

**Communication and Public Opinion  
Communication 5392–Section 001 | Spring 2013**

Wed., 6-8:50 p.m.

Fine Arts Building Room 414

**Instructor: Dr. Erika Pribanic-Smith**

**Office:** 2114 Fine Arts Building

**Hours:** 12:30-2 p.m. Tues. & Thurs. & by appt.

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Note: Because of other department and university duties, office hours occasionally will be cancelled. Cancellations will be posted on the office door and, when possible, announced in class and/or via email.

**Course Description:** This course will provide students with an understanding of how public opinion intersects with journalism and strategic communication in oral, print, and electronic forms.

**Learning Goals and Objectives:** The following learning goals and objectives have been set for students in this class:

- Students will discover how public opinion intersects with their chosen communication fields.
- Students will become familiar with the philosophical and normative assumptions surrounding public opinion.
- Students will understand the theoretical approaches to studying public opinion formation and change.
- Students will learn the research processes involved in measuring public opinion and understanding its change over time.
- Students will apply their knowledge in a group research project.

**Required Readings:**

- All course readings will be provided in PDF form on Blackboard.

**Course Policies**

**Course Requirements:** Students' grades for this course will be based on participation in class discussion, reading response papers, exam(s), a group research project, and a research presentation.

***Grade Calculation***

<b><u>Assignment</u></b>	<b><u>% of grade</u></b>	<b><u>Grading scale</u></b>
Class participation	20	A – 90-100 percent
Reading response papers	20	B – 80-89 percent
Exams	10	C – 70-79 percent
Final research paper	20	D – 60-69 percent
Presentation	10	F – below 60 percent
Preliminary research reports	20	

*Class participation.* This course will be conducted as a seminar/workshop, requiring active participation from all students. A portion of students' learning will occur through their own processing of reading material and discussion of these materials with their peers. Participation in these discussions will be evaluated based on asking insightful questions and contributing informed, thoughtful comments. Students are expected to keep up with assigned readings BEFORE class in order to participate. Reading response papers (below) will facilitate that discussion.

*Reading response papers.* Each week, unless instructed otherwise, students will submit 1-2-page response papers on that week's readings. At a minimum, papers must answer questions about the readings that are distributed the prior week, in essay form (no need to restate the questions). Students who answer **all** questions without making more than five mechanical errors can expect to receive a B on the paper.

Students should, however, make an attempt at providing a thoughtful synthesis and analysis of the material IN ADDITION TO answering the questions posed. Students who do so without more than five mechanical errors can expect to receive an A on the paper.

A full letter grade will be deducted for papers with more than five mechanical (spelling/grammar) errors.

Additionally, a full letter grade will be deducted for papers that are less than a full page. Papers should be double-spaced with one-inch margins and in standard-size type (10-12 points). Do not include a header on the page; just a brief boldfaced title as follows: **[Your name], Response Paper, [Date]** (Example: **John Smith, Response Paper, Jan. 23**). The title should be centered at the top of the page without extra spaces before it or between the title and the start of your essay. Do not end your essay more than 1½ inches from the bottom of the first page.

Although you may go over two pages, extra credit will not be given for doing so.

**All reading response papers will be due to the appropriate portal on Blackboard by 5:45 p.m. on class days. They will not be accepted late.** Of course you may submit earlier than 5:45.

Please bring a print or electronic copy of your response paper to class to facilitate your participation in class discussion.

*Exam(s).* Students will take two examinations over material covered in the course readings. An exam on Feb. 27 will cover material from the start of the semester through week 6 (Feb. 20). An exam on April 24 will cover material from week 8 (March 6) through week 13 (April 17). Each exam will be worth 5 percent of the final grade (10 percent total).

*Research project.* Students will form groups to complete a research project. These groups will be organized on the first day of class by area of interest (such as news, advertising, public relations, entertainment media, public speaking, etc.).

Each group will (1) examine public opinion databases and select a trend in public opinion to study, (2) plot that trend, noting the change over time, and explain its societal relevance, (3) develop a theoretical rationale regarding how communication might explain this trend, (4) conduct a content analysis of mass media to relate to this trend, and (5) prepare a presentation that summarizes their findings.

Throughout the semester, groups will submit preliminary papers as they progress through their research. At the end of the semester, students will submit a full paper consisting of revised versions of the preliminary reports combined into one seamless, conference-quality research paper (due May 10).

Introduction (due Feb. 6): This 4-5-page paper consists of an introduction to the opinion trend that your group selected, a plot of the changes in measurements of this opinion trend, and a discussion about its importance.

Literature/Theoretical Review (due March 6): This 5-7-page paper consists of a literature review and a discussion of possible theoretical explanations for the relationship between communication content and changes in public opinion.

Methods (due April 3): Each group must work together to conduct a content analysis of communication text (such as advertising, PR messages, public speeches, music lyrics, etc.) focusing on the period spanning the trend in public opinion. Students will submit a 3-5-page paper discussing precisely how their research will be conducted.

Results/Discussion (due May 1): This 5-7-page paper explains the results of the content analysis and implications of the findings.

**Presentation:** During the final exam period (May 8), each group will make a 15-minute presentation that (a) highlighting the opinion trend, (b) explains their theory of communication influence, and (c) summarizes findings of the content analysis relating communication content with public opinion.

**Peer Evaluation:** At the end of the term, students INDIVIDUALLY will submit a confidential analysis of their group dynamic. Each member of the group will evaluate all other group members' contribution to the overall research project on a quantitative scale. The average of these evaluations will be converted to make up 25 percent of the students' grade on the final paper.

NOTE: Because this is a group project, at least an hour of class time each week will be devoted to group work to minimize the necessity of coordinating schedules to meet outside of class. As the final paper deadline approaches, some full class sessions will be devoted to group work.

**Behavior expectations:** Students are learning to be communication professionals and are expected to model the following professional behaviors in class:

- Arrive to class on time and ready to participate.
- Turn cell phones to silent/vibrate.
- Respect others; don't speak when someone else is speaking.
- Listen closely and disagree calmly with others opinions.
- Do not text message, check personal e-mail, instant message, surf the Web or study for other classes during lab time.

Students who fail to follow these guidelines will be asked to leave and will not earn participation credit for that day.

**Attendance Expectations:** Students are to treat the class like a job; they are expected to attend every class and arrive on time. Work completed in class weighs heavily on the student's grade; therefore, failure to come to class will affect students' grades adversely. Students will receive zeros for work completed during the student's absence.

Tardiness will not be tolerated. Class begins at 6 p.m. Students will be penalized at a rate of 2 percent off that day's class participation grade per minute late. In other words, students will lose a full letter grade off that day's participation exercise for every five minutes they are late, up to 20 minutes. Students who arrive more than 20 minutes late will receive a 0 for that day's participation.

There are no make ups, and no late work is accepted. Consideration will be given for **extreme circumstances** (serious illness, debilitating injury, or death of a loved one) if the student provides documented proof of the circumstances.

**Blackboard:** All course materials will be posted to Blackboard, including the syllabus, assignment sheets, and course readings. Students will submit all written work on Blackboard (<http://elearn.uta.edu>). Assignments not posted to the proper portal will not be graded. Emailed assignments will not be accepted.

All grades for course assignments, including class participation, will be posted to Blackboard, and course averages will be posted there periodically. Please log in regularly to check grades and announcements. No grade information will be emailed. Students are expected to keep track of their performance throughout the semester on Blackboard and seek guidance if their grade drops below satisfactory levels.

### **Department, College, and University Policies**

**Drop Policy:** Students may drop or swap (adding and dropping a class concurrently) classes through self-service in MyMav from the beginning of the registration period through the late registration period. After the late registration period, students must see their academic advisor to drop a class or withdraw. Undeclared students must see an advisor in the University Advising Center. Drops can continue through a point two-thirds of the way through the term or session. It is the student's responsibility to officially

withdraw if they do not plan to attend after registering. **Students will not be automatically dropped for non-attendance.** Repayment of certain types of financial aid administered through the University may be required as the result of dropping classes or withdrawing. For more information, contact the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships (<http://www.uta.edu/ses/fao>).

**Americans with Disabilities Act:** The University of Texas at Arlington is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of all federal equal opportunity legislation, including the *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)*. All instructors at UT Arlington are required by law to provide "reasonable accommodations" to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of that disability. Any student requiring an accommodation for this course must provide the instructor with official documentation in the form of a letter certified by the staff in the Office for Students with Disabilities, University Hall 102. Only those students who have officially documented a need for an accommodation will have their request honored. Information regarding diagnostic criteria and policies for obtaining disability-based academic accommodations can be found at [www.uta.edu/disability](http://www.uta.edu/disability) or by calling the Office for Students with Disabilities at (817) 272-3364.

**Student Support Services:** UT Arlington provides a variety of resources and programs designed to help students develop academic skills, deal with personal situations, and better understand concepts and information related to their courses. Resources include tutoring, major-based learning centers, developmental education, advising and mentoring, personal counseling, and federally funded programs. For individualized referrals, students may contact the Maverick Resource Hotline by calling 817-272-6107, sending a message to [resources@uta.edu](mailto:resources@uta.edu), or visiting [www.uta.edu/resources](http://www.uta.edu/resources).

**Electronic Communication:** UT Arlington has adopted MavMail as its official means to communicate with students about important deadlines and events, as well as to transact university-related business regarding financial aid, tuition, grades, graduation, etc. All students are assigned a MavMail account and are responsible for checking the inbox regularly. There is no additional charge to students for using this account, which remains active even after graduation. Information about activating and using MavMail is available at <http://www.uta.edu/oit/cs/email/mavmail.php>.

**Student Feedback Survey:** At the end of each term, students enrolled in classes categorized as lecture, seminar, or laboratory will be asked to complete an online Student Feedback Survey (SFS) about the course and how it was taught. Instructions on how to access the SFS system will be sent directly to students through MavMail approximately 10 days before the end of the term. UT Arlington's effort to solicit, gather, tabulate, and publish student feedback data is required by state law; student participation in the SFS program is voluntary.

**Final Review Week:** A period of five class days prior to the first day of final examinations in the long sessions shall be designated as Final Review Week. The purpose of this week is to allow students sufficient time to prepare for final examinations. During this week, there shall be no scheduled activities such as required field trips or performances; and no instructor shall assign any themes, research problems or exercises of similar scope that have a completion date during or following this week *unless specified in the class syllabus*. During Final Review Week, an instructor shall not give any examinations constituting 10 percent or more of the final grade, except makeup tests and laboratory examinations. In addition, no instructor shall give any portion of the final examination during Final Review Week. During this week, classes are held as scheduled. In addition, instructors are not required to limit content to topics that have been previously covered; they may introduce new concepts as appropriate.

**Academic Integrity:** At UT Arlington, academic dishonesty is completely unacceptable and will not be tolerated in any form, including (but not limited to) "cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, taking an examination for another person, any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts" (UT System Regents' Rule 50101, §2.2). Suspected violations of academic integrity standards will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. Violators will be disciplined in accordance with University policy, which may result in the student's suspension or expulsion from the University.

### Course Schedule & Due Dates

The course schedule is tentative and is subject to change. Minor changes will be noted in class; major changes will result in the distribution of a revised schedule.

Week	Dates	Topics	Assignment Due Dates
1	Jan. 16	Course Overview/Introductions Definition & Importance of Public Opinion Group Selections	
2	Jan. 23	Public Opinion Polling/Poll Databases Group work: Selecting a topic (NOTE: At least one person from each group should bring a laptop computer or tablet to class.)	
3	Jan. 30 <b>CENSUS DATE</b>	Theories of Public Opinion	
4	Feb. 6	Theories of Public Opinion, cont.	Group Project: Introduction due by 11:59 p.m.
5	Feb. 13	Public Opinion and the News	
6	Feb. 20	Public Opinion and Persuasive Media	
7	Feb. 27	EXAM 1	
8	March 6	Conducting Content Analysis	Group Project: Literature/Theoretical Review due by 11:59 p.m.
<b>SPRING BREAK</b>	<b>March 13</b>	<b>NO CLASS</b>	
9	March 20	Public Opinion and Electronic Media	
10	March 27  <b>March 29: LAST DAY TO DROP</b>	<i>Group project workshop</i>	
11	April 3	Public Opinion and Entertainment Media	Group Project: Methods due at 11:59 p.m.
12	April 10	Public Opinion and Interpersonal Communication	
13	April 17	Public Opinion and Speech-making	
14	April 24	EXAM 2	
15	May 1	<i>Group project workshop</i>	Group Project: Results/Discussion due at 11:59 p.m.
FINALS	May 8 May 10	Presentations (TIME TBA) NO CLASS	Final Paper due at 11:59 p.m.