

POLS 3010: Analyzing Elections with Exit Polls

Tuesday, Thursday, 10:00-11:15am

Location of course: Fretwell 206

Professor: Dr. Martha Kropf

Office: 435H Fretwell Hall

Office Hours: Tuesday, Thursday, 8:30am-10:00am

Email: mekropf@uncc.edu (Use a subject heading “Analyzing Elections”)

Course Description: This is a service learning course wherein you will learn that elections are not just about campaigns and the politics of candidate communication. Someone has to administer an election—after all, all those polling places do not just magically appear! Somebody has to make sure there is somebody at the polling place to check you off a registration list and allow you to vote. Somebody has to give you a form to complete to register to vote and then enter your name in a computer. Somebody has to add up all the votes so we know who wins the election. The nuts and bolts of an election are complicated. At the end of the day, voters decide who will represent them. At the end of the day, for a representative democracy (or any democracy) to work, voters/citizens must believe the announced results of the elections. At the end of the day, citizens must accept the results as correct, even if voters did not get the result they wanted.

The process affects how voters feel about it. That’s why we (that’s us!) are analyzing how voters in Mecklenburg County feel about the election. We will conduct surveys here during early voting and on election day in order to evaluate voter satisfaction.

Scholars of elections have discovered that how people feel about elections can affect how willing they are to accept an election as legitimate. The experience in the polling place matters to legitimacy, but also, the Mecklenburg County Board of Elections Office cares about voter service!

What is service learning? According to the UNC Charlotte Center for Teaching and Learning: “Service learning is a method of teaching that combines formal instruction with a related service in the community. Research has shown that service learning can have a positive impact on many student learning outcomes, including academic performance and retention. It also provides a valuable service to the larger community, thereby promoting the university’s community engagement mission and the broader social good.”¹

You need to understand that service learning is learning by doing. We will learn about the process of survey research and policy evaluation by conducting voter surveys after voters have voted (exit polls). You will prepare a report that you will present to the Mecklenburg County Board of Elections office.

We will still have textbooks! We will still study and read, but we will also do. Believe me, you’ll work hard, but you will learn more than you ever thought possible.

I’d plan on being available for most, if not all of election day and at least two days during early voting. I’m happy to write excuses to other professors for you. All in all, there will be a total of approximately 15 hours of required service outside the classroom. The bulk of the service will be on Election Day. Other service can be recruiting other students to be pollsters.

¹ UNC Charlotte Center for Teaching and Learning, <https://teaching.uncc.edu/instructional-workshop/2018-02-28/service-learning-101>.

Required Books: (Available in the bookstore)

Ruel, Erin, William Edward Wagner, III, and Brian Joseph Gillespie. 2016. *The Practice of Survey Research: Theory and Applications*. Sage Publications.

Alvarez, R. Michael, Lonna Rae Atkeson and Thad E. Hall. 2013. *Evaluating Elections: A Handbook of Methods and Standards*. Cambridge University Press. (This is available at the library electronically)

Key Dates: Early Voting: October 18-November 3, 2018

General Election: November 6, 2018 (6:30am-7:30pm)

Required Service Learning for Course Grade:

Every student will be required to document having “volunteered” 15 hours of service for the course.

That means you must do some combination of the following “service” activities:

1. Recruiting fellow students to assist with exit polling
2. Helping to train non-class volunteers to conduct exit polling
3. Exit polling during early voting
4. Exit polling on Election Day

We must have a significant number of people to help with exit polling on Election Day. I expect that we will be working in approximately 20 polling places. Voting begins at 6:30am rain or shine, so exit polling begins then, too. You will work in pairs so nobody will be alone at any polling place. Failure to work your assigned shifts/times will result in significant docking of your grade, aside from the grades you receive for the time you’ve volunteered.

Separately from the 15 hours, all students will be required to enter your “fair share” of surveys into the computer. We will have time in class to enter surveys, but if we are very successful, then you may have to enter some surveys outside of class time.

Note: A big portion of your grade (400/1000) is working all 15 hours. You can earn extra credit for working more than 15 hours (20 points for each hour over 15). But you can massively lose credit for not working over 15 hours.

More than 15 hours: an extra 20 points per hour

15 hours: Full 400 points

14: 370 points

13: 310 points

12: 220 points

11: 100 points

10: 90 points

9: 80 points

8: 70 points

7: 60 points

6: 50 points

Less than six hours: no points.

If you cannot work the hours, I suggest you do not take this course OR you come talk to me—we can see if we can work something out. But you must come talk to me well in advance of Election Day.

Elements of your grade (1000 points; 90-80-70% standard grading scale):

Service learning hours: 400 points

Reflection Journal: 200 points

Current Events (5@ 25 points each): 125 points

Final Report (done in a group): 200 points

Final Presentation (also in a group): 75 points

***Please go to Canvas for a description of these assignments.

Special Note: I have an attendance policy. You can miss three class meetings over the semester. Everyone gets sick and many of you have family or friend obligations. But, if you have more than three misses, then you'll lose ten points per class missed.

Calendar:

Week 1: August 21 and 23

Tuesday: *Introductions*

Thursday: *Introduction to Elections*

Reading Assignment:

Kropf, *Institutions and the Right to Vote*, portion of Chapter 3; available on Canvas

Barreto, Matt A., Mara Cohen-Marks and Nathan D. Woods. 2009. "Are All Precincts Created Equal? The Prevalence of Low-Quality Precincts in Low-Income and Minority Communities." *Political Research Quarterly* 62(3): 445-458.

Week 2: August 28 and 30

Tuesday: Current Events Day

Thursday: Tour of Meck County Elections

Week 3: September 4 and 6

Tuesday: *Ways of Evaluating Elections*

Alvarez, et al., *Evaluating Elections*, Introduction and Chapters 1-2

Thursday: Ways of Evaluating Elections, continued...

Week 4: September 11 and 13

Tuesday: *Alternative to Asking Voters? Audits & Observation*

Alvarez, et al., Chapters 5-6

Thursday: Current Events Day

Week 5: September 18 and 20

Tuesday: *Introduction to Survey Research*

Ruel, et al., Chapters 1-2

Thursday: *Asking the Voters*

Alvarez, Chapter 3-4

Hall, Thad E., J. Quin Monson, and Kelly D. Patterson. 2009. "The Human Dimension of Elections: How Poll Workers Shape Public Confidence in Elections." *Political Research Quarterly* 62(3): 507-522.

Week 6: September 25 and 27

Tuesday: More on Survey Research

Thursday: Current Events Day

Week 7: October 2 and 4

Tuesday: Sampling the Voters,

Ruiz, et al., Chapter 7

Thursday: Gaining Response and Factoring in Non-Response

Ruiz, et al., Chapter 9

Week 8: October 9 Fall Break! and October 11

Tuesday: No Class! Fall Break

Thursday: Current Events Day

Week 9: October 16 and 18

Tuesday: Interviewer Training

Thursday: Non-Response Analysis and Training

Week 10: October 23 and 25

Tuesday: Writing a Final Report

Ruiz, et al., Chapter 14

Examine examples of final reports posted on Canvas

Thursday: Current Events Day

Week 11: October 30 and November 1

Tuesday: SPSS is not so bad (meet in computer lab)

Thursday: SPSS is not so bad (meet in computer lab)

Week 12: November 6 and 8

Tuesday: Exit Polling

Thursday: Writing that Final Report and Data Entry Training (Discussion and outlining)

Week 13: November 13 and 15

Tuesday: Data Entry

Ruiz, et al., Chapter 12

Thursday: Data Entry

Week 14: November 20 and 22

No school November 22!

Tuesday: Data Entry and Cleaning

Ruiz, et al., Chapter 13

Week 15: November 27 and 29

Tuesday: Class Time for Reports

Thursday: Class Time for Reports

Week 16: December 4

Tuesday: Class Time for Reports

Thursday, December 13: 8:00am-10:30am Final Exam Day