

POLLING IN A PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION YEAR
UCDC
WINTER 2020

Professor: Ken Goldstein

E-mail: kmgoldstein@usfca.edu

Location: UCDC 331

Office Hours: Thursday 4 pm to 6:30 pm and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This class will provide you with the practical research skills required to design, field, evaluate, and analyze a sample survey with a focus on elections. It will combine statistical theory with actual practice and exploration, taking the insights of political scientists and political practitioners and rolling them into one. We will take special advantage of the fact that this class is taking place during the Democratic presidential primaries and in the run-up to the 2020 general election. We are in a data and information rich environment and will analyze and gather data in real time. Although the focus of this class is on political polling, the basics convey to all sorts of other survey studies. And, even if politics is not a career goal, understanding how to conduct, consume, and think about research is a valuable professional skill, crucial for anybody who is gathering evidence to make decisions in a variety of fields. **You do not need a stats background to take this course.**

COURSE OUTCOMES

This course will cover the following areas.

- 1. Core concepts of probability theory and sampling.** You will get a taste of the basic statistical concepts that underlie sampling and survey research. You will learn what conditions need to be in place to draw a probability sample and the logic behind calculating margins of error. We will also learn about and evaluate non-probability methods and discuss when they are appropriate.
- 2. Learn all the Steps of Fielding a Survey.** Getting good data demands good interviewing methods and good questions. You will learn the basics of survey administration, questionnaire writing, data processing, and data analysis.
- 3. Design and Conduct a Political Survey.** There is no better way to learn how to do a survey than to do an actual survey. You will be responsible for every aspect of developing, fielding, analyzing, and explaining a real political survey.

- 4. Presenting Results.** Research results are numbers on a page unless you present and interpret the information in clear and lucid form in oral, written, and visual presentations.

To summarize, by the end of the course, I want you to be good at several things that are hard to be good at:

- 1. Writing clear, valid, and reliable survey questions.*
- 2. Evaluating and improving questions others have written.*
- 3. Analyzing public opinion data in simple ways.*
- 4. Presenting results to an audience.*

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

This first part of the course is more abstract, and I will assess your mastery of the material via class discussion and problem sets. The second part will be collecting, analyzing, writing up, and presenting results from a survey we will do in real time.

The table below details the percentage of your final grade that your course assignments fulfill and the alignment of your course assignments to the course outcomes numbered above.

| Evaluation Category | Weight | Alignment to Outcome | Pages |
|----------------------------|---------------|-----------------------------|--------------|
| Class Participation | 20% | 1,2 | |
| Problem Sets | 20% | 1,2 | 5 |
| Survey Proposal | 10% | 3 | 5 |
| Final Paper | 40% | 1,2,3,4 | 10 |
| Final Presentation | 10% | 1,2,3,4 | |
| Total | 100% | | 20 |

COURSE SCHEDULE

January 9: Overview and Introduction

- Literary Digest Article from 1936 - <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5168/>
- Cliff Zukin. 2015. "What's the Matter with Polling?" *The New York Times*. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/21/opinion/sunday/whats-the-matter-with-polling.html?_r=0
- AAPOR. "An Evaluation of 2016 Election Polls." <http://www.aapor.org/Education-Resources/Reports/An-Evaluation-of-2016-Election-Polls-in-the-U-S.aspx> -- Just read the introduction
- Feltus, William, Mathew Dallek, and Ken Goldstein. 2018. *Inside Campaign*, Chapters 2 and 3 of to be provided.
- Couper, M.P. 2013. "Is the Sky Falling? New Technology, changing media, and the Future of Surveys." *Survey Research Methods* 7 (3): 145-156.

January 16: Sampling in Theory, Sampling in Practice

- Trochim, William M. "Probability Sampling" *The Research Methods Knowledge Base*, 2nd Edition. <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/sampprob.php>
- Coverage Error in Internet Surveys - <http://www.pewresearch.org/2015/09/22/coverage-error-in-internet-surveys/>
- Goldstein, Ken. 2016. "The Bloomberg Politics Decoder." *Bloomberg*. <https://www.bloomberg.com/politics/graphics/2016-poll-decoder/>
- Determining Who Is a 'Likely Voter', Scott Keeter, Director of Survey Research, Pew Research (2012) <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/2340/likely-voters-registered-poll-samples>

January 23: Questionnaire Design

- Pasek, J., and J.A. Krosnick. 2010. Optimizing survey questionnaire design in political science: Insights from psychology, Oxford Handbook of American Elections and Political Behavior. <https://pprg.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2009-03-Leighly-Chapter03.pdf>
- Zaller, John, and Stanley Feldman. 1992. "A Simple Theory of the Survey Response: Answering Questions versus Revealing Preferences." *American Journal of Political Science*, 36: 579-616. **JSTOR**
- Malhotra, N., J.A. Krosnick, and R.K. Thomas. 2009. "Optimal design of branching questions to measure bipolar constructs." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 73 (2): 304-324.

January 30: Data Analysis Workshop

February 6: Building the Questionnaire

In advance of this class session, students will prepare questions for the national survey we will conduct. We will break into groups, hone questions, and then decide as a group how we want to structure the survey.

February 13: Survey Administration and Online Programming

February 20: Data Cleaning and Post-Stratification - The Weighting is the Hardest Part

February 27: Data Visualization Workshop

- Few, Stephen (2013): Data Visualization for Human Perception. In: "The Encyclopedia of Human-Computer Interaction, 2nd Ed.". Aarhus, Denmark:
http://www.interactiondesign.org/encyclopedia/data_visualization_for_human_perception.html

March 5: Project Review Meetings

Although you are strongly encouraged to meet with me in office hours or make other appointment times over the course of the semester, there will be mandatory one-on-one meetings this week to review your final report and presentation.

March 12: Final Presentations

COURSE POLICIES

Make-up, Late, and Incomplete Work. No make-up assignments will be permitted except in case of documented emergency and emergency health issues. Late assignments will be docked a letter grade per day late without prior approval or appropriate documentation. There are no “extra credit” assignments in this course. Incompletes will only be assigned for compelling reasons to those students who have completed at least two-thirds of the required course work at a passing level. Requests must be made in writing on the official request forms.

Attendance: Attendance is required so please be sure that your internship supervisor understands that you will be in class every Thursday 1p-4 pm. Excused absences are usually extraordinary events such as the death of an immediate family member (parent, sibling, or grandparent), personal illness, or a major religious holiday that is recognized by the [UCDC calendar](#). **You MUST provide written documentation for each of these absences; and for religious holidays, you must submit your excuse two weeks in advance of the absence to be excused.** On occasion, and with at least 48 hours notice, you may request to be excused for a special internship or other DC event. If granted, it is likely you will be asked to report on your experience in class. Each *unexcused* absence will lower your final course grade to the next lower grade (e.g. A- will become a B+).

Statement on Weather Emergencies: In the event of a weather emergency, UCDC follows the [federal government’s decisions](#) about delays and closures.

Policy on Academic Misconduct UCDC has a zero-tolerance policy for cheating, plagiarism, and any other form of dishonesty. Students should refer to their home campus Student Code of Conduct for the regulations that apply to them. The burden is on each student to know what behaviors constitute cheating and plagiarism. Ignorance of these behaviors is not an adequate defense.

[Statement on Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence](#) Click on this link for the University of California statement on sexual harassment and sexual violence.

The University of California is committed to creating and maintaining a community where all individuals who participate in University programs and activities can work and learn together in an atmosphere free of harassment, exploitation, or intimidation. Every member of the community should be aware that the University prohibits sexual harassment and sexual violence, and that such behavior violates both law and University policy. The University will respond promptly and effectively to reports of sexual harassment and sexual violence, and will take appropriate action to prevent, to correct, and when necessary, to discipline behavior that violates this policy on Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence.

Students who wish to speak confidentially about an incident of sexual misconduct should contact UCDC's Counseling Services at UCDCCounseling@gmail.com. To report sexual misconduct to ask questions about UCDC policies and procedures regarding sexual misconduct, please contact the UCDC Title IX administrator, Josh Brimmeier (202-974-6214 or josh.brimmeier@ucdc.edu). Because the University of California is legally obligated to investigate reports of sexual misconduct, the confidentiality of reported misconduct cannot be guaranteed.

[Statement on Accommodations for Students with Disabilities](#)

Click on this link for the University of California statement on accommodations for students with disabilities. If you require accommodation for class, please let me know at our first meeting so the necessary arrangements can be made.