

## PS 78-01

### The Political Behavior of Young People

#### A Sophomore Seminar

Fall Semester 2007

Kent E. Portney

This course is built around the political and civic engagement behavior of young people (young adults). Its main focus is on people between the ages of 18 and 25. Over the last five years or so, we have seen a renewed interest in this group of people. This has happened for several reasons. First, we have begun to observe significant changes in the attitudes and behaviors of this particular cohort, both compared to earlier cohorts of the same age, and compared to older cohorts. Second, largely because people in this age range have tended to “opt-out” of politics in recent years, many organizations have targeted it for special attention to try to stimulate greater involvement, especially among young college students. And third, there is increasing recognition of the implications of lower involvement for the polity and the functioning of our democracy.

With all this said, the fact is that contemporary research on this group of people is quite underdeveloped. There are many important research questions that have not really been addressed. There are other research questions for which there seem to be conflicting or contradictory answers. And only recently have researchers started to pay serious attention to the methodological challenges posed by conducting research with this group of people. The hope and expectation in this course is that it will serve as a way to get everyone engaged in the research endeavor to address the shortcomings noted above. So the course will be conducted in the spirit of exploration and discovery.

This class meets once a week, on Tuesday mornings, in seminar format. What this means is that we will spend most of our class time discussing the readings and related issues for the designated topic. Because each class meeting represents a significant portion of the semester’s class time, it is important for you not to miss class. Please note that there is no class meeting on Monday October 9 because we use Monday’s schedule that day.

You have been asked to purchase two books that will constitute the primary readings. The first is by Cliff Zukin, Scott Keeter, Molly Andolina, Krista Jenkins, and Michael Delli Carpini entitled *A New Engagement? Political Participation, Civic Life, and the Changing American Citizen*. This book is referred to as Zukin et al. in the reading list. The second, by Martin Wattenberg entitled *Is Voting for Young People?* This book is referred to as Wattenberg in the reading list. In addition to these readings, you will periodically be given an article to read, either in hardcopy or online. Below is a class-by-class list of the specific topics that we will address. So you should strive to complete the designated reading for that class day before class.

There will be two graded assignments. First, there will be a take-home mid-term exam, given out in class on October 23 and will be due the following week, October 30. Second, there will be a final research paper due the first day of final exams, December 13. We will spend considerable class time discussing these final papers, and you will be provided ample opportunity to develop your topic during the course of the semester. The final grade will be straight-forward average of the mid-term exam and final paper, adjusted up or down not more than one half grade for especially good or bad class participation. All written work will be graded numerically based on an assessment of three content categories: 1) writing and organization, which includes the mechanics of your writing (sentence structure, spelling, and overall organization of the argument); 2) factual accuracy and completeness, which assesses whether what you say is accurate and adequately supported, and whether you included or omitted all relevant information; and 3) idea synthesis and creativity, which focuses on the extent to which you may have presented new information, new arguments, or new ideas. Each of these three areas can earn up to 33.3 points.

This class has a Blackboard web site, and all of the materials for the class will be posted there. You will find this reading list there, along with other written materials, and links to online reading materials. If you have specific materials you would like to see posted on this web site, please feel free to let me know.

I can be contacted via email at [kent.portney@tufts.edu](mailto:kent.portney@tufts.edu). My office hours are Monday and Thursday from 9:30 to 11:00 am and by arrangement.

## Class-by-Class Topics and Readings

**September 4:** Introduction to the class; Introduction to political behavior, citizenship, and civic engagement; kinds of questions we will address; kinds of comparisons that make sense; distinction between description and analysis; how social scientists think about issues, hypotheses, and hypothesis testing.

Read: No readings to do for today.

**September 11:** What we know and don't know about the political behavior and civic engagement of young people.

Read: Zukin et al., Chapters 1-3.

**September 18:** Generational change I: Young people today compared to past generations of young people on political behavior and attitudes

Read: Zukin et al., Chapters 4-6.

[The Youth Vote 2004: With a Historical Look at Youth Voting Patterns, 1972-2004](#)  
by Mark Hugo Lopez, Emily Kirby, Jared Sagoff, and Chris Herbst of CIRCLE

**September 25:** Generational change II: Young people today compared to past generations of young people on engagement with politics and government (changing sources of political information and knowledge)

Read: Wattenberg, Chapters 1 and 2.

**October 2:** Generational change II: Young people today and citizenship norms

Read: Zukin et al., Chapter 4.

**October 16:** Is voting becoming obsolete? Only for old people?

Read: Wattenberg, Chapters 3 through 7.

**October 23:** Importance of college – the college/no college divide

Read: [The Political Participation of Working Youth and College Students](#)  
by Sharon E. Jarvis, Lisa Montoya & Emily Mulvoy

[The Political Participation of College Students, Working Students and Working Youth](#)  
by Sharon E. Jarvis, Lisa Montoya & Emily Mulvoy

The Missing Link: Exploring the Relationship Between Higher Education and Political Engagement, by Sunshine Hillygus  
<http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~hillygus/HillygusPB.pdf>

**October 30:** Is there a gender gap among young people?

Read: [Gender and Civic Engagement: Secondary Analysis of Survey Data](#)  
by Krista Jenkins, Ph.D.

[Do Gender and Ethnicity Affect Civic Engagement and Academic Progress?](#)  
by Alberto Davila and Maria Mora  
<http://civicyouth.org/PopUps/WorkingPapers/WP53Mora.pdf>

CIRCLE Factsheet  
<http://www.civicyouth.org/quick/trends.htm>

**November 6:** Is there a racial or ethnic divide among young people?

Read: Davila and Mora, cited above.

[Civic Views of Young Adult Minorities: Exploring the Influences of Kinship Communities and Youth Mentoring Communities on Prosocial Civic Behaviors](#)  
by Diann Cameron Kelly

**November 13:** New and emerging forms of political participation: The internet and www

Read: [Young Voters and the Web of Politics 2004: The Youth Political Web Sphere Comes of Age](#) by Lance Bennett and Michael Xenos

**November 20:** New, alternative, and emerging forms of civic engagement

Read: Wattenberg, Chapter 8.

**November 27:** The Roots of Youth Adult Civic Engagement: High School and Earlier

Read: [Civic Engagement and High School Academic Progress](#)

by Alberto Davila and Maria Mora

[Experiments in Political Socialization: Kids Voting USA as a Model for Civic Education Reform](#)

by Michael McDevitt and Spiro Kiouisis

[The Relationship between Secondary Education and Civic Development: Results from Two Field Experiments with Inner City Minorities](#)

by John Phillips

**December 4:** Subject to be determined

Read: To be determined

**December 13:** Final Paper Dues