

POL 307: Public Opinion Laboratory

Kevin Reuning

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Public Opinion Laboratory

Fall 2024

Harrison Hall 313

Tues & Thurs 11:40 AM – 1:00 PM

Instructor: Dr. Kevin Reuning (ROY-ning)

Email: reunink@miamioh.edu

Course Website: Canvas

Office: Harrison Hall 222

Office Hours: Monday: 1:00 – 3:00 PM

Tuesday: 11:00 – 11:30 AM

Tuesday: 1:00 – 2:30 PM

Schedule appointments: <https://calendly.com/reuning>

Course Description

Banner Description

Practice in the execution of survey research with attention to questionnaire construction, sampling, interviewing, data coding, and data analysis. Discussion of ethical issues surrounding polls and the role of polling in a democratic polity.

Extended Description

Polling and surveying is used across campaigning, policy policy and in the private sector. This course will introduce students to how to *best* measure public opinion given the many challenges that exist today. Students will write survey questions, design different sampling strategies, and analyze data using survey weights. As part of this will we discuss how survey research is used by different actors, and the ethical issues present in survey research.

Student Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course you will be able to:

1. Write survey questions that accurately capture public opinion on a range of topics.
2. Explain the basics of survey sampling, including how online surveys differ from traditional survey methods.
3. Analyze survey data to identify patterns and complete simple hypothesis testing to confirm those patterns.
4. Communicate the results of a survey to the public.

Required Books

- Asher, Herb. 2016. *Polling and the Public: What Every Citizen Should Know 9th edition*. CQ Press.

Course Policies

Preparation

This is a 300 level courses and so you will be expected to do the readings for the day prior to coming to class. We will be having weekly quizzes and those quizzes can draw questions from the lectures and from the readings. If you only come to class without doing the reading you will miss easy points.

Technology

In the class you are expected to be focused on what is going on within the class. Laptops will be required on some days. On those days that laptops are not required you may bring one to take notes, etc. If the laptop becomes a distraction to those around you we will look at reevaluating this policy.

Generative AI (ChatGPT, etc)

The basic question to ask over when you can and cannot use AI is whether your use of AI supplements what you have done or if it replaces what you have done. Below I provide some examples of **good** and **bad** uses of AI and a philosophical explanation of why this distinction is important. **For this course, bad uses of AI count as academic integrity violations.**

Good use of AI	Bad use of AI
Checking for grammar or spelling.	Rewriting whole sections of your paper.
Creating catchy titles.	Generating an argument in its entirety.
Checking code, asking questions of how code works.	Writing all the code you need for an assignment.
Formatting citation.	Generating citations.

Philosophy

Generative AI is a powerful tool but there are two important reasons for why you shouldn't use AI for the "bad uses" above. First, in order to learn you need to actually complete tasks. By completing these tasks you can build up basic skills that you can then use to do things that AI tools cannot do. For example, I can find information online that AI tools cannot find because I have a lot of experience finding more basic things.

Second, AI tools have a lot of flaws. These flaws are noticeable to experts but not to beginners. You will only be able to work past these flaws though if you practice things on your own without using AI. For example, AI is very good at making confident claims without any real evidence or support for those claims. You need to learn how to provide evidence for a claim so you don't fall for this.

As a final note, Generative AI often makes mistakes. It can generate fake citations, make impossible claims, and simply write vague nonsense. These are all things that will lead you to lose points whether or not AI is the source of the writing.

Email Policy

I will check email between 8am and 6pm, and will try to always respond to any contact within 24 hours. Although I do not expect formality in email communications, I do expect you to respect that emails are not a costless act.

Course Assignments

Assignments (25%)

- Survey Examples (Due Sept 10)
- Survey Questions (Due Sept 24)
- Analysis of a Single Variable (Due Oct 22)
- Analysis of Multiple Variables (Due Oct 29)
- Survey Weights (Nov 12th)

Throughout the semester you will have several shorter assignments that you must complete. The content of these assignments will vary across the semester but they will serve as time for you to apply the things we have learned in class.

Survey Project (10%)

- Survey Questions and Presentation (Due Oct 8th)
 - Group project
- Participation in Fielding Survey (Week of Oct 29-31)

This semester we will be completing a real survey of Ohio voters. You will be involved in both developing survey questions and contacting the potential survey participants. We will be working with Dr. Schneider's Campaign and Elections course through this.

Note, part of this will require you to help send out text invitations for the survey. You will *not* be using your own phone for this, but you might need to schedule sometime outside of class to help send these texts. This should not be more than a few hours outside of class and we will have a lot of flexibility about when and where you can do this.

IMPORTANT: You will need to complete the [CITI](#) training prior to when we field the survey. You may have done this for other courses, if so you'll have to just upload the certification.

Final Project (25%)

- Analyzing survey data and presenting results (Due on Final Exam Day)

Your final project will require you to analyze some of the data we collected and present it in a polished manner. We will discuss this in more detail as the final approaches.

Midterm (25%)

- In-class midterm (October 10th)

You will have an in-class midterm, we will discuss the details as it approaches. Put it in your calendar now, make sure you are not going to be traveling, etc.

Attendance Quizzes (15%)

There is no attendance in this class, instead, there will be *weekly in-class quizzes*. These quizzes are not meant to be particularly hard but will test whether you've been keeping up with the readings and taking notes in class. Each quiz will be 5 multiple choice questions, and you will have access to your notes. We will hold the last 5-10 minutes of class for those quizzes and they will usually be on Thursday.

If you take notes on your computer you will be allowed to access your computer but you **cannot** type on it during the quiz time. If you are typing I will assume that you are using ChatGPT or something similar to help answer the question and you will receive a 0 on that day's quiz.

If you miss a quiz you will not be able to make it up unless you miss it for a university sanctioned event, a religious holiday or military training. The lowest 3 will be dropped, so missing one or two it should not impact your grade significantly, as long as you are keeping up and doing well on the other quizzes.

Item	Percentage
Weekly Quizzes (3 lowest dropped)	15%
Assignments	25%
Midterm	25%
Final Project	25%

Item	Percentage
Survey Project	10%

Extra Credit

I will provide several extra credit opportunities throughout the semester and will announce them in class and on Canvas.

Late work policy

In order to receive a deadline extension on one of assignments or parts of the project, you should contact me more than 24 hours before the deadline. If an assignment is turned in late without an extension but within 24 hours of the due date, your grade will decrease by 5 percentage points (a 95% would become a 90%). For every additional 24 hours after this you lose another 5% point.

Letter Grade Distribution

>= 93.00	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 - 67.99	D
80.00 - 82.99	B-	60.00 - 62.99	D-
77.00 - 79.99	C+	<59.99	F

Academic Integrity

Miami University is a scholarly community whose members believe that excellence in education is grounded in qualities of character as well as of intellect. We respect the dignity of other persons, the rights and property of others, and the right of others to hold and express disparate beliefs. We believe in honesty, integrity, and the importance of moral conduct. We defend the freedom of inquiry that is the heart of learning and combine that freedom with the exercise of judgment and the acceptance of personal responsibility.

Miami demands the highest standards of professional conduct from its students, faculty, and staff. As a community of scholars, our fundamental purpose is the pursuit of knowledge. Integrity in research and creative activities and in academic study is based on sound disciplinary practices and expectations, as well as a commitment to the values of honesty and integrity.

Any student caught committing academic dishonesty will, at a minimum, receive a 0 for the assignment at hand. For more information on academic dishonesty and potential punishments visit <http://MiamiOH.edu/integrity>.

Disability Services

If you are a student with a physical, learning, medical and/or psychiatric disability and feel that you may need a reasonable accommodation to fulfill the essential functions of the course that are listed in this syllabus, you are encouraged to contact the Office of Student Disability Services at 529-1541 (V/TTY), located in the Shriver Center, Room 304.

Course Outline

- **August 27 & 28:** History of Survey Methods
- **September 3 & 5:** Polling and Society
 - **NO CLASS ON SEPTEMBER 5**
 - Chapter 1 of Polling and the Public
- **September 10 & 12:** Writing Survey Questions
 - Chapter 2 of Polling and the Public
 - *Due September 10th: Example of Surveys*
- **September 17 & 19:** Writing Survey Questions
 - Chapter 3 of Polling and the Public
- **September 24 & 26:** Random Sampling
 - Chapter 4 of Polling and the Public
 - *Due September 24th: Survey Questions*
- **October 1 & 3:** Online Panels
 - October 1st: Class with Campaigns and Elections
 - Section 2 of [Data Quality Metrics for Online Samples: Considerations for Study Design and Analysis, AAPOR Report](#)
- **October 8 & 10:** Midterm and Survey Project
 - October 8th: Class with Campaigns and Elections
 - October 10th: Midterm
 - **Survey Project** Survey Questions and Presentations
- **October 15 & 17:** Analyzing a single variable
 - Section 2.3 of *Polling at a Crossroads*
- **October 22 & 24:** Analyzing two variables
 - Section 6.1 and 5.4 of Quantitative Research Methods for Political Science, Public Policy and Public Administration: 4th Edition With Applications in R
 - *Due October 22nd: Analysis of a Single Variable*

- **October 29 & 31:** Election surveys and Models
 - Kenett, Ron S., Danny Pfeffermann, and David M. Steinberg. 2018. "Election polls—a survey, a critique, and proposals." *Annual Review of Statistics and Its Application* 5(1): 1-24.
 - **Not required:** Shirani-Mehr, Houshmand, David Rothschild, Sharad Goel, and Andrew Gelman. 2018. "Disentangling bias and variance in election polls." *Journal of the American Statistical Association* 113(522): 607-614.
- **November 5 & 7:** Survey weights
 - Chapter 3 of *Polling at a Crossroads*
 - **Not required:** [Practical Considerations in Raking Survey Data](#)
 - *Due October 29th: Analysis of Multiple Variables*
- **November 12 & 14:** Reporting Results
 - Chapter 6 of *Polling and the Public*
 - *Due November 12th: Survey Weights*
- **November 19 & 21:** Open-ended Questions
 - Singer, Eleanor, and Mick P. Couper. 2017. "Some methodological uses of responses to open questions and other verbatim comments in quantitative surveys." *Methods, data, analyses* 11(2).
- **November 26:** Survey experiments
 - Sniderman, Paul M. 2018. "Some advances in the design of survey experiments." *Annual Review of Political Science* 21(1): 259-275.
- **December 3 & 5**
 - Debrief on December 3rd with Campaigns and Elections
 - Catch up and work time on final project.

Additional Resources

- Howe Writing Center: <http://miamioh.edu/hcwe>
- If you are a student who may be experiencing mental or emotional distress, you are encouraged to call Student Counseling Service (513-529-4634). For emergencies outside of business hours, the H.O.P.E. Line is available at all times for Miami students at 855-249-5649.
- Students come to Miami from a variety of economic backgrounds. If you are having financial trouble I urge you to make use of the services available through Miami Cares Resources: <https://www.miamioh.edu/emss/offices/student-success-center/miami-cares/index.html>