

# SOCIAL INFLUENCE IN POLITICS Updated October 10, 2019

POS 3931-0002 – FALL 2019  
TUE/THUR 3:35-4:50PM in BELLAMY 0004 (lowest floor)

**Instructor:** Matthew Pietryka

**Email:** [mpietryka@fsu.edu](mailto:mpietryka@fsu.edu)

**Office:** BEL 561

**Office Hours:** by appointment via <https://pietryka.youcanbook.me/>

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## 1 COURSE INFORMATION

### Course Objectives

This course examines *social* influence: how our political attitudes and actions are influenced by the people around us. To understand social influence on the topic of politics, much of the course material will cover social influence across a range of topics including emotions, economics, and intergroup relations. The material in the course is divided into three units, each culminating in a unit exam. The first unit emphasizes that people are bad at understanding the world because they do not understand social influence. The second unit covers a range of ways in which our attitudes and behavior are shaped by our social networks. The third unit focuses on the evolutionary and psychological reasons why we are so sensitive to social influence. Therefore, students should emerge from the course with a better understanding of when, how, and why their choices are influenced by others. This improved understanding should help them take this social influence into account, allowing them to make better decisions throughout their lives.

### Required Texts

1. *Everything Is Obvious (Once You Know the Answer): How Common Sense Fails Us*, by Duncan J. Watts, ISBN 978-0307951793.
2. *Connected*, by Nicholas A. Christakis and James H. Fowler, ISBN 978-0316036139.
3. *Conformity: The Power of Social Influences*, by Cass R. Sunstein, ISBN 978-1479867837.
4. Additional articles, available on Canvas, will be assigned throughout the semester.

Students should do the assigned readings before each lecture. The instructor will discuss some of the more difficult material from the readings in lecture, but will not discuss all of the readings. Before the exams, students should be sure to understand the main argument expressed in each assigned reading as well as the evidence the author(s) present to support their argument.

## 2 GRADES

Students' grades for the course depend on the scores they earn for two midterm exams (each worth 20% of the final grade), a final exam (20%), several in-class reading quizzes (30%), and the Network Analysis Project (10%). Details about each are below. Students can calculate their numeric grade using the following formula, expressing their scores in percentage points:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Numeric Grade} = & .20 \times \text{Midterm Exam 1 percentage} + \\ & .20 \times \text{Midterm Exam 2 percentage} + \\ & .20 \times \text{Final Exam percentage} + \\ & .30 \times \text{Average of eight best Reading Quiz percentages} + \\ & .10 \times \text{Network Analysis Project percentage} \end{aligned}$$

The final letter grade will be assigned according to the standard table:

93-100: A	87-89 : B+	80-82 : B-	73-76 : C	67-69 : D+	60-62 : D-
90-92 : A-	83-86 : B	77-79 : C+	70-72 : C-	63-66 : D	00-59 : F

### Midterms and Final Exam

Midterm exams will be due on THUR, 10/3 and TUE, 11/5. A final exam will be due on Mon 12/09 7:30PM. All three exams are take-home exams—they will be completed at a location of your choice and submitted through Canvas's Assignment section. The exams will feature short answer questions, which can typically be answered in 8-12 sentences. Exams will cover material from lectures, guest speakers, and the assigned movies and readings. There will be no make-up exams, except in cases with university-approved, documented excuses. The final is *not* cumulative; it covers only the material since the second midterm.

### Reading Quizzes

At least 10 reading quizzes will be administered in class on randomly chosen days throughout the semester. The quizzes will cover basic questions about readings assigned in the last week. A student's eight highest scores will determine their grade. In cases of university-approved, documented absences, students will be able to perform a make-up quiz for equal credit. To make up a missed quiz, students must inform the instructor of their absence prior to the class they will miss. They must then schedule an office hours appointment via <https://pietryka.youcanbook.me/> to take a make-up quiz *within a week of returning to school*.

### Network Analysis Project

Over the course of a week, students will complete an analysis of their own real-world social networks, providing information about the people they interact with, how they met these acquaintances, and which of these acquaintances know each other. The instructor will aggregate these data and provide *anonymized* results to the class.

### Late Work Policy

Technology failure (e.g., hard drive crash) is not an acceptable excuse for late work—students must back up their data. Likewise, except in rare, prolonged cases, illnesses and family emergencies are not acceptable excuses for late work; students should get their work done early in case unforeseen problems arise.

### **3 EXPECTATIONS**

#### **Participation & Attendance**

To succeed in the class, students should show up to class having done the assigned readings for the day. Students do not need to have mastered the material, but rather they must have begun to think about the concepts in order to keep up with lecture. There is no formal grade for participation or attendance.

#### **Email Policy**

The instructor encourages email questions and comments. The instructor will respond to emails within 24 hours, excepting weekends and holidays. To receive a response, the email must be sent from your FSU email address and the subject line of all emails must include the course number (POS 3931-0002), followed by a descriptive subject title (e.g., “POS 3931-0002: Question about [topic]”). The instructor *will not* respond via email to the following:

1. Emails that fail to include the course number and a descriptive title in the subject line.
2. Questions that students can answer themselves by reading the syllabus.
3. Questions that require more than a short paragraph to address fully. For more detailed responses, students are encouraged to see the instructor during office hours.

#### **Classroom Etiquette**

Students must be courteous to the instructor and fellow students. Students should arrive to class on time. Those who must leave early should sit near the exit to avoid distracting others, but do not need to inform the instructor in advance. Students who miss class should talk to other students to find out what material they missed. Cell phones must be silent and *out of sight*. Laptops are allowed in class if they are used solely for note taking and other course-relevant purposes. Students must ensure that they are not distracting others with the content of their screen.

#### **University Attendance Policy**

Excused absences include documented illness, deaths in the family and other documented crises, call to active military duty or jury duty, religious holy days, and official University activities. These absences will be accommodated in a way that does not arbitrarily penalize students who have a valid excuse. Consideration will also be given to students whose dependent children experience serious illness.

#### **Academic Honor Policy**

The Florida State University Academic Honor Policy outlines the University’s expectations for the integrity of students’ academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of those expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty members throughout the process. Students are responsible for reading the Academic Honor Policy and for living up to their pledge to “...be honest and truthful and ...[to] strive for personal and institutional integrity at Florida State University.” (Florida State University Academic Honor Policy, found at <http://fda.fsu.edu/Academics/Academic-Honor-Policy> .)

## **Americans With Disabilities Act**

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodation should (1) register with and provide documentation to the Student Disability Resource Center; and (2) bring a letter to the instructor indicating the need for accommodation and what type. This should be done during the first week of class.

This syllabus and other class materials are available in alternative format upon request. For more information about services available to FSU students with disabilities, contact the Student Disability Resource Center, 874 Traditions Way, 108 Student Services Building, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL 32306-4167, 850-644-9566 (voice), 850-644-8504 (TDD), [hsdrc@admin.fsu.edu](mailto:hsdrc@admin.fsu.edu), <http://www.disabilitycenter.fsu.edu>

## **Free Tutoring from FSU**

On-campus tutoring and writing assistance is available for many courses at Florida State University. For more information, visit the Academic Center for Excellence (ACE) Tutoring Services' comprehensive list of on-campus tutoring options - see <http://ace.fsu.edu/tutoring> or contact [tutor@fsu.edu](mailto:tutor@fsu.edu). High-quality tutoring is available by appointment and on a walk-in basis. These services are offered by tutors trained to encourage the highest level of individual academic success while upholding personal academic integrity.

## **Syllabus Change Policy**

Except for changes that substantially affect implementation of the evaluation (grading) statement, this syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advance notice.

## **4 FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

- (Q) Is the final exam cumulative?**  
(A) No.
- (Q) You assigned [insert reading] on the syllabus, but didn't talk much about it in class. Will it be on the exam?**  
(A) Yes, it might be. The readings and lecture are both essential for your understanding of the material.
- (Q) When should I do the readings?**  
(A) Once before lecture, then again (and again) as necessary until you understand the material.
- (Q) I need a [insert specific letter grade] in this class. [Blank stare].**  
(A) Well, that's not really a question. I assume everyone wants the best grade possible. If you need a good grade, put in the work. I'm always happy to clarify difficult material in lecture and office hours, but I will not change grading policies for individual students—no matter how badly they want a [insert specific letter grade].
- (Q) I just need [X] points to receive a [insert specific letter grade] in this class. Is there anything I can do to improve my grade?**  
(A) There are no additional ways to earn credit for the course beyond those specified in the syllabus.

6. **(Q) Will there be study guides for the exams?**  
(A) Yes.
7. **(Q) When will the study guide be ready?**  
(A) Usually 3-5 days before the exam.
8. **(Q) When will the exam grades be posted?**  
(A) As soon as possible. It often takes a day or two to scan and another day or two to look the scores over and upload them to Blackboard.
9. **(Q) I need to miss an exam because [insert reason]. Can I take it at a different time?**  
(A) No, you must take the exam at its scheduled time; drop the class if you cannot attend one of the exams. Documented excuses are the *only* acceptable reason to miss an exam.
10. **(Q) I am unable to take the quiz or exam next week. What type of doctor's note do I need to be excused from an exam or quiz?**  
(A) Once you are no longer contagious, bring me a doctor's note stating that you were not well enough to attend class on the day of the exam. A note stating only that you saw the doctor that day is not sufficient.
11. **(Q) I missed the [quiz/exam] last week. What type of doctor's note do I need to be excused from an exam or quiz?**  
(A) You cannot make up a missed [quiz/exam] unless you informed me about your absence prior to the [quiz/exam]. The only exception is if the nature of the documented emergency that caused you to miss the [quiz/exam] also prevented you from contacting me. If you are sick, you still must contact me via email or Canvas.
12. **(Q) If I have an emergency, when and where can I take a make-up exam?**  
(A) All makeup exams will be held on the same day. Meet in my office on FRI 12/06 9-11AM. Students must get the instructor's approval to take a makeup prior to the make-up exam date and within one week of returning to class.

## 5 SCHEDULE

Date	Topic	Reading
TUE, 8/27	Introduction	
THUR, 8/29	Putting the *social* in social science	Watts chapter 1
TUE, 9/3	Why it's so tough to study social influence	Watts chapter 2
THUR, 9/5	Micromotives, macrobehavior	Watts chapter 3
TUE, 9/10	It's not made by great men	Watts chapter 4
THUR, 9/12	Six degrees of separation I	Watts chapter 5, Canvas Reading: Gladwell 1999
TUE, 9/17	Six degrees of separation II	Watts chapters 6-7
THUR, 9/19	Black Swans	Watts chapter 8
TUE, 9/24	Skill, Luck, and Justice	Watts chapter 9
THUR, 9/26	Defeating Common Sense	Watts chapter 10
TUE, 10/1	Review for Midterm 1	
THUR, 10/3	<b>Midterm 1</b>	
TUE, 10/8	Social <i>networks</i>	Christakis & Fowler chapter 1
THUR, 10/10	Emotional Contagion I	Christakis & Fowler chapter 2; Canvas Reading: Dunn et al. 2009
TUE, 10/15	Emotional Contagion II	Christakis & Fowler chapter 2; Canvas Reading: Dunn et al. 2009
THUR, 10/17	Weak Ties	Christakis & Fowler chapter 3-4
TUE, 10/22	Social Influence in Politics	Christakis & Fowler chapters 5
THUR, 10/24	Confounds	Christakis & Fowler chapters 6-7
TUE, 10/29	Online social networks	Christakis & Fowler chapter 8-9
THUR, 10/31	Review for Midterm 2	
TUE, 11/5	<b>Midterm 2</b>	
THUR, 11/7	Social Psychology	Sunstein: preface and chapter 1
TUE, 11/12	A Class Divided	Sunstein chapter 2
THUR, 11/14	Social Identity 1	Canvas Reading: Tajfel 1970
TUE, 11/19	Social Identity 2	Sunstein chapter 3
THUR, 11/21	Conformity	Sunstein chapter 4 and conclusion
TUE, 11/26	Altruism	
THUR, 11/28	No Class	
TUE, 12/3	Conclusions	
THUR, 12/5	Review for Final Exam	

**Final Exam:** Take-home exam due Mon 12/09 7:30PM

**Students can find the Canvas Readings in the 'Files' section of the course Canvas.**

Note: The schedule is tentative and is likely to change as the semester progresses.