

MC 3510
Political Communication Research
Monday/Wednesday, 4:30 PM – 5:50 PM
107 Journalism
Fall 2017

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Office hours: Thursday, 1-3 PM & Friday, 10AM – 12PM

Course Overview

This class will explore the measurement of public and individual political opinions through polls, experiments, and other forms of communication research. You will gain hands-on experience with: crafting a political message and testing its effectiveness; analyzing decades of nationally representative polling data; using experiments to determine causal relationships; and participating in political messaging experiments in the LSU Media Effects Laboratory. After this course, you will be able to conduct original research on political communication and communicate your results to both expert and non-technical audiences using Qualtrics and SPSS.

Learning Objectives

- Evaluate the quality of polls and survey data in a political context.
- Analyze political survey data using inferential statistics.
- Recognize different research methods (e.g., observational studies, different kinds of experiments) and understand their pros, cons, and appropriate use.
- Conduct original political communication research by utilizing A/B testing on political messages.
- Communicate research results to both expert and non-specialist audiences.
- Translate results into strategy for advocacy or electoral campaigns.

Expectations

It is expected that the students have read the assigned chapters or pages prior to class for the background necessary to properly participate in the discussion and think critically about the concepts addressed. As a general policy, for each hour you are in class, you (the student) should plan to spend at least two hours preparing for the next class. Since this course is for three credit hours, you should expect to spend around six hours outside of class each week reading or writing assignments for the class.

Required Text

Available from the LSU Bookstore or various online retailers.

Pollock, Phillip. (2016). An IBM SPSS Companion to Political Analysis, 5th edition. CQ Press College: Washington, DC.

There are also multiple supplemental readings, which are linked here or will be made available on Moodle.

Assignments

There will be several required assignments for this course, detailed below.

Original Research Project: 50%

Homework: 30%

MEL participation: 5%

Attendance and participation: 15%

1. Original Research Project (50% of your grade). Your central assignment in this course will be an original research project, based around a survey experiment to determine the effectiveness of a message relevant to the 2016 election. You will act as a campaign consultant for a party's campaign committee in the fall 2018 election. No partisanship on your part will be inferred from these choices!

Republicans: National Republican Congressional Committee [NRCC]

Democrats: Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee [DCCC]

You will craft a message on behalf of your campaign committee with the intention of persuading voters through campaign advertising in the fall. Campaign committees put their messages through rigorous A/B testing, with various goals: persuading undecided voters, encouraging people to register to vote, encouraging supporters to volunteer, attract media attention for their chosen issues, etc. You may choose to advocate on behalf of a specific candidate, or a specific issue, or merely for the party you choose to retain/win control of the legislature – your topic is up to you, but you must choose an organization on whose behalf your research will be conducted.

There will be four parts to this assignment, detailed below, each worth 12.5% of your final grade. Each part should be considered a direct, professional, and informative communication to the committee chairman (Professor Darr), highlighting the importance and feasibility of your proposed assessment.

I. Empirical plan and background memo. Based on historical polling and recent trends, what issue or problem will your research address—and why does this matter for your campaign committee? Situate the problem in literature, polling trends, and the context of the current election, and convince the campaign committee chair that this issue or problem is worth addressing with the committee's money and time. Within this issue, what message will you test?

II. Variation and empirical strategy memo. What will be the variation you use to assess the effectiveness of your message testing? How will you reliably test this message—and on what audience? What are the advantages and drawbacks of this approach? Why might this variation be effective? Present examples of your

proposed variation in Qualtrics, and convince the campaign committee chair that you are ready to send this out into the field pending their approval.

III. Results and assessment memo. After placing survey in the field and obtaining sufficient responses, you will need to assess the results of your testing. Was your intervention effective? How do you know – and according to what methods? Based on your results, should this message be used – and if so, which audiences should it target? If it did not work as intended, why might it have failed? Inform your campaign manager what you learned and what actions they should take based upon your original research. This portion of your project will require SPSS.

IV. Presentation of research project. Congratulations – you have been invited to present your work at the yearly conference for *Campaigns and Elections* magazine, as part of a panel showcasing up-and-coming political consultants and their methods to potential employers! You are given 7 minutes to present your research (using PowerPoint) to this audience, explaining in layman's terms what you did, how you did it, what you learned, and how that research influenced (or did not influence) your campaign committee's decision-making. These potential employers will assess you on professionalism, command of the methodology and data, and your ability to communicate your findings.

2. Homework (30% of your final grade). There will be five homework assignments throughout the semester. Many will come from the Pollock book. The purpose of these homework assignments is to increase your familiarity with data analysis in SPSS, a critical part of the final project. Homework will be collected at the beginning of the class period it is due.

3. MEL participation (5% of your grade). In this course we will cover how to conduct and understand research originating in the field and academia. You will have the opportunity to receive course credit by participating in ongoing research in the Manship School, or by completing an alternate assignment in lieu of a research participation opportunity (<https://lsu-manship.sona-systems.com>). These studies must be ongoing studies in the Manship School and may not be a study conducted for this class by a classmate or conducted by students in other sections of this course. Please note that to earn this credit, you must either earn **three (3) MEL points** or complete alternate assignments associated with studies by the due dates given—late participation is not available.

4. Attendance and participation (15% of your grade). Attendance is mandatory and will be taken at the beginning of each class. Excused absences must comply with the policy below. Though most of this grade will be based on attendance, active participation in the in-class exercises and the class discussion is expected. Failure to participate in class – or looking at your phone during class (yes, I can tell) – will be reflected in your grade.

Attendance & Excused Absences

Each student must attend class, and attendance will be taken during each class period. Excused absences will be granted with a signed statement from a doctor or LSU

administrator. (Please note that the LSU Student Health Center will not provide medical excuses for short-term illness or injury.) If you know you will miss class with an excused absence, please discuss these planned absences with me well ahead of time. In the event of an excused absence interfering with the due date of an assignment, the assignment will be due on a date agreed upon by the student and myself, depending upon the circumstances of the absence. In the event of a missed exam (with excused absence), a make-up exam will be administered in my office (204 Hodges Hall). Makeup exams will not be administered for exams missed with unexcused absences.

Grade Scale

Grades in this class will follow the scale below.

97.0 and above	A+	77.00–79.99	C+
93.00 – 96.99	A	73.00–76.99	C
90.00–92.99	A-	70.00–72.99	C-
87.00–89.99	B+	67.00–69.99	D+
83.00–86.99	B	63.00–66.99	D
80.00–82.99	B-	60.00–62.99	D-
		59.99 and below	F

Policy on Submitting Work

Please do not assume I have received your assignment if I do not reply to your e-mail: late, unsent, or other e-mail server errors will be treated as late assignments unless you provide proof of the malfunction.

All work is due at the date and time discussed in class. Any late work will be docked one letter grade per day late. An assignment due at 12 noon, but submitted at 12:01 PM, will be docked one letter grade (an A paper becomes a B, a C paper becomes a D, and so on).

Technology

You may not film or record this class without permission.

Normally, I do not allow laptops in class. This class requires research and in-class activities, however, and I believe that laptops can be an asset. Therefore, laptops may be used in class, but inappropriate use of laptops is tempting and far too common. You may find it more effective to take notes in paper notebooks – there is plenty of research to back this up. Use of cell phones in class is not permitted, and I can tell when you are using them. I will take your cell phone until the end of class if you are caught using it.

Communication

All students are required to check their LSU e-mail account regularly. I frequently communicate with students via email and Moodle, and not checking your email will not be an excuse for missing an assignment or reading. *I will try to reply to all e-mails within 24 hours, and will not reply to e-mails sent after 5PM until the next business day.*

Statement of Academic Integrity

Students are bound to uphold the Code of Academic Integrity. All students are expected to read and be familiar with the LSU Code of Student Conduct and Commitment to Community, found online at www.lsu.edu/saa. It is your responsibility as a student at LSU to know and understand the academic standards for our community. Students who are suspected of violating the Code of Conduct will be referred to the office of Student Advocacy & Accountability. A first academic violation could result in a zero grade on the assignment or failing the class and disciplinary probation until graduation. For a second academic violation, the result could be suspension from LSU. Ignorance of these guidelines is no excuse for failure to comply with them.

Readings and Course Structure

***Note: classes marked with a * will take place in Room 230A in Middleton Library.**

M 8/21: Introduction, syllabus overview.

- McCaskill, Claire. (2015). [“How I Helped Todd Akin Win – So I Could Beat Him Later.”](#) 11 August. *Politico Magazine*.

W 8/23: The numbers game.

- Issenberg, Sasha. (2012). [“A more perfect union.”](#) *MIT Technology Review*.
- Hersh, Eitan. (2015). [Hacking the Electorate](#), ch. 2. (Moodle)

M 8/28: Surveys I – Measuring public opinion.

- Journalist’s Resource. (2015). [“Polling fundamentals and concepts: An overview for journalists.”](#) *JournalistsResource.org*, 11 August.
- Pollock, ch. 11. (skip the section “Inputting data”)
- Clawson & Oxley. [Public Opinion: Democratic Ideals, Democratic Practice](#). Ch. 1: “Public Opinion in Democracy” & ch. 1 Appendix. (Moodle)

W 8/30: Research resources and using academic journals.

M 9/4: No class, Labor Day.

W 9/6: Surveys II – Modern issues with polling.

- Zukin, Cliff. (2015). [“What’s the Matter with Polling?”](#) *The New York Times*.
 - *HW assigned: Poll write-up.*

M 9/11: Levels of measurement.

- Healey, Joseph. (2010). [The Essentials of Statistics](#), ch. 1, sections 1.4 and 1.5. (Moodle)

W 9/13: Principles of survey design.

- “Harvard University Program on Survey Research: [Tip Sheet on Question Wording](#).”
- Seth Goldman, Diana Mutz, and Susanna Dilliplane. (2013). [“All Virtue is Relative: A Response to Prior.”](#) *Political Communication*, 30(4): 635-653.

M 9/18: Causal inference I: Observational methods. ***HW due: Poll write-up.***

- Darr, Joshua, and Matthew Levendusky. [“Relying on the Ground Game: The Placement and Effects of Campaign Field Offices.”](#) *American Politics Research* 42(3): 529-548.

W 9/20: Causal inference II: A/B.

- Issenberg, Sasha. (2014). [“Department of Experiments.”](#) POLITICO, 27 February.
- Christian, Brian. (2012). [“The A/B test: Inside the technology that’s changing the rules of business.”](#) *Wired*, 25 April.

M 9/25: Experiments I – Internal Validity. **Final Project Part I due.**

- Thorson, Emily. (2016). [“Belief echoes: The persistent effects of corrected misinformation.”](#) *Political Communication*, 33(3): 460-480.

W 9/27: Experiments II – External Validity.

- Gerber, Alan, Gregory Huber, and Christopher Larimer. (2008). [“Social Pressure and Turnout: Evidence from a Large-Scale Field Experiment.”](#) *American Political Science Review*, 102(1), 33-48.

M 10/2: Qualtrics I: Survey design and flow.

W 10/4: Qualtrics II: Response options and advanced tools.

M 10/9: Qualtrics III: Survey experiments and IRB preparation.

- **HW due: Complete [Human Subjects Training](#), a requirement of the IRB. E-mail me the completion certificate before class begins for credit.**

*W 10/11: SPSS setup.

- Pollock, ch. 1, 3. In-class: ch. 1 exercises.

*M 10/16: Measures of central tendency & dispersion. **Final Project Part II due.**

- Pollock, ch. 2.

*W 10/18: SPSS graphics.

- Pollock, ch. 4.

*M 10/23: Data management. **HW due: Pollock, ch. 2 exercises.**

- Pollock, ch. 3. In-class: ch. 3 exercises.
- Singal, Jesse. (2015). [“The case of the amazing gay marriage data: How a graduate student reluctantly uncovered a huge scientific fraud.”](#) *New York Magazine*, 29 May.

*W 10/25: Making comparisons I: Hypotheses and significance.

- Pollock, ch. 6.
- Healey, ch. 8 (excerpts, Moodle).

*M 10/30: Making comparisons II: T-tests and association (Chi-square). **HW due: Pollock, ch. 6 exercises.**

- Healey, ch. 9 (excerpts, Moodle).
- Pollock, ch. 7.

*W 11/1: Making comparisons III: Bivariate linear regression.

- Pollock, ch. 8.

*M 11/6: Making comparisons IV: Logistic regression.

- Pollock, ch. 10.

W 11/8: Principles of data visualization. **HW due: Pollock, ch. 8 & 10 selected exercises.**

M 11/13: Qualitative methods I: Interviews.

- Walsh, Katharine Cramer. (2012). "[Putting inequality in its place: Rural consciousness and the power of perspective.](#)" *American Political Science Review*, 106:3, 517-532.

W 11/15: Qualitative methods II: Focus groups. **Final Project Part III due.**

- Delli Carpini, Michael, and Bruce Williams. (1994). "[The method is the message: Focus groups as a method of social, psychological, and political inquiry.](#)" In M. X. Delli Carpini, L. Huddy, & R. Shapiro (Eds.), Research in Micropolitics: New Directions in Political Psychology, Vol. 4 (pp. 57-85). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

M 11/20: Empirical methods wrap-up and final presentation questions.

W 11/23: Thanksgiving holiday, no class.

M 11/27 & W 11/29: **Final Project Part IV presentations in class.**

ADA Statement

The Americans with Disabilities Act requires that reasonable accommodations be provided for students with physical, cognitive, systemic, learning and psychiatric disabilities. Please contact me at the beginning of the semester to discuss any such accommodations for this course. In order to have any accommodations met, you must be registered with the LSU Office of Disabilities Services. More information on registering and accommodation is available on the ODS website:

<http://app1003.lsu.edu/slas/ods.nsf/index>

Diversity Statement

The pledge of the Manship School of Mass Communication is to establish an intellectually diverse environment and an educational experience designed to cope with and improve an interconnected, modern world.

Through its students, faculty, curriculum, and culture, the school will create, maintain and support a supportive climate for learning and working among faculty, students and staff who are diverse with respect to race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, age, spirituality, socio-economic status, disability, family status, experiences, opinions, and ideas.

STUDENTS: We will develop a diverse student body that brings a broad range of backgrounds, goals, points of view, and learning objectives to the program.

FACULTY: We will actively seek out, hire, and support a faculty with strong academic and professional credentials with an emphasis on diversity.

CURRICULUM: We will facilitate conversations about diversity both inside and outside the classroom to further an understanding and tolerance among students, faculty and staff.

CULTURE: We will establish a culture of diversity to supplement and inform the Manship curriculum and personnel.

THE 1, 2, 3s of a Manship EDUCATION

1 Values

- Freedom of Expression and understanding the range of systems of freedom around the world
- Historical roles of media institutions and individuals in society
- Ethical ways of pursuing truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity
- Diversity of ideas, viewpoints and experiences domestically and globally

- Understand and apply theories in presenting visual and written information
- Ability to think analytically, creatively and independently
- Use, conduct and evaluate research
- Understand and apply statistical information
- Use technology and current tools of the profession

Knowledge 2

3 Sharing of Information

- Writing clearly and accurately
- Editing and critically evaluating own work and the work of others

Believe it. Know it. Share it.

Manship School of Mass Communication

WRITING ESSENTIALS

Writing skills are essential for all of our students, and writing is a skill to be developed in all courses offered in the Manship School of Mass Communication. Manship faculty will evaluate student writing with consideration for these fundamental writing concepts.

WORD CHOICE	<p>The following words are often confused or misused in writing. Make sure you understand the difference:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accept, except • a lot • all right • affect, effect • among, between • anxious, eager • because, since • due to, because of • farther, further • fewer, less • its, it's • media (plural), medium (singular) • principal, principle • stationary, stationery 	
ACTIVE/PASSIVE VOICE	<p>English sentences have three basic elements: a subject, a verb, and an object. In active voice sentences, the verb is the action element of the sentence, the subject is the "doer" of the action, and the object is the recipient of the action. In passive voice sentences, the subject is not "doer" of the action; the object becomes the "doer" of the action. These sentences flip-flop the subject and the object. In general, active voice sentences are preferred because they focus the reader's attention on the "doer of the action." Active voice is also more concise because it usually involves fewer words. Although there are situations where passive voice is proper, reliance on passive voice produces a cumbersome text.</p>	<p>Active: The executive committee <u>approved</u> the new policy.</p> <p>Passive: The new policy <u>was approved</u> by the executive committee.</p>
ANTECEDENT/ PRONOUN AGREEMENT	<p>A pronoun usually refers to something earlier in the text (its <u>antecedent</u>) and must agree in number — singular/plural — with that to which it refers. A pronoun's antecedent may be either a noun or another pronoun, but it <i>must</i> be clear what the antecedent is in either case.</p> <p>A pronoun should have only one possible</p>	<p>Incorrect: If a student loses their books, they should go to lost and found.</p> <p>Correct: If students lose their books, they should go to lost and found.</p>

	<p>antecedent. If there is more than one possible antecedent for a personal pronoun in a sentence, make sure that the pronoun refers only to one of them:</p> <p>Also, please note that countries and organizations are NOT people. In a sentence in which a country or organization is the subject, the second reference is to “it” (singular) and “its” (singular possessive).</p>	<p>Incorrect: Jerry called Steve 12 times while he was in Reno. Rationale: The pronoun "he" could refer either to "Jerry" or to "Steve." Incorrect: McDonald’s cancelled all of their advertising, and they later regretted doing so. Correct: McDonald’s cancelled all of its advertising, and it later regretted doing so.</p>
<p>PARALLEL CONSTRUCTION</p>	<p>An article or a preposition applying to all the members of a series must be used either before the first term or be repeated before each term.</p> <p>Correlative expressions (both, and; not, but; not only, but also; either, or; first, second, third; and the like) should be followed by the same grammatical construction.</p> <p>When making comparisons, the things you compare should be couched in parallel structures whenever that is possible and appropriate.</p>	<p>Incorrect: The French, the Italians, Spanish and Portuguese Correct: The French, the Italians, the Spanish and the Portuguese Incorrect: It was both a long ceremony and very tedious. Correct: The ceremony was both long and tedious. Incorrect: My income is smaller than my wife. Correct: My income is smaller than my wife's.</p>
<p>ATTRIBUTION/ CITING</p>	<p>Presenting ideas and phrases from another writer as your own is plagiarism and is unacceptable.</p> <p>In journalistic writing, attribution is indicating your source for a piece of information. You must attribute any judgment or opinion statements. You should not attribute known facts.</p>	

PUNCTUATION OF QUOTES	Commas and periods always go inside quotation marks. Semi-colons and colons do not go inside quotation marks. If a statement ends in a quoted <u>question</u> , allow the question mark within the quotation marks to end the sentence. On the other hand, if a question ends with a quoted statement that is <u>not</u> a question, the question mark will go outside the closing quotation mark.	<p>“I like to go swimming,” she said, “but I am afraid of getting sunburned.”</p> <p>May asked her daughter, "Who are you going out with tonight?"</p> <p>Who said, "Fame means when your computer modem is broken, the repair guy comes out to your house a little faster"?</p>
SUBJECT/VERB AGREEMENT	Singular subjects need singular verbs; plural subjects need plural verbs. Collective nouns (herd, team, board, faculty, etc.) take singular verbs.	My brother <u>is</u> a nutritionist. My sisters <u>are</u> mathematicians.
PREPOSITIONS	A preposition describes a relationship between other words in a sentence. Examples are: after, at, beside, between, during, into, on, with, etc. In everyday speech we often use prepositions where they are not necessary. Eliminate unnecessary prepositions, particularly those at the end of sentences.	<p>The book fell off of the desk.</p> <p>Where did they go to?</p> <p>Where is your college at?</p>

For more help with writing style, the following Web sites and books are recommended:

The Guide to Grammar and Writing - <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/>

The Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue University - <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>

Latest edition of Strunk, W., White, E. & Angell, R. *The Elements of Style*, Longman.

Latest edition of The Associated Press *Stylebook and Briefing on Media Law*