

Draft Syllabus
Strategic Uses of Survey Research in
Political and Public Affairs Campaigns (PPHA 31730)
Whit Ayres & Dan Judy, North Star Opinion Research
Winter Quarter 2022

Description

This course will provide the student with an introduction to the basic aspects of survey research as it relates to modern political campaigns and public affairs battles. Topics include sampling, research design, data analysis, interpretation of results, and practical applications in politics and policy. The course will cover quantitative research to measure public opinion, and qualitative research to help understand it.

The focus of the class will be how polling and focus groups are used to help candidates win elections, and help proponents of policy choices advance their cause. We will look at how the polling industry is changing, what challenges pollsters face, and how polling fared in the 2020 presidential and congressional elections. The course leaders collectively have more than 50 years of experience in public opinion research at North Star Opinion Research. In addition, the course will feature prominent guest speakers, leaders in their fields from journalism and both political parties, who will discuss how polling and focus groups have affected their professional work.

Grades/Assignments

The final grade will be based on:

1. Questionnaire design (25% of grade): using a real-world example of a race in the 2022 midterm election, write a questionnaire for a benchmark survey. Due Wednesday, January 26.
2. Strategy memo (4-5 pages) and paid communications recommendations based on actual poll (top-lines and cross-tabs) (25% of grade) Due Friday, February 11.
3. Final exam (50% of grade) Due Friday, March 11.

Readings

- *The Victory Lab: The Secret Science of Winning Campaigns*, Sasha Issenberg, Crown Publishers, 2016
- *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know*, Herbert Asher, 9th Edition, CQ Press, 2016
- *Political Polling in the Digital Age: The Challenge of Measuring and Understanding Public Opinion*, edited by Kirby Goidel, Louisiana State University Press, 2011
- Additional news articles, political documentaries, and focus group recordings will be assigned throughout the course

Time: Tuesday-Thursday, 2 pm - 3:20 pm Central Time

It is essential to participate in live class discussions and get the most out of this course. Watching recorded sessions after the fact will not provide the same learning experience.

Tuesday, January 4: Introduction and Overview

Leader: Whit Ayres, North Star Opinion Research (in person)

**Assignment: Asher, Chapters 1-2, pp 1-73
Goidel, Chapter 1, pp 11-25**

- Outline of the course
- What polling does and does not do
- The role of public opinion in a democracy
- Determining acceptable range of policy alternatives
- Stability, change, and voter information in public opinion
- Measuring vs creating public opinion
- The problem of non-attitudes

Thursday, January 6: Trends in Public Opinion and Polling's Effects on Democratic Government

Leader: Whit Ayres, North Star Opinion Research (in person)

Assignment: Asher, Chapter 9, pp 279-295

- Abortion
- Guns
- Gay marriage
- Health care
- Immigration
- Fiscal responsibility
- America's role in the world

Tuesday, January 11: Sampling

Guest Speaker: Jon McHenry, North Star Opinion Research (virtual)

Assignment: Asher, Chapter 4, pp 107-137

**Assignment: Watch Charlie Cook's Interview with Ann Selzer:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oeqL3e8HWvg>**

- Probability vs non-probability samples
- The magic of random sampling
- RDD vs lists vs panels
- Determining sample size
- Sample construction
- Quotas and weighting
- Nonresponse problem
- Dilemma of party balance in samples

Thursday, January 13: Data Collection

Guest Speaker from a leading call center (virtual)

Assignment: Asher, Chapter 5, pp 139-160

- Telephone (landline and cell) vs IVR vs online vs text
- How a Computer Assisted Telephone Interview system (CATI) works
- Running a call center
- Timing of calls
- Response rates
- Interviewer effects

Tuesday, January 18: Writing the Questionnaire

Leader: Dan Judy, North Star Opinion Research (in person)

Assignment: Asher, Chapter 3, pp 75-106

- Standard polling questions
- Screening questions
- Question wording
- Order effects
- Open-ended questions
- Agree/Disagree vs he said/she said questions

Thursday, January 20: Quantitative Research in Campaigns

Leader: Dan Judy, North Star Opinion Research (in person)

**Assignment: Asher, Chapter 7, pp 191-235
Issenberg, Chapters 6,7; pp 143-211**

- Benchmark vs brushfire vs tracking
- Horserace polling
- Developing candidate messages
- Determining resonance of issues
- Testing opposition research
- Pollster as messenger for fundraising and the press

Tuesday, January 25: Creative Methodologies in Polling and Campaigns

Guest Speaker: Leading Democratic pollster (virtual)

**Assignment: Goidel, Chapter 7 (Anna Greenberg), pp 115-123
Issenberg, Prologue & Chapters 1,2; pp 1-69**

- Experimental designs in political polling
- Polling to support candidates other than your own

Wednesday, January 26: Assignment #1 Due: Benchmark Questionnaire

Thursday, January 27: Analytics, Big Data, and Micro-targeting vs Polling

Guest Speaker: Leading authority in data analytics (virtual)

Assignment: Issenberg, Chapter 3,4,5; pp 70-142

- How analytics and big data compare to polling
- Are analytics and polling competitive or complementary?
- Future of analytics and big data in political campaigns

Tuesday, February 1: Analyzing Data

Leader: Dan Judy, North Star Opinion Research (in person)

Assignment: Asher, Chapter 8, pp 237-278

- Adults vs registered voters vs likely voters
- Polling for party committees vs candidate campaigns
- Bivariate vs multivariate analysis
- Targeting key groups (McHenry charts)
- How polling contributes to big data and modeling

Thursday, February 3: Qualitative Research in Campaigns

Leader: Dan Judy, North Star Opinion Research (in person)

- What qualitative research does and does not do
- In-person focus groups
- Online focus groups
- Qualboards
- Elite interviewing

Tuesday, February 8: Using Polls in Political Advertising in Democratic Campaigns

Guest speaker: Leading Democratic media consultant (virtual)

Assignment: Issenberg, Chapters 8,9; pp 212-271

- Deciding the message of a Democratic political ad
- Evaluating political advertising using polls and focus groups

Thursday, February 10: Using Polls in Political Advertising in Republican Campaigns

Guest Speaker: Leading Republican media consultant (virtual)

Assignment: Issenberg, Chapters 10, Epilogue pp 272-322

- Deciding the message of a Republican political ad
- Evaluating political advertising using polls and focus groups

Friday, February 11: Assignment #2 Due: Strategic Memo

Tuesday, February 15: Case Studies: How Polls Help Made Strategic Decisions in Campaigns

Leader: Whit Ayres, North Star Opinion Research (in person)

**Assignment: Issenberg, Afterword, Postscript pp 323-370
Watch *The War Room* (1993)**

- The role of a pollster on a political team
- Case studies where polling made a difference in political campaigns
- Case studies where polling made a difference in public affairs campaigns

Thursday, February 17: Trustworthiness of Polls

Leader: Whit Ayres (in person), Guest Speaker (virtual)

**Assignment: Goidel, Chapter 3 (Mark Blumenthal), pp 54-70, Chapter 6 (Kirby Goidel et al), pp 99-114
Mark Mellman, "Polling isn't broken. But we too often miss its hidden signals"**

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/11/16/polling-isnt-broken-we-too-often-miss-its-hidden-signals/>

- Factors determining trustworthiness of different polls
- Accuracy of national and state polls in 2016
- Accuracy of national and state polls in 2020
- Methodological differences between 2016 and 2020 polls
- Effect of the internet and social media on public opinion

Tuesday, February 22: Using Polls in Non-Partisan Political Analysis

Guest Speaker: Leading non-partisan political analyst (virtual)

Assignment: Goidel, Introduction (Charlie Cook), pp 1-8, and Chapter 5 (Susan Herbst), pp. 85-97

- How polls affect analysis of political campaigns
- How candidates and partisans use polls to affect political analysis
- Polling vs. blogs, Twitter, and Facebook for assessing public opinion

Thursday, February 24: Political Polls in the Media

Guest Speaker: Leading political journalist (virtual)

**Assignment: Asher, Chapter 6, pp 161-189
Goidel, Chapter 4 (Johanna Dunaway), pp 71-84**

- How journalists use public opinion polls
- How journalists report on polls
- The difference between media polls and campaign polls
- How polls affect campaign coverage

Tuesday, March 1: Polling for Corporations and Associations

Guest Speaker: Leading association pollster (virtual)

Assignment: Watch Rest of Margin of Error Conference, University of Chicago Institute of Politics

- Public affairs polling
- Polling to develop messages
- Pressure testing messages
- Employee attitude surveys
- Qualitative research for jury selection

Thursday, March 3: The Future and Challenges to Polling in the 21st Century

Guest Speaker: Leading non-partisan pollster (virtual)

**Assignment: Goidel, Chapter 2 (Scott Keeter), pp 28-51
Chapter 8 (Kirby Goidel), pp 124-136
Scott Keeter et al, "What 2020's Election Poll Errors Tell Us
About the Accuracy of Issue Polling"**

<https://www.pewresearch.org/methods/2021/03/02/what-2020s-election-poll-errors-tell-us-about-the-accuracy-of-issue-polling/>

- How the digital age has changed polling
- Challenges facing public opinion researchers
- What polling will look like in 10 to 15 years

Friday, March 11: Final Exam Due