Course Description: In this seminar, we will study the nature and origins of public opinion and its representation through polls and surveys in the media. Beyond developing an understanding of what public opinion is and the role it plays in a democracy, we will also look at the ways that journalists and news organizations portray public opinion in the media, the collection of public opinion data by and for the media, and the role that the media play in representing the state of public opinion to their audience members. This will include the linkage between elite and mass opinion, and the influence of public opinion on policy making.

All of this will take place in the context of understanding the quality of the measurement of public opinion and the accuracy of its representation in the media. The focus will be on the use of polls and surveys to measure public opinion, although other techniques will be briefly considered. We will use the case studies of pre-election and exit polls to consider how information about public opinion is collected and disseminated and what the impact of alternative representations in news stories might be.

There is a CTools site for the class, and most of the required reading will be available there. The readings include several review essays that appear as chapters in Wolfgang Donsbach and Michael W. Traugott (editors), The Sage Handbook of Public Opinion Research (Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, CA 2008). They are identified below with the reference “Sage Handbook.” Beyond the readings, you should be attentive to four websites that track current public opinion in the United States, if you are not already:

www.fivethirtyeight.com
www.pollster.com
www.realclearpolitics.com
http://themonkeycage.org/

We are going to be discussing the campaign and current opinion throughout the semester. That is the main reason I decided to offer the seminar during the fall of a campaign year.

Students will have small projects to undertake during the semester as well as a final term paper. There will be a take home exam at the end of the semester. Final grades will be calculated by combining class participation (15%), work on the small projects (20%), a term paper (30%), and the final exam (35%). We will discuss all of these activities continually during the course of the semester.

September 10: The Theoretical Underpinnings of Public Opinion and Its Role in a Democracy
Jacobs and Shapiro, Chapters 1 and 2
Lippman, Chapters 1 and 23
Price, Chapters 2 and 3
Price, Chapter 1, “The Public and Public Opinion in Political Theories” (Sage Handbook)
Traugott, Chapter 5
September 17: The Measurement of Public Opinion
AAPOR On-Line Task Force Report
Fishkin, Chapter 8
Lang and Lang, Chapter 4, “Advocacy: Alternative Expressions of Public Opinion” (Sage Handbook)
Morgan and Fellows, Chapter 31, “Focus Groups and Public Opinion” (Sage Handbook)
Neijens, Chapter 2, “The Deliberating Public and Deliberative Polls” (Sage Handbook)
Tourangeau and Galesic, Chapter 13, “Theories on the Perception of Social Reality” (Sage Handbook)
Schwarz, Chapter 34, “The Psychology of Survey Response” (Sage Handbook)

September 24: Models of Opinion Formation
Zaller, Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion, Chapters 2, 3, and 5
Visser, Holbrook and Krosnick, Chapter 12, “Knowledge and Attitudes” (Sage Handbook)
Tourangeau and Galesic, Chapter 13, “Theories on the Perception of Social Reality” (Sage Handbook)
Schwarz, Chapter 34, “The Psychology of Survey Response” (Sage Handbook)

October 1: The Impact of the Media on Public Opinion
Arterton, Media Politics, Ch. 6
Brettschneider, Chapter 44, “The News Media’s Use of Polls” (Sage Handbook)
Iyengar and Kinder, News That Matters, Chapters 3, 5, 7 – 9, Epilogue
Patterson, Chapter 3, “The News as a Reflection of Public Opinion” (Sage Handbook)
Patterson, “U.S. Journalists and Their Use of Election Surveys” (Public Opinion Quarterly)
Roessler, Chapter 19, “Agenda-Setting, Framing, and Priming” (Sage Handbook)
Traugott, Chapter 21, “The Uses and Misuses of Polls” (Sage Handbook)
Weaver, Chapter 41, “Attitudes of Journalists toward Public Opinion Research” (Sage Handbook)

October 8: The Design of Pre-election Polls
AAPOR Report on 2008 Pre-Primary Polls
Gelman and King, 1993, British Journal of Political Science
Traugott and Tucker, 1984, Public Opinion Quarterly
Traugott and Wlezien, 2009, Public Opinion Quarterly
Traugott, 2011, Chapter 20 (Oxford Handbook)
Traugott, 2012, Chapter 4, Methodological Trends and Controversies in the Media’s Use of Polls”

October 15: NO CLASS – FALL BREAK

October 22: The Design of Exit Polls
Mitofsky, A Short History of Exit Polls
ABC News Report on the 2000 Exit Polls
CBS News Report on the 2000 Exit Polls
CNN Report on the 2000 Exit Polls
October 29: Issues in the Reporting of Polls in the Media
Donsbach and Hartung, Chapter 39, “The Legal Status of Public Opinion Research in the World” (Sage Handbook)
Frankovic, “Opinion Polls and the Media in the United States”
Stromback, “Published Opinion Polls, Strategic Party Behavior, and News Management”
Traugott and Means, “Problems of Character: Was It the Candidate or the Press?”
Traugott and Powers, “Did Public Opinion Support the Contract with America?”
Traugott- Shorenstein Essay, 2009, “Changes in Media Polling in recent Presidential Campaigns: Moving from Good to ‘Average’ at CNN”

November 5: Do We Have a Knowledgeable Public?
Delli Carpini and Keeter, Chapters 2 - 4
Dran and Hildreth, 1995, “What the Public Thinks about How We Know What It Is Thinking” IJPOR
Hildreth, Chapter 40, “Attitudes of the Public Toward Public Opinion Research and Polling” (Sage Handbook)
Kepplinger, Chapter 18, “Effects of the News Media on Public Opinion” (Sage Handbook)
Traugott and Kang, Ch. 8, “Public Attention to Polls”

November 12: The Polling Industry and the Need for Transparency
AAPOR Report on the 2008 Pre-Primary Polls
Mosteller Ch. 5, “Measuring the Error”
Crespi, Chs. 2, 3, and 9
Mitofsky, 1996, “Was 1996 a Worse Year for the Polls than 1948?”
Traugott, 2012, “Data Quality from Low Cost Data Collection Methodologies”
Falsified Data: Strategic Vision and Daily Kos and PPP (articles from Pollster.com and Fivethirtyeight.com)

November 19: Public Opinion about Racial Issues
Gilens, 1996, “ ‘Race Coding’ and White Opposition to Welfare” American Political Science Review

November 26: Public Opinion and Foreign Affairs
Berinsky and Druckman, 2007, “Public Opinion and Support for the Iraq War” Public Opinion Quarterly
Gelpi, Reifler, and Feaver, 2007, “Iraq the Vote: Retrospective and Prospective Foreign Policy Judgments on Candidate Choice and Casualty Tolerance” Political Behavior
Traugott and Brader, “Framing Terrorism”
Zaller, “Strategic Politicians, Public Opinion, and the Gulf Crisis”
December 3: Public Opinion and Public Policy

December 10: Student Presentations