Public opinion polling has become an essential tool in public policy decision-making, election campaigns, and media reporting. This course focuses on helping students interested in these areas learn the basic skills required to design, use, and critically interpret election campaign and public policy surveys measuring public opinion. Class participants will have “hands on experience” analyzing and critically evaluating existing opinion surveys, designing polling questions, and interpreting and developing strategies from results. International students can design polls related to issues in their home country.

Class slides and supplementary materials specifically for DPI214m are available on the KSG course web page. Additional articles, poll data and other items related to Dr. Blendon’s research can be found at www.hsph.harvard.edu/horp.

Course Objectives
This course is designed to teach students about the following:

1. Fundamentals of designing questions for polls
2. Design and sampling techniques for polling
3. Focus groups as part of the polling development process
4. How to utilize polling results for public policy development, media reporting, and election campaigning
5. How polling techniques vary in different countries

Course Participants
This course is a methods course that will prepare students in designing and analyzing opinion polls. The course may not meet the needs of students interested in the more theoretical aspects of the role of public opinion in society. Enrollment is limited to those students taking the course for credit and is NOT open to auditors.
Course Requirements Overview
Students will be expected to complete assigned readings and participate in class discussions. Students will have two take-home assignments—preparing one strategy memo and designing one poll. In addition, a final exam will be given in-class. There is also an in-class final exam which will be held on the last day of class.

For the poll question assignment, students will have a choice of writing a poll for an election or a national policy issue. One component of the final exam will be to write an issue poll.

Class Protocol
Students are expected to attend all classes. Please email the teaching fellow if you expect to be absent. During class, cell phones must be turned off or to vibrate mode. If you need to respond to a call, please step outside the room. During class, students are asked not to use the Internet for email or other purposes.

Electronic materials
This class uses the available websites to post lecture slides, supplementary materials, and some announcements. Materials are posted on the KSG course website (which can be found at www.ksg.harvard.edu).

We use the Kennedy School system to send mass emails, so we require all students to sign up on KSG website. Cross-registered students can do this easily:

- Step 1: Go to www.ksg.harvard.edu
- Step 2: Click on “login” in the upper right corner
- Step 3: Click the button on the login page (below the login lines) that says “Cross-registered student or auditor needing an account”
- Step 4: Follow the instructions
- Step 5: The Teaching Fellow or administrative assistant will admit you to the class electronically, and you will be notified by email with your login information

Course Grading
Final grades for the course will be based on class participation, assignments, the midterm and the final exam.

1. Class Participation 20%
2. Strategy Memo 20%
3. Poll exercise 20%
4. Final exam 40%

Assignments are due at the beginning of class. Late materials will not be accepted without prior discussion with the teaching fellow and permission from the instructor.

Required Readings
Students will be required to read journal articles each week as well as sections from the required book.

Required Books:

The book is available for purchase at the Harvard Square Coop or on-line.

**Required Additional Readings:**

Course packets with additional readings are available in the Kennedy School Course Materials Office. This is located on the ground floor of the Belfer Center building. **Packet 1** contains course materials not on-line

On-line readings can be found on the course webpage and are noted “ON-LINE.”

The required book and a copy of the course packets are available on reserve at the Kennedy School Library.

**Recommended Readings**

You may find the following texts useful.


• www.pollster.com

• www.fivethirtyeight.com

• www.pollingreport.com

• http://blogs.abcnews.com/thenumbers/
Session 1: Introduction to Polling and Public Opinion/Key Course Issues
Robert J. Blendon

Assigned Readings:

Session 2: How To Write Quality Poll Questions
Robert Blendon

Assigned Readings:

STRATEGY MEMO ASSIGNMENT HANDED OUT IN CLASS

Session 3: How to Design Election Polls
Robert J. Blendon

Assigned Readings:
Cohen, M. “Polls as the Key to Victory: When to Use Vulnerability, Benchmark and Tracking Polls.” Campaigns & Elections, July 2004. 35. [ON-LINE]

POLL QUESTION ASSIGNMENT HANDED OUT IN CLASS
Session 4: Use of Polls for Election Strategy
Robert Blendon

Assigned Readings:

Session 5: How To Design Issue Polls
Robert Blendon

Assigned Readings:
Fowler, Chapters 5 and 6

Session 6: Class Exercise: Developing a Strategy Memo for Elections
Robert Blendon

Assigned Readings

STRATEGY MEMO DUE (Be prepared to discuss memos in class)

Session 7: Race, Public Opinion and Polling
Guest: Kalahn Taylor-Clark, PhD

Assigned Readings:
Session 8: Basic Statistical and Sampling Issues for Polls

Robert Blendon and John Benson

Assigned Readings:
Fowler, Chapters 3 and 11
Morin, R. “Smackdown in Maryland: RBS versus RDD.” Public Perspective, January/February 2003. 7-9 & 41. [ON-LINE]

Session 9 Focus Groups
Guest: Gillian SteelFisher, PhD

Assigned Readings:

Session 11 Contracting for Polls - Nuts & Bolts

John Benson

POLL QUESTION ASSIGNMENT DUE

Session 12 Public Opinion Polling Abroad and Internet Polling
Guest: Humphrey Taylor, Chairman of The Harris Poll/Harris Interactive

Assigned Readings:


Session 11: Course Review and Wrap-Up

Session 12: FINAL EXAM IN CLASS