)	

\* There is an assignment due in lab on this week; see grading section details.

# Marked lecture sessions will be held online at  
<https://uwmadison.zoom.us/j/93645869259?pwd=NnFhYVpRS24raUVRyZlLU25xeHdBUT09>  
 One tap mobile: +13126266799,,93645869259#,,,,\*112901#

^ Guest lecture by Leo Shan, Doctoral Candidate

## READINGS SCHEDULE

<u>WEEK</u>	<u>Monday</u>	<u>Wednesday</u>
One		<b>Cutlip (1997) Brief history of public relations</b>
Two	Glynn et al. (1999). The history of public opinion – Ch. 2.	Glynn et al. (1999). Public opinion and policymaking - Ch. 9
Three	Glynn et al. (1999). Psychological perspectives – Ch. 4 +	Zaller (1994) Positive constructs of public opinion + <b>Tourangeau et al. (2000) Introduction - Ch. 1</b>
Four	Price & Oshagan (1995) Social perspectives on opinion	<b>Mueller (1994) Policy &amp; opinion during Gulf War, Ch. 1 &amp; 2</b>
Five	Chong & Druckman (2007) Framing + McCombs (2005) Agenda Setting	Gerbner et al (2002) Growing up with television
Six	Jamieson (2000) Ch. 10 – 13	<b>MIDTERM EXAM</b> (Feb. 23)
Seven	Perloff (2002) The third person effect	Eveland (2002) Media impact on social reality judgments
	Spring Break	Spring Break
Eight	<b>PROJECT WORKDAY - NO LECTURE</b>	Glynn et al. (1999). Methods for studying opinion - Ch. 3
Nine	Babbie (2007) Content analysis Ch. 11 + Zhang et al (2022)	Babbie (2007) Survey research Ch. 9
Ten	Babbie (2007) Experimental methods Ch. 8	Tourangeau et al. (2000) Understanding Survey Questions, Ch. 2
Eleven	Babbie (2007) Conceptualization/Operationalization Ch. 5 + <b>Carmines &amp; Zeller (1979) Reliability and Validity</b>	Babbie (2007) Sampling Ch. 7
Twelve	Keeter et al. (2006) Growing non-response	<b>Kennedy et al (2018) Trump and 2016 Polling</b>
Thirteen	Schor (1999) Materialism and Consumption + <b>Twitchell (2002) Lap of luxury</b>	Stolle & Hooghe (2006) Consumers as political...
Fourteen	Student presentations	Student presentations
Fifteen	<b>FINAL EXAM</b> (12:25 - 2:25 PM, Friday 5/13)	

**Readings in bold are optional for undergraduates but required for graduate students**

## COURSE READINGS

- Babbie, E. (2007). Conceptualization and measurement. Ch. 5 / Sampling. Ch. 7 / Experimental Methods. Ch. 8 / Survey Research. Ch. 9 / Content analysis. Ch. 11 in E. Babbie, *The Practice of Social Research*. 11th edition. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson.
- Carmines, E. G., & Zeller, R. A. (1979). *Reliability and validity assessment*. Sage publications.**
- Chong, D., & Druckman, J. N. (2007). A theory of framing and opinion formation in competitive elite environments. *Journal of communication*, 57(1), 99-118.
- Cutlip, S. M. (1997) *The unseen power: A brief history of public relations*. In Caywood, C. (Ed). *The Handbook of Strategic Public Relations and Integrated Communications*, New York: McGraw-Hill (pp. 15-33.).**
- Eveland, W. P. (2002) The impact of news and entertainment media on perceptions of social reality. In Dillard, J. P. and Pfau, M (Eds.) *The Persuasion Handbook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage 691-727).
- Gerbner, J. et al. (2002) Growing up with television: Cultivation process. In Bryant, J. & Zillmann, D. (Eds.) *Media effects: Advances in Theory and Research*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum (43-67).
- Glynn, C.J., Herbst, S., O'Keefe, G.J., & Shapiro, R.Y. (1999). The history of public opinion – Ch 2. / Methods for studying public opinion – Ch 3. / Psychological perspectives - Ch 4. / Public opinion and policymaking - Ch 9. In C.J. Glynn et al. (Eds.). *Public Opinion*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Jamieson, K. H. (2000). *Everything You Think You Know About Politics...* New York: Basic Books (pp. 93-114).
- Keeter, S., Kennedy, C., Dimock, M., Best, J., and Craighill, P. (2006) Gauging the Impact of Growing Nonresponse on Estimates from a National RDD Telephone Survey, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 70, 759-779.
- Kennedy, C., Blumenthal, M., Clement, S., Clinton, J. D., Durand, C., Franklin, C., ... & Wlezien, C. (2018). An evaluation of the 2016 election polls in the United States. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 82(1), 1-33.**
- McCombs, M. (2005). A look at agenda-setting: Past, present and future. *Journalism studies*, 6(4), 543-557.
- Mueller, J. (1994) *Policy and opinion in the Gulf War*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press (pp. 17-63).**
- Perloff, R. M. (2002) The Third Person Effect. In Bryant, J. & Zillmann, D. (Eds.) *Media effects: Advances in Theory and Research*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum (489-506).
- Price, V & Oshagan, H (1995). Social-psychological perspectives on public opinion. In Glasser, T.L., & Salmon, C.T. (Eds.) *Public opinion and the communication of consent..* New York: Guilford Press (pp. 177-216).
- Schor, J. (1999). Toward a new politics of consumption. In Schor, J. and Holt, D., *The consumer society reader*, New York: The New Press.
- Stolle, D. & Hooghe. (2006). Consumers as Political Participants? In Micheletti, M., Follesdal, & Stolle, D. *Politics, products, and markets*. London: Transaction Publishers.

Tourangeau, R., Rips, L. J., & Rasinski, K. (2000). **Chapter 1: Introduction and a Point of View / Chapter 2: Respondents Understanding of Survey Questions.** *The psychology of survey response.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

**Twitchell, J. B. (2002) *Living It Up: Our Love Affair with Luxury.* New York: Columbia University Press. Ch. 1.**

Zaller, J. (1994) Positive constructs of public opinion. *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, September 11: 276-286.

Zhang, Y., Chen, F., & Rohe, K. (2022). Social media public opinion as flocks in a murmuration: Conceptualizing and measuring opinion expression on social media. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 27(1), zmab021.

**Readings in bold are optional for undergraduates but required for graduate students**



## LAB SCHEDULE

### Lab section details:

Mo 11:00 AM - 11:50 AM - VILAS 4008 – Lab 302  
We 9:55 AM - 10:45 AM - COMP SCI 1257 – Lab 303  
We 11:00 AM - 11:50 AM - COMP SCI 1257 – Lab 304

### Week 1: No Lab

### Week 2: Intro to Public Opinion

Introduction to lab and class  
Discuss response paper assignment  
Group project overview  
    Opinion poll data sources (Roper i-poll system)  
    Reviewing literature (scholarly journal search)  
Project: select groups, discuss relevant opinion topics

### Week 3: Importance of Opinion Trends/Psychological Roots

Discuss normative implications of opinion  
Discuss psychological roots of opinion  
Discuss opinion trend paper  
    Finding opinion data  
    Plotting opinion trends  
    Describing opinion trends  
*Individual Assignment: Response paper 1 due in lab*

### Week 4: Survey Response and Social Influence

Discuss nature of survey response  
Discuss norms and social influence  
    In-lab presentation of opinion trends (5-7 minutes for each group)  
*Project Assignment: Opinion trend paper due in lab*  
*Mini Assignment 1: Presentation slides or handouts due in lab (Group project)*

### Week 5: Social Conflict and News Effects

Discuss theories of social conflict  
Discuss theories of news influence on opinion  
    Agenda setting, priming, and framing  
Discuss media prediction paper  
Applying theory to opinion trends  
In-class question-wording activity

### Week 6: Entertainment and Campaign Effects [Exam Week]

Discuss theories of cultivation and campaign influence on opinion  
Applying theories to opinion trends  
    Hone arguments for media predictions paper  
Discuss midterm exam and strategies for study  
    Review core concepts and relevant materials

**Week 7: Media, Perceptions, and Opinion**

Discuss third-person perceptions and effects

Project: continue to work on media explanations for the opinion trend

*Mini Assignment 2: Share two relevant scholarly articles or chapters related to the group project.*

**Spring Break!!!****Week 8: Spiral of Silence / Opinion Research**

Discuss spiral of silence and perceptual influences

Introduction to opinion research

Begin work on study design

*Project Assignment: Media prediction paper due in lab*

**Week 9: Content Analysis**

Review of content analysis assignment

Sampling (sampling procedures/decisions)

Content measurement (units of analysis, variables, validity and reliability)

Project: Designing content study (sampling procedures, coding categories)

*Individual Assignment: Response paper 2 due in lab*

**Week 10: Opinion Research and Question Wording**

Discuss survey and experimental research approaches to studying opinion

Finalize question wording experiment for programming

Discuss conceptual and operational issues of content coding

Establish timeline for completion of project

*Project Assignment: Question wording paper due by Friday at noon (submit by email)*

**Week 11: Connecting Content and Trend Data**

Discuss issues of reliability and validity in opinion research

Project: Relate content findings to opinion trends

Establishing inter-coder reliability

Coder training

**Week 12: Preparing for Presentation**

Discuss Sampling Making presentation slides

Project: Discuss conclusions and implications of research

*Project Assignment: Content analysis work due in lab*

*Mini Assignment 3: Presentation slides or handouts of content analysis due in lab (Group project)*

**Week 13: In-lab Presentation**

Each group gives practice run of presentation

*Mini Assignment 4: Abstract for the presentation due in lab (Group project)*

*Mini Assignment 5: Each group uploads presentation slides to Canvas by 6 pm Sunday (4/24) of week 14*

**Week 14: Exam Review and Preparation**

Exam review